

# The Four Schools of Tenets

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# The Four Schools of Tenets

The Tibetan word for tenet is *grub mtha'* (pronounced: *drub tha*) which literally means "established conclusion." A Buddhist tenet school is explained to be a set of views that are based on what the Buddha taught and that are the final product of a process of logical reasoning. Since tenets are not mere beliefs, a proponent of Buddhist tenets should be someone who studied and analyzed the different concepts of the Buddha Dharma and who comprehends the implications of accepting one view and refuting another.

There are basically four different Buddhist tenet schools:

1. Vaibhashika (Great Exposition School, Tib.: *bye brag smra ba'i grub mtha'*)
2. Sautrantika (Sutra School, Tib.: *mdo sde pa'i grub mtha'*)
3. Chittamatra (Mind-Only School, Tib.: *sems tsam pa'i grub mtha'*)
4. Madhyamika (Middle Way School, Tib.: *dbu ma'i grub mtha'*)

According to their different views they can be further categorized:

1. The **Vaibhashika** can be categorized either into eighteen sub-schools or into:
    - 1.1. The School of the Kashmiris
    - 1.2. The School of the Aparantakas
    - 1.3. The School of the Maghadas
  2. The **Sautrantika** can be categorized into:
    - 2.1. Sautrantika School Following Scripture
    - 2.2. Sautrantika School Following Reasoning
  3. The **Chittamatra** can be categorized into:
    - 3.1. Chittamatra School Following Scripture
    - 3.2. Chittamatra School Following Reasoning
  4. The **Madhyamika** can be categorized into:
    - 4.1. Svatantrika Madhyamika (Middle Way Autonomy School)
    - 4.2. Prasangika Madhyamika (Middle Way Consequentialist School)
- 4.1. The **Svatantrika** can be further categorized into:
    - 4.1.1 Yogachara Svatantrika (Yogic Autonomy School)
    - 4.1.2 Sautrantika Svatantrika (Sutric Autonomy School)

The various philosophical concepts reflected in these Schools of tenets were all taught by the Buddha. Later they were categorized into different tenet systems by Indian and Tibetan masters who had gained sufficient proficiency in the Buddhist teachings to take on the enormous task of systematizing and organizing the vast body of the sutras. However, the classification into four tenet systems comes from the Buddha himself, for in one of the stanzas of a Tantric discourse the Buddha cites the four tenet systems by name. Also, Vajragarbha says in his *Commentary on the Condensation of the Hevajra Tantra* (Skt.: *Hevajrapindarthatika*, Tib.: *kye'i rdo rje bsdus pa'i don gyi rgya cher 'grel ba*):

*It is not the Subduer's thought that a fourth [vehicle]  
Or a fifth [school of tenets] exists for Buddhists.*

Buddha Shakyamuni taught extensively. After he attained enlightenment he spent the remaining 45 years of his life travelling across the Indian subcontinent, explaining and disseminating what he had come to realize. But he did more than that, for, being an extremely skilful pedagogue, he met the needs of his immediate listeners by teaching them according to their predispositions, interests, levels of comprehension, and so forth. The Buddha thus deliberately articulated different viewpoints that sometimes directly contradicted the views he had expressed earlier but that were most beneficial to whoever was the Buddha's immediate audience. And although that particular viewpoint may not have reflected the Buddha's own view, it would still serve as an effective platform or stepping stone to prepare the audience to be taught the 'higher' viewpoints at a later time.

## The order of the four tenet schools

The four tenet systems are arranged according to their approach to the view of the Madhyamika, the view that is free of the two extremes - the extreme of 'reification/permanence' and the extreme of 'nihilism/annihilation'. Therefore, the 'lowest' tenet school is the Vaibhashika (Great Exposition School) and the 'highest' tenet school is the Madhyamika (Middle Way School), for, starting with the Vaibhashika, each School successively expands the range of what it regards as the extreme of reification/permanence and reduces the extent of what it regards as the extreme of nihilism/annihilation.

Yet, even though the four tenet schools are set out in such a hierarchical order, all Buddhist tenet schools are considered to be of equal importance, for their study and comprehension is explained to be a vital tool for the cultivation of wisdom. In the Buddhist literature one finds accounts of Nalanda Monastery in India accommodating proponents of all four tenet schools, who lived and studied together, learning from one another.

## The reasons for studying the four tenet schools

In general, Tibetan Buddhism places great emphasis on the importance of study. Study and debate of Buddhist philosophy are regarded as an integral part of analytical meditation and thus of Buddhist practice. They are further considered to be a vital tool of preparation for intense and prolonged meditational retreats. The Kadampa Geshes have a saying that 'meditating without having studied the teachings is like someone trying to climb a mountain without their hands'. Therefore, study and debate help to remove our misconceptions and sharpen the mind so that meditation can be more effective.

In particular, the study of the four tenet schools is considered to be extremely beneficial since it enables us to identify the innate misapprehensions that we consciously and unconsciously hold, so that we may subject them to analysis. It allows us to gain an understanding of the fact that most of the perspectives basic to our every-day life are devoid of any valid foundation and are mere fabrications of the mind - and that a majority of our actions of body, speech, and mind are governed by misperceptions that are diametrically opposed to reality. By identifying our invalid assent to deceptive appearances and comprehending their lack of logical validity, we can replace these misperceptions with well-founded views. This is achieved by first learning about the various tenets, then reflecting on their meaning until valid cognition is attained, and finally meditating on them after enhancing our meditation through the force of concentration.

Furthermore, systematic study starting with the lower tenet schools enables us to develop the capacity to appreciate the profound views of the highest tenet school, since an understanding of the less subtle concepts of the lower tenet schools is described as an effective stepping stone to gaining insight into the subtlest concepts of the highest ones. This is evidenced by the considerable amount of time that was traditionally spent in India and Tibet probing into the perspectives of the lower tenet schools.

Thus, the study of tenets provides practitioners with an inner force that helps them distinguish between correct and incorrect perspectives so as to penetrate reality. It further provides a comprehensive worldview that creates a framework for those who want to delve further into the study of Buddhist philosophy, such as the study of the 'Five Great Canonical Texts'.

## Texts on tenets

As explained above, the source of the four tenet schools are the sutras of the Buddha. But since the teachings on the different tenet schools are not immediately accessible in those sutras, their study is primarily based on Indian and Tibetan commentaries which elaborate on the various philosophical Schools.

Some of the main Indian texts on tenets are:

1. ***Blaze of Reasoning*** by Bhavaviveka (6th century)
2. ***Compendium of Principles*** by Shantarakshita (8th century)
3. ***Commentary on the Compendium of Principles*** by Shantarakshita's disciple Kamalashila (8th century)

Some of the main Tibetan texts on tenets are:

1. ***Treasury of Tenets, Illuminating the Meaning of all Vehicles*** by the Nyingma scholar Longchen Rabjam (14th century)

2. ***Explanation of 'Freedom from Extremes Through Understanding All Tenets': Ocean of Good Explanation*** by the Sakya Scholar Daktsang Sherab Rinchen (15th century)
3. ***Great Exposition of Tenets*** by the Gelugpa scholar Jamyang Shaypa (17th century)
4. ***Clear Exposition of the Presentations of Tenets, Beautiful Ornament for the Meru of the Subduer's Teaching*** by the Gelugpa scholar Jangya Rolpai Dorje (18th century)
5. ***Presentation of Tenets, a Precious Garland*** by the Gelugpa scholar Koenchok Jigme Wangpo (18th century)

## Buddhist tenet holders

Proponents of any of the four Buddhist tenet schools must be Buddhist tenet holders. A Buddhist tenet holder is defined as a person who accepts the four seals. So, the proponents of the four Buddhist tenet schools all commonly accept the validity of these four seals.

The four seals are:

1. *All conditioned phenomena are impermanent*

The first seal establishes that phenomena produced by causes and conditions are impermanent. The definition of impermanent is: that which is momentary. The definition of permanent is: a phenomenon that is not momentary. To be momentary does not mean to merely exist for one moment, but to *change* moment by moment. Nor does it mean that something that is impermanent changes every moment into something completely different, since momentary change mainly refers to very subtle change and may thus not be obvious to us. For instance, even though the molecules that constitute a table change from moment to moment (which is why we have to say that the table is momentary) the table does not cease to be a table from one moment to the next. In fact, its changes are so subtle that we are not directly aware of them.

Thus, whatever is impermanent is necessarily a phenomenon that changes moment by moment whereas whatever is permanent is necessarily a phenomenon that does not change moment by moment.

However, it is important to understand that something that is impermanent can exist eternally, that is, its continuum can go on forever (e.g. the mind), and something that does not exist eternally can be permanent (e.g. the absence of pen on the table). The absence of pen on the table does not exist eternally because the moment one puts a pen on the table, the *absence* of pen on the table becomes non-existent.

2. *All contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering*

This seal establishes that all contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering, which means that all contaminated phenomena have the potential to produce suffering. Here, the “contaminators” are afflictions such as ignorance, anger, attachment, etc. and volitional karma (actions) induced by the afflictions. *Contaminated* phenomena are contaminated because they are the products of both afflictions and volitional actions.

3. *All phenomena are selfless and empty*

Even though the proponents of the four tenet schools accept that all phenomena are selfless and empty, each one explains the meaning of empty or selfless differently. Yet, there is also a type of 'empty' and a type of 'selfless' that are commonly asserted by the four Buddhist tenet holders. The commonly accepted 'empty' refers to the lack of a permanent, partless, independent self. The commonly accepted 'selfless' refers to the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self. Hence, most Buddhist tenet holders assert that a person is not permanent, partless, and independent, and does not exist self-sufficiently and substantially.

There is only one exception: the proponents of one of the sub-schools of the Vaibhashika, the Sammitiya School, assert the *existence* of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self although they deny the existence of a permanent, partless, independent self.

The two types of selflessness will be explained below.

4. *Nirvana is peace*

Nirvana is neither a place nor a type of consciousness; it is liberation from suffering and its causes. Therefore, Nirvana is equivalent to the elimination or cessation of suffering and its causes.

However, this does not mean that a person who has attained Nirvana no longer feels anything anymore. On the contrary, a person who has overcome suffering and its causes experiences pure and lasting happiness that is free from any dissatisfaction, desire, attachment, etc.

## The way to subsume the four tenet schools

The four schools can be subsumed into two categories:

- 1) The Hinayana tenet schools
- 2) The Mahayana tenet schools

It is important to understand that there is a difference between the 'Hinayana *tenet school*' and 'Hinayana *vehicle*', and between the 'Mahayana *tenet school*' and 'Mahayana *vehicle*'. The 'Hinayana tenet school' refers to either the Vaibhashika (Great Exposition School) or the Sautrantika (Sutra School) whereas the 'Hinayana vehicle' refers to the practices that lead to self-liberation. Likewise, the 'Mahayana tenet school' refers to either the Chittamatra (Mind-Only School) or the Madhyamika (Middle Way School) whereas the 'Mahayana vehicle' refers to the practices that lead to Buddhahood. Moreover, there is a difference between a 'Hinayanist *by tenet*' and a 'Hinayanist *by path*', and between a 'Mahayanist *by tenet*' and a 'Mahayanist *by path*'. A 'Hinayanist *by tenet*' is a proponent of one of the two Hinayana tenet schools (Vaibhashika or Sautrantika) whereas a 'Hinayanist *by path*' refers either to a Hinayana Arhat or to someone who aspires to attain self-liberation and thus follows the Hinayana vehicle. Likewise, a 'Mahayanist *by tenet*' is a proponent of one of the two Mahayana tenet schools (Chittamatra or Madhyamika) whereas a 'Mahayanist *by path*' is either a Buddha or someone who aspires to attain Buddhahood and thus follows the Mahayana vehicle.

So, it is possible for a person to be a 'Mahayanist *by tenet*' but a 'Hinayanist *by path*'. An example is a practitioner on the Hinayana path of accumulation who is either a proponent of the Chittamatra or the Madhyamika. Likewise, it is possible for a person to be a 'Hinayanist *by tenet*' but a 'Mahayanist *by path*'. An example is a Bodhisattva on the Mahayana path of accumulation who is a proponent of either the Vaibhashika or the Sautrantika.

## THE TWO HINAYANA TENET SCHOOLS

As just mentioned, the two Hinayana tenet schools are the Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika. They hold similar assertions with regard to the following topics:

- Selflessness
- The two truths
- True existence
- All-knowingness
- Objects of elimination
- Arya Nature
- Buddha Shakyamuni

Their assertions regarding these topics also distinguish the proponents of the Hinayana tenet schools from the proponents of the Mahayana tenet school.

### Selflessness

The proponents of the Hinayana tenet schools assert the selflessness of person but do not assert emptiness, i.e. the ultimate mode of existence of *all* phenomena.

There are two types of selflessness of the person (which are also asserted by the proponents of the Mahayana tenet systems):

- (1) The lack of a permanent, partless, independent self
- (2) The lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self

#### (1) *The lack of a permanent, partless, independent self*

At the time of the Buddha about 2600 years ago, the followers of the different non-Buddhist Indian philosophical systems spent considerable time analyzing and debating the mode of existence of the self. Since most of them accepted past and future lives, they were particularly interested in

establishing what it is that travels from one life to the next. They understood the ever-changing nature of the five aggregates, and needed to posit a self that was more stable than the psycho-physical complex. Hence, many of them asserted the existence of a permanent, partless, independent self. They accepted the existence of a self that was static and unchanging (*permanent*), did not have spatial and temporary parts (*partless*), and existed independently of the five aggregates (*independent*). Such a self is compared to a pea in a jar, the jar being the psycho-physical aggregates and the pea being the self residing within the aggregates until the aggregates disintegrate at death, at which point the self goes on to its next rebirth.

From a Buddhist point of view, such a self is impossible, for if it really existed, one would be able to find it as an entity separate from mind and body. In addition, a person would never change, and would be completely unaffected by his physical and mental experiences. Therefore, Buddhist tenet holders assert the absence or the *lack* of such a permanent, partless, independent self, and this constitutes the coarsest type of selflessness.

(2) *The lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self*

The understanding of the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self counteracts the ignorance that perceives the *existence* of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self. This ignorance is subtler than the ignorance that apprehends the existence of a permanent, partless, independent self.

The mind that apprehends a self-sufficient, substantially existent self does not necessarily perceive the self to exist totally independently of the five aggregates. Instead, it conceives the existence of a self to which the mind and body belong, like an owner or governor, something that has different characteristics than they do and possesses, controls, and utilizes them, thinking, "Mine".

Furthermore, there is a sense that one's own mind and body could be exchanged for another person's mind and body, i.e. that one's self could become the owner of another person's psycho-physical aggregates.

From a Buddhist point of view, a self-sufficient, substantially existent self (or as it is also described "a substantially existent self in the sense of being self-sufficient") is impossible because an 'owner' of the five aggregates which possesses, controls, and utilizes them cannot be found. Also, it is not possible to isolate one person's self and exchange his mind and body for the mind and body of someone else, since a person's self is characterized by his mind and body.

Therefore, Buddhist philosophers assert the absence or *lack* of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, which is more difficult to realize than the lack of a permanent, partless, independent self.

## **The two truths**

Another difference between the Hinayana and the Mahayana tenet schools is how they assert the two truths – the conventional and ultimate truths.

All Buddhist tenet holders assert that whatever exists must be either a conventional or an ultimate truth, and that there is nothing which is both. Thus, conventional and ultimate truths do not refer to ideas or perspectives, nor to two levels of reality or truths; they refer to the phenomena themselves.

Moreover, 'truths' are divided into two categories primarily from the perspective of the types of mind that apprehend them. Although the two truths do not refer to the types of mind that perceive them but to the objects of the minds, the fact that they are defined in relation to these awarenesses demonstrates the close connection between awarenesses and their objects. This inter-connectedness becomes more evident in the higher tenet schools.

Conventional truths are the main objects of conventional awarenesses and ultimate truths the main objects of ultimate awarenesses. Ultimate awarenesses are in general considered to be 'superior' to conventional awarenesses, either because in the Sautrantika they are direct perceivers that experience their objects directly and unmistakably, or because in the Chittamatra and Madhyamika Schools they realize the ultimate nature of phenomena and are thus instrumental in leading practitioners to their respective goals.

Yet, unlike Mahayana tenet holders, Hinayana tenet holders do not assert ultimate truths to refer to the ultimate mode of existence of all phenomena (i.e. emptiness), and conventional truths to everything else that exists, i.e. to phenomena that are *not* the ultimate mode of existence of all phenomena. Therefore, they do not accept that the two truths are of one nature, but instead, assert that they are two different and unrelated categories of phenomena.



Furthermore, in the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika Schools the concept of the two truths is far less significant than in the Madhyamika School, for the proponents of the two Hinayana tenet systems devote more attention to exploring the four noble truths. Nevertheless, examining the two truths according to the lower tenet systems is considered an effective method for comprehending the two truths according to the Madhyamika School.

### **True existence**

A further difference between the Hinayana and the Mahayana tenet systems is that the proponents of the Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika assert that external phenomena exist truly. The external physical world (that is, the objects of the five senses such as shapes, colors, sounds, etc.) exist the way they appear to us – objectively, and independently of our perception. Therefore, they also contend that phenomena exist inherently/intrinsically and from their own side.

However, the proponents of the two Mahayana tenet schools do not hold the assertion that those phenomena which are external to consciousness exist truly. The followers of the Chittamatra do not hold that assertion because they refute the existence of phenomena external to consciousness, whereas according to the Madhyamika School, whatever exists necessarily *lacks* true existence.

Yet, except for the highest tenet system, the Prasangika Madhyamika (Middle Way Consequentialist), the other Mahayana schools all maintain that phenomena nonetheless exist inherently/intrinsically and from their own side.

### **All-knowingness**

Also, unlike the proponents of the Mahayana tenet systems, the proponents of the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika do not accept that a Buddha's mental consciousness is omniscient; they merely assert 'all-knowingness', which means that if a Buddha's mental consciousness thinks about objects, seen or unseen, it will know these objects one by one. Consequently, followers of the Hinayana tenet schools do not propound cognitive obstructions (i.e. obstructions to omniscience) or the ten Bodhisattva grounds/bhumis. For Hinayana tenet schools, in order to become enlightened, Bodhisattvas merely have to eliminate afflictive ignorance and other afflictions as well as the non-afflictive ignorance which is explained to be fourfold (ignorance of the profound and subtle qualities of a Buddha, ignorance due to the distant place of the object, ignorance due to the distant time of the object, and ignorance due to the nature of the object, such as the subtle details of the relationship of karmic causes with their effects).

