

# Chapter Three. Knowing through Direct Means - Direct Perception

## Overall Explanation of Direct Perception

### G2: Extensive Explanation

#### H1: The Principle of Establishment by Proof through Direct Perception

##### I1: Overall Explanation

[VERSE 18]

***Valid direct perception is of four kinds:***

***Unmistaken sensory direct perception, Mental direct perception, Self-knowing, and yogic direct perceptions, all of which are non-conceptual, Since they directly perceive the corresponding objects' own characteristics.***

The direct perception of the conventional and of the ultimate can be summarized into four kinds: (1) unmistaken sensory direct perception, (2) mental direct perception, (3) self-knowing direct perception, and (4) yogic direct perception.

The first kind is unmistaken sensory direct perception. It means, without being contaminated by any kind of delusive conditions, such as eye disease or the movement of a boat one is sitting on, one's sensory consciousnesses directly perceive the external object's own characteristics. For example, when I see a pillar with my own eyes, I have perfectly seen the real characteristics of the pillar on the conventional level without being influenced by any deluding condition. This is what we call unmistaken sensory direct perception.

The second kind is mental direct perception. With no conditions of mental illness

affecting one's mind continuum, one is able to clearly discern the object directly perceived in the previous moment. This is what we call mental direct perception.

The third kind is self-knowing direct perception. Whether pervaded by a feeling of joy or pain, one is perfectly able to perceive this feeling itself, with no need to be told by others or to rely upon other conditions. This is what we call self-knowing direct perception.

The fourth kind of direct perception is yogic direct perception. When a practitioner, whether by means of meditation, or relying on the power of mantras, reaches a state that is beyond the sensory consciousness of ordinary beings, he or she will be able to know the real reality of all things. This is what we call yogic direct perception, which may be further divided into many levels.

A conceptual consciousness takes as its object the object's general characteristics. In contrast, all kinds of direct perception take as their object only the object's own characteristics. Hence, all kinds of direct perception are completely free from conception. To be more precise, Buddhist Logic discusses three types of discrimination. (1) The first type is called intrinsic discrimination, which includes the minds and mental concomitants of all living beings. By this definition, sensory direct perception is included in intrinsic discrimination, for it does belong to minds and mental concomitants. (2) The second type of discrimination is the analytical discrimination. As discussed at length in the *Abhidharmakosa*, it includes the applied attention of coarse qualities and the analysis of detailed qualities. For example, to apply attention to a bottle means to know that this thing is a bottle, whereas to analyze it means to know the chips on the surface of the bottle as well as its fine patterns. (3) The third type is the discrimination that mixes names with what the names refer to. This is the discrimination that direct perception is free from. When direct perception perceives an object, it never mixes the object's own characteristics with its general

characteristics. Indeed, direct perception clearly sees its own object the way as it is without any discriminating thoughts. Or in other words, it is free from conception.

In the next two verses, we will discuss the faults of not having the four kinds of direct perception.

**[VERSE 19]**

***With no direct perception,***

***There would be no evidence and hence no inference.***

***The perception of all things, including their arising from the causes,***

***And then their cessation, would become impossible.***

Here, the verse explains why the four kinds of direct perception are important. If there were no direct perception capable of clearly seeing an object's own characteristics, given the lack of evidence, there would also be no inference that draws its conclusions from it. In the *Commentary on Valid Knowledge* it is stated that the foundation of inference is direct perception. Without something that appears, there is no way to infer something hidden that is related with it. If we have not seen smoke on the mountain, we will be unable to rely upon smoke to infer the presence of the hidden fire. If the fact that the pillar is produced is not established, it will be impossible to rely upon this fact to infer its impermanence. Therefore, inference must certainly contain a portion of direct perception, otherwise it is impossible to make conclusions about the hidden portion.

All in all, if there were no direct perception, the appearance of all things, such as sprouts being produced from seeds as their causes, and those sprouts' cessation in the very end, would be impossible. So any appearance and its corresponding cause-and-effect relationship must be based on direct perception. For this reason, we say that direct perception is crucial. Still, many do not grasp the concept of direct perception quite well, and so the conclusions they draw from inference are hardly satisfactory.

