

# Chapter Two. The Two Truths and the Two Types of Valid Knowledge

## The Two Truths to be Ascertained

### **B2: The Wholesome Middle**

### **C1: Two Truths to be Ascertained: Conventional and Ultimate Truth**

[VERSE 3]

***The Dharma spoken by all buddhas,***

***Depends in reality upon the two truths.***

***The mundane is the conventional truth;***

***The supramundane is the ultimate truth.***

Buddha Shakyamuni spoke innumerable teachings in accordance with the different capacities of sentient beings. All such teachings can be included in conventional and ultimate truths. In *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way* it is said:

*The Dharma that the Buddha teaches*

*Is wholly founded on two truths:*

*The “all-concealing” truth of mundane beings*

*And the truth of ultimate reality.*

What is ultimate truth? The domain that goes beyond ordinary speech and conceptual thought, and cannot be conveyed through verbal expression, is named ultimate truth. Conventional truth refers to all those domains that ordinary people are able to comprehend with conceptual minds and to describe by means of verbal expressions.

It is as stated in the *Introduction to the Middle Way* that, ultimate truth and conventional truth are established from the real and illusory aspects of all things. They are the actual reality and the deluded appearance of all things, respectively. All things possess a reality and an appearance. If you realize the reality, you have realized the ultimate truth; if you realize the appearance, you have realized the conventional truth. In the *Nirvana Sutra* it is also said that the world has two aspects: one is the ultimate truth, the other is the conventional truth.

Therefore, the myriads of things are all comprised of ultimate and conventional truths. The Buddha's teachings are also comprised of ultimate and conventional truths. The way in which the two truths are established and analyzed will not be discussed at length here. They are covered in many works, such as those on the Middle Way.

We must understand the principles concerning ultimate and conventional truths. If we do not understand the two truths, we are in no way different from a blind person in our world. Even now, among those who study the Buddhadharma, some know nothing concerning the two truths. This is really regretful.

## The Two Types of Valid Knowledge that Can Ascertain the Two Truths

### C2: The Two Types of Valid Knowledge that Can Ascertain the Two Truths

#### D1: The Concise Explanation of the Two Types of Valid Knowledge

[VERSE 4]

*If one is to enter into the nature of the two truths*

*By means of unmistaken and certain wisdom,*

*One must obtain the two flawless valid knowledges through practice,*

*That is the supreme eye of wisdom.*

We can approach the nature of the two truths by means of the two types of valid knowledge: (1) the valid knowledge of the conventional, and (2) the valid knowledge of the ultimate. Once we have attained such wisdom of these two valid knowledges through gradual practice, we will have attained the supreme eye of wisdom. We will be able to understand this in the context of *The Ornament of the Middle Way*, where Shantarakshita, in explaining the topic of merit accumulation, says the following:

*Those who ride the sublime chariot of the two truths,*

*Holding the reins of reasoned thought firmly,*

*Are called practitioners of the Mahayana,*

*Bearing their names according with reality.*

This verse states that with a firm hold on the reins of the wisdom - valid knowledge of the conventional and of the ultimate, those who ride the sublime chariot of conventional and ultimate truths are worthy of the name of Mahayana practitioner. Why does Shantarakshita say this? Because a true Mahayana practitioner should have a perfect understanding of the two truths. If we lack genuine understanding in the

ultimate truth and the conventional truth, but claim “I am a Mahayana practitioner”, the claim can hardly withstand scrutiny on many aspects.

In his *Commentary on The Ornament of the Middle Way*, Mipham Rinpoche says:

*Through having gained the ultimate, the heart of sky-like peace,*

*The glorious Moon in beauty sails above the triple world.*

*Through seeing the conventional, like rainbow hues unmixed,*

*The Dharma’s Fame resounds throughout the earth.*

The conventional truth, which is just like a rainbow where the arched stripes do not mingle with each other, should be understood through the teachings of Dharmakirti; the truth of emptiness, which is like empty space free from all conceptual thoughts, should be comprehended based on the teachings of Chandrakirti. Through the instructions of these two masters, we will definitely realize the conventional and ultimate truth. Of course, we must rely on conventional truth at first, then the wisdom of the ultimate truth can be generated.

Also in his *Beacon of Certainty*, Mipham Rinpoche says:

*The fame of the Moon of the Amazing Dharma*

*Arises along with the light of elegant speech*

*In the vast sky of the Buddha’s teaching,*

*Vanquishing the heavy darkness of doubt.*

The excellent doctrines of the unrivaled Chandrakirti and Dharmakirti are like the sun and the moon. Their brilliance manifested at once in the vast empty space of the Buddha’s teaching, destroying the heavy darkness of ignorance, confusion, and doubt about the profound and the vast Dharma teachings throughout the entire world. Hence, based on the instructions of Mipham Rinpoche, we can say that valid knowledge of the conventional and of the ultimate are of great importance.

Therefore, the key point here for us is, I believe, to receive training in both Buddhist

Logic and in the Middle Way. If we fail to do so, a mere discussion of the teachings about the karmic law of cause and effect or some worldly example will not help us truly solve our problems. Hence, when we study *The Way of the Bodhisattva* and *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, together with other relatively simple instructions, we should also become familiar with more profound Dharma teachings. In terms of wisdom, everyone is on a different level. So we should all learn in different ways. In this manner, it will be easier to generate solid conviction in our mental continuums.

## The Manifestation of Dependent Arising

### D2: The Extensive Explanation of the Four Principles

#### E1: The Four Principles that can Ascertain the Two Truths

#### F1: The First Three Principles

#### G1: Overall Explanation of Dependently-Arising Appearance

[VERSE 5]

*All things appear in their rich variety,*

*As a result of dependent Arising.*

*Things that do not depend on anything else,*

*Will not appear, like a lotus flower in empty sky.*

All kinds of internal and external things that appear to sentient beings come into existence because of dependent arising. Without anything to depend on, a thing will certainly never appear, just like a lotus flower that grows in empty sky.

