

MIND & ITS WORLD 1

sourcebook

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EXPLANATION OF MENTAL DIRECT VALID COGNITION

THE DZOGCHEN PONLOP RINPOCHE

We have discussed the meaning of a nonconceptual, nonmistaken awareness arisen on the basis of its own dominant condition, a physical sense faculty, for direct sense perception. Now we have the mental sense faculty as the dominant condition for direct mental perceptions. As we discussed, the dominant conditions for the physical sense faculties are the five sense organs, whereas in this case, the dominant condition is the mental sense faculty.

MENTAL DIRECT VALID COGNITION

The text says:

2.1.1.2.1.1.2.2. *Mental direct valid cognition*

This has two parts:

- (1) Definition
- (2) Divisions

2.1.1.2.1.1.2.2.1. *Definition of mental direct valid cognition*

The first, the definition [of mental direct valid cognition] exists because it is “a nonconceptual, nonmistaken awareness arisen on the basis of its own dominant condition, the mental sense faculty.” This is so, because it is stated in the *Compendium of Valid Cognition*:

Mental [direct valid cognition] as well [apprehends] objects and...

and in the *Commentary on Valid Cognition*:

Thus, arisen from a sense consciousness,
[Its] immediately preceding condition,
Mental consciousness apprehends another object.
Therefore, the blind do not see.

Definition of Mental Direct Valid Cognition

The definition of mental direct valid cognition is “a nonconceptual, nonmistaken awareness arisen on the basis of its own dominant condition, the mental sense faculty.” The mental sense faculty is defined as “the cessation of the preceding moment of direct sense perception.” It is like the sense organ for the arising of mental perceptions. In the earlier stage, for direct sense perceptions to arise, the sense organs have to be in good condition. We need an eye and an ear to generate the corresponding sense perceptions. In this case, to generate direct valid cognition of mind, we need the mental sense faculty, which is a preceding moment of sense perception. Whether a direct valid cognizer is apprehending forms, sounds, smells, tastes or tangible objects, the cessation of any one can become the mental sense faculty. On the basis of that sense faculty, the nonconceptual, nonmistaken awareness of mental direct valid cognition arises.

The first part of the definition is the same as before: “a nonconceptual, nonmistaken awareness.” Saying it is “nonconceptual” eliminates the possibility that mental direct valid cognition could be a conceptual consciousness, saying it is “nonmistaken” eliminates the possibility that it is a mistaken consciousness, and saying it is “awareness” eliminates the possibility that it is something with physical form. The last part of the definition is different: “arisen on the basis of its own dominant condition, the mental sense faculty.” Saying the dominant condition is “the mental sense faculty” eliminates the possibility that sense direct valid cognition, self-aware direct valid cognition, and



see Lorik: divisions of mind:
valid cognition:
direct valid cognition:
mental direct valid cognition



Definition of Mental Direct Valid Cognition:

A nonconceptual, nonmistaken awareness arisen on the basis of its own dominant condition, the mental sense faculty.



Definition of Mental Sense Faculty:

The cessation of the preceding moment of direct sense perception.

yogic direct valid cognition could be mental direct valid cognition because they do not arise from the mental sense faculty.

Process of Perception & Conception

The Sautrāntika-Chittamātra view expressed by Dharmakīrti may be interpreted in different ways at this point. Our interpretation accords with the similar views of the seventh Karmapa and Sakya Paṇḍita. We say that the “first moment” of direct sense valid cognition arises purely as a sense perception, such as an eye consciousness perceiving or apprehending a form. It is the sense direct valid cognition of the fresh, first moment. The “second moment,” so to speak, of that sense direct valid cognition arises simultaneously with the first moment of mental direct valid cognition. In other words, mental direct valid cognition arises simultaneously with the “second moment” of direct sense perception. Self-aware valid cognition also arises in that “second moment” (as well as in the first moment), but we will look at self-aware valid cognition in the next class.

So three things arise together in the second moment. However, in itself, or in its nature, perception has no first, second, or third moment. When we analyze the relationship between sense direct valid cognition, direct mental perception, and self-aware direct valid cognition, we can say that there is a “second moment” of direct sense perception. It is “second” in relation to something else, although the sense perception itself has no first or second moment. As has been said, every moment is new.