**[VERSE 20]**

***If so, as for their emptiness and such,***

***What do we rely on to understand it?***

***Without relying on the conventional truth,***

***It is impossible to realize the ultimate truth.***

From the perspective of the manifest aspect, or the valid knowledge of the conventional, we have illustrated how inference must rely upon direct perception. Without direct perception, the appearance of all things, as well as the conventional truth such that all phenomena are impermanence, cannot be established.

Likewise, if direct perception did not exist, it would also be impossible to know emptiness, for the knowing of emptiness actually depends on appearances, and emptiness is the ultimate truth of appearance. In order to reach the ultimate truth through inference, we take those conventional things that we see as the objects. For example, although I can see this pillar with my own eyes, if I analyze it through the reasoning of Middle Way, it turns out to be non-existent, just like an illusion. Then I will know that the appearance of the pillar is emptiness, beyond all conceptual elaboration. Without appearance being perceived on conventional level, it will be impossible to attain a mere emptiness, because emptiness and appearance are inseparable. If all of the objects that we see and hear did not exist, then relying on nothing, it would become impossible to realize the ultimate truth of emptiness that is beyond all conceptual elaborations. Therefore, it must be relying upon direct perception that one can realize the ultimate truth through the conventional truth.

Say, for example, that I wish to point to someone the moon in the sky. If I don't use words or fingers to show him the moon, or, I have no hands or mouth but a mere intention, I have no way to show him anything. On the contrary, if I have a hand, then although my finger is not the moon in the sky, I will be able to point to him the moon

with my finger and say, “Look! There is the moon in the sky.” In such manner, this person will be able to see the moon, unless he or she is someone of dull faculties, as Sakya Pandita once said, who does not look at the sky but only looks at the finger instead.

Hence, with no direct perception, it would be utterly impossible to introduce emptiness by any means. The realization of the ultimate truth entirely depends upon the conventional truth. If we have not realized the conventional truth, we will be absolutely unable to reach the ultimate truth that is beyond our conceptual thoughts. As Nagarjuna once said,

*Without recourse to the conventional,  
The ultimate cannot be shown.  
Without the realization of the ultimate,  
There is no gaining of nirvana.*

In his *Introduction to the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti also stated,

*Conventional reality therefore becomes the means;  
And by this means, the ultimate is reached.  
Those who do not know how these two differ  
Err in thought and take mistaken paths.*

So one must take conventional truth as expedient means, through which ultimate truth will arise in one’s mind. Otherwise, not knowing the distinction between the two truths, one takes the wrong path following wrong thoughts. For example, some Vajrayana gurus make use of what a disciple directly see, such as a pillar or a bottle, to direct the disciple with a sort of expression, “This thing you are now seeing is...” With reliance upon such expedient means, the wisdom of ultimate truth arises in the mental continuum of the disciple.

Those who do not know how appearances are related to emptiness, and do not

understand the two truths, will be in the very dangerous situation of having gone astray from the Buddhist path. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to understand the two truths and the relationship between direct perception and inference. Without this kind of understanding, it will be certainly difficult to grasp the essential meaning of emptiness.

## Sensory Direct Perception

### **I2: Specific Explanation**

#### **J1: Sensory Direct Perception**

**[VERSE 21]**

***The consciousnesses produced relying on the five senses,***

***Clearly perceive their own objects.***

***Lacking these sensory direct perceptions,***

***Just like a blind person, one would not know external things.***

The five consciousnesses, i.e., eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness and body consciousness, are produced through the five sensory faculties respectively, namely, visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile faculty. These five consciousnesses clearly perceive their own objects. For example, depending on eye, colors such as white and red on a material object appear perfectly to an eye consciousness. This is what we call sensory direct perception.

Such sensory direct perception is necessary, otherwise everyone in the world would be just like the blind, or the deaf, for they would be utterly unable to know anything that exists in the world. Lacking the visual faculty, the blind are unable to see colors. Lacking the auditory faculty, the deaf are completely unable to hear outer sounds. Some people even lack bodily sensation, that is, their tactile faculty is damaged, such as the upper or lower part of a patient being paralyzed. Moreover, there are also people whose olfactory faculty or gustatory faculty is damaged, so they cannot smell or taste anything whatsoever.