It is well known that external things arise as a result of dependent arising. For example, depending on a seed, its sprouting, its blossoming, and its bearing, a fruit occur. The same is true of internal things: from ignorance to mental formation and consciousness, up to birth and death, the wandering of beings in samsara owes its production to nothing but dependent arising.

Regrettably, worldly people have knowledge of dependent arising only in relation to external and material things. But they have no knowledge of dependent arising in relation with the inner twelve links that have held them captive in samsara since beginningless time. In most countries, textbooks teach students how to investigate external and material objects. However, they neglect to analyze the inner mind. Even when textbooks explain consciousness, their analysis is confined to present mental

states, and they never touch upon past and future lives, or the mechanism of samsara. It is regrettable how the content of the mind is still an unexplored field.

All phenomena arise as a result of dependent arising. Yet, as Nagarjuna says, when we investigate dependent arising by means of rigorous reasoning on the ultimate level, we find that nothing is ever possibly produced. In *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, it is said:

*Things are not produced by themselves,  
They are not produced by others,  
Not by both, and not without a cause,  
Thus we know that they are not ever produced.*

In explaining this verse, Rendawa says that the meaning of “not ever produced” should be understood as dependent arising which calls “the fifth kind of production”. In his *Commentary on the Introduction to the Middle Way*, Mipham Rinpoche also says that “not produced” means dependent arising, i.e., production through dependent arising does exist on a conventional level. Nagarjuna also has the following instruction:

*There has never been one thing  
That did not arise from causes and conditions.  
Therefore, among all things,  
There is none that is not empty.*

Hence, the myriads of things that we can talk about are produced from causes and conditions. Furthermore, these things are of the nature of emptiness. The modes in which these things appear according to dependent arising are explained in detail in the *Precious Garland of the Middle Way*.

In sum, with regard to all things, we should understand that on conventional level a result must certainly be produced when all causes and conditions come together. Yet when we employ wisdom to analyze such production on ultimate level, we will see that

none of these things have ever been substantially produced. Mipham Rinpoche also says in his *Commentary on the Introduction to the Middle Way*, “Because of the nature of emptiness, all appearing things originate from their dependent causes.” Hence, when we analyze dependent arising, we find that it is nothing but emptiness free from all conceptual elaborations. Certainly, everyone can use words to simply talk about this, but it is not so easy to develop a firm conviction in regard to the teachings of the Middle Way.

## The Principle of Function and the Principle of Dependence

### G2: Specific Explanation of the Three Principles According to the Cause, Effect and Entity of Dependent Arising

#### H1: The Principle of Function and the Principle of Dependence

##### I1: The Meaning of the Two Principles

[VERSE 6]

*If causes and conditions are complete,*

*They function to bring about an effect.*

*All things with the nature of an effect,*

*Depend on their individual causes.*

In the *Sutra Unfurling the Real Meaning*, the Buddha discussed the four principles: (1) the principle of function, (2) the principle of dependence, (3) the principle of nature, and (4) the principle of establishment by proof. The four principles are explained in the form of pith instructions in treatises such as *The Ornament of the Middle Way* and in Rongzom pandita's *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle*. *The Ornament of the Middle Way* says:

*Satisfactory if not examined,*

*Based upon foregoing causes,*

*Things arise as though they were*

*The causes' subsequent effects.*

In explaining this verse, Mipham Rinpoche introduces these four principles. The principle of function and the principle of dependence are mainly established with regard to causes and effects respectively. The principle of nature, on the other hand,

is established from the perspective of things themselves, whereas the principle of establishment by proof asserts that these doctrines can be established, and hence proved, by means of direct perception and inference. That is, the manifest is proved by means of direct perception, while the hidden is proved by means of inference. Ultimately, direct perception and inference are comprised in the principle of nature, since, in truth, all things are inseparable from their own nature. For example, no one can deny the heat nature of fire. Similarly, no one can argue about, or refute the principle of nature.

Through listening and contemplation, we will certainly understand these principles. An understanding of the four principles is of great importance to our study and practice. In his *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle*, Rongzom Pandita explained that, regarding causes, effects, the entity of things, and correct reasoning respectively, the principle of function, the principle of dependence, the principle of nature, and the principle of establishment by proof are introduced. Yet, what are the reasons for giving the teachings in this form? Because we have four kinds of doubts in our minds about causes, about effects, about the entity of things, and about the correct reasoning, and the four principles can eradicate these four doubts.

The principle of nature is introduced because we doubt the entity of things; for example, doubting that the nature of fire is heat, or doubting the fact that a pillar is impermanent. The principle of function is taught because of the doubt about the effect of a given cause, for example, the doubt about whether wholesome deeds can produce happiness. The principle of dependence is taught in regard to doubts about the cause of a given effect, for example, whether or not the suffering and happiness of sentient beings is the result of unwholesome and wholesome deeds performed in the past. The following thought: “Is there a correct theory that can explain such principles of cause and effect?” is then a doubt concerning reasoning or logic. Hence, the principle of establishment by proof is taught.

I learned *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle* from His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche a few decades ago. At that time, when I first learned these four principles, I had a deep understanding of the Buddha's teachings. We never forget those things that greatly arouse our interest, or those things that bring us great benefit, even as many years go by. For example, a few days ago I met by chance an old classmate of more than twenty years ago. At that time, another classmate of ours had a bag to hold tsampa (Tibetan barley flour). It was a cowhide bag of a special shape. Perhaps, because of the harsh living conditions in which we then lived, to the degree that we often felt hungry, any source of even a tiny bit of food left a deep impression on our minds. Although so many years have gone by, each classmate still retains a clear memory of the bag and of its shape; it is as if none of us can forget it. I asked many of them about it, and everyone said, "Yes, I know, that is what the bag looks like." Similarly, I was deeply impressed by the four principles, and held a great faith in them, so the memory of them is still fresh.

