

# Study Group - Bodhicharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

10 May 2005

As usual generate the virtuous motivation of bodhicitta thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings, and in order to accomplish that aim I am now going to listen to this profound teaching. Then I am going to put it into practice'.

## 2.1.2.3.2.2. Showing that it is valid to say that the wisdom realising emptiness can abandon the afflictions

### 2.1.2.3.2.2.2. In particular (cont.)

#### Objection

The Buddha cannot benefit sentient beings because he lacks conceptual motivational thought.

#### Refutation

*Through the power of prayer, [35cd]  
The body of the conqueror appears to the disciples*

**Objection:** 'But how could the prayers that a buddha made on the bodhisattva path benefit sentient beings since those prayers were made a long time ago before that person became enlightened?

This objection is refuted with an example:

*Even if having died after [36]  
Having made offerings to Garuda  
And a long time after that,  
It will still pacify the poison*

Even if a long time has passed since the death of a Brahmin who had established an offering tree to Garuda for the purpose of pacifying all poisons, the practice of Garuda will still pacify poisons.

The meaning of the example:

*Likewise offerings to the conqueror, [37]  
In accordance with the Bodhisattva practices  
Will achieve all purposes, though the Bodhisattva  
Has gone already beyond misery.*

Similarly, if bodhisattvas establish an 'offering tree' to the conquerors by building up the two accumulations of merit and wisdom in an extensive manner, the final result of that will be the two buddha bodies, i.e. the body for the purpose of self and the body for the purpose of others.

These will continue to benefit sentient beings even though the bodhisattva on becoming enlightened, has gone beyond misery into non-abiding nirvana. When the bodhisattvas pass away (in a figurative sense), and become enlightened, they are no longer bodhisattvas but buddhas. The power of the prayers that the bodhisattva made, such as, 'May I be able to benefit all sentient beings effortlessly' still carry on through the two bodies - the form body and the truth body - of a buddha. In such a way they continue to benefit all sentient beings.

One should also relate this to one's own practice, likewise making prayers to be able to effortlessly benefit sentient beings in the future. However, we don't have to be in any hurry to attain enlightenment. We can take our time - there is no need to become too uptight about it!

## 2.1.2.3.2.3. Showing that perfect abandonment will arise

### Objection

*How can a result be achieved [38]  
By offering to one lacking mind?  
Because it is taught that it does  
For both remaining and gone beyond misery.*

**Hearer practitioner:** 'How can a result be achieved by offering to one lacking mind?' The thought is that since a buddha doesn't have the conceptual thought, 'now I have received the offerings', how could the making of offerings to the Buddha be of any benefit.

**Madhyamaka:** Because it is taught by the Buddha himself in the sutras, such as the *Lion's Roar Sutra*, that merits are accumulated with regard to both the one remaining and the one gone beyond sorrow. This means that both accumulate merits, regardless of whether one makes offerings to the Buddha remaining directly in front of oneself, or to representations of the Buddha after his parinirvana.

The *Sutra Explaining the Benefits of Circumambulation of a Stupa* says the same: 'Regardless of whether it is an actual buddha or whether it is a representation of a buddha that has already gone beyond sorrow, there will no difference in the merits accumulated to a mind of equal faith in both.'

If one recognises the representation of a buddha who has already gone beyond sorrow as the actual buddha, and then makes offerings, circumambulations and so forth, the merit will be exactly the same as if the buddha were actually there.

*That it is possible to have a result nominally [39]  
And also ultimately, is taught in scripture.  
For example, like have a result  
Relative to a true buddha.*

This is saying that it is taught in the scriptures that the result of making offerings to a buddha does not depend on whether one recognises that buddha as being illusory, or whether one thinks of that buddha as existing ultimately. For example, it is taught that even if one believes that the Buddha exists truly, such as what the lower tenets do, and makes offerings to the Buddha on the basis of that belief, one will still accumulate vast merits because of the law of cause and effect will still apply.

### 2.1.3. Establishing the Mahayana as supreme

2.1.3.1. Establishing that all sutras are the advice of the Buddha

2.1.3.2. Establishing emptiness as the antidote

#### 2.1.3.1. ESTABLISHING THAT ALL SUTRAS ARE THE ADVICE OF THE BUDDHA

There are twelve verses that relate to these outlines, which we will go through slowly, one by one.

#### Objection

*One becomes liberated by seeing truth, [40ab]  
Why should one see emptiness?*

**Followers of the hearer vehicle** (Primary opponent): 'One can become liberated merely by realising directly, and meditating on, the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths, such as impermanence and so forth. Therefore, what need is there to see the emptiness that is the lack of true existence of all phenomena.' Not only do they not accept that one needs to realise emptiness to become enlightened, they completely refute the Mahayana teachings as being teachings of the Buddha, and do not accept the term *selflessness of phenomena* even on a figurative level. The selflessness that they associate with the Four Noble Truths is either the lack of a

permanent, isolated (partless), independent self, or the lack of a person that is a self-sufficient substantial existent<sup>1</sup>, which in the Prasangika system are only the coarse selflessness of person.

**Mind Only** (Secondary opponent): 'Though there is selflessness of phenomena, it is not necessary to realise it in order to go beyond misery (liberation).'

#### Response

*Because it is taught in scripture that [40cd]  
Without it one will not attain enlightenment.*

The task for the Madhyamaka here is to establish to the opponent that there is a purpose for realising the lack of inherent existence of phenomena. First they do so with the reason of scripture.