Therefore, on conventional level, such sensory faculties and sensory direct

perceptions are truly existent, and they are not merely imputed by language. If both visual faculty and eye consciousness did not exist and were merely imputed by language, then just like naming something, we could call a blind person with any beautiful words so that he or she could see external things. But this is not true.

By means of correct analysis, we can understand those things that we previously did not. It is as if something was kept inside a storehouse, and a person did not discover it until he lit a lamp. In the past, many people who did not receive a training in the doctrinal tenets did not know much about sensory direct perception and mental direct perception. But now, as we study Buddhist Logic we know that on conventional level sensory direct perceptions do exist. In reliance upon sensory direct perception as well as inference, we will be able to know the fundamental nature of all things.

In our world, thanks to the blessings of buddhas and bodhisattvas, we have obtained such authentic doctrines. At this time, we only have some understanding of the ultimate truth by means of inference. Yet, relying upon the instructions of the compassionate Buddha, if one engages in correct practice and follow in earnest with one's actions, everyone will be able to enjoy the unspeakable, sublime flavor of the ultimate truth. Everyone should place great confidence on this point. I believe that the more you listen and reflect, the more you will develop a trusting mind.

## Mental Direct Perception

### J2: Mental Direct Perception

**[VERSE 22]**

***That which arises relying upon mental faculty,***

***Clearly distinguishes both inner and outer objects.***

***With no such mental direct perception,***

***The consciousness that know all objects is missing.***

What we call mental direct perception refers to a mental consciousness that arises relying upon mental faculty, and that clearly knows both inner and outer objects. In the Tibetan language, the verb “distinguish” has the meaning of “know”, but it can also be explained as to judge or to decide. The mental direct perception perfectly knows all kinds of external material objects and internal objects. Those even bear no relation with the outer realm, such as dreams, can also be clearly known by mental direct perception. So capable of knowing both inner and outer objects, this kind of direct perception is called mental direct perception.

Without mental direct perception, one would still be able to perceive external objects such as color and sound through one’s sensory faculty. However, one would be unable of knowing them in a comprehensive manner. This explains the necessity of the existence of mental direct perception.

All living beings do need the five sensory consciousnesses to know the external world, but moreover, they have to rely on mental direct perception to comprehend everything. We may compare mental direct perception with a household owner who is rather knowledgeable about the conditions of his own household, but who is also well aware of the outer conditions of his society and of his country. Or for another

example, we could compare the five sensory consciousnesses with five professional workers who engage in different kinds of tasks. Each sensory consciousness only fits in its own tasks. For example, eye consciousness knows colors very well, yet it knows nothing about sound. In order to know everything about both inner and outer objects, one must rely on the “general manager” that is the mental direct perception.

## Yogic Direct Perception

### **J3: Yogic Direct Perception**

**[VERSE 23]**

***Having practiced adeptly according to the teachings,***

***One ultimately clearly perceives objects by himself.***

***Without yogic direct perception,***

***One does not perceive the realm beyond the ordinary.***

Yogic direct perception arises when one practices in accordance with the instructions of the teacher and of the Buddha. First, one listens and reflects about the Dharma teachings. Then, one goes to a quiet place to meditate on the teaching by applying both samatha and vipassana. Finally, one attains a state that cannot be perceived by the ordinary eye or the ordinary conceptual mind. This state is what we call yogic direct perception. In this state, one is able to see all the appearances of external material objects, but not using the physical eyes. Meanwhile, one understands the minds of others, knowing all about their thoughts and mental condition, but it is not by inference. This kind of state is unimaginable to us ordinary beings, for it transcends our level, but it does exist.

There are two kinds of yogic direct perception: (1) in-meditation and (2) post-meditation yogic direct perception. With in-meditation yogic direct perception, one unerringly knows the reality of emptiness of the person and of the phenomena. Post-meditation yogic direct perception means that, having emerged from meditation, a noble one is able to see the innumerable phenomena of the world. As the *Abhidharmakosa* puts it, shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and buddhas, can see one million, one billion, and countless worlds respectively. In addition, yogic direct

perception can be distinguished into categories in accordance with the ten stages of the bodhisattva path, or in accordance with the path of learning and the path of no-more-learning. For such distinct categories, one can refer to Sakya Pandita's *The Treasure of Logic on Valid Cognition*.