In the three processes of direct valid cognition—or three modes of arising—two cognitions apprehend the outer object, and one cognition apprehends the mind itself, which is self-awareness. Self-awareness has no outer object, whereas direct sense perception and direct mental valid cognition do have an outer object. That is our interpretation, coming from the seventh Karmapa and Sakya Paṇḍita.

The second interpretation is alternate arising. In this interpretation, one moment of sense perception alternates with one moment of mental perception. First you have one moment of sense perception, then one moment of direct mental valid perception, and then self-awareness and conceptual mind. They do not say that the second moment of direct sense perception arises simultaneous to direct mental valid cognition. They do not posit that view. They believe that each moment is separate and independent, and that sense perception and mental perception alternate—first sense and then mental. This alternation repeats again and again and again.

In a third interpretation, mental direct valid cognition arises at the end point of sense perception, no matter how long that perception lasts. It may take five moments or hundreds of moments to complete its function. Then there is one short moment of mental direct valid cognition, which gives rise to conceptual mind. It is a long process with moments and moments of direct sense perception. At the end of that process, one short moment of mental direct valid cognition occurs, which gives rise to conceptual mind. Many Gelukpa scholars seem to hold this view.

Other Interpretations of Modes of Arising	
Mode of Arising	Description
Alternate arising	one moment of sense direct valid cognition — one moment of mental direct valid cognition — conception
End of continuum arising	a series of moments of sense direct valid cognition — one moment of mental direct valid cognition — conception

The seventh Karmapa's and Sakya Paṇḍita's interpretation is three processes of direct valid cognition. The first moment of direct sense perception leads to the second moment of direct sense perception, which arises simultaneously with mental direct valid cognition and self-aware direct valid cognition. To recapitulate: three things arise together in the second moment—direct sense perception, mental direct valid cognition, and self-aware direct valid cognition.

Mental Direct Valid Cognition Apprehends Objects

In the *Compendium of Valid Cognition*, Dignāga says, "Mental direct valid cognition as well apprehends objects and..." He is saying that mental direct valid cognition, the second direct valid cognition, apprehends objects. Like direct sense perception, mental cognition also apprehends an outer object, such as a form, sound, smell, taste, or a tangible object.

Dharmakīrti comments, "Thus, arisen from a sense consciousness, / Its immediately preceding condition, / Mental consciousness apprehends another object. / Therefore, the blind do not see." First he says that the sense consciousness immediately precedes the mental direct valid cognition. The mental consciousness arises on the basis of the sense consciousnesses; it cannot arise without them. Then it says, "Mental consciousness apprehends another object." So the mental consciousness apprehends another object, different from the object of the immediately preceding sense consciousness.¹ Next it says, "Therefore, the blind do not see." Although a blind person possesses mental consciousness, he or she does not possess mental direct valid cognition of visual forms because that cognition is dependent on a direct sense perception of a visual form. Mental cognition cannot arise without having a first moment of sense direct valid cognition, such as a sense direct valid cognizer apprehending a form. "The blind do not see" because they do not possess preceding sense perceptions to generate the mental perception of visual forms.

Mental direct valid cognition is a difficult subject because it is such a subtle moment of consciousness arising between two moments of sense perception and conceptual mind. First you have sense perception, then sense perception with mental perception, and then you have concept; and this is repeated over and over. We may somewhat clearly see sense perception, and we may clearly see concepts, but we miss the tiny moment in between. Mental direct valid cognition and self-aware direct valid cognition arise simultaneously: it is a very short moment, so subtle, and it happens fast, like the frames of a movie running through the projector. They are not easy to notice, perceive, or experience. Between two frames, two isolated pictures, there is a line; but you do not see it because the frames move so quickly. You only see images connected together; you do not see the lines separating them.

¹ The object in the first moment is the old object, and in the second moment, the object is new, making it a valid cognition.