**Madhyamaka:** *Because it is taught in the scripture of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras that without the realisation of the selflessness of phenomena one will not attain the enlightenment of a hearer, or a self-liberator or of a buddha.'*

In the *Great Commentary on the Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* it gives quotes from the *Perfection of Wisdom sutras* such as 'those that have recognition of phenomena cannot attain liberation', and 'All the three-time buddhas, and all the other realisations from the attainment of a stream enterer up to the attainment of a self-liberator, are attained in dependence on the perfection of wisdom alone.'

**Hinayana:** 'This does not prove anything to me because I don't accept the perfection of wisdom scriptures as valid sutras'.

*If the Mahayana is not established [41]  
The how are your texts established?  
Since they are established for both.  
Initially it is not established for you.  
The conditions through which you generate faith [42ab]  
Are the same for the Mahayana.*

**Madhyamaka:** 'If you don't accept the Mahayana sutras to be authentic, then how do you establish the Hinayana sutras as valid scriptures?'

**Hinayana:** 'They are authentic because they are established as valid by both of us.'

**Madhyamaka:** 'But they were not valid for you initially, because at the time of your birth, or before you had investigated their meaning through listening and contemplation, they were not authentic scriptures for you.'

First you established with logic the *Great Treatise*, which identifies the three baskets of teachings, as valid scriptural reference. And then, in dependence on the *Great Treatise*, you identify the Hinayana sutras as valid scriptures. The *Great Treatise* shows how the teachings on the higher training of morality form the Vinaya basket; how the teachings on the higher training of concentration form the Sutra basket; and how the teachings on the higher training of wisdom form the Abhidharma basket.

This style of establishing faith is the same for us with the Mahayana sutras.'

*If true because two others assert it [42cd]  
The Vedas and so forth also become true.*

If you do not use this system to identify whether a scripture is a sutra or not, and base your assertion of the validity of a sutra on whether it is accepted by two parties, then one would also have to say that the *Vedas* would be valid teachings, because they are accepted by two parties as valid'.

*If you say, 'The Mahayana is in question', [43]  
Non-buddhists also question the texts,  
And other texts are also questioned by  
Self and other, therefore they should be abandoned.*

**Hinayana:** 'Since the Hinayana scriptures we accept as authentic teachings by the Buddha are also accepted by you as such there is not argument between us about them. But there is debate regarding the Mahayana scriptures you accept as authentic teaching, because we do not accept them.'

**Mahayana:** 'If you deny the Mahayana sutras for the reason that they are being questioned, then you should also deny the Hinayana sutras. Firstly, the Hinayana sutras are questioned by non-Buddhists and Hinayanists alike. Secondly, while the authenticity of the Hinayana sutras is accepted by the eighteen Hinayana schools, there are certain teachings such as the *Sutra Explaining the Intermediate State* that are not accepted by all.'

**It is not possible to even attain nirvana without realising emptiness**

*If the root of the teachings is the essential bikkhu,[44]  
Even the essential bikkhu has a problem.  
The mind endowed with an object,  
Has difficulty even to abide beyond sorrow.*

The term 'essential bikkhu' refers to arhats. Arhats preserved in their perfect memory the Buddhas teachings, and that is why they are referred to as the root of the teachings. If the *root of the teachings* is the *essential bikkhu*, then *even the essential bikkhu has a problem*, because *the mind that is endowed with an object has difficulty even to abide beyond sorrow*.

This shows that even the attainment of liberation is impossible without the realisation of emptiness, and that those who do not accept the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena can not become arhats. The mind endowed with a truly existent object can not counteract true-grasping because it can not negate the apprehended object of true-grasping. It is true-grasping. Therefore, the realisation of mere coarse selflessness can not counteract true-grasping, because it does not realise the absence of the apprehended object of true-grasping.

*Even* because not only can one not become enlightened without the wisdom realising emptiness, one can not *even* attain liberation.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
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Edited Version*

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<sup>1</sup> According to the lower tenets these two views of the self are the subtle and coarse views of the selflessness of person: coarse being absence of a permanent partless and independent self, and subtle being the absence of a self-sufficient substantial existent.

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

17 May 2005

As usual, generate the motivation of wanting to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings thinking, 'Towards that end I am then going to listen to this profound teaching and then I am going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

### 2.1.3.2. ESTABLISHING EMPTINESS AS THE ANTIDOTE (CONT.)<sup>1</sup>

#### 2.1.3.2.1. It is not even possible to attain nirvana without realising emptiness

*If the root of the teachings is the essential bikkhu,* [44]

*Even the essential bikkhu has a problem.*

*The mind endowed with an object,*

*Has difficulty even to abide beyond sorrow.*

There are two reasons why essential bikkhus are referred to 'the root of the teachings'.

First of all, the term *essential bikkhu* refers to arhats. In general, it is said that the *root of the teachings* are the vows of individual liberation. The ultimate practitioners of those vows are arhats, and therefore arhats are referred to as roots of the teachings.

Secondly, arhats such as Mahakashyapa, Ananda and Upali kept the teachings preserved in their perfect memory and were able to recite it to others. Therefore they are regarded as roots of the teachings. At the first Buddhist council of five hundred arhats, Mahakashyapa recited the sutras belonging to the Abhidharma basket, Ananda recited the sutras belonging to the sutra basket, and Upali recited the teachings belonging to the Vinaya basket of teachings.