Yogic direct perception is totally beyond the ordinary world. The higher one's achievement of yogic direct perception is, the lower the realm of the world perceived by ordinary beings appear to him or her. In his *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*, Shantideva writes, "The views of ordinary beings are undermined by yogis." It means that the direct perceptions of the yogis can perfectly refute the realm of the ordinary world that is based on the sensations of eyes, ears, nose, tongue and so on. So, without yogic direct perception, who is capable of knowing these realms beyond the ordinary?

In the *King of Samadhi Sutra*, the Buddha says, "If the senses could be relied upon, what need would there be for the path of the noble ones?" Supposing that sensory faculties were forms of valid knowledge, how would the noble path be useful? Our present eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, are not forms of valid knowledge. If they were, the noble path would be of no use. Hence, the existence of yogic direct perception becomes clear.

However, ordinary beings may not admit the existence of yogic direct perception. They believe only in the existence of what they can see with their own eyes. Hence, they reject categorically the existence of any realm that is subtle and profound. However, this is only the blind perspective of ordinary beings. As Chandrakirti says, what is seen by the eye consciousness of a person affected by cataracts cannot negate what is seen by the eye consciousness of a person who has no cataracts. Similarly, the realm of ordinary beings cannot damage the realm of yogins and sages. There is a great difference between the realm of an adept or a sage, and the realm of ordinary beings who are hindered by their strong negative karma and mental afflictions. For example, both an adept and an ordinary being meditate on impermanence. The ordinary being

may just think about impermanence with a conceptual mind, while the adept perfectly perceives the impermanent nature of all things. Thus, there is an essential difference between the two realms.

After listening and reflecting about these teachings, we should develop certainty about the sublime realm that is beyond ordinary beings' thoughts, and have no doubts about its existence.

## Self-Knowing Direct Perception

### J4: Self-Knowing Direct Perception

**[VERSE 24]**

***Just as direct perception that perceives forms***

***Eliminates erroneous superimpositions in accordance with reality.***

***The mind has self-knowing direct perception, it knows itself.***

***Otherwise, it would need another mind, which ends up endless.***

When eye consciousness takes form as its object, it is able to know form in accordance with reality, and eliminate any erroneous superimposition about form. For example, relying upon healthy eyes, eye consciousness is perfectly capable of knowing that a conch is of white color, eliminating erroneous superimpositions such as the conch being yellow or of other colors. Likewise, relying upon the mind's own ability, with no need for any other conditions, we are perfectly capable of perceiving what there is in our minds, and eliminating erroneous superimpositions about our own minds or about the thoughts that arise within our minds. This kind of perception is what we call self-knowing direct perception.

If the ability of self-knowing did not exist, then in order to know one's own mind, another mind is needed, there would occur the fault that an endless number of minds are needed. Why? With self-knowing, one is capable of perfectly knowing all about one's own mind. In contrast, without self-knowing, one needs another mind to know one's mind. In turn, this other mind will need another mind in order to be known. And so on, their number would become endless. As a result, knowing them would become impossible. Therefore, on conventional level, it is certainly necessary to posit self-knowing.

Mipham Rinpoche also said about self-knowing, “From the mere perspective of looking inward, self-knowing is self-clarity and self-awareness. It does not know itself by means of a perceiver and the perceived. Otherwise, it would be called other-knowing.” Indeed, it is not difficult to understand self-knowing. In the ninth chapter of Sakya Pandita’s *The Treasure of Logic on Valid Cognition*, self-knowing direct perception is analyzed in some detail.

**[VERSE 25]**

***Therefore, the mind possesses an entity of clarity and knowing,  
And just as it knows its objects,  
Can clearly know itself without depending on other conditions.  
Hence, it is called self-knowing.***

Mind greatly differs from external things such as vehicles, walls, pillars, and bottles in the way that external things are insentient, lacking an entity that is clear and knowing, but mind is capable of clearly knowing its own entity, without depending on any other condition. So mind possesses the basic character of clearly knowing itself. To be precise, what we call self-knowing is that, simply like an eye consciousness knows external form objects, mind clearly knows itself as it looks inward, without depending on anything. In his *The Treasure of Logic on Valid Cognition*, Sakya Pandita says, “The consciousness that knows its own entity, is self-knowing direct perception, as the sages said.”