### **Objects of elimination**

In general, the proponents of the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika contend that the root of cyclic existence refers to afflictive ignorance which mainly prevents the attainment of liberation. Examples of afflictive ignorance are the ignorance perceiving a self-sufficient, substantially existent self and attachment, anger, arrogance, etc. which are induced by the self grasping ignorance. However, unlike the followers of the higher Buddhist tenet schools, the proponents of the Hinayana tenet systems do not apply the term 'afflictive obstructions' to the objects of elimination of practitioners who aspire to self-liberation. The object of elimination of Mahayana practitioners is described as 'non-afflictive ignorance', which refers to the above-cited four-fold ignorance.

Therefore, Hearer and Solitary Realizer practitioners have to eliminate afflictive ignorance (self-grasping ignorance and other afflictions which are induced by that ignorance) in order to reach the state of an Arhat, whereas Bodhisattvas have to eliminate afflictive ignorance *and* the (four-fold) non-afflictive ignorance in order to become fully enlightened Buddhas. The direct antidote to both, afflictive and non-afflictive ignorance is the yogic direct perceiver (on the path of seeing and the path of meditation) that directly realizes the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths. Hearers, Solitary Realizers, and Bodhisattvas thus have to cultivate the yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes those sixteen aspects.

One of the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths is the lack of a permanent, partless, independent self (the third aspect: empty), and another is the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self (the fourth aspect: selfless). Hence, the yogic direct perceiver that realizes the sixteen aspects also directly realizes the two types of selflessness.

## Arya Nature

The proponents of the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika do not use the term 'Buddha Nature' but the term '*Arya Nature*'. The reason is that according to the two Hinayana tenet holders, most sentient beings are not able to attain the enlightened state of a Buddha.

Arya Nature is explained to have four aspects:

- (1) Being satisfied with simple monastic robes
- (2) Being satisfied with simple dwellings
- (3) Being satisfied with simple alms
- (4) Taking great delight in eliminating [afflictions] and meditating

The first three aspects enable practitioners to temporarily overcome craving to their possessions and thus facilitate meditation on the path. The fourth aspect enables practitioners to engage in actual meditation and thereby irreversibly eradicate craving to the self and its possessions. A person who possesses all four aspects possesses Arya Nature, enabling him to attain the state of an Arhat or possibly the state of a fully enlightened Buddha.

## Buddha Shakyamuni

Hinayana tenet holders further differ from Mahayana tenet holders in asserting that Buddha Shakyamuni was not already a Buddha when he took birth in Lumbini/India 2600 years ago. Instead, they hold that he was a Bodhisattva on the path of preparation, who attained enlightenment 35 years later under the Bodhi tree. Mahayana tenet holders, on the contrary, assert that Buddha Shakyamuni was already fully enlightened when he entered the womb of his mother Queen Māyā, and later merely *manifested the aspect* of attaining enlightenment.

Furthermore, many followers of the Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika maintain that the word of the Buddha is always literal and cannot be interpreted, and that the Mahayana sutras were not taught by the Buddha. The followers of the Mahayana tenets accept the Mahayana sutras to be spoken by the Buddha but categorize his teachings into definitive and interpretative sutras.

This completes a short presentation of some of the principal assertions that distinguish the proponents of the Hinayana tenet systems from the proponents of the Mahayana tenet systems.

Next follows a detailed description of some of the main assertions of the two Hinayana schools:

## The Vaibhashika (Great Exposition School)

One of the reasons for why this school is called "Vaibhashika" or "Great Exposition School" is that the proponents of this philosophical system mainly follow the *Great Exposition of Particulars* (Skt.: *Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra*, Tib.: *bye brag bshad mtsho chenmo*), a treatise that is thought to have been authored around 150 CE (even though Vaibhashika followers erroneously believe it to be the word of the Buddha).

Since this text was not translated into Tibetan until the middle of the twentieth century, students in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition chiefly rely on Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* (Skt.: *Abhidharma-kośa*, Tib.: *chos mngon pa mdzod*) and his *Auto-Commentary on the Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharma-kośa bhasya*, Tib.: *chos mngon pa mdzod kyi rang 'grel*) for their study of the Vaibhashika.

According to 18<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan master Koenchok Jigme Wangpo's *Precious Garland of the Presentation of Tenets* (Tib.: *grub pa'i mtha'i rnam par bzhag pa rin po che'i phreng ba*) the definition of a proponent of the Vaibhashika School is: 'a person propounding Hinayana tenets who does not accept self-knowers and who accepts that external phenomena exist truly'.

The Vaibhashika can be subdivided into eighteen different sub-schools that emerged in the centuries following the Buddha's passing away. Several of these schools arose simply because they had different teachers or their monasteries were located in different areas.

Another categorization of the proponents of this tenet system is into (1) Kashmiris, (2) Aparantakas, and (3) Magadhas.

Some of the essential assertions of the proponents of the Vaibhashika are with regard to:

- The existence of partless particles
- The existence of smallest moments in time
- The simultaneous existence of cause and effect
- The sequential production, abiding, aging, and disintegration of impermanent phenomena
- 'Existent' and 'functioning thing' being equivalent
- The two truths
- 'Substantially existent' and 'substantially established' having different meanings
- Karma of body and speech being physical
- The mode of existence of the person
- Sense powers' ability to perceive phenomena
- Sense consciousnesses perceiving their objects 'nakedly'
- The non-existence of self-knowers
- The existence of three final vehicles
- Arhats regressing from their attainment of self-liberation

### **The existence of partless particles**

The proponents of the Vaibhashika assert partless particles as the smallest building blocks of the physical world, which aggregate to form coarser objects such as stones, trees, etc. They are partless in the sense that they do not possess any directional parts, i.e. an upper, lower, left, or right side. However, according to the other philosophical tenet systems (except for the Sautrantika School Following Scripture), partless particles do not exist, because if they existed they would all merge or collapse into one particle. It would be impossible to have particles that were positioned to the left side and not the right side of a smallest particle because smallest particles do not possess any sides. Also, it would be impossible for particles without left and right sides touching each other to effectively come together and, without occupying the same place, to form a bigger entity. Consequently it would be impossible for partless particles to aggregate into coarser objects.

### **The existence of smallest moments in time**

The followers of the Vaibhashika also propound the existence of smallest moments in time, and that the linear aggregation of these smallest moments leads to a longer continuum in time. But for the other tenet schools (except for the Sautrantika School Following Scripture), a moment in time, such as one second, can endlessly be subdivided mentally, and it is not possible to find a smallest or shortest moment in time. If such smallest moments existed they could not form a longer continuum because, just like the smallest particles, they would all merge into one moment.

### **The simultaneous existence of cause and effect**

The proponents of the Vaibhashika are the only Buddhist tenet holders that assert the simultaneous existence of a cause and its effect, i.e. that there are some causes that exist at the same time as their effects. For instance, they hold that the shadow of a sprout is the result of the sprout, but that the sprout and its shadow exist at the same time. Likewise, a mind and its mental factors exist simultaneously, while being each other's causes. Other Buddhist tenet holders do not accept this, citing as their reason that one phenomenon cannot affect another that already exists; it can only affect later moments of the other.

### **The sequential production, abiding, aging, and disintegration of impermanent phenomena**

According to the proponents of the Vaibhashika, impermanent phenomena are first produced, then abide, then age and eventually disintegrate. This is different from all the other Buddhist tenet schools, the proponents of which maintain that production, abiding, aging and disintegration of a phenomenon occur simultaneously. In other words, according to the tenet systems other than the Vaibhashika, a phenomenon is produced, abides, ages, and disintegrates all at the same time. For instance, the first moment of a car is all four: it is produced, abides, ages, and disintegrates; the second moment of a car is produced, abides, ages, and disintegrates, and so on.

## **'Existent' and 'functioning thing' being equivalent**

According to the Vaibhashika School, whatever exists is necessarily a 'functioning thing'. Therefore, both permanent and impermanent phenomena are 'functioning things'. For instance, unconditioned space (i.e. the absence of obstructive contact) is a 'functioning thing', for it is able to perform a function.

Unconditioned space is able to perform a function because it allows movement to take place. This is different from the other Buddhist tenet schools, which do not assert that unconditioned space is a 'functioning thing'. They do not assert that unconditioned space is a functioning thing because according to them, a functioning thing refers to a phenomenon that is able to perform the function of creating its own effect. Hence, Buddhist tenet holders other than the proponents of the Vaibhashika hold that a 'functioning thing' and 'impermanent' are equivalent.

## **The two truths**

The followers of the Vaibhashika contend that a conventional truth refers to a phenomenon which is such that when it is physically broken up or mentally separated into individual parts, the phenomenon ceases to exist. For instance, a vase is a conventional truth because, when one physically breaks it or mentally takes it apart, there is no longer a vase but only shards, or parts of the vase that are not the vase. Other examples of conventional truths are a *mala* (prayer beads), a table, the body of a person, and so forth. Thus, a conventional truth is defined as 'a phenomenon which is such that when it is physically destroyed or mentally separated into parts, the consciousness perceiving it is cancelled'. For instance, when the vase is destroyed or mentally separated into parts, the consciousness perceiving the vase is discontinued (in the continuum of the person who destroyed or mentally separated the vase), since its object, the vase, is no longer there. Chandrakirti explains in his *Clear Words* (Skt.: *Prasannapadā*, Tib.: *tshig gsal*) that 'conventional' in the term 'conventional truth' has three different meanings: (1) concealing reality, (2) interdependent, and (3) worldly convention. Here, the most appropriate meaning of 'conventional' is "interdependent". Furthermore, since the statement, "a phenomenon such as a vase exists in dependence on its parts" is a statement that is in accordance with the truth, the proponents of the Vaibhashika assert that a vase is a conventional *truth*.

An ultimate truth refers to a phenomenon which is such that when it is physically broken up or mentally separated into individual parts, the phenomenon does not cease to exist. Examples of ultimate truths are, 'an impermanent phenomenon', a partless particle, permanent phenomena, and so forth. An impermanent phenomenon is an ultimate truth because whether it is physically broken up or mentally separated, an impermanent phenomenon does not cease to exist, for all its parts are impermanent phenomena. Partless particles and permanent phenomena are both ultimate truths, since they cannot be physically broken up nor separated into individual parts because they do not possess any physical parts. Hence, they are phenomena which do not cease to exist when physically broken up or mentally separated into individual parts. The definition of an ultimate truth is 'a phenomenon which is such that when it is physically destroyed or mentally separated into parts, the consciousness perceiving it is not cancelled'. Here the word 'ultimate' of the term 'ultimate truth' refers to a phenomenon that does not depend on parts, and the word 'truth' to something that can be known through reasoning, etc.

The view of the two truths according to the Vaibhashika is also held by the proponents of the Sautrantika School Following Scripture.

The study of the two truths according to the Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika School Following Scripture prepares students of Buddhist philosophy for the study of the highest philosophical tenet system, the Madhyamika School, for it familiarizes them with the idea that whatever exists pertains to one of the two truths. It also introduces the idea that phenomena that are imputed on a collection of parts other than themselves are not as real, solid, unchanging, and substantial as they may appear.

## **'Substantially existent' and 'substantially established' having different meanings**

The Vaibhashika is the only Buddhist tenet school that differentiates 'substantially existent' from 'substantially established'. For the other tenet systems these two are the same.

The followers of the Vaibhashika contend that 'conventional truth', 'conventionally existent', and 'imputedly existent' are equivalent, and that 'ultimate truth', 'ultimately existent' and 'substantially existent' are equivalent.

A conventional truth, such as a tree for example, is imputedly existent because it is imputed/designated on the basis of its parts. Hence, in order to perceive the tree, the mind that perceives the tree must also perceive phenomena that are not the tree, like the tree's branches. Similarly, John, for instance, is imputedly existent because in order to perceive John, the mind that perceives him must also perceive phenomena that are not John, such as his face.

An ultimate truth, on the contrary, is substantially existent because in order to perceive it, the mind that perceives an ultimate truth does not have to perceive anything that is not an ultimate truth. For instance, an impermanent phenomenon is a substantially existent phenomenon, because in order to perceive an impermanent phenomenon, the mind that perceives it does not have to perceive anything that is not impermanent.

Yet, according to the Vaibhashika, all phenomena are substantially *established* since they have an independent existence. Consequently, even an imputedly existent phenomenon is substantially established, because when the phenomenon that is imputed/designated is sought, an independent entity is found.

Therefore, the proponents of the Vaibhashika do not accept the existence of non-affirming negatives, for if non-affirming negatives were to exist it would contradict the assertion that all phenomena are substantially established. For the Vaibhashika, all negatives are necessarily affirming negatives since they have an *independent* existence and must therefore always imply something affirmative. For instance, 'the absence of elephant on the table' is an affirming negative, even though the proponents of this tenet do not clarify which positive phenomenon is affirmed. The difference between affirming and non-affirming negatives will be explained below.

### **Karma of body and speech being physical karma**

The proponents of the Vaibhashika and of the *highest* tenet system (the Prasangika Madhyamika) both accept that volitional actions of the body and volitional actions of speech are form. Volitional actions of the body are physical because they are visual, and volitional actions of speech are physical because they are sound. However, these are coarse physical form - called 'observable form' (Tib.: *rnam par rig byed kyi pa'i gzugs*) - because they can be perceived by sense consciousnesses. After the action has been completed a *subtle* physical form – called 'unobservable form' (Tib.: *rnam par rig byed ma yin pa'i gzugs*)- is left in a person's continuum where it remains until it ripens as a karmic result in the future. For instance, the action of killing is *observable* form because it can be perceived by an ordinary person's eye consciousness. After the act of killing has been completed, a subtle form of the act is left in the continuum of the killer until it ripens into its karmic results sometime in the future. This subtle form is *unobservable* form because it cannot be perceived by an ordinary person.

Similarly, the action of lying is *observable* form because it can be perceived by an ordinary person's ear consciousness. Here again, after the words of the lie have been spoken, a subtle form of those words, *unobservable* form, is left in the continuum of the person who lied, until sometime in the future, when it ripens into negative karmic results.

Other subtle unobservable forms are vows, such as, for instance, the vows in the continuum of someone who has taken the five lay vows.

The proponents of the other tenet systems do not assert this. According to them, volitional actions of body and speech are mental, and after a verbal or physical action is completed, karmic imprints are what is left in the person's continuum. Likewise, vows are considered to be a type of non-physical potential (Tib.: *nus pa*) – hence they are also considered to be a type of imprint.

### **The mode of existence of the person**

Although they assert the two types of selflessness, followers of the Vaibhashika, like the followers of the other Buddhist tenet schools, nonetheless accept the existence of the self, i.e. the person (self and person are equivalent). Yet, they differ from other tenet systems with regard to their assertion of the *mode of existence* of the person. Some Vaibhashika tenet holders assert the collection of the five aggregates to be the person. Others hold that the person is the *continuum* of the five aggregates, which is also accepted by the Sautrantika School Following Scripture. Another group maintains that the ever-present mental consciousness is the person, a view they share with the proponents of the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning, the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Reasoning, and the proponents of the Svatantrika Madhyamika.

Please note that, in particular, Buddhist tenet holders who maintain that the ever-present mental consciousness is the person assert two different types of person: an imputedly existent person and a substantially existent person. The imputedly existent person is the being who is imputed/designated on the basis of the five aggregates and with whom we can interact. For example Jane, whom we can see and talk to, is an imputedly existent person because we impute/designate 'Jane' on the basis of her psycho-physical complex. However, the essence of imputedly existent Jane is her ever-present mental consciousness. So her mental consciousness is the substantially existent person or the substantially existent Jane, who is found when looking for the essence of Jane among her basis of imputation (i.e. her five aggregates). For the tenet holders who accept the ever-present mental consciousness to be the person, if Jane's mental consciousness were not Jane, if it were not the substantially existent person 'Jane', then she would not exist, because she would not be findable among her psycho-physical aggregates. Hence, (according to Buddhist tenet holders other than the proponents of the Prasangika Madhyamika) merely being imputed on the basis of the five aggregates, without having some sort of substantial existence, is not enough for it to be possible to say that a person exists.

### **Sense powers' ability to perceive phenomena**

The followers of the Vaibhashika are the only Buddhist tenet holders who contend that sense powers *perceive* their objects (i.e. shapes, colors, sounds, smells, tastes, or tangible objects). Sense powers are internal, invisible, clear physical forms which are responsible for the arising of sense consciousnesses. An eye sense power, for instance, is a clear physical form that gives rise to an eye consciousness. Even though the higher tenet holders accept that shape and color *appear* to the eye sense power, sound to the ear sense power, smell to the nose sense power, taste to the tongue sense power, and tangible objects to the body sense power, they do not assert that these sense powers *perceive* shape and color, etc. However, the followers of the Vaibhashika maintain that both the sense powers and the sense consciousnesses perceive objects. They reason that if sense powers did not perceive their objects, then, for instance, an eye consciousness which is non-physical (and thus not obstructed by walls, etc.) would be able to perceive objects that are not in the sphere of vision of the person in whose continuum the eye consciousness arises.

### **Sense consciousnesses' perceiving their objects 'nakedly'**

Another assertion that is only found in the Vaibhashika School is the assertion that sense consciousnesses perceive their objects 'nakedly', without taking on the aspects of their objects. An awareness taking on the aspect of an object refers to an awareness taking on the *appearance* of that object. Hence, according to Vaibhashika tenets, for an eye consciousnesses there is no appearance of shape and color, for an ear consciousnesses there is no appearance of sound, for a nose consciousness there is no appearance of smell, and so forth. The proponents of all the other tenet systems hold that sense consciousnesses are generated in the aspect of their object, i.e. to an eye consciousness perceiving blue, for instance, the aspect or the appearance of blue appears.