#### 2.1.3.2.2. The consequence of becoming an arhat merely by abandoning the manifest afflictions

*If 'liberated through abandonment of the afflictions'* [45a]

Here, the followers of the **Hearer** vehicle say that one can eliminate mental afflictions and be liberated from cyclic existence by meditating on the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths, such as impermanence and so forth. Therefore, they say, it is not necessary to realise emptiness in order to abandon mental afflictions.

**Madhyamaka:** It is, of course, possible to realise the lack of a person as a self-sufficient substantial existent, and by meditating on that selflessness abandon a certain level of manifest afflictions. However, according to the Prasangika system, one will not be able to abandon the manifest afflictions as asserted by the lower tenets. This is because according to the Prasangika system, the lack of a person that is a self-sufficient substantial existent is not, strictly speaking, even the selflessness of person.

*Immediately afterwards one becomes that* [45b]

The Madhyamaka posit this consequence: if one can be liberated by meditating on the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths then it follows that by merely abandoning the manifest afflictions as taught in the two texts on knowledge, *The Compendium of Knowledge*, and *The Treasury of Knowledge*<sup>2</sup>, one would *immediately afterwards become* an arhat. This means that non-Buddhist practitioners who abandon the manifest afflictions would also be arhats.

*Though not having afflictions,* [45cd]  
*One can see that their karma is still potent.*

**Madhyamaka:** Though such a person does *not* have any manifest *afflictions* in their mental continuum, one can observe that the *karma* to project a future life *is still potent* in their continuum.

#### 2.1.3.2.3. Refuting the answer to the consequence

*If, 'Occasional craving taking forcefully,* [46ab]  
*It is certain I say it does not exist.'*

**Hearer follower:** 'It is not a mere occasional abandonment but certain liberation because, even though the karma in the person who has abandoned the manifest afflictions might still be potent, the conducive condition of craving that induces the next existence does not exist in that person's continuum. At the time of death the potent karma has to be ripened through the conducive conditions of craving and grasping, and though the karma might still be potent, it will not ripen as the conducive conditions of craving and grasping are lacking.'

One can say that at the time of death, craving relates to appearances of this life, while grasping relates to appearances of the next existence.

*Though this craving is not afflicted,* [46cd]  
*Why should it not be like ignorance?*

**Madhyamaka:** 'Though the craving arising from the transitory view grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial existent might be a non-manifest affliction at that time, but why should it not be the same for craving as it is for ignorance? We have common ignorance as explained in the *Two Knowledges*, and uncommon ignorance according to the Prasangika.'

There is the **common ignorance** that is taught in the *Two Knowledges*, which is the ignorance grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial existent. Then there is the **uncommon ignorance** as taught in the Prasangika system, which is the ignorance grasping at an inherently existent self. The line 'Why should it not be like ignorance?' means that since that are two levels of ignorance, why should it not also be the same for craving? There is the coarser craving that is induced by the transitory view grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial existent, and the more subtle craving that is induced by the transitory view grasping at an inherently existent self.

In the first system the root is the grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial existent, from which arises attachment to pleasure and anger to suffering. This then gives rise to the other root and affiliated afflictions. There

<sup>1</sup> This heading wasn't actually used last week.

<sup>2</sup> Known as the *Two Knowledges*.

is a whole set of root and affiliated delusions which have the grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial existent as their root.

Then there is the more subtle level of root and affiliated afflictions, which have as their root the grasping at inherent existence. Through meditating only on the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths as taught in the *Two Knowledges*, a person may have abandoned the manifest craving that is induced by the grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial existent, but that will not even dent the manifest craving that arises from grasping at the self as inherently existent. The craving that arises from the grasping at the self as inherently existent will not be harmed in the slightest by the meditation on the sixteen aspects alone. Although it can abandon the manifest coarse afflictions to a degree, it will not abandon the seed of the afflictions at all.

*Craving arises from feeling, [47]  
And those with feeling have it;  
It abides for some, whose  
Mind is endowed with an object.*

These lines establish that the person who has abandoned the manifest afflictions according to the *Two Knowledges* still has craving, and therefore can still take rebirth.

**Madhyamaka:** By grasping at the feeling of happiness as truly existent one generates craving to make contact with happiness. By grasping at suffering as truly existent one generates the craving to be separate from the feeling of suffering. Practitioners with feeling who have not abandoned the grasping at true existence will always have craving.

Therefore, to counteract craving it is not enough to just to realise the lack of true existence of something in general. One needs to realise the lack of true existence of happiness and suffering. Otherwise, by grasping at the feelings of happiness and suffering as truly existent, one will generate the craving to meet with the feeling of happiness, and to be separated from the feeling of suffering.

The mind endowed with a truly existent object is true grasping. We previously said that true grasping is the grasping at the basis, path and result as truly existent. As long as one is endowed with that grasping, one is endowed with true grasping. As long as the mind is endowed with true grasping, and has not realised that the absence of the apprehended object of true grasping, then that mind will also have craving.

**2.1.3.2.4. Showing the need to meditate on emptiness to even achieve just liberation**

*The mind lacking emptiness [48]  
Will arise again despite ceasing,  
Like the absorption without recognition.  
Then, meditate on emptiness.*

Even though the manifest afflictions might have ceased momentarily through meditating on the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths, these afflictions will arise again, for as long as the mind lacks the realisation of emptiness - the realisation of the lack of true existence of person and aggregates. It is similar to *absorption without recognition*, where the manifest afflictions have ceased temporarily, but then rise again. That's why one needs to meditate on

emptiness in order to attain liberation and enlightenment. That's the instruction.