Mental direct valid cognition perceives the same object as the sense perception—that is the outer object, not something inside. This perception is usually said to include clairvoyance. Clairvoyant mind is perhaps the clearest illustration of mental direct valid cognition. It can see different objects, and it goes to a subtler level. It is not just sense perception; it is mental perception perceiving an object purely mentally.

Mental direct valid perception communicates between direct sense perceptions and concept—it joins the two. Right after a moment of mental direct valid cognition, conceptual mind arises. Then we say, “Oh, it’s a glass,” or “It’s a person.” In some sense, mental and self-aware direct valid cognition make a stronger imprint of the objects we have perceived through the sense perceptions. With these imprints we label, and the thought process arises on the basis of that labeling.

Try to contemplate your direct sense perceptions, and see whether you can have any insight or stability in your mind to experience mental direct valid cognition. Most logic texts, including our commentary by the seventh Karmapa and the Geluk commentaries, say that this is almost impossible to detect it with mundane consciousness, but it is possible to experience through yogic perception in contemplation or meditation. It is only possible to gain insight into these subtleties through inward contemplation, and not just through theoretical explanations.

Student: I thought mental direct valid cognition apprehended another object different from the object of sense perception. But you just said that they apprehend the same object.

DPR: Both sense perception and mental direct valid cognition apprehend the external object. When we say “mental,” we usually think it means something inside, not outside. In this case, mental direct valid cognition perceives an external object. In a sense, it resembles sense perception, which also perceives an external object. In a manner of speaking, they perceive the same object, but actually, it is not the same object. Dharmakirti clearly says that the mental consciousness apprehends another object—“another” meaning different from the object of sense perception. It is another object because it is perceived in a different moment. In the second moment, however, sense perception may have the same object as mental direct valid cognition because they arise simultaneously.

Student: How does concept come out of self-aware valid cognition?

DPR: It does not come directly out of it, but directly after mental valid cognition. Self-aware direct valid cognition is the main consciousness that perceives sense perception and mental direct valid cognition. It recognizes them all, or you could say it has the quality of being awareness.

Student: Do you mean that a mental direct valid cognition apprehending form actually sees the same thing as the sense direct valid cognition apprehending form, but at a later moment? If that is so, I do not understand how that mental direct valid cognition perceives without the organ of sight.

DPR: It cannot.

Student: But it is seeing the same thing.

DPR: Yes, that is why in the definition it says that it arises on the basis of its own dominant condition, the mental sense faculty. The mental sense faculty is the cessation of the preceding moment of sense perception. Without the preceding moment of sense perception, you cannot have mental direct valid cognition.

Student: Does it sort of “see” the previous moment of sense direct valid cognition?

DPR: It is a separate moment of seeing the object, but at the same time, that separate moment cannot be generated without the preceding moment of sense perception.

Student: Can it actually see the outer world with just the mind, independent of the previous moment? The only way I can understand this is through the idea of clairvoyance, that the mind could actually directly perceive the world without an organ.

DPR: Yes, but it arises on the basis of the sense faculty. It is not totally independent because it has a strong relationship with or dependency on sense perception. Without the sense perceptions, it cannot arise. It arises through the medium of the sense perceptions, but it is independent in the sense that it perceives its own object.

Student: It perceives its own object?

DPR: Dharmakirti’s commentary says that mental consciousness apprehends another object. The mental consciousness does not perceive the perceived object of the senses, but still it is not entirely separate. It arises simultaneously with the second moment of sense perception; in that sense, it arises with the sense perception and observes or perceives the object.

Student: It sounds very connected to the previous sense.

DPR: Yes, definitely. That is why Dharmakirti said that the blind do not see— because it is totally dependent on sense perception.

Student: What is a clairvoyant mind an example of?

DPR: It is the example, and also sometimes a classification, of mental direct valid cognition. Mental direct valid cognition can have different states, and one of them is clairvoyance. There are different kinds of clairvoyance under this category.

Student: What makes it clairvoyant? If it is still dependent on the previously arisen sense direct valid cognition, it must be dependent in a different way.