### **The non-existence of self-knowers**

Unlike the proponents of the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning, the Chittamatra, and the Yogachara Svatantrika, the proponents of the Vaibhashika do not assert self-knowers, for they do not accept the existence of an awareness that is of one nature with another awareness. According to Buddhist philosophers who accept the existence of self-knowers, there are two types of consciousness: *other-knowers* and *self-knowers*. An other-knower is an awareness that perceives phenomena other than a consciousness that is of one nature with itself. Examples are a conceptual consciousness realizing that sound is impermanent, an eye consciousness perceiving a tree, an ear consciousness listening to a teaching by H.H. the Dalai Lama, and so forth. A self-knower, on the other hand, is a mental consciousness that directly perceives an awareness that is of one nature with itself, and all awarenesses are accepted to have a self-knower. The self-knower of the eye consciousness perceiving the tree, for instance, is of one nature with the eye consciousness itself. It is not a sense consciousness but a mental direct perceiver which perceives *the eye consciousness perceiving the tree*. Hence, the self-knower of the eye consciousness perceiving the tree is a mental consciousness which is also a direct perceiver so that it directly realizes its main object, *the eye consciousness perceiving the tree*. It is not self-awareness or introspection and plays only a small role in spiritual practice.

Likewise, the conceptual consciousness realizing that sound is impermanent has a self-knower that is of one nature with itself. That self-knower is a mental direct perceiver which directly realizes *the conceptual consciousness realizing that sound is impermanent*.

The analogy given for a self-knower is a lamp that illuminates itself while also illuminating other phenomena.

Those Buddhist tenet holders who assert self-knowers argue that self-knowers enable us to remember not only *the object* we experienced but also the subjective experiencing itself. Thus, self-knowers are explained to facilitate the memory of *perceiving* something.

## The existence of three final vehicles

All Buddhist tenet holders accept three vehicles: the Hearer Vehicle, the Solitary Realizer Vehicle, and the Universal Vehicle. These vehicles pertain to the different modes of practice of three different types of individuals.

However, like the proponents of the Sautrantika and the Chittamatra School Following Scripture, the proponents of the Vaibhashika assert that the three vehicles are three *final* vehicles, because they hold that practitioners who have reached the state of a Hearer Arhat or a Solitary Realizer Arhat do not continue to practice in order to become Buddhas. Indeed, at the time of death, the mental and physical continuums of these Arhats are severed and they cease to exist. Therefore, the proponents of the Vaibhashika maintain that there are only a very few Buddhas who, after having attained enlightenment, teach others the methods to self-liberation and Buddhahood. Furthermore, when these Buddhas pass away, their mental and physical continua are also severed and they go out of existence.

For the higher tenets (except for the Chittamatra School Following Scripture) there are two *temporary* vehicles but there is only one *final* vehicle. This means that everyone will eventually attain enlightenment and become a Buddha, even if they first become Hearer or Solitary Realizer Arhats. It is asserted that after their death these Arhats form a new physical body through pure prayers and meditative powers and enter the Mahayana path. Also, once they have become enlightened, even if they leave their bodies behind, their mental continua will go on, and by emanating new bodies they will continue to work towards leading all sentient beings to enlightenment.

## Arhats regressing from their attainment of self-liberation

Unlike the followers of the other Buddhist tenet schools, the followers of the Vaibhashika contend that some Arhats can fall from their attainment of self-liberation and re-enter the path of meditation or even the path of seeing; they lose some of their realizations and their afflictions return.

This completes a short presentation of the Vaibhashika.

## The Sautrantika (Sutra School)

This philosophical system is called the "Sautrantika" or "Sutra School" because their proponents chiefly rely on sutras when propounding their views, without following the **Great Exposition of Particulars** (Skt.: *Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra*, Tib.: *bye brag bshad mtsho chenmo*). However, since all Buddhist tenet holders base their assertions on the word of the Buddha, the explanation of the name of this tenet merely indicates an emphasis but does not define the Sautrantika.

According to Tibetan master Koenchok Jigme Wangpo's **Precious Garland of the Presentation of Tenets** (Tib.: *grub pa'i mtha'i rnam par bzhag pa rin po che'i phreng ba*), the definition of a proponent of the Sautrantika School is: 'a person propounding Hinayana tenets who asserts that both external phenomena and self-knowers exist truly'.

Please note that although according to this definition, proponents of the Sautrantika School Following Scripture assert the existence of self-knowers, some scholars disagree. For instance, the 18<sup>th</sup> century scholar Jangya Rolpai Dorje says in his **Clear Exposition of the Presentations of Tenets, Beautiful Ornament for the Meru of the Subduer's Teaching** (Tib.: *grub mtha' thub bstan lhun po'i mdzes rgyan*): "However, it does not seem that the proponents of the Sautrantika School Following Scripture clearly set forth the presentation of accepting self-knowers."

The Sautrantika can be categorized into two:

1. The Sautrantika School Following Scripture
2. The Sautrantika School Following Reasoning

Some of the common assertions of the two sub-schools of the Sautrantika are with regard to:

- Existent
- Permanent and impermanent
- Positive and negative phenomena
- Manifest and hidden phenomena
- One and different
- The mind
- The existence of self-knowers
- Permanent phenomena not appearing to direct perceivers
- The existence of three final vehicles

## **Existent**

The proponents of the Sautrantika have a distinctive way in which they posit, define and categorize that which exists:

(1) Existent, (2) phenomenon, (3) object of knowledge, and (4) established basis are equivalent. The definition of existent is: 'that which is observed by a valid cognizer'. The definition of a phenomenon is: 'that which holds its own entity'. The definition of an object of knowledge is: 'that which is suitable as an object of an awareness'. The definition of an established base is: 'that which is established by a valid cognizer'.

## **Permanent and impermanent**

'Existent' has two categories: (1) permanent and (2) impermanent. Permanent and impermanent were explained above. Impermanent is again categorized into (1) form, (2) consciousness, and (3) 'compositional factors that are neither' [form nor consciousness].

The category of form is: (1) external form and (2) internal form. External form refers to the objects of the five sense consciousnesses (shapes and colors, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects) and internal form to the five sense powers (eye sense power, ear sense power, nose sense power, tongue sense power, and body sense power). Consciousness refers to any kind of awareness (main minds and mental factors). 'Compositional factors that are neither' [form nor consciousness] are further categorized into (1) 'compositional factors that are persons' and 'compositional factors that are not persons'. Examples of 'compositional factors that are persons' are Arya Buddhas, human beings, animals, and so forth. Examples of 'compositional factors that are not persons' are karmic imprints, vows, and so forth.

The definitions of 'existent' and of phenomena equivalent to 'existent', the categorization of 'existent' into permanent and impermanent phenomena, etc., set forth in the scriptures of the Sautrantika School are also asserted by the higher tenet systems.

## **Positive and negative phenomena**

Another way of categorizing 'existent' is into (1) positive and (2) negative phenomena. So, whatever exists is either a positive or a negative phenomenon, and there is nothing which is both.

A positive phenomenon is characterized as being the main object of a conceptual consciousness which perceives that positive phenomenon without explicitly negating an object of negation. A table is an example of a positive phenomenon because it is the main object of a conceptual consciousness which perceives the table without explicitly negating anything.

A negative phenomenon, on the other hand, is characterized as being the main object of a conceptual consciousness which perceives that negative phenomenon by way of explicitly negating an object of negation. For instance a 'non-permanent table' is a negative phenomenon because it is explicitly perceived by a conceptual consciousness by way of explicitly negating an object of negation, namely 'permanent'.



Please note that even though table and 'non-permanent table' are equivalent, there is no contradiction in one being a positive and the other a negative phenomenon. The reason for this is that being a positive or negative phenomenon depends on how something is explicitly perceived by a conceptual consciousness.

Negative phenomena have two further categories: (1) affirming negatives and (2) non-affirming negatives, and any negative phenomenon is necessarily one of these two.

However, unlike positive and negative phenomena which are differentiated according to how they are perceived by a conceptual consciousness, affirming and non-affirming negatives are differentiated according to whether or not the words that express them indicate a positive phenomenon in the place of what is negated.

'Non-permanent table', for instance, is an affirming negative because the words that express 'non-permanent table' indicate a positive or affirmative phenomenon in the place of negating permanent. The positive or affirmative phenomenon these words indicate in the place of the negated 'permanent' is 'table'.

Another example of an affirming negative which is found in the scriptures is 'fat Devadatta not eating food during the day'. This is an affirming negative, because the words that express 'fat Devadatta not eating food during the day' indicate or imply a positive/affirmative phenomenon in the place of negating 'fat Devadatta eating food during the day'. The words imply a positive phenomenon because they imply 'fat Devadatta is eating food *at night*', which is a positive phenomenon.

An example of a non-affirming negative is 'lack of a permanent, partless, independent self'. This is a non-affirming negative because the words that express the 'lack of a permanent, partless, independent self' do not indicate any positive or affirmative phenomenon in the place of negating 'a permanent, partless, independent self'.

## Manifest and hidden phenomena

Phenomena can also be categorized into manifest (obvious) and hidden phenomena, with the latter being further subdivided into slightly hidden and very hidden phenomena.

Anything that exists is either manifest, slightly hidden or very hidden. Manifest phenomena are objects which can be newly understood by ordinary awarenesses without having to depend on inference, i.e. on inferential cognizers that are the product of logical reasons or of reliable scriptural sources. The objects of the five senses, for instance, are manifest phenomena because they can be newly known or understood by their respective sense consciousnesses.

Slightly hidden phenomena are objects that are less obvious and thus more difficult to realize than manifest phenomena. Examples of slightly hidden phenomena are subtle impermanence, selflessness, and so forth. These phenomena, the understanding of which is essential to spiritual progress, can be newly realized only by 'inferential cognizers through the power of the fact'. Inferential cognizers through the power of the fact are conceptual consciousnesses which correctly infer, that is, realize their objects in dependence on correct logical reasons.

Very hidden phenomena are objects that are even more difficult to realize than slightly hidden and manifest phenomena. The subtle working of the law of karma, for instance, is an extremely hidden phenomenon because its realization depends on an 'inferential cognizer through belief' (also called 'scriptural inferential cognizer'). Inferential cognizers through belief are conceptual consciousnesses which correctly infer, or realize their objects in dependence on reliable scriptural sources.

However, even though very hidden phenomena can be realized or understood to some extent by such inferential cognizers, their full comprehension depends on the omniscient mind of a Buddha.

## One and different

The followers of the Sautrantika further categorize phenomena into (1) one and (2) different.

Whatever exists is necessarily one of the two, and there is nothing that is both. The definition of one is: a 'phenomenon which is not diverse'. The definition of different is: 'phenomena that are diverse'. Blue is an example of something that is 'one'. The two, blue and yellow, are an example of something that is 'different'.

Also, even phenomena which are equivalent, such as product and impermanent, or house and 'opposite from not house', are *different*. They are different because although they refer to the same phenomenon, they nonetheless appear differently to the conceptual consciousness that perceives them.

These presentations of *existent, permanent and impermanent, positive and negative, manifest and hidden, and one and many* are also accepted and relied upon to a large extent by the other Buddhist Schools.

## The mind

The proponents of the Sautrantika School give extensive explanations of the mind, its definition and categories. They further provide detailed descriptions of the various types of awareness such as direct perceivers, of the difference between direct perceivers and conceptual consciousnesses, and so forth. Therefore, the higher tenet schools all rely on these elucidations by the Sautrantika School for their presentations on the mind – even though they differ in some of their assertions.

(For more detail about the mind, please see “Mind in Tibetan Buddhism” by Lati Rinpoche and Betsy Napper)

## The existence of self-knowers

Like the proponents of the Chittamatra and the Yogachara Svatantrika tenets, the proponents of the Sautrantika School accept the existence of self-knowers.

## Permanent phenomena not appearing to direct perceivers

Unique to the proponents of the Sautrantika School is their assertion that permanent phenomena do not appear to direct perceivers. Therefore, they accept that a yogic direct perceiver realizes the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self *implicitly* since the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self is permanent and thus does not appear to that direct perceiver. The ‘five aggregates which are empty of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self’ are what appears to that yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self.

The other Buddhist tenet holders merely hold that permanent phenomena do not appear to *sense* consciousnesses, and they do not accept that a yogic direct perceiver does not *explicitly* realize the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self.

## The existence of three final vehicles

Like the proponents of the Vaibhashika and the Chittamatra School Following Scripture, the proponents of the Sautrantika assert that the three vehicles are three *final* vehicles, for they hold that at the time of death the mental continuum of Hearer Arhats, Solitary Realizer Arhats, and Buddhas is severed.

## The Sautrantika School Following Scripture

Among the Indian treatises, proponents of the Sautrantika School Following Scripture mainly rely on Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* and his *Auto-commentary on the Treasury of Knowledge*.

Please note that even though the *Treasury of Knowledge* and the *Auto-commentary* mainly set forth the tenets of the Vaibhashika, they also present the Sautrantika School Following Scripture. The reason for this is that in these two texts the author Vasubandhu (who was himself a follower of the Sautrantika when he composed the *Treasury of Knowledge* and its *Auto-commentary*) frequently expresses his disagreement with particular views of the Vaibhashika, and thereby indirectly reveals assertions of the Sautrantika.

According to many scholars, Vasubandhu was initially a follower of the Vaibhashika, then became a follower of the Sautrantika School Following Scripture, and was eventually converted to the Chittamatra School by his half-brother Asanga.

This Sautrantika tenet system is called "Sautrantika School Following Scripture" because even though its proponents are advocates of reasoning, it is not the basis for their assertions to the same extent as for the proponents of the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning. Instead, they rely more on scripture, which is why they are considered the less advanced of the two groups.

The Sautrantika School Following Scripture differs from the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning mainly because of its assertions regarding:

- The existence of partless particles
- The existence of smallest moments in time
- The two truths
- The mode of existence of the person

### **The existence of partless particles**

Like the proponents of the Vaibhashika, the proponents of the Sutra School Following Scripture assert the existence of directionally partless particles which cannot be further subdivided either physically or mentally.

### **The existence of smallest moments in time**

Like the proponents of the Vaibhashika, the proponents of the Sutra School Following Scripture also assert the existence of smallest moments in time which cannot be further subdivided either physically or mentally.

### **The two truths**

The proponents of the Sutra School Following Scripture explain the two truths in the same way as the proponents of the Vaibhashika, for they define a conventional truth as 'a phenomenon which is such that when it is physically destroyed or mentally separated into parts, the consciousness perceiving it is cancelled', and an ultimate truth as 'a phenomenon which is such that when it is physically destroyed or mentally separated into parts, the consciousness perceiving it is not cancelled'.

### **The mode of existence of the person**

Like *some* of the followers of the Vaibhashika, the proponents of the Sautrantika School Following Scripture maintain that the continuum of the five aggregates is the person.

These four concepts are only asserted by the proponents of the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika School Following Scripture.

## **The Sautrantika School Following Reasoning**

This Sautrantika sub-school is called "Sautrantika School Following Reasoning" because it mainly relies on the reasoning (as well as on many of the assertions) presented in Dignaga's *Compendium of Valid Cognition* (Skt.: *Pramāṇa-samuccaya*, Tib.: *tshad ma kun las btus pa*) and Dharmakirti's *Seven Treatises on Valid Cognition* (Skt.: *Pramanavartikadisapta-grantha-samgraha*, Tib.: *tshad ma sde bdun*).

The Chittamatra School Following Reasoning differs from the Chittamatra School Following Scripture due to its assertions regarding:

- The non-existence of partless particles
- The non-existence of smallest moments in time
- The two truths
- The mode of existence of the person

The reasons for not accepting the existence of directionally partless particles or of smallest moments in time were explained above.

### **The two truths**

According to the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning, a conventional truth is defined as 'a phenomenon which is ultimately not able to perform a function'. This is because conventional truths are phenomena which are not able to perform the function of creating their own effects. Therefore,

conventional truths and permanent phenomena are equivalent. Permanent phenomena are conventional truths because they cannot be explicitly perceived by direct perceivers. To be explicitly perceived by a direct perceiver means to be perceived by that direct perceiver while *appearing* to it. Instead, permanent phenomena have to rely on imputation/designation by conceptual consciousnesses. Unconditioned space (i.e. the absence of obstructive contact), for instance, cannot be explicitly perceived by a direct perceiver because it cannot appear to any of the five sense consciousnesses or to a mental direct perceiver. Its cognition depends on a *conceptual* consciousness that imputes/designates (i.e. explicitly cognizes) it. Therefore, conventional truths are explained to be merely imputed. Here the word 'merely' negates appearance to a direct perceiver, but not inherent existence as it would for the Prasangika Madhyamika. An ultimate truth is defined as 'that which is ultimately able to perform a function', for ultimate truths are able to perform the function of creating an effect. Ultimate truths and impermanent phenomena are equivalent. Hence, impermanent phenomena are ultimate truths because they can be explicitly perceived by direct perceivers and do not have to rely on imputation/designation by conceptual consciousnesses. For instance, a car is an ultimate truth since it creates its own effect and since it is perceived by an eye consciousness while appearing to it.

Furthermore, the *appearing object* of a conceptual consciousness is always a conventional truth and the *appearing object* of a direct perceiver is always an ultimate truth.

Therefore, distinguishing the two truths according to the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning is closely linked to distinguishing between (1) conceptual consciousnesses (Skt.: *kalpana*, Tib.: *rtog pa*) and (2) direct perceivers (Skt.: *pratyaksha*, Tib.: *mngon sum*).

### (1) *Conceptual consciousnesses*

Conceptual consciousnesses are mental consciousnesses that apprehend their objects of engagement *indirectly* by way of a generic image (also called 'mental image' or 'meaning generality', Tib.: *don spyi*). A conceptual consciousness apprehending a car, for example, apprehends its main object, the car, *indirectly* by way of the generic image of the car. The generic image of the car is only a representation of the car, not the car itself; it serves as an intermediary object that allows the conceptual consciousness to get at the car. The generic image is a subjective representation of the car in that it encompasses what we *mean* when we say "car." This constructed representation or generic image of the car enables the conceptual awareness to apprehend the car. Without the appearance of the generic image, the conceptual consciousness would not be able to think about the car, since it does not function like a direct perceiver to which an actual car 'nakedly' or directly appears. Similarly, when we think about a song, a generic image of the song appears; when we think about the smell of a perfume, a generic image of the smell of the perfume appears; when we think about chocolate, a generic image of chocolate appears; and when we think about smoothness, a generic image of smoothness appears.

Like every other consciousness, a conceptual consciousness has two types of objects: (1) an appearing object and (2) an object of engagement. In the case of the conceptual consciousness apprehending a car, the car is the *object of engagement* of the conceptual consciousness, for it is the main object the consciousness is engaging with or perceiving. Therefore, the *object of engagement* refers to the object that the mind "gets at", it is the object that the mind perceives and possibly realizes.