Then come three verses that establish the Mahayana sutras as authentic Buddhist teachings. However there is some doubt amongst some scholars as to whether or not these three verses were part of the original text, because they repeat a point that was made earlier.

*If the words regarded as sutras [49]  
Are regarded as teachings of the Buddha  
Why do you not regard the sutras  
Of the Mahayana likewise?*

This asks the question, 'If the words that teach the superior training of the mind are regarded as Sutra basket, and those dealing with the morality are regarded as Vinaya basket, and those dealing with wisdom are regarded as Abhidharma basket, and since the *Mahayana sutras* also mostly deal with the three higher trainings, then why don't you also regard the *Mahayana sutras* as authentic sutras?'

*If, because of only one [50]  
All become faulty,  
Then why, through one concordant sutra,  
Are not all teachings of the conqueror?*

'If you feel that the Mahayana sutras are not authentic scriptures because there is one Mahayana sutra that doesn't fit your definition of an authentic sutra, then one could likewise say, "Why wouldn't you accept all of the Mahayana sutras" as valid sutras, if there is even just one valid sutra according to your definition.

'If all the Mahayana sutras become faulty because there is one sutra that doesn't fit your description of a valid sutra, then by the same reasoning, one could say that they are all valid as long as there is one sutra that fits your description of a valid sutra.' The sutras that they have a particular problem with are the *Extensive, Medium and Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*.

*The words are not comprehended [51]  
By the great Mahakashyapa and so forth.  
Who would disregard them,  
Just because you do not realise them?*

Here the **Hinayana** say that the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* are not comprehended even by such great beings as the Mahakashyapa and so forth, and therefore they are not authentic sutras.

**Madhyamaka:** 'Who would disregard the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*, which have actually been pronounced as being very profound by the great Mahakashyapa, just because you do not realise their have profound meaning? Nobody in their right mind would disregard the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* as authentic sutras just because you don't realise them.'

**2.1.3.2.4.1. Showing why emptiness is the path to nirvana while avoiding the two extremes**

Ordinary individuals are bound by true-grasping and attachment and abide in the extreme of existence, because they have to take rebirth through karma and afflictions. Hearer and self-liberated arhats who have attained individual liberation while not abiding in the extreme of existence, abide in the extreme of peace. Arya Bodhisattvas don't abide in the two extremes of existence

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and peace: on the one hand they are not bound by cyclic existence, and on the other hand they have not gone to the extreme of peace. They take rebirth in cyclic existence out of compassion for sentient beings. This is a result of their realisation of emptiness, and that is why the attainment of non-abiding nirvana is the fruit of the realisation of emptiness. The attainment of the non-abiding nirvana is the fruit of the wisdom of realising emptiness, and therefore it is inappropriate to refute the view of emptiness. That is why one must meditate repeatedly on emptiness.

### **Review**

What is the meaning of afflictions?

*Student: Any thought that may upset the peace of mind.*

Are you sure? How many root afflictions are there?

*Students: Six.*

Name them.

*Student: Attachment, ignorance, hatred, pride, deluded doubt and wrong view.*

What is attachment?

*Student: The mind that doesn't want to be separated from an object.*

That could also be virtue, such as the mind that doesn't want to be separated from bodhicitta, or the Buddha.

What is the meaning of liberation?

*Student: Being free from cyclic existence.*

Is this vase liberated?

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright*

*Preliminary edit by Adair Bunnett*

*Final edit by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*

*Edited Version*

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# Study Group - Bodhicharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

24 May 2005

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As usual we should begin with a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. In order to do so I am going to listen to this profound teaching and put it into practice as much as possible'.

## 2.1.3.2.4.2. For those wishing for liberation it is suitable to meditate on emptiness

*Emptiness is the antidote against the darkness [54]  
Of afflictive and omniscience obscurations.  
How can those wishing for quick omniscience  
Not meditate on it?*

*Afflictive obscurations* are the afflictions such as ignorance, attachment and anger, and their seeds.

*Obscurations to omniscience* have a two-fold division into seed and manifest obscurations. The seed part is the imprints of the affliction that have the power to produce dualistic appearances in the mind, while manifest obscurations to omniscience are the actual dualistic appearance to the mind. Until one has abandoned true grasping, one's mind will be obscured by dualistic appearances.

The wisdom realising *emptiness is the antidote to the darkness of the afflictive and omniscience obscurations*. Therefore *how could those wishing to attain quick liberation and omniscience not meditate on it?*

The **hearer** follower replies, 'Well I don't really feel like meditating on emptiness because it makes me afraid'. They can be forgiven for that argument, because if one does not know how to meditate on emptiness properly then one falls into the extreme of nihilism, where everything becomes non-existent.

The **Madhyamaka** reply,

*If one generates fear [55]  
Of the phenomena generating suffering  
Then why generate fear of emptiness,  
Which pacifies suffering.*

This is a slight rebuke saying, 'Well actually the real danger is generated by truly existent phenomena'. By this they mean that by grasping at phenomena as truly existent one generates all the different sufferings that one is right to fear, but that there is really no reason to be afraid of emptiness, which in fact pacifies suffering.

Emptiness is not really a phenomenon to be afraid of, because it pacifies all fears and dangers, while true-grasping, which is the root of cyclic existence, should be the actual object of one's fear.

*If one becomes afraid of anything [56]  
Should some selves exist,  
Since there is no nature at all  
Who is the one afraid?*

One generates fear if, at the time of analysis, one finds that some selves do exist from their own side. No-one is afraid if at the time of analysis no self nature is found at all. But if there is a strong perception of the person existing

independently from its own side, one experiences fear at the time of analysis.