The four principles are truly meaningful to us. Especially in this complex age when there are these chaotic thoughts on a national and international level, east to west, we have fortunately found an actual truth, a truth which is like a good seed planted in the depths of our alaya consciousness, and will benefit us for the present life and for all lives to come. I believe, if we understand the truth of the Buddha's teaching, and especially the teachings of Mipham Rinpoche, we will develop a very strong faith in our fundamental teacher Buddha Shakyamuni. In order to develop such faith in our minds, we should understand these four principles thoroughly, observing everything in the world through them. In this manner, an uncommon conviction on the Buddha's teachings, as well as on the correct worldly principles, will arise in our mental continuums. This kind of conviction will not depend on some temporary condition or fleeting emotion. It will have arisen from the depths of our hearts, and will not be destroyed upon our meeting with unfavorable conditions.

Unlike the two treatises mentioned above where the four principles are explained in the form of pith instructions, here in this treatise, the theoretical explanations are clearly given. First, what is the meaning of the principle of function? If causes and conditions are complete, they will definitely produce an effect. This is the function of causes and conditions. In this world, it is impossible that when the causes and conditions are complete, their result is not to be produced.

If we understand the principle of function we will be very careful not performing unvirtuous deeds. Some people wonder: “Why should I be reborn in the hells in the future, if I kill animals today?” The reason is actually quite simple. Suppose that we put together a fertilizer, some soil, and the seeds of highland barley. Then in the spring, when all conditions are present, will a result be produced? The answer is: yes, definitely. In Dharmakirti’s *Pramanavarttika* it is said, “With no cause missing, how can the effect be absent?” If all causes and conditions are complete, then why should their effect be missing? It is impossible.

Likewise, if I were a bad person, and today I performed unvirtuous deeds such as killing beings, slandering the Three Jewels, and breaking the precepts, then, without proper confession, I would definitely be reborn in the hells. On the other hand, if I confess my unvirtuous deeds with a sincere mind, although these unvirtuous deeds are the primary cause of suffering, this cause is destroyed before it has the chance to produce any result.

For example, when all causes and conditions to grow highland barley, such as seeds, are present, but one takes the seeds, burns them, and places them back into the soil, the seeds will no longer bear a fruit. Likewise, if we do not confess and purify our past unvirtuous deeds, when all conditions come together we will certainly experience suffering as a result. But if we engage practices such as Vajrasattva purification so as to destroy the seeds of our unvirtuous deeds, these very seeds, despite their

unwholesome nature, will not bear a bitter fruit. This is the principle of function. Many people in the world do not understand this principle, and as a result, refuse to accept the law of cause and effect.

Second, from the perspective of things at present as the result of previous causes, we have the principle of dependence. All things with the nature of an effect depend on their individual causes. Take, for example, those beings who are impoverished or possess no wisdom. Their current situations are effects, and these effects certainly depend on previous causes which can trace back to sometime this life, to the last lifetime, and even to the lifetime before the last.

Take another example. I am often sick. My illness is apparently an effect of some causes. Therefore, I do not blame anyone or anything for my illness, nor do I expect to recover immediately after taking some medicine. I believe I must have killed many beings in some past lifetimes, so today I must be sick, I must suffer. Sometimes I feel terrible for the unwholesome deeds I performed in my past lives, but they are already there. In brief, an effect must certainly depend on its individual causes.

Mipham Rinpoche's pith instructions are extraordinary. We should always think the following: if we perform good deeds, such as practicing generosity or diligently studying and reflecting about the Dharma, we will certainly obtain the fruit of happiness; but if we perform unwholesome deeds, there must be suffering as the result. There is absolutely no cheating about this. On the other hand, all present suffering and happiness arise from previous causes. To summarize, the principle of function is from the perspective of causes, and the principle of dependence is from the perspective of effects.

## The Necessity of Understanding the Two Principles

### 12: The Necessity of Understanding the Two Principles

**[VERSES 7~8]**

***Thus we know that, the principles of cause and effect,***

***And their proper or improper relationships,***

***Are the foundation***

***Of the judgment of whether or not to do something,***

***And of the various doctrines, crafts, etc.***

***Hence they have included,***

***All worldly knowledge,***

***And transcendental teachings.***

The verses illustrate the necessity of understanding the principle of dependence and the principle of function. In this world, all things involve the relationship of causes and effects, which could be understood in two different ways, reasonable and unreasonable. In a reasonable way, the effect is produced depending on its own causes. This accords with reason. For example, if we perform wholesome deeds such as observing monastic precepts and practicing generosity, we will obtain results such as, respectively, rebirth in fortunate destinies and obtaining happiness and wealth. But if we perform deeds such as harming sentient beings or sexual misconduct, the retribution will be suffering, poverty, etc. These relationships are probable and reasonable, and that is why they are called “proper relationship”.

The unreasonable way, on the other hand, is like, when we perform wholesome deeds, unwholesome results are produced; or, when we perform unwholesome deeds, happiness is produced as a result. This type of relationship is called “improper

relationship”, as it is improbable and unreasonable.

To understand this, consider the following simple analogy: rice seeds should produce rice, and barley seeds will produce barley. Such relationship between cause and effect is reasonable, hence it is called “proper” relationship. However, if wheat or rice is produced from barley seeds, this is an impossible and unreasonable outcome; it is thus called an “improper” relationship. In sum, what we have said here is that the relationship between causes and effects can be either proper or improper, which means that it can be either possible or impossible.