DPR: The clairvoyance of seeing a form, for example, is somehow connected to the perception of eye consciousness. You cannot see a form or color without eye consciousness. But in the case of clairvoyance, you see it with mental direct valid cognition, but it is still dependent on a sense perception. If you hear a sound, it is dependent on the sound that is the object of ear consciousness. If you experience the clairvoyance of hearing a sound from another universe, it is nevertheless dependent on the ear consciousness at a certain level.

Student: My question has to do with the object of visual consciousness.

DPR: Mental or sense?

Student: It could be both because it is the same object. Some of us have been talking about seeing snow as red because of the condition of light. The perception of snow as red in the first instant is sense direct valid cognition, and in the second moment of mental consciousness, it is also valid, but now it is mental direct valid cognition.

DPR: Yes.

Student: My confusion comes from the belief that there is some validity in the object itself, that snow has properties that are absolute. In this example, we call it both valid and red. In the third instant, when we think about it, it is no longer valid because it is a concept. Is what makes it valid or not whether it is directly perceived or whether

there are concepts or not? The concept makes it very relative, and we recognize things as relative when we deal with them as concepts. The phenomena in themselves are also relative because they are influenced by the light. There is nothing fixed about that particular phenomenon of snow and how it appears.

DPR: That is a great relief. Yes, that is actually a valid perception—like when you see the reflection of the sunset on the snow mountain as pink or red. At that very moment, if you see a white snow mountain, there is a problem because your perception does not correspond to that momentary nature of reality. The validity exists in that particular moment itself.

Whether it is a moment in the daytime when you see a white mountain, or a moment at sunset when the snow mountain is red, there is some sense of validity in both cases. Without conceptual labeling or making justifications, just being in that particular situation, in that very moment, has its own experiential validity. The *svalakṣhaṇa* of that form has its own characteristic or mark—which consists of snow, mountain, and sunset all coming together. That is separate from the daytime moment consisting of snow, mountain, and very bright sunlight. That also has its own characteristic, or its own validity.

Student: I was trying to determine whether mind could arise outside the linear presentation of everything coming out of the eight consciousnesses. Earlier when we were talking about the eight consciousnesses, you said we could have the sixth and seventh consciousnesses without one through five. But today, you said that we cannot have mental direct cognition without the senses.

DPR: That's right. You cannot have mental direct valid cognition without the sense perceptions. That does not mean that you cannot have the sixth consciousness without them, because the sixth consciousness is not only mental direct valid cognition. Yogic valid cognition, conceptual mind, and self-awareness are also included in the sixth consciousness. Mental direct valid cognition is just one part of it.

Student: My question has to do with clairvoyance and the perfection of shamatha. With the attainment of supernormal powers, one can supposedly see very long distances. I assume that means without the fleshly eye. You see something that is not directly based on a direct sense cognition.

DPR: That's interesting because in our commentaries, the example of vultures that can see meat at a very far distance is used to illustrate this kind of supernormal power. To a certain degree, it seems that it is based on the sense organ and sense perception. Out of that, you develop something that further extends perceptual capacity.

Student: Is this because with the perfection of shamatha, the mind slows down enough so you can actually see the process of the three moments of sense direct valid cognition, mental direct valid cognition, and self-aware direct valid cognition? Is that what you tune into?

DPR: No, through meditation your mind gets subtler; your *prajñā* becomes subtler; so you can perceive the subtle levels of mind functioning. Right now the mind is overwhelmed, distracted, and disturbed, as on a very windy day among huge ocean waves. You cannot see its subtle level.

Student: You said that in terms of the nature of the perception, there is a first and second moment, but there are not really two moments. There is only one moment, but it appears that there are two moments. Is that correct?

DPR: When you isolate perception itself, which changes from moment to moment, and look at the very nature of that moment of perception, it is always fresh and new. There is no sense of a second object or an old consciousness.

Student: In the first moment of sense direct valid cognition, the dominant characteristic is the sense perception. At the same time, there is the object condition, for example, something you are looking at. In the second moment, the object becomes stronger or more imprinted, and that is called the mental direct perception. The imprint is stronger.