## 2.2. Practising it through meditation

2.2.1. Establishing the selflessness of person through reason

2.2.2. Establishing the selflessness of phenomena through reason

### Different in basis

The self that is being negated in the term 'selflessness' is the self that exists out of its own nature, independently, from its own side. This is the self that is referred to in *Introduction to the Middle Way* where it says, 'Since all our faults of delusions and so forth arise from the view of the transitory collections, yogis abandon the self'. This is the self to be negated. Grasping at that self constitutes self-grasping. Without realising the absence of such a self it is impossible to counteract self-grasping.

If this type of self existence is negated on the person it is the selflessness of person, and if it is negated on phenomena it is the selflessness of phenomena. That is why there is no difference in the subtlety of the two selflessness. They only differ from the point of view of the basis of negation, and not from the point of view of the object of negation.

In *Introduction to the Middle Way* the selflessness of phenomena was explained before the selflessness of person, which is in accordance with the sequence of generation of the two types of self-grasping. Here the selflessness of person is explained before the selflessness of phenomena in accordance with the sequence in which the two selflessness are realised.

### Innate and intellectually acquired

There is also the two fold division of self-grasping into innate self-grasping and intellectually acquired self-grasping. *Innate self-grasping* is the self-grasping that arises naturally in one's mind. *Intellectually acquired self-grasping* is the true grasping that is generated through thinking about reasons. On investigating the nature of phenomena some individuals arrive at the conclusion that phenomena exist truly, which is an intellectually acquired true grasping. Others, of higher intelligence, arrive at the conclusion that phenomena lack true existence.

Intellectually acquired true grasping is a true grasping that is generated in dependence on reason, i.e. having some reason for thinking that phenomena exist truly. It only exists in the continuum of tenet holders, and therefore is not regarded as the root of cyclic existence. Innate true grasping is true grasping that arises naturally in the mind. Only innate true grasping is the root of cyclic existence.

### 2.2.1. Establishing the selflessness of person through reason

2.2.1.1. The way of refuting the object of innate true grasping

2.2.1.2. The way of refuting the object of the intellectually acquired true grasping

#### 2.2.1.1. THE WAY OF REFUTING THE OBJECT OF INNATE TRUE GRASPING

If the self is found in the basis of imputation then it has to exist either in the body or the mind. The body as a whole or some part of it, or the mind as a whole or some part of it, has to be the self, and that is what is being refuted through this analysis.

The significance is that not only does the object that is imputed not exist inherently, but the basis of imputation also does not exist inherently. This second point is usually more

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difficult to understand. How one has to approach this is that the basis of imputation does not exist inherently, because it is not found at the time of analysis. If one approaches it in this way, thinking that the basis of imputation does not exist inherently because it is not found at the time of analysis, then it will become clearer. If one says straight away that the basis of imputation simply does not exist truly, then it is more difficult, because one would still feel that the object is existing from its own side.

The self is merely labelled in dependence on the aggregates. If the object of the thought thinking, 'I', which is present most of the time, is really existent within the basis of imputation then it has to exist either in the body or in the mind. Either the body as a whole, or some part of the body has to be the 'I', or the mind as a whole, or some part of the mind, has to be the 'I'. Sequentially refuting that they are not establishes that the 'I' is not findable at the time of analysis. This means that the 'I' does not exist intrinsically within the body or mind. That leaves only the possibility that the 'I' is merely labelled in dependence on the body and mind, which is the 'I' that actually exists. The focal object of the mere 'I'-grasping is the mere 'I' that exists as merely labelled in dependence on the body and the mind.

*The teeth, hair and nail are not the self; [57]  
The self is not the bones or blood,  
Not the nasal mucus or phlegm,  
And also not lymph or pus.*

*The self is not the fat or sweat, [58]  
And neither the lungs nor liver are the self.  
The other inner organs are also not the self,  
The self was not urinated to the outside.*

*The teeth, hair and nails are not the self.* That we know. Neither are the *bones* and *blood* an example for the self. *Nasal mucus* and *phlegm* are not the self, and neither is *lymphatic* liquid or *pus*. None of these parts of the body are the self, which is merely labelled in dependence on those parts.

Neither *fat* nor *sweat* are examples of the self, because the self is merely labelled in dependence on those. *Neither the lungs nor the liver are the self*, nor are *other inner organs*, such as the intestines and so forth, the self, because the self is merely imputed in dependence on these body parts. The emphasis here is that the self is merely imputed in dependence on those body parts. Likewise, neither the *urine* nor the faeces are the self. Also *the flesh and the skin are not the self*, because the self is merely imputed on them.

*The flesh and skin are not the self, [59]  
The heat and air are not the self,  
The holes are not the self, and certainly the  
Six primary consciousnesses are not the self.*

*The heat and the air* and so forth, *are not the self*. Here the four elements of fire, air, space and consciousnesses are refuted as examples of the self. Neither the fire element nor the wind element, nor the *holes* like the nostrils and so forth, which are the space element, are the self. And *certainly the six primary consciousnesses are also not the self*.

None of the six elements are the self because the self is merely imputed in dependence on them. This refutation of approaching the analysis from the point of view of the six elements is accordance with Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*, where the same reasoning is used. None of the six elements individually are the self, and the self is also not contained in the mere collection of the six aggregates, because the self is merely labelled in dependence on the six aggregates.

## Review

At the beginning of *Introduction to the Middle Way* it says, 'In order to liberate sentient beings from cyclic existence, he taught selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena'. What is the difference between the two selflessnesses?