If we deeply understand the proper relationships between cause and effect and are not confused by those improper relationships, it will be clear to us what we should and should not do. Peasants and workers, too, understand “proper” and “improper”. For example, a peasant knows that by sowing crop in the spring he will reap a harvest in the fall, so he is willing to do the work. A worker learns that he can make money in one place but he cannot make much money in another place, so he will choose the former. Furthermore, if a working activity not only does not bring any profit to him, but also endangers his life, he will absolutely refuse to engage in this activity.

Indeed, the understanding of proper and improper relationships in terms of causes and effects is the source of the wisdom of all knowable things in the world, such as medicine, craftsmanship, and doctrinal traditions. There are so many types of knowledge in this world, and all of them involve relationships of causes and effects. For example, in the world of crafts, when highly skilled artisans must complete a task, they know that they will only do what is useful, whereas they will not do what is not effective. A carpenter will only use his skills to build something if what he is doing is profitable.

The same is true for medical treatment. If I can recover from an illness through surgery, I am willing to have it done. But if the doctor is not skilled, or the surgery will

not be beneficial, I would rather not have the surgery at all. This is also true for doctrinal traditions. If someone finds that Buddha Shakyamuni's doctrinal systems bring benefit not only to one's present life, but also to the next and to all future lives, then this person will want to learn those doctrinal systems. In contrast, if a doctrinal system is meaningless to both ourselves and to others, no one will feel encouraged to learn about it.

Therefore, all foundations of worldly knowledge such as craftsmanship, as well as those of the doctrinal traditions, are established depending on the principle of function and on the principle of dependence. Hence, we can say that these two principles cover all worldly types of knowledge.

The same is true for the transcendental aspect. If I can achieve enlightenment from the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, consisting of the three trainings in discipline, concentration, and wisdom, then I would practice concentration, observe discipline and cultivate wisdom. However, if all such activities turned out to be vain, I would not pursue them any further. In conclusion, we must learn all about the proper and improper relations of this world. But before we do that, we must understand the two principles we explained above.

Unfortunately, many people are ignorant, and have no knowledge of the law of cause and effect whatsoever. In the teachings that the Buddha delivered on this topic, he said that wholesome deeds cannot produce unfavorable results, and that unwholesome deeds cannot produce favorable results. Still, people who hold onto particularly wrong views keep asking the following question: "Why should I experience the retribution of a short lifespan in the future, if I kill today? Is this not unreasonable?" Certainly, if you could overturn the laws of cause and effect, such as barley seeds producing barley, then you would have a point. But if you are unable to do so, you must understand that this is the relationship of cause and effect, and that no one can

overturn it.

Still others, holding wrong views, might think, “It is said that wholesome actions, such as performing five-point prostrations and spinning prayer-wheels the entire day, generate merit. But why do such acts produce merit? The reason is not clear.” Indeed, there is no need to specify a reason. Why? In his *Commentary on The Ornament of the Middle Way*, Mipham Rinpoche says that these four principles ultimately resolve into the principle of nature, which does not need a reason to be explained.

Truly, this speech is adamant! His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche also often said that those who understand these principles hold no doubts about the Buddha’s teachings. Even if doubts ever arise, they can be eliminated through learning and contemplation. As I talked to many people around the world, I sometimes felt sorry for them. However reasonable, when placed before such an ordinary truth, they simply would not accept it. Indeed, the Dharma that Buddha Shakyamuni taught possesses unparalleled qualities. It is the truth that no other scholar or sage in the world has fully discovered. When I teach the Buddhadharma to lay practitioners outside Larung Gar, I do have some confidence to answer whatever kind of questions they bring up to me.

Some time ago, during an assembly, I met a layman, who said, “I am the son of a peasant family. I am seventy years old now. I muddled away as the days went by, but today I have begun to develop faith in the Buddha’s teachings. May I be your student?” I myself thought, “Well, in the mundane world, a seventy-year-old student and a forty-more-year-old teacher seem to go against common sense. But from the perspective of Buddhist knowledge, if you just took refuge this year, despite your age of sixty, seventy or eighty, you are not even a first grader in terms of your knowledge of the Buddhadharma. I developed a strong faith in the Buddha’s teaching since childhood and I have studied this teaching for a long time. In the course of learning, I gradually reached the conclusion that the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni are supreme and I

gained tremendous benefit from them. So, I should have the capability to be his teacher.”

Because of the background and many other factors, many people lack understanding of the Buddha’s teaching. Although such great principles are available, their path to them has always been blocked by their own wrong views. Therefore, we must make sure we understand these principles through learning and contemplating the Buddhadharma. Having listened to and contemplated the Dharma for many years, we should become skilled in these most fundamental and crucial points.

## The Principle of Nature on Conventional Level

### H2: The Principle of Nature

#### I1: From the Perspective of Appearance on Conventional Level

##### J1: The Explanation of the Principle of Nature

[VERSE 9]

*All things produced by dependent arising,*

*Naturally possess their uncommon characteristics*

*That abide in their own entities, such as solidity, dampness, heat, etc.*

*This is the way things are on conventional level, which cannot be denied.*

Everything in the world arises depending on its causes and conditions. For example, external things such as trees, flowers, and grass, take into birth depending on specific causes and conditions. Internal things such as thoughts, mental states, and cyclic existence of beings, are also depending on various causes and conditions. Hence, not a single thing in this world is produced, or come into being, without depending on causes and conditions. Therefore, the kind and compassionate Buddha said in a sutra:

*All things arise from causes,*

*Those causes have been taught by the Tathagata.*

*And those things cease because of causes,*

*This, too, has the Great Shramana explained.*

Nagarjuna also said, “There is not a single thing whose production does not depend on causes and conditions; thus there is not a single thing that exists without being emptiness.” So all things arise from causes and conditions, such dependent arising produces the entity of a given thing, in which its own uncommon characteristics abide.