However, the *appearing object* of the awareness is not the car itself, for a conceptual consciousness is unable to directly perceive the car. The *appearing object* is the generic image of the car. The generic image appears to the conceptual consciousness but is not perceived by the conceptual consciousness. The generic image is permanent, and thus a conventional truth. Although it only lasts as long as the conceptual consciousness to which it appears, during that period it is not subject to momentary change.

Conceptual consciousnesses are of numerous different types. Afflictions such as ignorance, anger, attachment, etc., doubting consciousnesses, correctly assuming minds, memory awarenesses, analytical consciousnesses, minds that visualize and imagine, awarenesses that categorize and classify, consciousnesses that think about colors, tables, food, etc. – these are all conceptual consciousnesses. However, despite their ability to analyze, reflect, categorize, and so forth, they are considered to be limited (1) because they cannot perceive their objects directly but only through the medium of a generic image and (2) because they are mistaken with regard to their appearing objects. Conceptual consciousnesses are mistaken with regard to their appearing objects because even

though the generic image of, for instance, the car is not the actual car, to a conceptual consciousness apprehending the car the generic image of the car *appears* to be the actual car.

(2) *Direct perceivers*

Direct perceivers are either sense or mental consciousnesses. They are non-conceptual and thus perceive their objects *directly*. An eye consciousness apprehending a car, for instance, does not rely upon a representation of the car (a generic image of the car) but perceives the car 'nakedly' or directly with every detail of shape, color, etc. However, since it is a sense consciousness, it can only apprehend it because the car exists in the present and is situated within the sphere of vision of that eye consciousness. If it were located elsewhere or did not exist in the present one could not take it to mind with a sense consciousness. A *mental* direct perceiver, on the other hand, can directly perceive any phenomenon. Yet, according to the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning, to mental direct perceivers that directly realize a permanent phenomenon such as selflessness, the selflessness itself does not appear because selflessness is permanent, and because whatever appears to a direct perceiver is necessarily impermanent.

Direct perceivers also have (1) an appearing object and (2) an object of engagement. In the case of the eye consciousness apprehending the car, the car is both the *appearing object* and the *object of engagement* of the eye consciousness.

A direct perceiver is not considered to be limited in the same way as a conceptual consciousness (1) because it perceives its object directly and (2) because it is not mistaken with regard to its appearing object. A direct perceiver, such as an eye consciousness apprehending a car, is not mistaken with regard to its appearing object because the car that is the appearing object of the eye consciousness exists as an actual car in the way it appears (to the eye consciousness) to be an actual car.

According to the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning, conceptual consciousnesses are conventional awarenesses while direct perceivers are ultimate awarenesses. Hence, etymologically permanent phenomena are conventional truths because they are the explicit objects of conventional awarenesses. They are the explicit objects of conventional awarenesses because they are explicitly perceived only by conceptual consciousnesses (not by direct perceivers). Impermanent phenomena are ultimate truths because they are the explicit objects of ultimate awarenesses. They are the explicit objects of ultimate awarenesses because they are explicitly perceived by direct perceivers. As mentioned before, ultimate awarenesses are considered superior to conventional awarenesses, for they perceive their objects directly and unmistakably.

Also, according to the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning, the meaning of the word 'conventional' in the term 'conventional truth' is *concealer of reality*. The proponents of the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning assert that conceptual consciousnesses are *concealers of reality* because they cannot perceive their objects directly but only through the medium of a generic image. Hence, conceptual consciousnesses *conceal* their objects from direct perception. A permanent phenomenon, such as unconditioned space, is a *truth for a concealer* because it is the appearing object of a *concealer* consciousness. Some proponents define a conventional truth as: 'that which is established as being merely imputed by a conceptual consciousness' and an ultimate truth as: 'that which exists from its own side, without being merely imputed by a conceptual consciousness'.

This presentation of the two truths is unique to the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning and is not accepted by any other Buddhist school of tenets.

The study of this view of the two truths serves as a stepping-stone to the study of Madhyamika philosophy, for it helps students gain an appreciation of the importance of conceptual consciousnesses and familiarizes them with the idea that phenomena which are merely designated/labeled by conceptual consciousness nonetheless exist. The Sautrantika School Following Reasoning also introduces the concept of the two truths existing as two different but compatible categories of phenomena, differentiated by the two types of awareness to which they appear. Further, it instills the idea that ultimate truths are "more real" (i.e. that they are actual truths), for they exist in the way they appear to direct perceivers. They exist in the way they appear to direct perceivers because the awarenesses that directly and explicitly perceive them are unmistakable consciousnesses, whereas the awarenesses that explicitly perceive conventional truths are mistaken consciousnesses.

## **The mode of existence of the person**

Like the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Reasoning, the proponents of the Yogachara Svatantrika, and the proponent of the Sautrantika Svatantrika, the followers of the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning contend that the ever-present mental consciousness is the person.

This completes a short presentation of the Sautrantika.

Please note that, as mentioned before, many of the concepts set forth in the scriptures of the Sautrantika School – e.g. the descriptions of the categories of ‘existent’, the different types of awareness, etc. – are in large measure embraced by the proponents of the other philosophical schools. In fact, the study of the scriptures of the Sautrantika School, in particular of the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning, serves as a foundation for the study of higher Buddhist tenet systems, and students of Tibetan Buddhist institutions traditionally dedicate several years to the study of logic, psychology, and epistemology on the basis of the tenets of the Sautrantika School.

## **THE TWO MAHAYANA TENET SCHOOLS**

As explained above, the two Mahayana tenet schools are the Chittamatra (Mind Only) School and the Madhyamika (Middle Way) School. They differ from the Hinayana tenet schools in their assertions regarding:

- Emptiness of phenomena
- The two truths
- True existence
- Omniscience
- Objects of elimination
- Buddha Shakyamuni

### **Emptiness of phenomena**

Unlike the proponents of the Hinayana tenet schools, the proponents of the Mahayana tenet schools assert not only the two types of selflessness of persons (explained above) but also emptiness, i.e. the ultimate mode of existence of *all* phenomena. According to the Mahayana tenet systems, the two types of selflessness are easier to understand and thus coarser, whereas emptiness is more subtle. Moreover, the direct realization of emptiness is considered essential for one's spiritual development since without this, it is impossible to progress on the Bodhisattva path and attain Buddhahood.

### **The two truths**

The followers of the Mahayana tenet schools propound that emptiness, i.e. the ultimate mode of existence of a phenomenon, is an ultimate truth, whereas whatever exists that is not emptiness is a conventional truth.

Furthermore, according to the Chittamatra and Madhyamika School, only ultimate truths are actual truths. Ultimate truths are truths because they are non-deceptive; they exist in the way they appear. Ultimate truths exist in the way they appear because when they appear to the meditative equipoise that directly realizes them they do not appear in a way that contradicts reality. The meditative equipoise that directly realizes emptiness is a non-mistaken awareness, for its main object, emptiness, does not appear in a way in which it cannot possibly exist.

On the other hand, conventional truths are deceptive since they do not exist in the way they appear. To the awarenesses that perceive them they appear in a way that is not in accordance with reality. According to the Chittamatra School, conventional truths appear to the awarenesses that apprehend them as being distant and cut off from those awarenesses; the subjects (the awarenesses) and their objects (the conventional truths) appear to be of a different nature. For the Madhyamika School, conventional truths appear to the awarenesses that apprehend them as existing truly and ultimately. Hence, the proponents of both Chittamatra and Madhyamika contend that conventional truths are deceptive and false - although this does not mean that they are utterly non-existent, but that they appear to exist in a way that is diametrically opposed to the way they actually exist.

Etymologically, emptinesses are *ultimate truths* because they are truth from the perspective of an ultimate awareness, i.e. a meditative equipoise directly realizing the ultimate nature of phenomena, while all phenomena other than emptiness are *conventional truths* because they are truths for a concealer consciousness. They are truths for a concealer consciousness because, from the perspective of an ignorant consciousness that conceals their actual reality, they seem to exist in the way they appear. For the Chittamatra School, such a concealer consciousness refers to the ignorance that perceives subject and object to be of a different nature, while for the Madhyamika School it refers to the ignorance that perceives phenomena to exist truly and ultimately.

Furthermore, even though the two truths differ by way of being deceptive and non-deceptive, the proponents of Mahayana tenet schools nonetheless contend that the two truths are of one nature. Yet this does not mean that they are the same, for they are not identical but different, distinct phenomena. Nor does it mean that every conventional truth is of one nature with every ultimate truth. Asserting that the two truths are different but of one nature refers to the two truths in relation to a particular phenomenon. For instance, a table is a conventional truth and the table's emptiness is the table's ultimate truth, which means that the ultimate truth of the table is a characteristic or attribute of the conventional truth, the table. Hence the conventional truth, the table, and the table's ultimate truth are different phenomena while being of one nature. They are of one nature because they are connected in a way in which one cannot exist without the other; the ultimate truth of the table cannot exist if the conventional truth, the table, does not exist and the conventional truth, the table, cannot exist if the ultimate truth of the table does not exist. Similarly, the impermanence, the colour and the shape of the table are all attributes of the table, and the table is also of one nature with each of those attributes.

Likewise for all other phenomena, there must be two truths existing together at the same time, inseparably connected, but distinct.

## **True existence**

The two Mahayana tenet schools contend that phenomena which are external to consciousness do not truly exist. As mentioned before, the proponents of the Chittamatra School do not hold that assertion because they refute the existence of phenomena external to consciousness, whereas according to the Madhyamika tenet schools, whatever exists necessarily *lacks* true existence.

However, only the proponents of the Prasangika Madhyamika School hold that whatever exists is necessarily also empty of inherent and intrinsic existence - empty of existing from its own side. The proponents of the Chittamatra and the Svatantrika Madhyamika Schools maintain that phenomena can only exist if they exist inherently and from their own side.

## **Omniscience**

According to the two Mahayana tenet systems, a Buddha's mind is omniscient; it directly and simultaneously realizes all phenomena of the past, present, and future. This means that unlike the awarenesses of sentient beings, a Buddha's mind directly and simultaneously realizes the two truths, the conventional and ultimate truths. To attain such omniscience, Bodhisattvas must advance through the ten Bodhisattva grounds/bhumis, in order to gradually eliminate the different layers of obstructions to omniscience (i.e. the cognitive obstructions).

## **Objects of elimination**

The proponents of the Chittamatra and the Madhyamika Schools assert two types of objects of elimination: (1) afflictive obstructions and (2) cognitive obstructions. The obstructions that mainly obstruct one from becoming liberated are afflictive obstructions (obstructions to liberation) and the obstructions that mainly obstruct one from becoming fully enlightened are cognitive obstructions (obstructions to omniscience). So, in order to attain liberation and become an Arhat, practitioners must gradually remove the afflictive obstructions, whereas in order to attain enlightenment and become a Buddha, practitioners must overcome both the afflictive *and* cognitive obstructions.

## **Buddha Shakyamuni**

Unlike the Hinayana tenet systems, the Chittamatra and Madhyamika tenet schools contend that Buddha Shakyamuni was already enlightened when he took birth as prince Siddhartha in India 2600 years ago. In

fact, he was an emanation of a Buddha, a *Supreme Emanation Body* manifesting as an ordinary human being. His subsequent experiences as a young prince, leaving the palace, his spiritual journey, and attaining enlightenment under the Bodhi tree are all considered to be the enlightened activities of a Buddha, which he manifested to teach his disciples.

A *Supreme Emanation Body* refers to a 'founding' or 'historical' Buddha, i.e. an emanation body/kaya that is emanated in order to display the twelve deeds and turn the wheel of Dharma.

Furthermore, followers of the Mahayana tenet systems also assert that both the Hinayana and Mahayana sutras are the word of the Buddha, although they distinguish between interpretative and definitive teachings.

This completes a short presentation of the assertions the two Mahayana tenet schools share. Next follows a detailed explanation of some of the principal views of the Chittamatra and the Madhyamika:

## The Chittamatra (Mind-Only School)

The reason for calling this tenet school "Chittamatra" or "Mind-Only" School is not that its proponents assert that all phenomena *are* the mind or that there is *only* mind; what they assert is that all phenomena are *of one nature* with the mind. This will be explained below. The Chittamatra is also called "Yogachara" (Mental Yoga Practice) and its proponents "Yogacharin" (Practitioners of Mental Yoga) because this tenet system attaches great importance to the practice of mental yoga. However, this is only the etymology and not a definition.

According to Koenchok Jigme Wangpo's *Precious Garland of the Presentation of Tenets*, the definition of a proponent of the Chittamatra School is: 'a person propounding Buddhist tenets who accepts the true existence of other-powered natures but does not assert external phenomena'.

The Chittamatra can be categorized into two:

1. Chittamatra School Following Scripture
2. Chittamatra School Following Reasoning

Another means of dividing this tenet is into:

1. True Aspectarians
2. False Aspectarians

However, since the latter two categories are less relevant when studying the 'Five Great Canonical Texts', only the first two categories will be discussed here. (For a presentation on True and False Aspectarians, please see Geshe Lhundup Sopa and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Cutting through Appearances*.)

Some of the principal assertions of the Chittamatra School (common to its two sub-schools) are with regard to:

- The lack of external existence
- The two truths
- The three natures
- True existence
- The mind
- The existence of self-knowers
- Afflictive and cognitive obstructions
- Buddha Nature

### The lack of external existence

The proponents of the Chittamatra maintain that there are no external objects. They assert that phenomena do not exist outside or external to the mind, but that phenomena and the minds that apprehend them are empty of being different substantial entities. The mind and its object are empty of being different substantial entities because they are of one nature and because they arise from the same mental imprint. They arise from the same mental imprint because the ripening of one mental imprint



causes both the arising of the mind and the appearance of an object to that mind. For instance, an eye consciousness apprehending a cup and the cup (that appears to that eye consciousness) are empty of being different substantial entities. They are empty of being different substantial entities because the mental imprint that gave rise to the eye consciousness also gave rise to the appearance of the cup to that eye consciousness. This means that the cup is not an externally existing phenomenon but is instead of one nature with the eye consciousness that apprehends it.

Consequently, the physical world, such as shapes, colours, sounds, and so forth merely *appear* to an awareness without existing as external phenomena. Yet this does not mean that physical phenomena *are* mind because minds are observers of objects, and if physical phenomena were minds, stones and so forth would absurdly have objects of perception. Rather, just as a dream object is not the dream consciousness that perceives it but is also not of a different nature than the dream consciousness, similarly the physical objects of the world are not the sense consciousnesses that perceive them but also not of a different nature than those sense consciousnesses.

Sights, sounds, smells, etc. appear to the mind because a mental imprint that was previously posited on the mental continuum of the person ripens and simultaneously produces both the appearance of an object and a cognizing mind – much as in a dream. The cognizing mind in turn leaves a *new* imprint that will be responsible for the appearance of another object and the manifestation of another cognizing mind at some time in the future.

Therefore, the reason for our perception of shapes, colours, and so forth, is not that these objects exist as entities external to our mind but that we have left – and continue to leave – countless imprints on the mind, which upon their ripening are responsible for our various experiences.

Only Buddhas do not have any imprints anymore. They perceive objects the way they are because they have overcome any obstructions or shortcomings of the mind.

The fact that the subject (the mind) and its object are empty of being different substantial entities, as they are simultaneously produced by one imprint, accounts for the subject and its object existing simultaneously.

This is different from the other Buddhist tenet holders who, except for the followers of the Yogic Svatantrika (Yogachara-Svatantrika), do accept the external existence of physical phenomena. For them, a sense object precedes the sense consciousness that perceives it, because it is the cause of the sense consciousness and thus of a different nature.

Indian masters who teach Chittamatra philosophy, like Asanga, cite various examples from the sutras to illustrate perception of phenomena that do not exist external to consciousness. One of the most potent examples is the example of a dream consciousness to which shapes, colours, sounds etc. appear from the activation of imprints, without these objects existing externally beyond the dream consciousness. Also, a yogi can experience an appearance of ugliness without such ugliness existing in the external world.

Similarly, beings from different realms can look at a bowl filled with liquid, and pretas perceive pus and blood, human beings see drinking water, and celestial beings, ambrosia. According to the Chittamatra, if the pus and blood, water, and ambrosia existed as external phenomena, there would be the contradiction of the liquid in the bowl possessing contrary natures (i.e. it would be pus and blood, water, and ambrosia).

## The two truths

As explained above, for the Mahayana tenet systems, emptiness, i.e. the ultimate nature of phenomena, is an ultimate truth, whereas any phenomenon that is not emptiness is a conventional truth.

Emptiness in the Chittamatra School refers to the 'lack of subject and object being different substantial entities' (Tib.: *gzung 'dzin rdzas gzhan gyis stong pa*). For instance, the 'lack of the two, a book and the eye consciousness perceiving the book, being different substantial entities' is the emptiness of the book *and* the emptiness of the eye consciousness perceiving the book. So, the lack of the two, the book and the eye consciousness perceiving the book, being different substantial entities is the *ultimate truth* of both the book and its eye consciousness.

The book and the eye consciousness perceiving the book are themselves conventional truths. In order to realize the ultimate truth of the book and its eye consciousness, practitioners must realize the lack of the two, the book and its eye consciousness, being different substantial entities. With this they also realize the lack of external existence of the book.

Regarding the etymology of the two truths, (as in the Sautrantika School) an ultimate truth is described as 'a truth for an ultimate awareness'. However, here an ultimate awareness does not merely refer to a direct perceiver but to a *yogic* direct perceiver that directly and non-dualistically realizes emptiness (i.e. ultimate truth). The lack of the two, the book and the eye consciousness perceiving the book, being different substantial entities, for example, is a 'truth for an ultimate awareness' because it exists the way it appears to a yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes the emptiness of both the book and the eye consciousness perceiving the book.

The book and the eye consciousness are themselves conventional truths because they are 'truths for a concealer'. They are 'truths for a concealer' because they are truths for a 'concealer consciousness'. According to the Chittamatra, a 'concealer consciousness' refers to an ignorance that apprehends subject and object to be different substantial entities, or in this case, an ignorance which apprehends the book and its eye consciousness to be different substantial entities. Such an ignorance is a concealer consciousness, for it conceals the reality or ultimate nature of both the book and the eye consciousness perceiving the book. Also, the book and its eye consciousness are *truths for* that 'concealer ignorance' because from the perspective of that ignorance, the book exists as an entity external to the eye consciousness in the way the book appears to exist as an entity external to its eye consciousness.