*Student: The base is different.*

What is the difference between self-grasping at person and the view of the transitory collections?

*Student: The view of the transitory collection is self-grasping at the person of one's own continuum, while self-grasping at person is self-grasping at person in general.*

If it is self-grasping at person, is it necessarily the view of the transitory collection?

*Student: No. Grasping at the self of person in another person's continuum is not the transitory view.*

What is the meaning of cyclic existence?

*Student: Being bound to the contaminated aggregates by karma and afflictions.*

Then that means the person is cyclic existence, because the person is bound to the contaminated aggregates.

Take the example of a person who is bound to a tree: the tree is cyclic existence, the rope is karma and afflictions, and the person is the self. We are bound to cyclic existence by karma and contaminated aggregates. Sometimes the meaning of cyclic existence is defined as that which takes repeated rebirth through karma and afflictions.

What is the object of the negation of the self of person?

*Student: The person not found under direct analysis.*

I was looking for the inherent or intrinsically existing person. This leads on to the next question. What is the meaning of inherent existence? If one doesn't refute the inherently existing person, one doesn't arrive at the lack of inherent existence.

*Student question: Is a person existing independently, by way of its own nature, including being independent from the designating thought, the object of negation?*

That is correct.

The Svatantrika-Madhyamaka say that a person, while not existing independently of the imputed mind, still has something from its own side. The Mind Only say that it exists out of its own uncommon mode of abiding. The Svatantrika-Madhyamaka say that everything is merely labelled, while the Prasangika say that everything is merely labelled 'on', emphasising that there is nothing from the side of object.

Is the person to be found somewhere as part of the elements?

*Students: No.*

The absence of person among the elements is the subtle emptiness. Sometimes, when one analyses too hard one falls into nihilism.

*Student: Can you say a few more words about why consciousness is not the self. We keep coming back to this time and again. What is the most compelling way of dismissing that idea?*

We say, 'my mind'. There is a feeling that the mind belongs to one. This is the indication that the consciousness is not the self. Because the thought of 'I' it is not generated with regard to the body, or aggregates. There is another basis with regards to which one thinks 'I'.

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# Study Group - *Bodhicharyavatara*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

31 May 2005

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As usual, please sit yourself comfortably and relax. Place your mind inwards, not engaging with external objects. Then generate a virtuous motivation, thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings. In order to do so I am now going to listen to this profound teaching, and then I am going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

## 2.2. Practising selflessness through meditation

### 2.2.1. Establishing the selflessness of person through reason

Last time we completed talking about the way of meditating on the lack of the object of innate self-grasping of person.

#### 2.2.1.2. MEDITATING ON THE SELFLESSNESS THAT IS THE LACK OF THE OBJECT OF THE INTELLECTUALLY ACQUIRED TRUE-GRASPING AT PERSON<sup>1</sup>

What is being refuted here are the different types of self that are posited by non-Buddhists. Even though there are a great variety of positions taken by different non-Buddhist tenets, Shantideva concentrates on the two main positions of the Samkya and Vaisheshika. By refuting these two positions, all the other various non-Buddhists views regarding the self will also be implicitly refuted.

2.2.1.2.1. Refuting the self to be consciousness (as posited by the Enumerators or Samkya)

2.2.1.2.2. Refuting the self to be matter (as posited by the Particularists)

2.2.1.2.3. Refuting objections regarding selflessness

##### 2.2.1.2.1. Refuting the self to be consciousness

###### The view of the Samkya

The Samkya assert a permanent, isolated, independent self, which is consciousness. They refer to the self as sentient being, knower, consciousness or experience. They attribute to this self five qualities:

1. Engaging - engaging happiness, suffering, and so forth.
2. Permanence - being a permanent functionality
3. Not being the creator, i.e. not being the creator of the different manifestations of the primary principle
4. Lacking qualities - lacking qualities of particles, darkness and courage
5. Lacking action - being pervading

Here the question arises, is the grasping at the person possessing these five previously mentioned characteristics intellectually acquired self-grasping not?

This question arises because if it is intellectually acquired self-grasping, then one realises selflessness by realising the absence of its apprehended object. What do you think?

Here one can draw a fine distinction between intellectually acquired self-grasping and self-grasping generated through tenets. Even though this is self-grasping that is generated through tenets, by realising the absence of its object, one does not realise selflessness. Therefore it might be mistaken to classify it as intellectually acquired self-grasping *per se*. One has to make a fine distinction here.

The Enumerators classify objects of knowledge into twenty-five categories.

- The primary principle. It exists truly and ultimately, and is only a cause and not an effect. The qualities of courage (happiness), particles (equanimity), and darkness (suffering) are perfectly balanced within it.
- The person, also exists truly and ultimately, but is neither cause nor effect.
- The five sense objects of form, sound, smell, taste and tactile sensations, plus awareness and pride, are both cause and effect.
- The eleven faculties, which are effects but not causes
- The five elements (4 + space), which are effects but not causes

The faculties and elements are only effects because they are only expressions of the primary principle. The Enumerators, or Samkya, say that the expressions of the primary principle are all of one partless nature with the primary principle.

They have their own view of how sentient beings circle in cyclic existence, and how they then attain liberation. When the person generates the desire to engage objects such as sounds, the nature of the primary principle is aware of that, and emanates these sounds. From the nature of the primary principle arises awareness, from which arises pride. From pride arise the eleven faculties and five sense objects. From the five sense objects arise the five elements.