The *Pramanavarttika* says, “All existing things with their uncommon characteristics

abide in their own entities.” For example, the specific characteristic of earth is hardness, whereas that of fire is heat. The term “such as” in the verse also includes other examples, comprising the specific characteristic of wind, that is, movement, and the characteristic of empty space, which is the absence of obstruction. The specific characteristics of earth, water, fire, and wind, thus all abide in their own entities, and this indeed are natural laws or the way as things are on conventional level.

It should be clear to everyone, that all things have the way as they are on ultimate level as well as on conventional level. What does “the way things are” mean? It refers to the nature of reality, things’ own entities, or what we often refer to as the natural laws.

On a conventional level, all things follow their natural laws. These natural laws cannot be refuted. Moreover, these natural laws fall into two categories: simple natural laws and profound natural laws. Simple natural laws are such as those about the nature of earth, water, fire, and wind. These laws are known to all of us. However, the profound natural laws are unknown to those who have never received a Buddhist training. For example, the nature of wholesome deeds is that they always bring about happiness, and the nature of unwholesome deeds is that they bring about suffering. If someone’s heart is at all times filled with anger and craving, then his or her body, mind, or entire life, will be filled with pain. If we generate the aspiration of bodhichitta or develop a kind heart, then its nature, its function, and its effect, will be only to bring about happiness, fortune, and harmony, to sentient beings. Unfortunately, many people do not understand these hidden principles. Yet this is the principle of “the way things are”, and no one can go against it.

Some people in this world have learnt some knowledge that is just partly and relatively true, and they consider themselves knowledgeable. But they may not understand the principles explained above. A while ago, at a class reunion on the

occasion of our twentieth anniversary from graduation, I spoke something about impermanence. In the course of twenty years, everyone in the classroom had a different life. If we had placed the pictures of everyone from twenty year ago on a slideshow, the differences of our appearances before and after the twenty years would have become more obvious. One of our classmates, now an official, had no knowledge of Buddhism previously. All he thought was that Buddhism was a superstitious belief, for he had a strong faith in materialist philosophy. Still, through our discussion about impermanence, his view changed drastically.

Later on, he asked someone to send me his words of appreciation that said, "I used to think that all talk about impermanence are merely some theory, but from what you said I have completely understood the impermanence of life. My own experience since elementary school can also prove this. Now I have gained a deep understanding of impermanence." While I have no intention to gain appreciation from others, I know that, at times, when the conditions ripen, even one sentence of the Buddha's teaching can benefit others. But at other times, no matter how much one says, some people will not truly gain any benefit.

By all means, one cannot deny these principles. Take fire for example, if you say that heat is not the nature of fire, your point cannot be established at all, and you also incur in the fault of intentionally damaging the natural law. Likewise, by saying that unwholesome deeds do not result in the experience of suffering, one is also damaging the truth.

I think, the teachings, such as everything is impermanent, and the very cause of all suffering is the unwholesome deeds we performed in the past, are very precious. Unfortunately, many people in the world did not know these teachings. Scholars such as anthropologists or biologists have reached some level of truth through research, but really profound truth is reachable only through the authentic teachings of the Buddha.

So, once again, I encourage everyone to spend enough time, and make enough effort, to study the Dharma. The truths of the Buddha's teaching can really bring us a lot of happiness. This is neither merely verbal praise, nor an advertisement, claiming how good a product is. That is not necessary at all. However, I gained the benefits from these teachings in my heart, so I feel compelled to share them with you.

## **J2: The Establishment of the Principle of Nature**

**[VERSE 10]**

***For one single thing, from different aspects,***

***And by means of affirmation and negation,***

***Countless attributes can be established,***

***All of which abide in the thing itself.***

Now let us consider how the principle of nature is established. We have discussed above how all things abide in their own entities and possess their own characteristics. When we analyze or understand one thing, we should know what particular characteristics it possesses. Then many different aspects of one thing can be separated out as its attributes by means of affirmation and negation, as explained in Buddhist Logic. As for affirmation, for instance, we can examine a pillar from different aspects such as being compounded, being produced, being impermanent, being existing, etc. In terms of negation, for example, we may say that a pillar does not substantially exist, that its shape is not an independent entity, etc. In brief, any existing thing can have infinite attributes, and as long as our conceptual thoughts and examinations have not disappeared, these attributes will not disappear.

Then, do these attributes exist on the thing's own entity? They should, on a conventional level. Take, for example this pillar, it can have numerous attributes from the perspective of both affirmation and negation. But all these attributes do abide in the thing's own entity, as it is stated in the above quotation from *Pramanavarttika*.

**[VERSE 11]**

***An object apprehended through direct perception,  
Is imputed with conceptual entities,  
That are seemingly separate and distinct,  
And are just distinguished by conceptual mind.***

When we perceive something by means of direct perception, we are perceiving the thing's own aspect. For example, when I see a pillar with my eyes, I have a complete vision of the actual form of the pillar; different parts of the vision appear clearly separate instead of mixed, and they appear so simultaneously instead of sequentially. When I analyze this object with a conceptual mind, from the perspective of its being impermanent, I establish a conceptual entity of "impermanence"; from the perspective of its not being non-produced, I establish a conceptual entity of "being produced", etc. On this object's own entity, I can establish the myriads of conceptual entities that seem to be distinct and separate.

According to the notion of "negation of others" in Buddhist Logic, although the actual entity of the pillar is one, we can conceptualize many entities and impute them on it. This is only possible when we use a conceptual mind to analyze the object. In contrast, when we perceive an object with a non-conceptual mind, the object is perceived simply as it appears before us, and nothing more than the object itself is perceived.