The study of the two truths according to the Chittamatra prepares students for the study of the Madhyamika School for it instills in them the idea that the ultimate nature of phenomena is their ultimate truth, while phenomena other than emptiness are conventional truths. Furthermore, it familiarizes students with the concept of the two truths being of one nature.

## The three natures

The proponents of the Chittamatra categorize phenomena into three natures:

- (1) Other-powered natures
- (2) Imputed natures
- (3) Thoroughly established natures

### (1) *Other-powered natures*

All impermanent phenomena are other-powered natures because they are produced through the power of causes and conditions that are other than themselves. Examples of other-powered phenomena are books, songs, awarenesses, people, and so forth.

### (2) *Imputed natures*

Imputed natures are twofold: a) permanent imputed natures and b) non-existent imputed natures. Permanent imputed natures refer to all permanent phenomena other than emptinesses (i.e. other than ultimate truths), such as unconditioned space, the absence of elephant on the table, permanent, and so forth. They are imputed natures because they depend for their existence on imputation/designation by conceptual consciousnesses. For example, the realization of unconditioned space depends on a conceptual consciousness explicitly negating obstructive contact. Non-existent imputed natures refer to non-existent objects, such as the horns of a rabbit, a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, a cup being of a different nature from the eye consciousness perceiving the cup, externally existent smell of soap, and so forth. They are imputed natures because they are mistakenly imputed/designated by wrong conceptual consciousnesses without actually existing.

### (3) *Thoroughly established natures*

All emptinesses/ultimate truths are thoroughly established natures. Instances of thoroughly established natures are the *lack* of the two, a song and the ear consciousness perceiving the song, being different substantial entities; the *lack* of the two, chocolate and the tongue consciousness perceiving the chocolate, being different substantial entities; and so forth..

Another presentation of the three natures is from the point of view of a single phenomenon and its ultimate truth. For instance, a mountain is an *other-powered nature*. 'The two, the mountain and the eye consciousness perceiving the mountain being different substantial entities' is the (non-existent) *imputed nature* of the mountain. And 'the lack of the two, the mountain and the eye consciousness perceiving the mountain, being different substantial entities' (i.e., the *emptiness* of both the mountain and the eye consciousness perceiving the mountain) is the *thoroughly established nature* of the mountain.

## True existence

Even though the followers of the Chittamatra School contend that phenomena which are external to consciousness do not exist truly (since they are utterly non-existent), they differentiate between (non-external) phenomena that exist truly and (non-external) phenomena that do not exist truly. According to the Chittamatra, other-powered and thoroughly established phenomena exist truly. Other-powered phenomena exist truly because they are dynamic, ever-changing things that are explicitly perceived by direct perceivers. Thoroughly established phenomena are truly existent because they are the ultimate natures or truths of phenomena. However, imputed natures lack true existence because of their dependence on imputation/designation by conceptual consciousnesses.

Nonetheless, all phenomena necessarily exist inherently and from their own side. Hence, although the Chittamatra rejects the reality of an external physical world, it maintains that, for instance, subjective experience (i.e. the mind) does have inherent reality. If the mind did not possess inherent existence, there would be no basis upon which to make meaningful distinctions between, for example, what is harmful and beneficial. They assume that for something to exist, it has to have an inherent basis upon which to posit its various functions.

And yet, for the Chittamatra, all things and events are not *purely* mental constructs. If that were the case, white could become black and black could become white merely by thinking it was so. Since this is not the case, the proponents of the Chittamatra also accept that the objects of the mind have inherent existence.

## The mind

Whether they assert eight or six consciousnesses (explained below), the proponents of the Chittamatra hold many of the same assertions regarding the definition and categories of the mind as the followers of the Sautrantika. However, unlike the followers of the Sautrantika School, they maintain that sense consciousnesses in the continuums of sentient beings are mistaken awarenesses. They are mistaken because the object of negation of emptiness appears to those awarenesses. The object of negation of emptiness appears, since shapes, colours, sounds, etc. *appear* to those awarenesses to exist externally and to be of a different nature from the sense consciousnesses that apprehend them. Hence, even though the body consciousness that perceives heat, for instance, is able to correctly identify its object, heat, it is nonetheless mistaken because the heat *appears* to it to be an externally existent object that is of a different nature than the body consciousness perceiving it.

## The existence of self-knowers

Unlike the followers of the Vaibhashika, the Sautrantika Svatrantika, and the Prasangika Madhyamika Schools, the followers of the Chittamatra accept the existence of self-knowers.

Their acceptance of the existence of self-knowers – which are of one nature with the awarenesses they perceive and therefore occur simultaneously with those awarenesses – supports their assertion of the lack of external existence. It supports that assertion because the followers of the Chittamatra School reason that a cup, for instance, lacks external existence since the eye consciousness perceiving the cup (similar to the self-knower) is of one nature with its object (the cup) and hence occurs simultaneously with that object.

## Afflictive and cognitive obstructions

Like the proponents of the two Hinayana tenet systems and the Svatrantika Madhyamika (Middle Way Autonomy) School, the proponents of the Chittamatra hold that the ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self is the root of cyclic existence, for it subsequently induces all other afflictions such as anger, attachment, jealousy, etc. as well as contaminated karma. Hence the ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, the afflictions which are induced by that ignorance, and the seeds of both the foregoing are afflictive obstructions, and in order to attain self-liberation, Hearer and Solitary Realizer practitioners have to cultivate a yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes the *lack* of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self. With this yogic direct perceiver (on the Hinayana paths of seeing and meditation) they gradually eliminate the obstructions to liberation. Therefore, Hearer and Solitary Realizers do not have to realize emptiness but only subtle selflessness.

Yet, unlike the other Buddhist tenet holders, the followers of the Chittamatra School contend that cognitive obstructions (obstructions to omniscience) refer to the ignorance that perceives subject and object to be different substantial entities, as well as the seeds of that ignorance. Therefore, Bodhisattvas cultivate the yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes the lack of subject and object being different substantial entities. Since this yogic direct perceiver (which is generated on the Mahayana paths of seeing and meditation) is more subtle than the yogic direct perceiver that realizes the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existence self, it gradually eliminates both afflictive *and* cognitive obstructions, taking the Bodhisattva to full enlightenment.

Moreover, unlike the proponents of the Prasangika Madhyamika tenets, the proponents of the Chittamatra School assert that Bodhisattvas who entered the Mahayana path *from the outset* (i.e. who did not previously enter the Hinayana path and remove afflictive obstructions by first attaining self-liberation in dependence on the Hinayana vehicle) eliminate the two types of obstructions simultaneously. This means that those Bodhisattvas simultaneously remove coarse afflictive and coarse cognitive obstructions (i.e. *intellectually acquired* afflictive and *intellectually acquired* cognitive obstructions) on the path of seeing. They then simultaneously remove subtle afflictive and subtle cognitive obstructions (i.e. *innate* afflictive and *innate* cognitive obstructions) on each of the Bodhisattva bhumis/grounds of the path of meditation, and thereafter simultaneously attain the state of an Arhat and a Buddha.

## Buddha Nature

Buddha Nature refers to what the proponents of the Chittamatra School call the “seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom”. The *seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom* is the potential in a sentient being's continuum that enables him to cultivate uncontaminated exalted wisdom and, in dependence on such wisdom, eventually attain liberation and Buddhahood. Uncontaminated exalted wisdom is essential to progress on the path, for it serves as the direct antidote to afflictive and cognitive obstructions. According to the Chittamatra School, examples of uncontaminated exalted wisdom are the meditative equipoise directly realizing subtle selflessness (the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self) and the meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness (the lack of subject and object being different entities). The meditative equipoise directly realizing subtle selflessness eliminates afflictive obstructions and takes practitioners to the state of self-liberation, while the meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness eliminates afflictive *and* cognitive obstructions and takes a practitioner to the enlightened state of a Buddha.

Buddha Nature can be categorized into:

- (1) Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature
- (2) Evolving Buddha Nature

According to the Chittamatra School, of the two types of Buddha Nature, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* represents the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that has not yet been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Buddha Dharma, whereas *Evolving Buddha Nature* refers to the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that has been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Buddha Dharma.

However, there is disagreement with regard to whether all sentient beings have the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom and thus the potential to remove the obstructions to enlightenment or not. As explained below, the proponents of the Chittamatra Following Scripture hold the view there are three final vehicles and therefore believe that not all sentient beings possess Buddha Nature.

The followers of the Chittamatra Following Reasoning, on the other hand, accept one final vehicle and maintain that all sentient will eventually reach Buddhahood. Therefore, they contend that all sentient beings possess Buddha Nature.

The proponents of the Madhyamika School also assert the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom to be Buddha Nature (although they do not call such a seed or potential “the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom”). However, according to the Madhyamika School, both the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that has been nourished and the seed that has not been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Buddha Dharma are evolving Buddha Nature.

## The Chittamatra School Following Scripture

The proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Scripture chiefly follow Asanga's *Five Treatises on the Levels*, which are five commentaries by Asanga on levels of attainments. This sub-school of the Chittamatra is called "Followers of Scripture" because its proponents do not rely on reasoning to the same degree as the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Reasoning, which is why they are considered the less advanced of the two groups.

The Chittamatra School Following Scripture differs from the Chittamatra School Following Reasoning mainly because of its assertions regarding:

- The existence of the mind-basis-of-all
- Selflessness
- The mode of existence of the person
- The existence of three final vehicles

### The existence of the mind-basis-of-all

One of the unique views of the Chittamatra School Following Scripture is the view of the mind-basis-of-all. The proponents of this tenet system hold that there are eight consciousnesses: the five sense consciousnesses, a mental consciousness, an afflicted mental consciousness, and a mind-basis-of-all (Skt.: *alayavijnana*, Tib.: *kun gzhi rnam shes*). The other Buddhist tenet holders assert only six consciousnesses, with some of the functions of the afflicted mental consciousness and the mind-basis-of-all being performed by the mental consciousness.

According to the Chittamatra School Following Scripture, except for Bodhisattvas who abide on the *uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum* and Buddhas, all living beings have a mind-basis-of-all. Since such an eighth consciousness is always present, even while fainting, during deep sleep, death, taking a new rebirth, and so forth, it serves as a very reliable repository or 'store-house' of mental imprints. It is a *neutral* consciousness and thus able to store virtuous, non-virtuous, and neutral imprints. (Please note that if it were virtuous it would not be able to store non-virtuous imprints, and if it were non-virtuous it would not be able to store virtuous ones.)

The objects that appear to the mind-basis-of-all are the five sense powers (eye sense power, ear sense power, etc.), the objects of the five sense consciousnesses (colours, shapes, sounds, etc.), and mental imprints. However, since the mind-basis-of-all is an *awareness to which an object appears but is not ascertained*, it is not aware of and does not realize these objects.

### Selflessness

The proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Scripture and the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Reasoning both agree that coarse selflessness refers to the lack of a permanent, partless, independent self; subtle selflessness refers to the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self; and both types of selflessness are easier to realize and thus coarser than emptiness. However, according to the Chittamatra School Following Scripture, the awareness that grasps at the existence of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self is the seventh consciousness, the *afflicted mental consciousness*. The *afflicted mental consciousness* focuses on the mind-basis-of-all and mistakenly perceives it to be a self-sufficient, substantially existent self. This means that it perceives the mind-basis-of-all to be the owner or governor of the five aggregates, owning, controlling, and utilizing those five. Therefore, the afflicted mental consciousness is the root of Samsara, for it induces all the other afflictions such as anger, attachment, and so forth. The direct antidote to the afflicted mental consciousness is either the wisdom that directly realizes the *lack* of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self or the wisdom that directly realizes emptiness, and through cultivating either of these two types of wisdom, practitioners are able to gradually eliminate the different layers of the afflicted mental consciousness as well as the other afflictions it induces. Yet, once [the afflicted aspect is] eliminated, the continuum of the *afflicted mental consciousness* remains and becomes the mental consciousness of an Arhat or a Buddha (*free* from perceiving the mind-basis-of-all to be a self-sufficient, substantially existent self).

## **The mode of existence of the person**

Unlike the followers of the other Buddhist tenets, the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Scripture assert the mind-basis-of-all to be the actual person. However, it is not a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, for it does not exist apart from the five aggregates and does not own, control or utilize them.

## **The existence of three final vehicles**

Like the proponents of the Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika School Following Scripture, the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Scripture hold the view of three final vehicles. As explained above, they assert that many sentient beings never attain Buddhahood because they either become Hearer or Solitary Realizer Arhats, subsequent to which their mental continuums are severed.

## **The Chittamatra School Following Reasoning**

This Chittamatra School is called "Followers of Reasoning" because, just as the Sautrantika Following Reasoning, it mainly relies on the reasoning (and on many of the assertions) presented in Dignaga's *Compendium of Valid Cognition (Pramāṇa-samuccaya)* and Dharmakirti's *Seven Treatises on Valid Cognition (Pramanavartikadisapta-grantha-samgraha)*.

Both Dignaga and Dharmakirti's commentaries are presented predominantly from the perspective of the Chittamatra School. However, since they also contain numerous sections that explain the views of the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning, there is no contradiction in both the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning and the Chittamatra School Following Reasoning relying on those texts.

The Chittamatra School Following Reasoning differs from the Chittamatra School Following Scripture mainly owing to its assertions regarding:

- The existence of six consciousnesses
- Selflessness
- The mode of existence of the person
- The existence of one final vehicle

## **The existence of six consciousnesses**

Like the followers of the Vaibhashika, the Sautrantika, and the two Madhyamika schools, the followers of the Chittamatra School Following Reasoning only accept the existence of six consciousnesses, i.e. five sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness.

## **Selflessness**

As mentioned before, like the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Scripture, the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Reasoning contend that coarse selflessness refers to the lack of a permanent, partless, independent self; subtle selflessness refers to the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self; and both types of selflessness are easier to understand and thus coarser than emptiness. However, since the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Reasoning do not assert the *afflicted mental consciousness* and the *mind-basis-of-all*, they hold that the mind that grasps at a self-sufficient, substantially existent self is the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness. Also, the mental consciousness that grasps at a self-sufficient, substantially existent self does not apprehend a mind-basis-of-all to be a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, but simply apprehends a self-sufficient, substantially existent self.

Therefore, (the sixth consciousness) the mental consciousness that apprehends a self-sufficient, substantially existent self is the root of Samsara, for it induces all the other afflictions. As before, the direct antidote to the mental consciousness that apprehends a self-sufficient, substantially existent self is either the wisdom that directly realizes the *lack* of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self or the wisdom that directly realize emptiness, and through cultivating one of the two types of wisdom practitioners are able to gradually eliminate the different layers of that misperception and attain liberation and Buddhahood.

## The mode of existence of the person

Unlike some of the proponents of the Vaibhashika, the proponents of the Sautrantika Following Scripture, the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Scripture, and the proponents of the Prasangika Madhyamika, the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Reasoning maintain that the ever-present mental consciousness is the person.

## The existence of one final vehicle

Like the proponents of the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning and the Madhyamika tenets, the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Reasoning also hold that there is only one *final* vehicle because all sentient beings will eventually attain the full enlightenment of a Buddha.

This completes a short presentation of the Chittamatra School.

As mentioned before, an understanding of the Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, and Chittamatra tenet systems is considered to be an effective stepping-stone to comprehending the Madhyamika School. One of the reasons for this is that the teachings of the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika introduce students to the concept of the interconnectedness of mind and its objects. However, the two Hinayana tenet systems nonetheless convey the idea of an external, objective, and independent reality, “waiting to be revealed” by our different awarenesses. Such an extreme sense of an objective, independent reality is counteracted by introducing the Chittamatra, a philosophical system that goes to another extreme by propounding the idea that there is no external, objective world but only consciousness, i.e. that the five sense objects are *mere appearances* to the mind. Hence, the study of the Vaibhashika, Svatantrika, and Chittamatra Schools serves as a stepping-stone since it prepares students for the teachings of the Madhyamika School about an external yet subjective and fully functioning reality that is greatly dependent on the mind.

## The Madhyamika (Middle Way School)

This school is called "Madhyamika" or "Middle Way" because it propounds a 'middle way' that is free from the two extremes: (1) the extreme of reification/permanence and (2) the extreme of annihilation/nihilism.

The extreme of reification/permanence is also known as the extreme of existence or the extreme of superimposition, and it refers to the true existence of phenomena. The extreme of annihilation/nihilism is also described as the extreme of non-existence or the extreme of denial, and it refers to the utter non-existence of phenomena.

Followers of the Madhyamika are free from the two extremes because they contend that even though all phenomena are empty of existing truly, they nonetheless exist conventionally.

The best-known proponents of this tenet school are Nagarjuna and his disciple Aryadeva, and followers of the Madhyamika base their assertions on Nagarjuna's *Six Scriptures on Reasoning* and Aryadeva's Four Hundred (Skt.: *Catuhshatakashastranamakarika*, Tib.: *bstan bcos bzhi brgya pa zhes bya ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa*). The *Six Scriptures on Reasoning* are six commentaries on the Madhyamika, which include the *Fundamental Wisdom of the Madhyamika* (Skt.: Tib.: *dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab*), and the *Precious Garland of the Madhyamika* (Skt. Tib.: *dbu ma rin chen phreng ba*), and so forth.

According to Koenchok Jigme Wangpo's *Precious Garland of the Presentation of Tenets*, the definition of a proponent of the Madhyamika School is: 'a person propounding Buddhist tenets who asserts that there are no truly existence phenomena, not even particles'.

The Madhyamika school has two sub-schools:

1. Svatantrika Madhyamika (Middle Way Autonomy School)
2. Prasangika Madhyamika (Middle Way Consequentialist School)

Some of the principal assertions of the Madhyamika held in common by its two sub-schools are with regard to:

- The lack of true existence
- Dependent arising

- Buddha Nature

## The lack of true existence

As mentioned above, the proponents of the Madhyamika maintain that whatever exists is necessarily empty of true and ultimate existence. Yet, although phenomena do not exist truly they exist conventionally.

## Dependent arising

The followers of the Madhyamika School are able to abide in the middle free from the two extremes because they understand the relationship between emptiness (the lack of true existence) and dependent arising. They understand that all phenomena are empty of existing truly because phenomena are dependently arisen, i.e. because they depend on a myriad of phenomena other than themselves.