They say that awareness is like a double mirror, externally reflecting the expressions of the primary principles such as forms and so forth, and internally reflecting the self. Through that the self is able to engage the different objects. They say that the reason why the self circles in cyclic existence is because it grasps at the action and at the agent as being one.

In order to attain liberation one has to apprehend the solitary self. This is done by initially reflecting on the disadvantages of the sensory objects, and so attaining calm abiding. Then, through the union of calm abiding and special insight, one generates meditative absorption. In dependence on the meditative absorption one generates the clairvoyance of the divine eye, with which one is able to see the primary principle. When one looks at the primary principle it will withdraw just like a modest girl, who has been surprised in the nude. The primary principle will withdraw from the self, and all its expressions will absorb in reverse sequence into it. The

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<sup>1</sup> Last week this was described as 2.2.1.2. The way of refuting the object of intellectually acquired true grasping

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only thing that is left is the solitary self, at which point one has attained liberation. You can read up more about this in the *Precious Garland of Tenets*.

**THE ACTUAL REFUTATION BY THE MADHYAMAKA**

*If the consciousness of sound were permanent [60]  
One would apprehend sound all the time.  
If there are no objects of knowledge how can  
One say what is known by what?*

The **Samkya** say that consciousness of sound is a permanent functionality. Sound is that which is being engaged, and consciousness is that which engages sound. In this context, when it refers to consciousness it refers to the self.

**Madhyamaka:** 'If the knower of sound is permanent, then regardless of whether or not external sound is present, that knower would apprehend sound constantly, because of being a permanent functionality. But that is invalid because if there is not object of knowledge then how can one say this consciousness is the object-possessor of such and such an object.'

The **Samkya** reply, 'That is not established because even though there might be no sound, the consciousness apprehending sound is permanently established'.

*If it is consciousness without that known [61]  
Then it follows that also wood is conscious.  
Therefore one has to say that without proximity of  
The object of knowledge consciousness does not  
exist.*

**Madhyamaka:** 'It follows that even wood is conscious, because it is possible to be consciousness without having an object. Considering all of this one has to say if you do not accept that it is ascertained that without the proximity of sound the consciousness of sound does not exist, then there is no time when sound is not apprehended.'

*If, 'they know form', [62]  
Why do they not hear anything at that time?  
If, 'because there is no proximity to sound,'  
Then there is also no consciousness of it.*

The **Samkya** reply, 'The fault of an objectless consciousness does not exist, because at the time of no sound the consciousness that is the permanent person engages form'.

**Madhyamaka:** 'Why should the person that is engaging form not hear sound even though there is no sound? After all, that person is a permanent functionality engaging the five objects without distinction.'

The **Samkya** reply, 'When there is no proximity to sound there is no consciousness of sound'.

**Madhyamaka:** 'If there is no knower of the object when there is no object then there is no permanent person.'

What you have to keep in mind is that the **Samkya** start out with the root proposition that the person is this permanent consciousness of sound. When asked, 'Why would one not hear everything all the time?' they say, 'Because there is no immediate proximity to sound'.

The **Madhyamaka** recognise that this is an opening where the **Samkya** have contradicted themselves. They say, 'Well, that actually contradicts your assertion of a permanent person. Because if you say that if there is no object there is no object-possessor, then there is no consciousness of the object, which contradicts your

assertion that the person is a permanent knower of sound'.

*How could that which is in the nature of the  
apprehension [63]  
Of sound become the apprehension of form?  
One is labelled as father and son  
But is not perfect.*

**Madhyamaka:** That which is in the nature of the apprehension of sound does not become the apprehension of form. because they are two mutually exclusive aspects.

The **Samkya** reply, 'Well, one person can be simultaneously labelled as father and son. Similarly, one consciousness can be labelled simultaneously as the apprehension of sound and the apprehension of form. Even though the *manifestation* of sound might not be present, since sound and form are of one *nature*, when form is present the nature of sound is also present. And therefore at that time the apprehension of form is also the object-possessor of sound.'

They have this notion that the person is this solitary partless entity of consciousness. They don't have the possibility of positing a consciousness that is made up out of parts, where one part is the apprehension of form and one part is the apprehension of sound. Instead, what they say is that it depends on how you look at it. If you look at it from one perspective, it is the apprehension of sound; if you look at it from another perspective, it is the apprehension of form. That is as valid as saying that one person is simultaneously father and son. That is how they posit the person as being the object possessor of form and sound simultaneously.

**Madhyamaka:** 'But it is not perfect'. What this means is that one person can be both father and son simultaneously, but not as a perfectly established phenomenon. This means that it is only a merely imputed phenomenon, and not ultimately established on the one person. That person is not ultimately both father and son, but only nominally on an imputed level. Being perfectly established is a synonym for being inherently established.

The **Madhyamaka** say, 'Your example does not really fit here because you assert that one consciousness is ultimately both the apprehension of sound and the apprehension of form. In the example it is possible for one person to be both father and son, because that person does not exist ultimately as father and son, but is only merely labelled as father and son'.

*Thus, courage and particles [64]  
As well as darkness are neither father nor son.  
It is not seen as possessing  
The nature of apprehending sound.*

This explains to the **Samkya** why something that ultimately exists cannot be labelled both as father and son at the same time.

**Madhyamaka:** 'Within the primary principle, where the three qualities of courage, particles and darkness are in a state of balance, the natures of father and son do not exist, since you yourself say, 'the supreme nature of qualities is not something that can be seen; Whatever can be seen is an accumulation, like an illusion.'

