

Jeffrey Hopkins Meditation on Emptiness PP 405

The two truths are objects, not vague concepts of truth, beauty, and so forth. They are phenomena (*dharmas*), objects (*vishaya*, *yul*), existents (*sat*, *yod pa*), and objects of knowledge (*jneya*, *shes bya*). Truths are those things that exist the way they appear, and thus only ultimate truths (*paramarthasatya*, *don dam bdenpa*) or emptinesses qualify as truths. The other various and sundry objects do not exist the way they appear, except to Buddhas. These objects are truths only for a concealer of suchness, an ignorant consciousness; therefore, they are called truths-for-a-concealer (*samvrtisatya*, *kun rdzob bden pa*).

Truths-for-a-concealer are falsities, appearing one way and existing another. Thus, since only an ultimate truth can actually sustain the meaning of truth, it is not truths that are divided into the two truths. Objects of knowledge, or phenomena, are the basis of division of the two truths.

The *Meeting of Father and Son Sutra* says, 'Objects of knowledge are exhausted in the two truths.'

“Without depending on others the
Knower Of the World taught these two truths,
Conventional and likewise ultimate—
A third truth does not exist.”

Since those which are divided into the two truths are phenomena (and the synonyms of 'phenomena'), each member of either division is a phenomenon, an object, an existent, and an object of knowledge. This means that an emptiness is a phenomenon, object, existent, and object of knowledge as are all other various objects.

Among six positions on the topic of what is divided into the two truths which are refuted by Jam-yang-shay-ba is that of the translator Ngok, (*Ngog-lo-tstsha-ba bLo-ldan-shes-rab*) and his followers, who do not accept that an emptiness is an object of knowledge because the mere non-finding of an object under analysis is just *called* an emptiness, and, thus, there is no phenomenon 'emptiness' existent there. Ngok's idea is that if an analytical consciousness cognized an emptiness, then that emptiness would necessarily inherently exist. For, an analytical consciousness is searching to find whether an object inherently exists or not, and if it 'finds' or cognizes an emptiness of inherent existence of that object, then it would seem that the emptiness must inherently exist since, according to him, it would be able to bear ultimate analysis. Therefore, according to him mere appearances are the basis of the division into the two truths and not objects of knowledge because an ultimate truth, that is, an emptiness, is not an object of knowledge.

The Ge-luk-ba answer to this is: An analytical consciousness investigating whether a table, for instance, is separate from its basis of designation, or is the composite of its bases of designation, or is some one of its bases of designation does not find a table. This very non-finding is an emptiness, and this non-finding is 'found' or cognized by an analytical consciousness. However, because an analytical consciousness is not investigating whether the emptiness of the table can be found, its 'finding' or cognizing the emptiness of the table, i.e., its lack of inherent existence, does not necessitate that the emptiness be inherently existent. This is because the analytical consciousness was not searching for the emptiness of the table but for the table. When, in turn, an analytical consciousness searches for the emptiness of the table, it also cannot be found; an emptiness of the emptiness of the table is 'found'. This type of finding does not mean that the object can bear ultimate analysis; nothing can bear ultimate analysis; even an emptiness cannot.

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That the Ge-luk-bas are able to view this non-finding as an object, an ultimate object, and as validly established allows them to take literally passages in sutras that others find require interpretation, such as the presentation of suchness as a phenomenon in the *Meeting of the Father and Son Sutra* above when it presents objects of knowledge—existents—as the basis of the division into the two truths. Still, suchness is a mere non-affirming negative of inherent existence, not a positive phenomenon, and when it is realized, one is not thinking, 'This *is* emptiness.'