Therefore, we must understand that, with a conceptual mind, we can conceptualize many entities upon the actual entity of one thing. Summarize many as one, and divide one into many - this is the feature of "negation of others". In addition, when a conceptual mind perceives an object, it associates the general characteristics, both in form of name and in form of meaning, with the thing's own characteristics together. For those who do not know the name of something, they still have the

potential to associate the name with the thing's own characteristics in the future.

**[VERSE 12]**

***Establishment of actual entities and of conceptual entities,***

***Are the two modes through which***

***All objects of knowledge are apprehended,***

***And from there the multitudes are established.***

With our conceptual minds, we apprehend all things in the world through two modes, that is, the mode of actual entities and the mode of conceptual entities. What is an “actual entity”? An actual entity manifests itself on its own, independent from other things. For example, when we see a pillar, it simply appears to our eye consciousness, independent from other causes. This is called an “actual entity”. Then, what is a “conceptual entity”? A conceptual entity is conceptually imputed due to other factors, or depending on other conditions, and it cannot manifest itself on its own. This is called a “conceptual entity”, or an imputed entity.

All objects of knowledge can be apprehended through the mode of actual entities and the mode of conceptual entities. The objects of knowledge perceived through the mode of actual entities can be categorized from four different aspects. The first aspect is whether they are able to function; all actually existing things are able to function, for the particular characteristic of actually existing things is to function. The second aspect is whether they are able to be affirmed as actually existing through reasoning; all existing things in the world can be affirmed by reasoning. The third aspect is whether they have perdurable continuum; all that we can directly perceive throughout samsara, in both the material world and the world of sentient beings, have perdurable continuum due to our strong habitual tendencies, therefore we think they are real. The fourth aspect is whether they are able to independently manifest their general characteristics; all those actually existing things can manifest their general

characteristics.

The objects of knowledge apprehended through conceptual entities can be summarized into four types. The first type is imputed things that are actually part of something else. For example, what we refer to as stinginess actually is a kind of craving. The second type is imputed things that are actually a stage of something, such as the fourteen types of “conditioned forces dissociated from thought” explained in the *Abhidharmakosa*. The third type is imputed things that are actually misconceptions. For example, the self does not exist, but many of us wrongly take the self to really exist. While we are carefully examining, we know that neither the self of things nor the self of persons exist. However, a moment later, we begin to think, “What am I going to eat now, porridge or something else?” and then start cooking a delicious meal for this “self”. This is a misconception, mistakenly perceiving the non-existent to be existent. The fourth type is one thing imputed as another thing. For example, because of his flat nose, the son of a Brahman is nicknamed “big lion”. He is in no way a lion. It is only the shape of his nose that looks a little like that of a lion. In India, some like to nickname others; those with a big nose are often called “elephant,” whereas others with a small nose are often called “lion”; but these individuals are not at all elephants or lions.

In summary, through the two modes of actual entities and conceptually imputed entities, we can comprehend all knowledge. The concepts of actual entities, conceptually imputed entities and their relationships, cover all the related concepts in Buddhist Logic that are explained in *The Treasure of Logic on Valid Cognition*, such as name, defined object, defining characteristics, as well as interrelation and mutual contradiction, establishment and negation of others. Yet, Mipham Rinpoche did not explain these concepts in detail here. In addition, an understanding of “object” and “subject” is indispensable for the study of Buddhist Logic and of correct reasoning. The topic of “object” includes things’ general characteristics and things’ own characteristics; “subject” is covered by direct perception and inference. With the help

of these concepts, we can understand all things.

In the *Sword of Wisdom*, the former two principles, the principle of function and the principle of dependence, are not discussed in detail. Nor is the principle of nature explained in much detail. The main content covers the principle of establishment by proof, especially direct perception and inference, as well as the four reliances. I believe you will benefit a lot from learning this treatise. As Mipham Rinpoche says, all four principles come down to the principle of the natural state of things, which actually equals to the principle of nature. This is the way of natural laws. Either among the worldly people or among the Buddhists, no wise person would deny the laws of nature. Some people engage in too much improper thinking, from which wrong views arise from time to time. This might bring on them some unfavorable situation. However, if one's thoughts contradict proper reasoning and go against the natural law, one must abandon them. In all ways, the Buddha's teachings and training do not contradict any truth in the world. We need to believe this, without harboring a single doubt.

## The Principle of Nature on Ultimate Level

### **I2: From the Perspective of Emptiness on Ultimate Level**

**[ VERSES 13~14]**

***Regarding the ultimate truth of all things,***

***Observe their causes, effects, and their own entities:***

***That which is able to bring about arising cannot be obtained,***

***Nor is there anything that arises in dependence.***

***Although each manifests its individual entity,***

***Their nature is indeed emptiness.***

***The realm of reality of the threefold liberation,***

***Is the very nature of the ultimate.***

We have observed that, on conventional level, there exists a relationship of cause and effect. Without a cause, an effect cannot be produced. In order to be produced, an effect must certainly depend on a cause. Hence, the production of an effect from a cause is an objective and natural law that cannot be denied. But here, our level of analysis presents some differences, for we engage it from the perspective of the ultimate, that is, from the perspective of emptiness. Our analysis distinguishes the three aspects of causes, effects, and entities and examines their ultimate nature in the following way.