There are three types of dependent arising:

1. Dependence on causes and conditions
2. Dependence on parts
3. Dependence on imputation/designation by name and thought

According to the two Mahayana schools, dependent arising addresses the way in which phenomena exist. Since all phenomena are dependently arisen, they lack true existence. Although the proponents of the Madhyamika Svatantrika (Middle Way Autonomy School) merely assert the first two types of dependent arising (i.e. dependence on causes and conditions, and dependence on parts) while the followers of the Prasangika Madhyamika (Middle Way Consequentialist School) accept all three types of dependent arising, proponents of both Madhyamika tenets commonly accept that whatever exists is dependently arisen.

The proponents of the Chittamatra and the two Hinayana tenets, on the other hand, limit the category of dependent arising to impermanent phenomena, for they only accept dependence on causes and conditions. Hence, according to them only impermanent phenomena are dependently existent because permanent phenomena are not produced in dependence on causes and conditions.

Furthermore, the proponents of the Madhyamika tenets maintain that the proponents of the other Buddhist tenets have fallen to an extreme:

The followers of the Vaibhashika assert that partless particles, permanent phenomena, etc. are ultimate truths and exist truly. The followers of the Sautrantika assert that impermanent phenomena are ultimate truths and that all external phenomena exist truly. And the followers of the Chittamatra assert that impermanent and thoroughly established phenomena are truly existent. Hence, the lower Schools have all fallen to the extreme of reification/permanence because they accept true existence.

## Buddha Nature

Like the proponents of the Chittamatra, the proponents of the Madhyamika contend that there are two types of Buddha Nature:

- 1) Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature (Tib.: *rang bzhin gnas rigs*)
- 2) Evolving Buddha Nature (Tib.: *rgyas 'gyur gyi rigs*)

Of the two, Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature is described as the principal type of Buddha Nature and it refers to the emptiness of a sentient being's mental consciousness. It is one of the main factors facilitating the development and transformation of the mind, for if the mind did not lack true/inherent existence, a sentient being's mental consciousness could not change; it could not gradually be freed from afflictive and cognitive obstructions and thus become the enlightened mind of a Buddha. Also, it is through *directly realizing* the mental consciousness' lack of true existence that sentient beings are able to overcome their obstructions. This is because the meditative equipoise directly realizing the lack of true existence of the mental consciousness (and all other phenomena) is instrumental in transforming a sentient being's mental consciousness into the omniscient mind of a Buddha, because it serves as the direct antidote to afflictive and cognitive obstructions.

Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature is explained to be 'suitable to become the *Dharmakaya* (Truth Body) of a Buddha'. Here, the *Dharmakaya* of a Buddha - which the Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature is suitable to become - refers to the *Nature Body of Natural Purity*, i.e. the emptiness of the omniscient mental



consciousness of a Buddha. Therefore, the emptiness of a sentient being's mental consciousness will become the emptiness of his mental consciousness as a Buddha. In other words, when the sentient being attains Buddhahood, the emptiness of his formerly obstructed mental consciousness becomes the emptiness of his now non-obstructed and omniscient mental consciousness.

Evolving Buddha Nature refers to either (1) a sentient being's mental consciousness itself or (2) the *potential* of that mental consciousness to remove obstructions and achieve the realizations of a Buddha. The mental consciousness also serves as the basis of the Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature (the mental consciousness' emptiness). Furthermore, the mental consciousness is suitable to become the *Jnanakaya* (Wisdom Body), while the potential of the mental consciousness (i.e. the potential to remove obstructions and achieve the realizations of a Buddha) is suitable to become the *Rupakaya* (Form Body) of a Buddha. This means that in the future, when the sentient being becomes a Buddha, the continuum of his mental consciousness will become the mental consciousness (the *Jnanakaya*) of his future Buddha while the continuum of the potential will become the *Rupa Kaya*.

## The Svatantrika Madhyamika (Middle Way Autonomy School)

The reason for calling this Madhyamika tenet system the "Svatrantika" or "Autonomy" School is because its followers are proponents of the Madhyamika who mainly rely on *autonomous* correct syllogisms in order to prove hidden phenomena, such as subtle impermanence, emptiness of true existence and so forth. This will be explained below.

Since the term "Svatrantika" does not appear in Indian literature it is widely accepted that it was coined by Tibetan masters.

According to Koenchok Jigme Wangpo's *Precious Garland of the Presentation of Tenets*, the definition of a proponent of the Svatantrika Madhyamika School is: 'a proponent of Non-Entityness who asserts that phenomena exist conventionally by way of their own characteristic.'

A proponent of *Non-Entityness* refers to a person who propounds the lack of true existence of all phenomena. Also, as explained below, according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika School, phenomena exist inherently and by way of their own character. However, they exist by way of their own character only conventionally and not ultimately. To exist ultimately means to exist truly and since followers of the Madhyamika School do not accept that something can exist truly, they do not assert that something can exist ultimately.

Svatrantika is categorized into:

1. Yogachara Svatantrika (Yogic Autonomy School)
2. Sautrantika Svatantrika (Sutric Autonomy School)

Some of the principal assertions of the Svatantrika School (common to both sub-schools) are with regard to:

- Inherent existence and the lack of true existence
- Dependent arising
- The two truths
- Real and unreal conventional truths
- Selflessness
- Autonomous syllogisms
- The mind
- The mode of existence of the person
- Afflictive and cognitive obstructions

### Inherent existence and the lack of true existence

Since they are proponents of Madhyamika tenets, the followers of the Svatantrika School assert that whatever exists necessarily *lacks* true existence. Yet, the way they define the lack of true existence, or its opposite, *true existence*, differs from the way it is defined by the followers of the Prasangika School. In the Svatantrika School true existence refers to: 'that which exists without being posited by the power of appearing to a non-defective awareness'. Hence, hypothetically, if a phenomenon were to exist truly it

would exist without being posited by the power of appearing to a non-defective awareness, i.e. it would exist without appearing to a correct consciousness.

However, for the Svatantrika, something exists only if it appears to a non-defective awareness; it cannot exist without appearing to such an awareness. A non-defective awareness is a correct mind that is non-mistaken with regard to its main object.

For instance, a chair exists because it appears to an eye consciousness and to a conceptual consciousness perceiving the chair, and it could not exist without appearing to those awarenesses. Both the eye consciousness perceiving the chair and the conceptual consciousness perceiving the chair are non-defective awarenesses, for they are non-mistaken with regard to their main object, the chair.

However, though all phenomena lack true existence, they nonetheless exist inherently, and from their own side. Unlike the proponents of the Prasangika, the proponents of the Svatantrika maintain that phenomena cannot exist if they do not exist inherently; they cannot exist if they are not findable among their bases of imputation/designation. Yet, although they exist inherently, and from their own side, they do not exist inherently, and from their own side without appearing to a non-defective awareness.

This view of the Svatantrika is elucidated by the example of a magician's illusion. In India it is believed that a magician can take ordinary objects such as a pebble and a stick, and by casting a mantra cause the pebble and stick to appear as a horse and an elephant. The appearance of the pebble and stick as a horse and elephant occurs through the power of the mind affected by the mantra; the appearance does not arise from the pebble and stick without depending on that mind. The magician is aware of this but to his audience, it appears as if a real horse and elephant were standing in front of them, and as if that appearance were independent of their minds which are under the influence of the mantra.

By analogy, two factors are essential for something to exist: (1) its inherent/intrinsic existence and (2) its appearance to a non-defective awareness. Neither of these factors, taken alone, is sufficient for something to exist. Thus, just as the horse and elephant cannot appear to the audience without the basis of the pebble and stick, a phenomenon cannot appear to a non-defective awareness without existing inherently. Also, just as the pebble and stick cannot naturally appear as a horse and elephant without depending on the mind affected by the mantra, likewise phenomena cannot exist inherently without appearing to a non-defective awareness.

The proponents of the Svatantrika School further assert that 'truly existent' (Tib.: *bden par grub pa*), 'ultimately existent' (Tib.: *don dam par grub pa*), and 'established as its own reality' (Tib.: *yang dag par grub pa*) are equivalent.

## Dependent arising

As mentioned above, among the three types of dependent arising, followers of the Svatantrika tenets accept (1) dependence on causes and conditions, and (2) dependence on parts. Phenomena exist because they are dependently arisen, and reflection on dependent arising is considered vital, for it prevents practitioners from falling to the extreme of nihilism.

### (1) Dependence on causes and conditions

This is the coarsest of the three types of dependent arising because it is easier to understand than the second and third type. It only applies to impermanent phenomena, for permanent phenomena are not produced in dependence on causes and conditions. A cake, for instance, exists because it is a dependently arisen phenomenon that was produced by numerous causes and conditions.

### (2) Dependence on parts

This type of dependence is subtler than the previous type. It refers to the fact that all phenomena, whether impermanent or permanent, are dependent on their parts. A car, for instance, has spatial parts such as its doors, roof, and tires. It has qualitative parts, such as its impermanence, its lack of true existence, and its conventional existence. And it has temporal parts, such as yesterday's car, today's car and tomorrow's car. Since it is composed of, and dependent on those parts, the car exists.

The proponents of the Svatantrika do not accept the third type of dependent arising: dependence on imputation/designation by name and thought, because they do not hold that phenomena are imputed/designated by conceptual consciousnesses (thoughts) and terms (names or labels) by which to designate them, without being findable among their bases of imputation.

## The two truths

Since they are followers of the Mahayana, the proponents of the Svatantrika maintain that emptiness, i.e. the ultimate nature of a phenomenon, is an ultimate truth, whereas everything else that exists (and that is not an emptiness) is a conventional truth. Yet, unlike the proponents of the Chittamatra, they contend that emptiness, or an ultimate truth, refers to the *lack of true existence* of a phenomenon. The *lack of the true existence of a chair*, for example, is an ultimate truth, while *the chair* itself is a conventional truth. Regarding the etymology of the two truths, the emptiness of true existence of the chair is an ultimate truth because it is 'a truth for an ultimate awareness', with an ultimate awareness in this case referring to a meditative equipoise (a yogic direct perceiver) directly and non-dualistically realizing the chair's lack of true existence. A meditative equipoise directly realizing the emptiness of the chair is a non-dualistic awareness because it is free of the appearance of true existence, the appearance of conventional truths, and the sense that the subject (the meditative equipoise) and its object (the emptiness of the chair) are separate and cut off. So for this yogic direct perceiver, all appearances of subject and object have become indistinguishable from each other; they are "of one taste" in lacking true existence, and they are likened to water being poured into water. Therefore, the emptiness of the chair is a 'truth for an ultimate awareness' because from the perspective of that yogic direct perceiver, the emptiness of the chair's true existence exists the way it appears.

The chair, on the other hand, is a conventional truth or 'a truth for a concealer' because it is 'a truth for a concealer consciousness'. A concealer consciousness refers to the ignorance perceiving a phenomenon to exist truly or, in this case, to the ignorance perceiving the chair to exist truly. The chair is a truth for that concealer because from the perspective of the concealer ignorance, the chair exists truly the way it appears. Furthermore, the ignorance that perceives the chair's true existence is a *concealer* because it conceals the ultimate nature of the chair, i.e. the chair's *emptiness* of true existence.

## Real and unreal conventional truths

Unlike the proponents of the other Buddhist tenets, the followers of the Svatantrika categorize conventional truths into real and unreal conventional truths. A real conventional truth refers to a conventional truth which, from the perspective of an ordinary person, exists the way it appears. Examples of real conventional truths are tables, chairs, cars, and so forth. A table, for instance, is a real conventional truth because from the perspective of an ordinary person, it *exists* as a table in the way it *appears* as a table. The reason for specifying, "from the perspective of an ordinary person" is that even though a table appears to exist truly without existing truly, ordinary people are not aware of the mistaken appearance since for them the table *does* exist truly. Hence, from the perspective of an ordinary person, the table does not appear in a way that does not accord with reality.

Unreal conventional truths, on the other hand, refer to conventional truths which, from the perspective of an ordinary person, do not exist in the way they appear. Examples of unreal conventional truths are mirror reflections, echoes, mirages of water, rainbows, dream-elephants, and so on. The reflection of a face in a mirror, for instance, is an unreal conventional truth because from the perspective of an ordinary person such a reflection does not exist in the way it appears. From the perspective of an ordinary person it does not exist in the way it appears because an ordinary person is aware that the reflection of a face in the mirror does not exist as a face in the way it appears as a face.

## Selflessness

Like the proponents of the Chittamatra but unlike the proponents of the Prasangika Madhyamika, the followers of the Svatantrika Madhyamika differentiate between selflessness and emptiness. According to the Svatantrika Madhyamika, coarse selflessness refers to the lack of a permanent, partless, independent self, while subtle selflessness refers to the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self. But even more difficult to realize and hence subtler than subtle selflessness is emptiness, the lack of true existence of phenomena.

## Autonomous syllogisms

As mentioned above, the followers of Svatantrika tenets assert that citing autonomous correct

syllogisms is the most effective means to establish the existence of hidden phenomena, such as subtle impermanence and the emptiness of true existence, to an opponent in debate.

Examples of correct syllogisms are:

*The subject, sound, is impermanent because it is a product (and)*

*The subject, the sprout, is empty of being truly existent because it is dependently arisen.*

For a syllogism to be logically correct, its reason must have three qualities. These three qualities are called the 'three modes of the reason':

- (1) The property of the subject
- (2) The forward pervasion
- (3) The counter pervasion

The above-cited examples of correct syllogisms possess the first mode of the reason, the **property of the subject**, because the reason, *being a product*, is the property of the subject, *sound*, and the reason, *being dependently arisen*, is the property of the subject, *the sprout*. The reason, *being a product*, is the property of the subject, *sound*, because sound is a product. Likewise, the reason, *being dependently arisen*, is the property of the subject, *the sprout*, because the sprout is dependently arisen.

Also, the two syllogisms possess the second mode of the reason, the **forward pervasion**, because - to put it simply - 'whatever *is a product* is necessarily *impermanent*', and 'whatever *is dependently arisen* is necessarily *empty of being truly existent*'. In the same way, they possess the third mode of the reason, the **counter pervasion**, because 'whatever is not *impermanent* is necessarily not *a product*', and 'whatever is not *empty of being truly existent* is necessarily not *dependently arisen*'.

Not only do the proponents of the Svatantrika contend that in order to generate a correctly inferring consciousness (i.e. an inferential cognizer) in another person's continuum, one must chiefly rely on correct syllogisms, they also hold that those syllogisms exist inherently or 'autonomously', for they inherently or autonomously possess the three modes of the reason. Hence, according to the Svatantrika, syllogisms are *autonomous* syllogisms.

## The mind

The proponents of the Svatantrika assert that phenomena appear to sense and mental consciousnesses to exist inherently, and from their own side. However, according to this philosophical school, phenomena *do exist* inherently and from their own side, so awarenesses are not mistaken with respect to those appearances. A conventional direct perceiver such as an eye consciousness perceiving a pen, for instance, is therefore not mistaken regarding the pen appearing to exist inherently and from its own side. According to the Svatantrika, although the pen appears to exist inherently, it does not appear to exist *truly* to the eye consciousness perceiving the pen. This applies to all direct perceivers; they are not mistaken with respect to the object of negation of emptiness, i.e. true existence, because their objects do not appear to be truly existent. Phenomena appear to be truly existent only to *conceptual* consciousnesses.

## The mode of existence of the person

Like some of the proponents of the Vaibhashika, the proponents of the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning, and the proponents of the Chittamatra School Following Reasoning, the followers of the Svatantrika also assert that the ever-present mental consciousness is the actual person.

## Afflictive and cognitive obstructions

Like the followers of the two Hinayana schools and the Chittamatra, the followers of the Svatantrika contend that the ignorance perceiving a self-sufficient, substantially existent self is the root of Samsara and of all the other afflictions such as anger, attachment, and so forth. Thus, the ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, the afflictions that are induced by that ignorance, and the seeds of both the foregoing are afflictive obstructions. Yet, even though Hearer and Solitary Realizer practitioners must eliminate those obstructions in order to attain self-liberation, they do not have to realize the emptiness of true existence.

Cognitive obstructions, on the other hand, refer to the ignorance perceiving true existence, and to the seeds and imprints of that ignorance. Therefore, Bodhisattvas generate the yogic direct perceiver that

directly realizes the emptiness of true existence in order to gradually remove both afflictive and cognitive obstructions.

Like the proponents of the Chittamatra, the followers of the Svatantrika also maintain that Bodhisattvas who entered the Mahayana path *from the outset* (i.e. Bodhisattvas who did not previously enter the Hinayana path and remove afflictive obstructions by attaining self-liberation in dependence on the Hinayana vehicle) eliminate the two types of obstructions simultaneously, and therefore attain the state of an Arhat and a Buddha simultaneously. Although the proponents of the Svatantrika, unlike the followers of the Prasangika Madhyamika, do not assert that Bodhisattvas become Arhats when they attain the eighth Bodhisattva ground, they nonetheless assert that the eighth, ninth, and tenth are “pure grounds”. They assert that these three grounds are pure, for they hold that once Bodhisattvas reach the eighth ground, the awareness that grasps at true existence can no longer manifest.

## Yogachara Svatantrika (Yogic Autonomy School)

This sub-school is called "Yogachara Svatantrika" because it is a Svatantrika tenet system which, like the Yogachara or Chittamatra School, does not accept external existence. Its proponents combine Madhyamika tenets from Nagarjuna and Bhavaviveka with tenets from the Chittamatra. Proponents of the Yogachara Svatantrika School include Arya Vimuktisena, Haribhadra, Shantarakshita, and Kamalashila, and its followers chiefly base their assertions on the scriptures authored by these three masters, such as Arya Vimuktisena's *Illuminating the [Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in] Twenty-Thousand [Verses]* (Skt. *Abhisamayalamkaravrtti*, Tib.: *nyi khri snang ba*), Haribhadra's *Commentary Clarifying the Meaning* (Skt.: *Sphuṭārtha*, Tib.: *'grel pa don gsal*), and so forth.

According to Koenchok Jigme Wangpo's *Precious Garland of the Presentation of Tenets*, the definition of a proponent of the Yogachara Svatantrika Madhyamika School is: 'a proponent of the Madhyamika who asserts self-knowers and does not assert external phenomena.'

