

founder of the Ge-luk-ba order, Dzong-ka-ba (1357-1419) wrote a commentary called *Illumination of the Thought, Extensive Explanation of (Chandrakirti's) 'Supplement to (Nagarjuna's) "Treatise on the Middle Way"*, and the major Ge-luk-ba monastic colleges have their own commentaries on both Chandrakirti's and Dzong-ka-ba's works, usually in the form of general explanations accompanied by debates. These works are the basis for the study of Madhyamika and more particularly of Prasangika, centering on the topic of the two truths.

## TWO TRUTHS

### Sources

Jam-yang-shay-ba's *Great Exposition of Tenets*

Nga-wang-bel-den's *Annotations*

Kensur Lekden's oral teachings

The two truths are objects, not vague concepts of truth, beauty, and so forth.<sup>300</sup> They are phenomena (*dharma, chos*), objects (*vishaya, yul*), existents (*sat, yodpa*), 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 (Pitaputrasamagama)* says, 'Objects of knowledge are exhausted in the two truths.'

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 and sundry 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<sup>301</sup> 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.

Every emptiness is, in turn, qualified by an emptiness, necessitating an infinite regress, but this does not entail a fallacy just as there is no fallacy in the fact that there are an infinite number of causes that eventually lead to the production of a sprout. Infinite regresses are damaging only when they necessitate an impossibility; since the causal sequence that leads to the production of a sprout can stretch back through measureless time, there is no fallacy such as the impossibility of millions of causes having to occur in a tiniest moment.

Still, the situation with an infinite number of emptinesses is different from that of an infinite chain of causes over time. Since each emptiness of the emptiness of the emptiness of the emptiness, etc., of a table is a phenomenon, they must all be cognized by a Buddha if he is to be omniscient. Also, if first one emptiness is understood and then the mind turns to the next, and the next, and the next, there would be no time in which all the emptinesses related with just one object could be known. However, this is true only for the mode of cognition of emptiness by inference. An inferring consciousness first realizes the emptiness of a thing through the medium of a concept; then, through merely turning the mind to another object, its emptiness is immediately known. However, when emptiness is directly cognized—that is to say, without the medium of concepts and images—all emptinesses throughout all world systems are simultaneously known. The mind and its objects—all emptinesses—are totally undifferentiated like fresh water poured into fresh water; a transformation has been effected that allows simultaneous cognition of the emptiness of everything.

Direct cognition of all emptinesses does not mean that all phenomena are directly known; rather, the mode of existence of all phenomena is realized. When a yogi has become familiar with direct cognition of emptiness on the Bodhisattva's path of meditation and has completed the necessary stock of merit, he becomes a Buddha, able to know directly and simultaneously both the emptinesses of all phenomena and the phenomena themselves. An analytical consciousness does not create an emptiness; it discovers the nature of a phenomenon; thus, an