Let us begin from the analysis of causes. On conventional level, the function of a cause to produce an effect is truly existent. But if we analyze a cause through the reasoning of the vajra-splinter put forth in *Introduction to the Middle Way*, must we say that it is a matter of self-production, other-production, production from both self and other, or causeless production? Self-production is impossible, for if something

produces itself, then production would become endless. In the case of other-production there would also be faults such as flames can be produced by darkness, and so on. We will not discuss the method of analysis here, for in order to study it in detail we can refer to other treatises on this topic. To summarize, we will find that, when examined by the four alternatives, the principle about a cause that produces an affect cannot be established at all.

Let us further analyze effects. As stated above, effects are produced in dependence upon causes. Yet, let us engage the reasoning explained in *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, which refutes production of the existent and of the non-existent. Hence, (1) if effects are already existent, they cannot be produced again, for they are already there; (2) if effects do not already exist, then because of their non-existence, they cannot be produced, even if millions of conditions come together; (3) since existence and non-existence are mutually contradictory, effects cannot be both existent and non-existent, therefore, they cannot be produced; (4) there is no other possibility than existence and non-existence. By means of such analysis, we can completely refute the principle about an effect that its production depends upon causes, leaving it no ground to stand on.

Thirdly, in order to analyze the actual entity of all things, that is, the actual entity of causes and effects, as well as the actual entity of a thing itself, such as the heat of fire, let us engage in another reasoning taken from *The Ornament of the Middle Way*: the reasoning of neither one nor many. Is such entity one or many? Because what we call “one” is merely imputed by a conceptual mind, therefore, it cannot be truly established. If “one” cannot be established, “many” also cannot be established. Through such mode of analysis we thus discover that the actual entity of all things cannot truly exist.

As a result, causes do not exist, effects do not exist, and the actual entities of all

things also do not exist. There is nothing in the world aside from these three. On conventional level, we can clearly perceive their existence. But as we infer through a valid knowledge of the ultimate, they are indeed like empty space free from all conceptual thoughts, and in no way can we find their substantial existence.

In the *Introduction to the Middle Way*, in *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, and in *The Ornament of the Middle Way*, we find such three main types of reasoning. At the time of listening and reflecting, if we observe things employing these three types of reasoning, the certainty and conviction about their emptiness will arise in our mind. Emptiness is the real nature of all things, and there is nothing solid aside from this. On conventional level, there are all kinds of phenomena manifest, however, their appearance does not possess any substantial existence, like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, or a reflection. Through analysis, all such phenomena disappear into the realm of reality, and can in no way be established.

The fact that causes, effects, and actual entities do not exist is corresponding to the threefold liberation. Causes do not exist, hence “causes lack characteristics”; effects do not exist, thus “no expectation for effects”; and entities also do not exist, therefore “entities are empty”. This is true for all things. Such is what we call the realm of reality, that is, the real nature of the ultimate.

All things are of the nature of emptiness, but emptiness cannot be separated from the great luminosity. The state that appearance and emptiness are indivisible and in a perfect union which is free from all conceptual thoughts, is the way all things are. It is not a kind of state into which things are just turned by someone with super ability. There are sublime instructions on this topic in both sutrayana and tantrayana teachings. In the *Introduction to the Middle Way*, it is said

*Whether Buddhas come or do not come  
Into the world, all things*

*Are empty by their nature.*

*And this is well described as their transcendent quality.*

Regardless of whether buddhas come into the world or not, the actual entity of all things remains emptiness, which is inseparable from the own being of all things. This is the real nature of the ultimate. Yet, such nature can be perceived directly only by those enlightened beings who enter the concentration of fundamental wisdom.

When the perceiving subject and the perceived object have not yet dissolved into the realm of reality, things do appear to the deluded mind of ordinary beings, which actually are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, or a reflection. The past and future lives, karma, causes and effects also appear to be unquestionably existing. However, this is not the ultimate truth. Regarding the ultimate truth, the causes, effects, and actual entities of all things are of the nature of emptiness that is beyond conceptual thought. Even if thousands of sages in this world were here, they would not be able to refute this truth, just as it is impossible to deny that the nature of fire is heat on conventional level. Only when we understand the ultimate truth that there is no distinction between appearances and emptiness, will we be able to attain the state of the enlightened noble ones.

Today, many people do not understand conventional truth, let alone ultimate truth. This also applies to many Buddhists, including eminent monks of some major monasteries. To lack understanding of the ultimate is not surprising. Yet, to lack understanding of the conventional is quite unfortunate. Therefore, we should study this treatise deeply. You had better memorize this treatise, and also constantly reflect about its content. If you lack time to listen and reflect, I believe, with a thorough understanding of *The Sword of Wisdom*, your faith in the Buddha's teaching will still become unshakeable. On the one hand, this contains Mipham Rinpoche's great blessings. On the other hand, these teachings themselves are indeed sublime, and can greatly benefit the followers for certain.

## Summary of the Three Principles

### G3: Summary of the Three Principles

**[VERSE 15]**

***The principles of function and that of dependence,***

***Are the natural laws of all existing things;***

***Both of them come down to the principle of nature,***

***Where no more reasons can be found.***

The principle of function and the principle of dependence are the way all existing things are, or in other words, the fundamental nature of all existing things. On conventional level, causes have the function of producing effects, while effects are produced depending upon causes. These are exactly the natural laws or things' conventional nature. Therefore, the principle of function and the principle of dependence end with the principle of nature.

If the principle of nature is already reached through analysis, then there is no further principle to seek, and there is no need to seek. For example, some may ask: "Barley seeds produce barley sprouts, and barley sprouts are produced from barley seeds. But what are the reasons for this?" It is a waste of time to ask this question. There is no further reason to ask about, for such relationship of cause and effect is the way as all things are.