The Yogachara Svatantrika differs from the Sautrantrika Svatantrika mainly in its assertions regarding:

- The lack of external existence
- The existence of self-knowers
- Afflictive and cognitive obstructions

### The lack of external existence

Like the proponents of the Chittamatra, the followers of the Yogachara Svatantrika School assert 'the lack of subject and object being different substantial entities'. In other words, they contend that there are no external phenomena. However, unlike the Chittamatra School, the followers of the Yogachara Svatantrika do not accept that the 'lack of subject and object being different substantial entities' is emptiness and thus an ultimate truth because (being followers of Svatantrika) they hold that an ultimate truth refers to a *phenomenon's lack of true existence*.

Nevertheless, 'the lack of subject and object being different substantial entities' is a conventional truth directly realized by Solitary Realizers and Bodhisattvas. This is explained below.

Since they maintain that all phenomena *lack* true existence, the proponents of the Yogachara Svatantrika School do not accept that impermanent phenomena (other-powered natures) and ultimate truths (thoroughly established natures) are truly existent.

They further contend that sense consciousnesses are mistaken awarenesses because their sense objects (shapes, colours, sounds, etc.), *lack* external existence but appear to those sense awarenesses to exist externally.

### The existence of self-knowers

The followers of the Yogachara Svatantrika accept the existence of self-knowers, because, like the followers of the Chittamatra, they accept that an object is not of a different nature from the mind that perceives it and thus occurs simultaneously with that mind.

## Afflictive and cognitive obstructions

The proponents of the Yogachara Svatantrika School also classify obstructions into afflictive and cognitive obstructions, with afflictive obstructions, as explained above, referring to the ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, the afflictions which are subsequently induced by that ignorance, and the seeds of both the foregoing.

What is unique to followers of the Yogachara Svatantrika is their subdivision of cognitive obstructions into (1) *coarse* cognitive obstructions and (2) *subtle* cognitive obstructions. Coarse cognitive obstructions refer to the ignorance that perceives ‘subject and object being different substantial entities’, and to the seeds of that ignorance, whereas subtle cognitive obstructions refer to the ignorance that perceives phenomena to exist truly, and its seeds.

These three types of obstructions correspond to the three types of practitioners: Hearers, Solitary Realizers, and Bodhisattvas. The ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, the afflictions subsequently induced by that ignorance, and the seeds of both the foregoing are the obstructions that mainly prevent Hearers from attaining Hearer self-liberation. The ignorance that perceives ‘subject and object being different substantial entities’ and the seeds of that ignorance are the obstructions that mainly prevent Solitary Realizers from attaining Solitary Realizer self-liberation. And the ignorance that perceives phenomena to exist truly together with the seeds of that ignorance are the obstructions that mainly prevent Bodhisattva from becoming fully enlightened Buddhas.

Therefore, Hearer practitioners cultivate the yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self; with that meditative equipoise, they gradually eliminate afflictive obstructions.

Solitary Realizer practitioners cultivate the yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes ‘the lack of subject and object being different substantial entities’; with that meditative equipoise, they gradually eliminate afflictive and coarse cognitive obstructions.

Bodhisattvas cultivate the yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes the emptiness of true existence of phenomena; with that meditative equipoise, they gradually eliminate afflictive obstruction as well as coarse and subtle cognitive obstructions.

Please note that Solitary Realizers also directly realize the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, and Bodhisattvas directly realize the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self as well as the lack of subject and object being different substantial entities, although these direct realizations are not the direct antidotes that eliminate the obstructions Solitary Realizers and Bodhisattvas need to overcome in order to reach their respective goals.

## Sautrantika Svatantrika (Sutric Autonomy School)

This school is called “Sautrantika Svatantrika” because it is a Sautrantika tenet system which, like the Sautrantika School, accepts that an object is of a different nature than the consciousness perceiving it, i.e. that its existence is external to consciousness. The most well-known proponents of this tenet is Bhavaviveka, and followers of the Sautrantika Svatantrika base their views mainly on his *Lamp of Wisdom* (Skt.: *Prajnadipa*, Tib.: *shes rab sgron ma*), *Heart of Madhyamika* (Skt.: *Madhyamika Hridaya*, Tib.: *dbu ma snying po*), and *Blaze of Reasoning* (Skt.: *Tarkajvala*, Tib.: *rtog ge 'bar ba*).

According to Koenchok Jigme Wangpo’s *Precious Garland of the Presentation of Tenets*, the definition of a proponent of the Sautrantika Svatantrika Madhyamika School is: ‘a proponent of the Madhyamika who does not assert self-knowers and who asserts that external phenomena exist by way of their own characteristic.’

The Sautrantika Svatantrika differs from the Yogachara Svatantrika School mainly in its assertions regarding:

- The external existence of phenomena
- The non-existence of self-knowers
- Afflictive and cognitive obstructions

## The external existence of phenomena

As mentioned above, followers of Sautrantika Svatantrika are similar to the Sautrantika, for they contend that the existence of phenomena is external to consciousness. For instance, the two, the smell of sandalwood and the nose consciousness perceiving the smell of sandalwood, are different substantial entities, or, in other words, the existence of the smell of sandalwood is external to its nose consciousness. Therefore, sense consciousnesses are not mistaken with respect to the appearance of external existence. However, unlike the proponents of Sautrantika, followers of the Sautrantika Svatantrika do not accept that external phenomena exist truly but maintain that whatever exists necessarily *lacks* true existence.

## The non-existence of self-knowers

Like the proponents of the Vaibhashika, the Sautrantika School Following Scripture, and the Prasangika Madhyamika tenets, followers of the Sautrantika Svatantrika do not accept the existence of self-knowers.

## Afflictive and cognitive obstructions

Unlike the proponents of Yogachara Svatantrika, the followers of Sautrantika Svatantrika do not assert the existence of *coarse* cognitive obstructions. Obstructions are either afflictive or cognitive obstructions. Afflictive obstructions refer to the ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, the afflictions which are subsequently induced by that ignorance, and the seeds of both the foregoing. They are the obstructions that prevent both Hearers and Solitary Realizers from attaining self-liberation. Cognitive obstructions refer to the ignorance that perceives phenomena to exist truly, and to the seed of that ignorance, which mainly prevent Bodhisattvas from becoming fully enlightened Buddhas. Therefore, both Hearer and Solitary Realizer practitioners cultivate the yogic direct perceiver directly realizing the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, and with that direct perceiver eliminate afflictive obstructions (i.e. the ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, the other afflictions, and the seeds of both the foregoing).

Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, cultivate the yogic direct perceiver directly realizing the emptiness of true existence of phenomena, which is the direct antidote to both afflictive and cognitive obstructions.

## Prasangika Madhyamika (Middle Way Consequentialist School)

This Madhyamika school is called “Prasangika” or “Consequentialist” because its followers chiefly rely on correct consequences in order to establish the existence of hidden phenomena, such as subtle impermanence, the ultimate nature of phenomena, and so forth. This will be explained below. Proponents of the Prasangika include Buddhapalita, Chandrakirti, and Shantideva, and followers of this philosophical system base their assertions mainly on Buddhapalita’s commentary *Buddhapalitavr̥tti*, Chandrakirti’s *Supplement to the Middle Way* (Skt.: *Madhyamakāvātāra*, Tib.: *dbu ma la ’jug pa*), and the Shantideva’s *Engaging in the Conduct of a Bodhisattva* (Skt.: *Bodhicaryavatara*, Tib.: *spyod ’jug*)

The Prasangika does not have any sub-schools and it differs in particular from the Svatantrika School in its assertions regarding:

- The lack of true and inherent existence
- Dependent arising
- The two truths
- Coarse and subtle selflessness
- The mind
- Being real and unreal from the perspective of the world
- Correct consequences
- The non-existence of self-knowers
- The mode of existence of the person
- Afflictive and cognitive obstructions

## The lack of inherent existence

The proponents of Prasangika are the only Buddhist tenet holders who assert that whatever exists necessarily lacks inherent existence, and that a phenomenon's *lack* of existing inherently is that phenomenon's ultimate truth.

According to them, the following are equivalent: lack of existing inherently, lack of existing truly, lack of existing from its own side, lack of existing by way of its own characteristics, lack of existing substantially, lack of existing objectively, lack of existing ultimately, lack of existing as its own reality, and so forth.

Please note that unlike the followers of the Svatantrika, the followers of the Prasangika do not differentiate between existing inherently and existing truly. Therefore, they do not accept that a *phenomenon's emptiness of existing without being posited through the power of appearing to a non-defective awareness* is an ultimate truth, and thus do not agree with the way the proponents of Svatantrika define the lack of true existence.

The followers of the Prasangika School argue that the emptiness identified by the Svatantrika is superficial and that realizing it does not result in liberation or Buddhahood.

Also, they find it contradictory for the followers of the Svatantrika to assert that phenomena are posited through appearing to an awareness on the one hand, and that they exist inherently and from their own side on the other.

It is important to understand that both the Svatantrika and the Prasangika Schools contend that phenomena are posited by the power of awareness. Yet, they differ greatly on what they mean by that. For the Svatantrika, the awareness that posits a phenomenon may be conceptual or non-conceptual as long as it is non-defective, i.e. non-mistaken with respect to its main object. The role of the awareness is more passive than in the Prasangika, for its function is to posit an inherently existent object by way of the object appearing to it.

According to the Prasangika School, the awareness by which an object is posited is necessarily a conceptual consciousness which actively imputes/designates an object in dependence on its parts, i.e. its basis of imputation. The consciousness designates objects with verbal conventions, names and qualities. Such imputation/designation is utterly subjective, for the designated object is not findable within its basis of imputation. Hence, the object is merely imputed/designated by name and thought without having any objective existence, i.e. without possessing a substantial, independent, and self-instituting essence that exists from its own side and is findable under ultimate analysis.

Ultimate analysis constitutes the search for an inherently and ultimately existent object. For instance, when engaging in ultimate analysis of a car, one analyses whether one can find an objectively and intrinsically existent car, a kind of "car-ness" that can be located among the parts, shape, and colour of the car. If it really existed, one should be able to find it.

It is important to understand that here one is not analyzing *whether* the car exists but *how* it exists. However, since ordinarily one is unable to differentiate between the car that exists and the inherently existent car that does not exist, it may seem that one is actually analyzing the existence of the car itself.

Buddhist scriptures describe numerous types of reasoning that use logic to refute the object of negation. If, for instance, the car existed inherently and were able to constitute itself, one would be able to see the car without having to depend on seeing something that is not the car. However, in reality whenever one says that one sees the car, one always sees something that is not the car but only one of its components. The car consists of a collection of different parts assembled in a particular way. Yet when looking at the car, it is impossible to perceive the entirety of those different parts because when seeing the front one does not see the back, and when seeing the outside one does not see the inside. Therefore, since the front, the back, the inside, and the outside of the car are not the car, one only ever perceives something that is not the car. The same applies to other phenomena such as the "I", the body, trees, forests, and so forth.

Furthermore, if an inherently existent car existed, either it would have to be one/identical with its parts or different/separate from its parts; there is no third possibility.

If the inherently existent car were different/separate from its parts it would have to be completely separate from its tires, engine, steering wheel, etc. In that case, the car would still have to be findable after its parts were removed.



If the car were one/identical with its parts it would have to be utterly and in all ways identical with its tires, engine, steering wheel, etc. Since those parts are plural, the car would have to be plural, or since the car is singular the parts of the car would have to be singular.

Nor would it make sense to talk of the 'tire *of* the car' since that implies an "owner" (i.e. the car) of the tire that is different from the tire itself. If the car were one with all its parts, it would further not make sense to say that the car was broken when only the engine was broken because for the car to be broken all of its parts would have to be broken.

Some people may argue that the car is identical with the *collection* of its parts, i.e. that the car *is* the collection of its parts. However, then the question arises, 'what does the collection of the parts of the car refer to?' Does it refer to *all* the parts of the car assembled in a particular way? If it does, does that mean that when one washes the car one washes the collection of the parts and therefore *all* the parts of the car? Likewise, when one sees the car does one see *all* the parts of the car?

This type of analysis is called 'ultimate analysis' because it searches for the car's inherent existence and instead finds the car's deepest level of existence, the car's ultimate truth which is the car's *lack* of inherent existence. Therefore, the car itself is a conventional truth whereas the car's lack of intrinsic, substantial, and objective existence is an ultimate truth.

Having thus negated the way the car does not exist, one needs to posit the way the car does exist, for even though the car does not exist by way of its own character and from its own side, it nevertheless exists. The way the car exists is explained in the context of explaining dependent arising.

## Dependent arising

According to the Prasangika, the lower Buddhist tenet systems have fallen to the extreme of reification because they do not negate enough. They do not negate enough, for even though they negate a permanent, self-sufficient self, and some tenet holders even negate external existence or *phenomena existing without appearing to a non-defective awareness*, all of them nonetheless assert inherent existence.

The proponents of the lower tenet schools, on the other hand, hold that the Prasangika tenet system has fallen to the extreme of nihilism, because they contend that if something *lacked* inherent existence it could not exist at all.

The Madhyamika Prasangika response to this is that they have not fallen to the extreme of nihilism because they maintain that even though phenomena, such as a car, lack inherent existence, they exist nonetheless for they are dependently arisen. Thus, for the Prasangika, the concept of dependent arising addresses the way in which phenomena exist. In other words, phenomena exist because they are *dependent arisings*, i.e. they are connected to and dependent upon a myriad of different other phenomena. Taking the example of the car, there are numerous different phenomena to which the car is connected and upon which it depends, and they are responsible for the existence of the car. Those phenomena can be classified into three categories:

- (1) Causes and conditions
- (2) Parts
- (3) Imputation by name and thought

Therefore, there are three levels of dependent arising:

1. Dependence on causes and conditions
2. Dependence on parts
3. Dependence on imputation by name and thought

Reflection on the three levels of dependent arising is considered to be vital for avoiding the extreme of nihilism. When subjecting phenomena to ultimate analysis (i.e. when searching for a phenomenon's inherent nature) there is a danger of cultivating the wrong idea that since phenomena cannot be found under such analysis, they do not actually exist. Therefore, contemplating dependent arising helps to overcome such a wrong view and facilitates the realization of how phenomena really exist.

Furthermore, understanding dependent arising also promotes an understanding of emptiness while understanding emptiness in turn promotes an understanding of dependent arising. In fact, the realization of the subtlest level of dependent arising must be preceded by the realization of emptiness.

### 1. *Dependence on causes and conditions*

As mentioned before, dependence on causes and conditions only pertains to impermanent phenomena. The car, for instance, is a dependently arisen phenomenon, for it was created in dependence on numerous different causes and conditions. This is the coarsest of the three levels of dependent arising because it is easier to understand than the other two levels.

The understanding of this level of dependence promotes an understanding of emptiness. Thus, if one reflects on this type of dependence, one comes to see that owing to the car's dependence on causes and conditions, the car cannot exist inherently and from its own side because if anything existed that way it would exist through its own power and therefore be *independent* of other phenomena.

If the contemplation of dependence on causes and conditions is taken to a subtler level of ultimate analysis, one also comes to understand that, despite one's sense that there was a truly existent moment of the initial *production* of the car, it is impossible to find that moment; it is not possible to determine the very moment when the cause of the car ceased and the car came into existence. The reason for this is that there is no smallest moment in time, so that no matter how brief a moment is, it can be further divided into even smaller moments. However, if the car existed inherently, objectively, and by way of its own character – the way it appears to exist – there would have to be a smallest moment in time, for one would be able to pinpoint the exact first moment of the car.

### 2. *Dependence on parts*

This level of dependence is subtler than the previous level. It refers to the fact that something exists because it has parts. Both permanent and impermanent phenomena are dependent on parts. A permanent phenomenon such as 'the absence of monkey on the table', for instance, is dependent on its attributes since it is dependent on its existence, its lack of *inherent* existence, etc. Likewise it is dependent on the table. Impermanent phenomena such as a car are dependent upon their spatial or directional parts, their moments in time, and their attributes.

Furthermore, reflecting on this level of dependent arising also facilitates a comprehension of emptiness, for despite the car existing in dependence on its parts, if we subject the car to ultimate analysis, by searching for some inherent car, a kind of essence or "car-ness" among its parts, we will not be able to find it. In fact, since there is no partless particle or a smallest moment in time, we could *endlessly* take apart the car mentally without ever finding a car. Hence, even though we have a sense that there is a car that truly exists in space and time, when we take apart the spatial parts of the car we are unable to find a car that truly occupies space; when we take apart the attributes of the car we are unable to find a car that truly possesses those characteristics; and when we take apart the temporal parts of the car we are unable to find a car that truly occupies time. Regarding the latter, since there is no smallest moment in time, we are unable to pinpoint an ultimately existent present moment of the car, for every present moment can again be subdivided into a former, middling and later moment. Therefore, it is also not possible to posit an ultimately existent past and future car, for the past and future depend on the present.

### 3. *Dependence on imputation by name and thought*

Dependence on imputation/designation by name and thought is the deepest level of dependent arising. According to the Prasangika School, it is on this level that dependent arising and the ultimate truth really connect. The reason for this is that the ultimate truth presents the way in which a phenomenon does *not exist* whereas dependence on imputation/designation takes the same phenomenon from a positive perspective, presenting the way in which it *does exist* – at its subtlest level.

Dependence on imputation/designation by name and thought refers to the fact that phenomena are imputed/designated by a term (name) and a conceptual consciousness (thought). A car, for example, is a car in dependence on a conceptual consciousness imputing/designating 'car' on the basis of an engine, tires, a steering wheel, etc. that are arranged in a specific way and perform a specific function. The car exists because a conceptual consciousness labelled it a car, and if it were not labelled a car it would not be one.

Another example is a 100 Rupee bill. Based on a specific quality of paper, engraving, and colouring, the India Government Mint labelled '100 Rupee' on a piece of paper, thereby giving it a specific value. The 100 Rupee bill does not exist from its own side but exists in dependence on such imputation/designation by name and thought. The same applies to countries, cities, forests, and all

other phenomena. They exist because they are apprehended by a conceptual consciousness and given a label.

Yet, even though imputation is necessary for a phenomenon to exist, it is not a sufficient condition for existence. Imputation by consciousness must occur in relation to an appropriate *basis of imputation*. There is a difference between imputing snake on a coiled, speckled rope and imputing snake on the aggregates of an actual snake. In the first case, a coiled, speckled rope is not a basis of imputation for a snake, for it does not perform the function of a snake, whereas in the second case, snake aggregates perform the function of a snake and are thus a suitable basis of imputation. So even though whatever exists is merely imputed, whatever is merely imputed does not necessarily exist, since a snake that is imputed on a coiled, speckled rope does not exist. This shows that imputation is not arbitrary but dependent on common conventions.