DPR: Yes, that is what I think, although it is not clearly expressed in the literature here. The sense perception is very mechanical. It just has a sense of perceiving and perceiving and perceiving and perceiving and perceiving, moment by moment. There needs to be something more like an imprint to connect that mechanical process to the level of conceptual mind, within the Sautrāntika sense of the sixth consciousness. The mental direct valid cognition takes it beyond just simply the perceiving process of sense perception. It goes more into the depth of the imprint.

Student: There is a first moment of sense direct valid cognition, and then a second moment in which there are three elements: another sense direct valid cognition, a mental direct valid cognition, and a self-aware valid cognition. Is the image that is being intensified or imprinted by the mental direct valid cognition in the second moment, the first or second moment's impression?

DPR: I believe the first and second moments are intensified together, because the second is also happening at the same time.

Student: And it is closely related to the first one.

DPR: That's right, and we are looking at the same object, so to speak. I think we are creating habitual patterns or tendencies, which are like imprints on our continuity of consciousness. During the three-stage process, those tendencies are imprinted more strongly in the mental consciousness.

Student: There is a tendency when there is a repeated sense perception, for the mind to kick in and say, "Oh, there's something continuous and solid here."

DPR: It enters further into your mind consciousness and appears later as a conceptual object. Then conceptual mind says, "Oh, it's a glass that I've seen before."

Student: There seems to be a slight element of memory to it. The previous moment is being remembered, very subtly.

DPR: That's right—RAM: Random Access Memory.

Student: What is the bridge from the mental sense faculty to the object? In other words, the eye consciousness sees through the eye, but how does the mental sense faculty "see" the object?

DPR: It arises simultaneously with the second moment of sense perception.

Student: So it sees the same thing as the eye?

DPR: Yes, it arises at the same time, and it has some sense of reliance on that visual sense perception to perceive.

Student: Is it like a mental image?

DPR: No, because a mental image is more like an isolate—an image of a form.

Student: So there is the sense perception, and the mental faculty picks up and expands on it?

DPR: Yes, I think it occurs as a kind of recording process. There has to be a bridge from sense perception to your mind perception. Otherwise sense perception would just be sense perception and mind would just be mind, and what would link the two? There has to be something. Mental direct valid cognition is the bridge that brings sense direct perception to the conceptual level—to the level of imprint. There is a gradual process and development. The mental direct perception makes the link from a solid outside object to an inner sense of perception.

Student: To have mental direct valid cognition seems intrinsic to what makes perception human. It seems sense perception alone would be like computerized robots with cameras, which could pick up visual objects and get around. But there is a huge difference between that kind of machine and the kind of system we are. Do you think this point has any truth to it?

DPR: In a way, yes, it does have some connection. That is how direct mental perception makes the bridge—it connects two very different worlds. Looking at just the perceptual level, it is outwardly directed, and seeing the outer objects is a mechanical process. There is no sense of being in the realm of mind. Mental direct valid cognition is like the bridge that takes the perceptual level into the realm of mental phenomena, which tends towards mental images, or isolates. Then you reach the conceptual world, and each time you make a stronger imprint.

Student: What is the *svalakṣhaṇa* of the mental direct valid cognition as opposed to that of the sense direct valid cognition?

DPR: According to this view, there is not much difference in their object. They are both outwardly directed. They both see the outer objects, but on a different level. First you see a glass through sense perception, and then you see the same glass through mental perception. Each perceptual level has its own characteristic to recognize in each moment—its own *svalakṣhaṇa* of the object.

Student: Is that the beginning of a label?

DPR: Not at this level of mental direct valid cognition. We get concept after mental direct valid cognition.

Student: In the second moment, are there three distinct *svalakṣhaṇas*—one being the mental direct valid cognition, one being the sense direct valid cognition, and the other being the self-awareness direct valid cognition?

DPR: Yes.

Student: So there are three distinct *svalakṣhaṇas*.

DPR: That's right.

Student: How does mental direct valid cognition arise with its own *svalakṣhaṇa* of an external object since it has no sense capacity?

DPR: It arises simultaneous to the second moment of the sense perception. There is a strong reliance or connection between sense perception and mental direct valid cognition. They arise together; in a way they cannot separate. At the same time, their perceptions of the object are independent.