Sometimes foolish people ask: "Why is it that wholesome deeds produce happiness, but unwholesome deeds produce suffering? I don't believe it." If you don't believe it and continue to do unwholesome deed, you will believe it someday. There are many such people in our world, who know little about the principle of nature. If you know the principle of nature, when asked, "Why is heat the nature of fire?" you can tell them

that no one has the answer. Let alone common people, even Einstein and Newton, the greatly admired scientists, are helpless in this respect. If you ask, “Hello, Einstein! Why is heat the nature of fire?” He would perhaps only say that this is the way the nature works. Aside from this, he would not bother looking for its reason. If he did, in the end he would be very confused, for he would not possibly come up with a satisfactory conclusion.

In today’s world, many people put aside areas that deserve studying, but try to analyze those principles of nature that they should rather not study: “Why does virtue bear a virtuous reward, while non-virtue bears a non-virtuous reward?” “Why do barley seeds produce barley sprouts?” Some people may spend their entire lifetime in forests observing trees: “How many leaves does this tree have? How many branches does that one have?” Some others travel everywhere holding a camera and taking photos of animals. Throughout their lives, they spend their entire time in this manner. Indeed, this is not necessary, for only authentic truths are worth studying. No one will be able to reach beyond the principle of nature, therefore it is not necessary to search its reason.

## The Principle of Establishment by Proof

### **F2: The Principle of Establishment by Proof**

#### **G1: Brief Explanation**

**[VERSE 16]**

***The principle of nature covered by the two truths,  
Can be verified by following corresponding reasoning.  
It is in accordance with the natural state of things,  
Hence, named the principle of establishment by proof.***

We have discussed the principle of nature on both conventional and ultimate levels, which are covered by conventional and ultimate truth. Scientists, who diligently pursue research in many areas, have made contributions on a great deal of topics. Still, their findings are no more than conventional nature of reality, without touching upon the ultimate nature of reality.

The ultimate nature of reality that appears to an enlightened being who has entered the concentration of fundamental wisdom is far more beyond ordinary being's apprehension. These knowledge exhibit the extraordinary quality of Buddhadharma and the inconceivable wisdom of the Buddha.

As for conventional nature of reality, there are also two kinds, one is directly perceived by ordinary beings through their five sensory faculties, and another is directly perceived by enlightened beings in their pure vision. What scientists have mastered is merely what ordinary beings see with sensory faculties, that is, the part of reality that lays before the vision of worldly beings. As of the other part of conventional nature of reality that appears in the pure vision of enlightened ones, scientists have little knowledge.

When engaged through a correct reasoning of the conventional and of the ultimate which agrees with reality, the conventional and the ultimate nature of things can be both established in a manner that is in accordance with the natural state of things. In what we've discussed above, the correct reasoning of the conventional includes the principles of function, dependence, and nature; the correct reasoning of the ultimate includes the reasoning that analyzes causes, effects and actual entities, namely, the reasoning that refutes production of the existent and non-existent, the reasoning of neither one nor many, and so on.

The meaning of "in accordance with the natural state of things" is that, the principles fully agree with the reality when examined with correct reasoning, and no one can tell any truth in opposition to these principles. Consider, for example, ultimate truth. When we employ the five kinds of reasoning of the Middle Way, or the eight kinds drawn from Longchenpa's *The Wishing Gem Treasury*, the actual entity of all things is exactly emptiness and free from all conceptual elaborations. Such conclusion is in accordance with the natural state of things, and no one is able to refute it. Likewise, on conventional level, the real character of the myriads of things is also established in accordance with the natural state of things, and no one is able to overturn it. This is what we call the principle of establishment by proof.

These teachings are very important. In the future, some of you will be spreading the Buddhadharma. Suppose that there is no chance to lecture on such works as *The Treasure of Logic on Valid Cognition*, or perhaps the audience does not understand them, or you cannot explain well their meaning. In that case, you can enlighten others with *The Sword of Wisdom*. For those Buddhists being well trained by modern education, it is better to guide them by means of Buddhist Logic and the Middle Way.

**[VERSE 17]**

***For the manifest aspect and the real aspect of all things,***

***Either their own entities can be seen through direct perception,  
Or, based on what is seen through direct perception,  
What is not seen can undoubtedly be inferred.***

The “manifest aspect” indicates appearances on the conventional level such as the heat of fire, while the “real aspect” is the nature of emptiness that is beyond all conceptual elaborations. The entities of the two can be both apprehended in two ways: direct perception and inference.

On conventional level, to see through direct perception is, for example, to see a red pillar with one’s own eyes. In contrast, to understand something through inference is, for example, to infer that there is fire on a mountain because smoke is seen directly, or to infer that the pillar is impermanent because it was produced. Therefore, on conventional level, there are two types of circumstances. Sometimes one can directly see the objects with their sensory faculties, that is, the conclusions can be reached by means of direct perception. Sometimes one cannot directly see the conclusion, but can reach it through inferential reasoning.

The ultimate nature of reality can also be established through direct perception and inference. Establishment by means of direct perception occurs when an enlightened being enters into the concentration of fundamental wisdom that is beyond all conceptual thoughts and is free from all grasping. The establishment of ultimate truth by means of inference is discussed in works such as the *Introduction to the Middle Way* and *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*. As one engages the common and uncommon types of reasoning of the Middle Way, one is able to thoroughly understand that all things are empty.

In this text, Mipham Rinpoche appears to have explained these principles in an extremely concise manner. However, many of us will actually be able to rely on these essential teachings to thoroughly understand these principles that were previously

unclear to us. It is extremely important for us to understand these principles for both studying and practicing the Dharma. Otherwise, without understanding the basics of the teachings even after many years of study, it will be of no use no matter how well one can talk. If you truly understand these profound principles, you will not be deprived of the correct view in this lifetime. Even more, because you have planted durable habitual tendencies in your alaya consciousness, you will also never abandon your conviction in Mahayana Buddhism for lifetime after lifetime.