However, both a snake imputed on a rope and a snake imputed on snake aggregates are similar in that they cannot be found as existing independently of imputation/designation and inherent to the rope or the aggregates. This is why past masters have given the example of imputing a snake on a coiled, speckled rope in order to illustrate the third level of dependent arising.

So, phenomena exist conventionally, relatively and in mutual dependence. For instance 'I' and 'other', 'here' and 'there', 'long' and 'short', 'hot' and 'cold', 'whole' and 'parts', and so forth are merely imputed/designated in dependence on a variety of different phenomena. 'I' or 'here' are imputed on the basis of their parts, in dependence on 'others' or 'there', and in dependence on the point of view of the person using the term. Similarly, 'long' is designated in relation to 'short', 'hot' in relation to 'cold', and so forth.

In short, phenomena exist because they are *merely* imputed/designated. Here the word "merely" implies that phenomena are imputed without existing intrinsically and thus without existing in addition to, from the side of, or inherently within their bases of imputation. They exist conventionally because they are labelled in dependence on common conventions.

The moment we start to search for, for instance, a car that can be pinpointed exactly in space and time or that exists separately from its parts and imputation, we engage in ultimate analysis and thereby in the search for an inherently and truly existent car. Since such a car cannot exist, it cannot be found by ultimate analysis. Even the *merely imputed* car cannot be found by ultimate analysis, for if it was found by that type of analysis it would have to exist inherently. Yet, although the car does not exist inherently, for it cannot bear ultimate analysis, it exists *conventionally* which is sufficient for it to exist. In fact, it cannot exist in any other way.

The same applies to all the parts of the car, such as the engine, for example. The engine of the car is also merely imputed upon the parts of the engine, and cannot be found separately from such imputation/designation. Likewise, the tires, the steering wheel, the windshield, etc. are merely imputed on their respective parts, and those parts are likewise merely imputed upon their own parts, and so on.

Hence, the "I", the mind, shapes, colours, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects, activities such as walking, talking, writing, and thinking, continuities in time such as weeks, months, years, etc., even emptiness itself - all phenomena are merely imputed by name and thought and cannot be found when subjected to ultimate analysis.

## The two truths

The proponents of the Prasangika School are further the only Buddhist tenet holders who assert that ultimate truths do not merely refer to emptiness, i.e. the lack of inherent existence of phenomena, but also to true cessations.

A true cessation is an irrevocable elimination of any of the afflictive or cognitive obstructions by a yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena. Arya Bodhisattvas, who have reached the path of seeing or the path of meditation, have attained yogic direct perceivers which directly realize the emptiness of inherent existence. With such meditative equipoise paths they gradually eliminate obstructions.

A yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes emptiness consists of two stages: (1) an uninterrupted path and (2) a path of release.

An uninterrupted path is a meditative equipoise that *eliminates* particular objects of elimination, i.e. particular obstructions. It is called 'uninterrupted' because it remains without interruption or intervals

until whatever obstructions it eliminates *are eliminated*. The moment they are eliminated, the uninterrupted path becomes a path of release.

A path of release is a meditative equipoise that arises immediately after the uninterrupted path. It arises, as mentioned above, when all the obstructions (which its preceding uninterrupted path eliminates) *are eliminated*, i.e. when the elimination or true cessation of those obstructions is attained. Thus, it is called a 'path of release' because it is freed or released from whatever objects of elimination the preceding uninterrupted path eliminated.

It is this path of release which, besides directly realizing the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena, also directly realizes the true cessations that have been attained. A path of release of the path of seeing, for instance, directly realizes the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena and the cessation of the *intellectually acquired* afflictive obstructions. Thus, since they are the objects of an ultimate awareness, both the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena and the cessation of intellectually acquired afflictive cognitions are ultimate truths.

For the Prasangika School, conventional truths refer to all the remaining phenomena that are neither emptiness nor true cessations.

The etymology of the two truths is similar to that described by the other Mahayana tenets. The difference is that, according to the Prasangika School, an ultimate awareness refers to a yogic direct perceiver that directly and non-dualistically realizes *the lack of inherent/ intrinsic existence* of all phenomena, whereas a concealer consciousness refers to an ignorance that wrongly perceives *inherent existence*. Such ignorance is a concealer consciousness because it conceals the ultimate nature of phenomena, i.e. their lack of inherent existence.

Furthermore, as explained above, the two truths are of one nature. Since, for instance, the car's ultimate truth is a characteristic or an attribute of the conventional car, the car and the car's ultimate truth are of one nature. They are related in a way that one cannot exist without the other; the ultimate truth of the car cannot exist if the conventional truth, the car, does not exist, and the conventional truth, the car, cannot exist if the ultimate truth of the car does not exist. Yet even though the two truths are of one nature, there is nothing that is both a conventional and an ultimate truth.

## Coarse and subtle selflessness

The proponents of the lower Buddhist tenets assert that the lack of a permanent, partless, independent self is coarse selflessness, whereas the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self is subtle selflessness. However, according to the Prasangika School, even though the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self is subtler than the lack of a permanent, partless, independent self, both types of selflessness are nonetheless coarse. The followers of the Prasangika School maintain that subtle selflessness refers to emptiness. They categorize emptiness into two: (1) selflessness of persons and (2) selflessness of phenomena (other than the person). Both types of selflessness are equally subtle and both are the objects of the meditative equipoise directly realizing the emptiness of inherent existence. They only differ from the point of view of the basis of emptiness. Therefore, the lack of inherent existence of Tashi, for instance, is the selflessness of persons, while the lack of inherent existence of a cup is the selflessness of phenomena.

## The mind

The proponents of the Prasangika tenets are also unique in their view that, except for yogic direct perceivers directly realizing the emptiness of inherent existence, all consciousnesses in the continua of sentient beings are mistaken. They are mistaken because the object of negation of emptiness, inherent existence, always appears to them. For instance, an eye consciousness realizing a house is a mistaken awareness because its object, the house, appears to it to exist inherently and from its own side. However, this does not mean that the eye consciousness is a *wrong* consciousness, for it correctly comprehends the house and realizes its shape and colour.

Therefore, sentient beings' awarenesses – with the exception of meditative absorptions that directly realize emptiness – are all mistaken with regard to their objects appearing to exist inherently (although they are fully functioning with regard to perceiving their main objects). Only Buddhas are able to overcome the appearances of inherent existence since these appearances are the results of cognitive obstructions, which only Buddhas have removed.

## Real and unreal from the perspective of the world

According to the Prasangika Madhyamika, conventional truths cannot be divided into real and unreal conventional truths because all conventional truths are deceptive and therefore unreal. Conventional truths are deceptive because whenever they appear to a sentient being's awareness they always appear to exist inherently. Therefore, conventional truths are unreal whereas ultimate truths are real. Ultimate truths are real, true or non-deceptive because they always appear the way they exist to sentient beings' direct perceivers. Ultimate truths appear to direct perceivers the way they exist because they never appear to exist inherently to those awarenesses but always appear to be *empty* of existing inherently.

However, the proponents of the Prasangika tenet school assert that *relative to the perspective of the world*, anything that is not an ultimate truth can be categorized into that which is *real* and that which is *unreal*.

Furthermore, just as phenomena can in general be categorized into subjects (awarenesses) and objects (objects of those awarenesses) the proponents of the Prasangika hold that likewise there are:

- (1) Subjects (awarenesses) that are real and unreal *relative to the perspective of the world*
- (2) Objects (objects of those awarenesses) that are real and unreal *relative to the perspective of the world*

### (1) Subjects (awarenesses) that are real and unreal relative to the perspective of the world

Subjects (awarenesses) that are real *relative to the perspective of the world* refer to awarenesses which are considered to be correct consciousnesses by someone who has never taken to mind emptiness. Examples are an eye consciousness perceiving a table, a conceptual consciousness realizing impermanence, ignorance grasping at inherent existence, and so forth.

Subjects (awarenesses) that are unreal *relative to the perspective of the world* refer to awarenesses which are considered to be wrong consciousnesses by someone who has never taken to mind emptiness. Examples are an eye consciousness perceiving the horns of a rabbit, a mental consciousness that apprehends a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, a yogic direct perceiver realizing emptiness, and so forth.

### (2) Objects (objects of those awarenesses) that are real and unreal relative to the perspective of the world

Objects that are real *relative to the perspective of the world* refer to objects which are considered to exist the way they appear to direct perceivers by those who have never taken emptiness to mind. Examples are tables, cups, impermanence, inherently existent persons, and so forth.

Please note that inherently existent persons are real relative to the perspective of the world because inherently existent persons are considered to exist the way they appear to direct perceivers by those who have never taken emptiness to mind.

Objects that are unreal *relative to the perspective of the world* refer to objects which are considered not to exist the way they appear to a direct perceiver by those who have never taken emptiness to mind.

There are objects that are unreal *relative to the perspective of the world* that exist and objects that are unreal *relative to the perspective of the world* that do not exist. Examples of those that exist are the reflection of a face in a mirror, an echo, a mirage of water, and a dream elephant. Examples of those that do not exist are the horns of a rabbit, the reflection of a face in a mirror being a face, an elephant in a dream, and a self sufficient, substantially existent self.

## Correct consequences

As opposed to the followers of the Svatantrika, the followers of the Prasangika School do not assert the existence of *autonomous* syllogisms, for, according to them, whatever exists necessarily *lacks* autonomous or inherent existence. They only accept *non-autonomous* syllogisms, i.e. syllogisms that *lack* inherent existence.

Furthermore, the Prasangika tenet holders maintain that it is more effective to cite correct consequences in order to bring about inferential understanding in the continuum of an opponent in debate. This means that even though they accept reasoning based on syllogisms they assert that it is not necessary to state them for another to generate an inferential comprehension of subtle impermanence, emptiness, and so forth.

Like a syllogism, a consequence is a form of logical statement which is used to prove concepts that are difficult to comprehend, enabling the opponent to generate an inferential cognizer realizing that concept. But a consequence is stated in a way in which it reveals the absurdities of the opponent's wrong views; it turns the opponent's own assertions against him, so that he is unable to give a correct response without contradicting what he asserts.

For instance, to an opponent who holds that sound is permanent, that sound is a product, and that whatever is a product is necessarily impermanent, the following consequence is cited:

*The subject, sound, it follows that it is not a product because it is permanent.*

In this case, the opponent accepts the three modes of the reason. He holds that *sound is permanent*, which is why he cannot claim that the **reason is not established** as a property of the subject.

Since he accepts the forward and counter-pervasions (i.e. that whatever is *permanent* is necessarily not a *product*, and whatever is a *product* is necessarily not *permanent*) he cannot claim that there is **no pervasion**. Lastly he cannot even accept that *sound* is not a *product*, for that would contradict his assertion that sound is a product. Therefore, he is left speechless.

The opponent comes to realize that his views are contradictory, enabling him to reassess his beliefs until he develops a correct understanding of the fact that sound is impermanent.

## The non-existence of self-knowers

Unlike the proponents of the Sautrantika School Following Reasoning, the Chittamatra, and the Yogachara Svatantrika tenets, the followers of the Prasangika School do not accept the existence of self-knowers. They reason that just as a knife is unable to cut itself and a fingertip is unable to touch that same fingertip, an awareness is unable to perceive an awareness that is of one nature with itself. Furthermore, they argue that the memory of a previous consciousness, i.e. of having perceived something, can be generated without previous perception of that same consciousness. The reason for this is that when one remembers, for instance, a tree, one is able to remember *having perceived* or *seen* the tree through association.

The proponents of the Prasangika Madhyamika also refute the analogy of a self-knower. They say that a lamp does not illuminate itself because it is naturally bright. If a lamp were to illuminate itself, darkness would obscure darkness which would lead to the absurdity that darkness could not be seen.

## Karma of body and speech being physical

Like the proponents of the Vaibhashika, the followers of the Prasangika assert that karma of the body and speech is physical. As explained before, they maintain that there are two types of karma of the body that are physical and two types of karma of speech that are physical. The two types of karma of the body that are physical are (1) *observable* karma of the body and (2) *unobservable* karma of the body. *Observable* karma of the body refers to volitional actions of the body that can be seen by an ordinary person, such as the actual act of killing someone. When the act of killing has been completed a subtle physical form (*unobservable* karma of the body) is left in the continuum of the killer, ripening in the future as experiences that correspond to taking someone's life. That subtle physical form is unobservable karma, for it is too subtle to be perceived by an ordinary person.

The two types of karma of speech that are physical are (1) *observable* karma of speech and (2) *unobservable* karma of speech. An example of *observable* karma of speech is the act of lying. It is observable because the lie can be heard by an ordinary person. When the lie is spoken a subtle physical form (*unobservable* karma of speech) is left in the continuum of the person who lied, which will ripen in future experiences that correspond to the non-virtue of lying. That subtle physical form is unobservable because an ordinary person is not aware of it.

Like the proponents of the Vaibhashika, the followers of the Prasangika also maintain that vows are unobservable physical form.

Even though according to the Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and Svatantrika schools, the volitional acts of killing and lying are physical and observable, they are not considered to be the karma of killing and stealing respectively. They are not considered to be the karma of killing and stealing, for the karma of killing refers to the mental factor of volition that is present during the act of killing, while the karma of stealing refers to the mental factor of volition that is present during the act of stealing. Furthermore, according to these tenet schools, after acts of body or speech have been completed, imprints of the respective actions are left in the mental continuum and not subtle unobservable physical form.

Likewise, vows are accepted to be imprints.

## **The mode of existence of the person**

The followers of the Prasangika School hold that the person is the mere “I” that is imputed on the basis of the five aggregates. They do not accept that the person refers to the mental consciousness, the mind-basis-of-all or the collection of the five aggregates, like the proponents of other Buddhist schools. Nonetheless, according to the Prasangika School, imprints are generally posited on the mental consciousness and it is the mental consciousness that transmigrates from one life to the next. Yet this does not mean that the mental consciousness is the person but rather that the person is imputed on the basis of the mental consciousness (as well as on the other aggregates). This is why it is correct to say that the person has imprints when his basis of imputation, the mental consciousness, has imprints, and to say that the person transmigrates to the next life when his basis of imputation, the mental consciousness, transmigrates to the next life.

## **Afflictive and cognitive obstructions**

Unlike other Buddhist tenet holders, the proponents of the Prasangika tenets contend that Hearer and Solitary Realizers have to directly realize the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena in order to eliminate afflictive obstructions and attain self-liberation (i.e. they have to directly realize the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena). It is not enough for these practitioners to merely realize the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self.

The reason is that according to the Prasangika, the root of cyclic existence refers to the ignorance that perceives inherent existence. Hence, that ignorance, the other afflictions which are produced by it, and the seeds of both the foregoing are all afflictive obstructions. Hearer and Solitary Realizer practitioners thus have to cultivate a yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena, and with this meditative equipoise they are able to gradually eliminate afflictive obstructions.

Cognitive obstructions, on the other hand, refer to the *imprints* of the ignorance that wrongly perceives inherent existence, and to the *imprints* of the other afflictions. In particular, it is the imprints of the ignorance perceiving inherent existence that prevent sentient beings from explicitly realizing the two truths with a single awareness. They are responsible for the appearance of inherent existence to sense consciousnesses and other awarenesses. And they obstruct sentient beings’ mental consciousnesses from becoming omniscient.

Like Hearer and Solitary Realizer practitioners, Bodhisattvas also have to cultivate the yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena. But thanks to their Bodhicitta, i.e. their aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, their yogic direct perceiver develops the capacity to serve as the direct antidote to *both* afflictive and cognitive obstructions.

Moreover, unlike the followers of Chittamatra and Svatantrika tenets, the proponents of the Prasangika also maintain that Bodhisattvas who have not previously removed afflictive obstructions by first attaining self-liberation in dependence on the Hinayana path eliminate the two types of obstructions in succession. First they eliminate intellectually acquired afflictive obstructions on the path of seeing. When they reach the path of meditation, they progress through the first seven Bodhisattva bhumi/grounds during which they gradually remove most of the innate afflictive obstructions. Thereafter, Bodhisattvas achieve the eighth bhumi/ground on which they remove the subtlest afflictive obstructions and attain liberation. Yet they do not stop there, but continue to generate yogic direct perceivers realizing emptiness with which, on the eighth, ninth, and tenth bhumi/grounds, they gradually overcome the cognitive obstructions.

This completes a brief presentation of the four Buddhist tenet systems.

As explained above, gaining an understanding of the different views of the lower Buddhist tenets in particular is considered an invaluable tool for comprehending the subtlest views of the Madhyamika School in general and the Prasangika School in particular. It allows students to discern the gradual progression away from substantial, true existence, away from phenomena existing inherently and from their own side, towards being merely imputed and hence towards analytical non-findability.

According to the Vaibhashika School, some phenomena exist substantially and some do not, but all are substantially established. For the Sautrantika, some phenomena are substantially established and some

are not, while all phenomena are truly existent. The proponents of the Chittamatra assert that some phenomena exist truly and some do not but all phenomena exist inherently. According to the followers of the Svatantrika Madhyamika, whatever exists is necessarily empty of existing truly. Yet they do not refute inherent existence, for they hold that if phenomena were not inherently existent, they would not exist at all.

Lastly, the proponents of the Prasangika Madhyamika maintain that whatever exists necessarily lacks inherent existence and that all phenomena are merely imputed.

Therefore, phenomena become less and less substantial and more and more nominal as one progresses from the Vaibhashika to the Prasangika tenets.

Gaining realization of the ultimate nature of all phenomena is fundamental and essential to Buddhist practice. The reason for this is that the root cause of all our problems and difficulties lies in our misperception of reality, in our instinctive, deep-rooted, and all-pervasive sense that everything exists independently, objectively, and from its own side.

The only effective antidote to these misconceptions is the wisdom that realizes how phenomena really exist. Through listening, contemplating, and meditating on teachings on emptiness we will be able to gradually undo our distorted views, reduce our anger, attachment, etc. and find more contentment and peace of mind. But even more importantly, we will be able to cultivate greater compassion and love for other sentient beings, to open our heart to their suffering and misery, and to devote our lives to working for their benefit.

Nagarjuna says in his ***Commentary on Bodhicitta (Bodhicittavivarana)***

*When this emptiness [as explained]  
Is thus meditated upon by yogis,  
No doubt there will arise in them  
A mind attached to others' welfare.*