*In The Ornament of the Middle Way, it is also said,  
Consciousness arises as the contrary  
Of matter, gross, inanimate.  
By nature, mind is immaterial  
And it is self-aware.*

So excluding that which is the nature of the insentient, only there does consciousness arise, and that which is not of the nature of the insentient, is the self-knowing

consciousness. In other words, consciousness can be established only to the exception of the nature of the insentient, which is the ability of self-knowing.

If the way of knowing requires a previous consciousness that knows a later one, or requires a later consciousness that knows a previous one, it would not be self-knowing, but other-knowing. Or else, suppose that one consciousness is the knowing subject, and that another consciousness is the known object. This, too, would not be self-knowing, but other-knowing. So the real self-knowing is an entity that is excluded from being insentient, and an entity that is clear and knowing.

When we employ the reasonings of the Middle Way to analyze the entity of self-knowing, by observing whether it happens simultaneously or not, on ultimate level self-knowing cannot be established at all. However, on conventional level, we have to admit its existence. As Mipham Rinpoche said, “If there were no self-knowing on conventional level, then seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing, would be damaged, therefore, one must certainly accept direct perception of self-knowing.” To make a comparison, with no eye consciousness, all knowledge of forms would completely cease. Similarly, with no self-knowing direct perception, the entity of clarity and knowing would also cease.

**[VERSE 26]**

***While perceiving by means of other direct perceptions,  
That which determines them as actual direct perception,  
Is only self-knowing, without which,  
Reliance upon other is of no avail.***

While one perceives things relying upon the other three kinds of direct perceptions, it is only self-knowing direct perception that can determine these perceptions. If, without self-knowing, one relied on other means to know these perceptions, such as using eye consciousness or inference to know sensory direct perception, it would be impossible.

## Summary

### 13: Summary

**[VERSE 27]**

***The root of inference is direct perception,***

***And direct perception is determined by self-knowing.***

***These all come down to unmistakable perception of mind,***

***And there are no other ways of establishing them.***

The root of all kinds of inference, including inference by effect and inference by nature, is direct perception. In turn, direct perception is perceived through self-knowing. For example, when one infers the existence of fire by means of smoke, smoke must be established by means of direct perception, otherwise the existence of fire cannot be inferred. Furthermore, direct perception of smoke is determined by means of self-knowing. Therefore, the verses say, “These all come down to unmistakable perception of mind.” Unmistakable perception of mind is exactly self-knowing. Aside from this, there is no other kinds of proofs or bases to establish direct perception or inference.

Therefore, any inferential reasoning must ultimately depend on one’s direct perception, and direct perception ultimately comes down to self-knowing direct perception. With self-knowing, there’s no need to search for other proofs. It is as if we saw and came into possession of an elephant. As a result, we would no longer need to track its footprints, and we would also no longer need to find out its characteristics, such as its color, from others.

[VERSE 28]

*Thus, it is based on non-conceptual,*

*Unmistaken direct perceptions,*

*That for anything that appears before one,*

*All erroneous superimpositions can be eliminated.*

If one relies on unmistakable direct perceptions that are free from conceptual elaboration, that is, sensory direct perception, mental direct perception, yogic direct perception, and self-knowing direct perception, all doubts and erroneous superimpositions concerning an object appearing before one can be eliminated.

For example, we face a dilemma about the color of the utpala flower: is it white, or is it red? As soon as we see with our own eyes that the utpala flower is actually blue, we will have eliminated the erroneous superimposition of non-blueness by means of direct perception. To make another example, we suppose that someone is quite wealthy based on the fact that he or she is wearing designer clothing. The fact that he or she is wearing designer clothing is seen by direct perception, whereas the hidden fact that he or she possesses a rich capital is known by means of inference, which dispels the erroneous superimposition of his or her lack of capital.

Not only are there hidden facts on conventional level, but the profound realm of the ultimate can also be known through inference. As it is said in the Middle Way, "All things lack self-nature, for they are free from being one or many." By means of direct perception and inference we know that both "one" and "many" are nonexistent. Therefore, we will reach a conclusion about the hidden part, that is, all things lack self-nature.