Courage refers to happiness; particles refer to equanimity; darkness refers to suffering. The natures of father and son can not exist within the primary principle, or ultimate truth, because the primary principle cannot be observed. It is not possible for the primary principle to be both son and father on different occasions, because it is the primordial substance. The reasoning is that since it is the primordial substance, it cannot be present within the expressions of that substance.

**Madhyamaka:** 'Further, if the apprehension of form were to possess the apprehension of sound, then that would be something observable, which it is not.'

*If, 'like an actor, it is seen* [65]  
*In a different guise,' - it is impermanent.*  
*In case, 'the different guise is one*  
*With it,' that is without precedent.*

**Samkya:** 'The different apprehensions are different expressions of the one consciousness, like an actor who is seen in different guises at different times.'

**Madhyamaka:** 'It follows that the person is not a permanent functionality because at one time is in the mode of the apprehension of sound, and then later it is in the mode of the apprehension of form. It is not a permanent functionality, because it is later something that it wasn't earlier, and it is earlier something that it won't be later, which makes it an impermanent object.'

The **Samkya** reply, 'There is no fault because the earlier and later apprehension of form and sound are of one nature'.

**Madhyamaka:** 'If you say that the subsequent apprehension of form is of one nature with the earlier apprehension of sound, then that is without precedent because they exist at completely different instances.'

*In case, 'the different guise is not true,'* [66]  
*That is how you assert your nature.*  
*If you say, 'only consciousness', according*  
*To that it follows that all beings are one.*  
*Also the animate and inanimate* [67ab]  
*Become one because of their shared existence.*

**Samkya:** 'There is no fault, because the different appearances are not true. The appearance of a different guise is misleading.'

**Madhyamaka:** 'If consciousness does not appear the way it exists, then when you refer to consciousness as being truly existent, what consciousness are you talking about? If it is not true it can not be truly existent'.

**Samkya:** 'The very person that is knowing consciousness is truly existent.'

**Madhyamaka:** 'Then it follows that all beings that are actually of different continuum would be one, because they are truly existent, permanent, pervasive, partless consciousnesses. Further, not only would all beings be one, but all animate and inanimate objects would be one, because of being permanent, partless, and pervasive.'

*When the particulars are distorted* [67cd]  
*Then what could be their shared basis?*

Out of the twenty-five categories of objects, the Samkya say that twenty-three are false, while the person and the primary principle are true and are truly existent. How could these various distorted false expressions of the

primary principle have the truly existent primary principle as their shared basis? That is not possible because the expressions are false.

Next time is discussion group and then exam. Have a good discussion. Also, everybody should come to the exam, do their best and write a good exam!

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright*  
*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett*  
*Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*  
*Edited Version*  
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# DISCUSSION

BLOCK: 3  
WEEK: 5

ASSIGNED: 7<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 05

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1. What factors matter when making offerings to a Buddha?
2. Who is saying that you don't need to see emptiness directly to get liberated? What realisations are proposed then for liberation without the direct perception of emptiness?
3. If a scripture were truly authoritative whenever any two people at all accepted that it was, then texts like the *Vedas* (of the non Buddhists) and such would have to be true as well, because you could always find two people who believed they were authoritative. Comment
4. Is it true that a person can temporarily stop the manifest appearance of the mental afflictions solely through a good understanding of the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths? If so, why can't this same person attain nirvana (liberation)?
5. What comparison does Shantideva use to show that, unless one realises emptiness directly, the mental afflictions will always come back – even in a case where one has been able to stop them from appearing in a manifest way for a while.
6. What kind of rebirth does an Arya Bodhisattva wish for and why?
7. How does Shantideva answer the concern that meditating upon emptiness might feel a little scary?
8. Name and define the two forms of the tendency to grasp things as existing in truth.
9. No Buddhist school agrees that there is a person which is distinct from the physical and mental parts of a person, but the Prasangika school says that we are further neither any single one of our parts, such as an arm or a leg, but why is it the case that we are not the sum of all of our various parts?
10. Discuss what the Samkyas refer to as '*the primary principle.*' How does this support their consciousness-like self?
11. How do the Samkyka School contradict their assertion that the person is a permanent knower of sound?
12. Why does this particular Samkyka argument appear in this part of the text? Briefly review where we are up to in Shantideva's 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter. (i.e. trace back the headings and sub-headings back to the start)

*Tara Institute Study Group 2005 - 'Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life'*

EXAM

NAME:

BLOCK: 3  
WEEK: 6  
ASSIGNED: 14<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 05

/28

MARK:

- 
1. What factors matter when making offerings to a Buddha? [1]
  2. Who is saying that you don't need to see emptiness directly to get liberated? What realisations are proposed then for liberation without the direct perception of emptiness? [3]
  3. If a scripture were truly authoritative whenever any two people at all accepted that it was, then texts like the *Vedas* (of the non Buddhists) and such would have to be true as well, because you could always find two people who believed they were authoritative. Comment [3]

***Tara Institute Study Group 2005 - 'Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life'***

4. Is it true that a person can temporarily stop the manifest appearance of the mental afflictions solely through a good understanding of the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths? If so, why can't this same person attain nirvana (liberation)? [3]

5. What comparison does Shantideva use to show that, unless one realises emptiness directly, the mental afflictions will always come back – even in a case where one has been able to stop them from appearing in a manifest way for a while. [2]

6. What kind of rebirth does an Arya Bodhisattva wish for and why? [2]



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10. Discuss what the Samkyas refer to as '*the primary principle.*' How does this support their consciousness-like self? [3]

11. Why does this particular Samkya argument appear in this part of the text? [2]