

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual let us spend some time in our meditation practice.
[meditation]

We can now set the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines—for the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will engage in the activity of listening to the teachings and put them into practice well.

The key factor of our motivation is the purpose of doing the activity, and the ultimate purpose here is that 'I must benefit other sentient beings'. So one has to put that at the forefront of one's aim in life and engage in virtuous activity for that purpose. Then our life becomes most meaningful.

1.2.1.2.1. Refuting the existence of independent causes

1.2.1.2.1.1. Refuting the generation of independent expressions by the principle

It was explained previously that the Samkhya school assert an independent entity called 'principle', or 'nature'. This is an entity which, while in itself is independent, causes other phenomena to arise from it.

The verses read:

27. *Whatever is accepted as that called principle,
And any imputation that is called self,
They do not arise volitionally, thinking
"I shall arise."*

28ab. *If the non-generated does not exist
How can one then posit generation?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse in the form of a syllogism.

Consider the dual subject—'The primary principle possessing five characteristics, which is an equilibrium of particle, darkness and courage¹, as well as the harms that are contained in its expressions' and 'the self that is imputed on the knowledge person'—it follows it is unsuitable to say that they are generated independently—because this very principle is like the horns of a rabbit that cannot perform actions. It does not arise volitionally thinking, "I shall arise to generate an independent expression" or "an independent experience of the object".

It follows it is unsuitable to assert that at the time of the generation of the result, a result is generated from the principle—because the principle itself is not generated. There is a pervasion because—if oneself is not generated, then one cannot generate a result. There is then a pervasion that one cannot generate a result.

So what is being presented here is the assertion of the primary principle (also known as nature or expression) by the Enumerators (the Samkhya non-Buddhist school), which possesses five characteristics that are the equilibrium of the

three qualities: particle, darkness and courage. The five characteristics are:

1. It is the creator of all actions and so forth.
2. Since it is unproduced it is permanent.
3. Being partless it is a single entity
4. As it lacks consciousness it is merely an object.
5. It pervades the entire environment and all beings.

Some other texts present six characteristics, by combining the three qualities of particle, darkness and courage into one, and adding that to the five characteristics.

Some texts present the meaning of particle, or motility, as suffering, darkness as ignorance, and courage or lightness as happiness.

Detailed explanations have been presented numerous times in previous teachings, such as when we studied the *Madhyamakavatara* text² and also when we studied the ninth chapter of *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*³. It has also come up in the *400 Verses* teaching⁴, in Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*⁵ and of course in *Tenets* which I have taught twice. So when we come to a topic which presents these subjects it is good for you to refer back to those teachings, where I explained it in detail, as way to refresh your mind, and become more familiar with it. By referring to the texts again and again, eventually it will be implanted into our memory so that we won't forget it. This is what is meant by really putting an effort into understanding the Dharma texts and teachings.

According to Samkhya school, the primary principle possessing the five characteristics, which is equilibrium of the qualities of particle, darkness and courage, as well as all harms contained in its expression, arise independently. We need to reflect on whether this holds true. Is this explanation in accordance with the reality of how things exist? Do things exist independently as an expression of the primary principle? Would it be reasonable to accept that? This is how you need to reflect on their presentation.

The Samkhyas assert that what they call a knowledge-being, or conscious principle, is an independent entity. They consider the primary principle itself (with its five characteristics) as arising independently. They assert this, because they believe that the experiences of suffering and happiness arise independently. Thus, because feelings arise independently, the knowledge-being (or self), who experiences these feelings, also has to be independent. This is their assertion. By understanding this we will know what is being refuted. They believe the knowledge-being or self is a solitary, independent entity, which has only one consciousness, but which functions through the five senses. For example, if there is a person looking out of five different windows in a building, they assert that it is the same consciousness that functions through the five different senses. This is how they assert a single consciousness that functions through the five senses.

The *Madhyamakavatara* text presents the Samkhya's assertion of a self in this verse:

A self that is a consumer, permanent, not a creator,
Lacking qualities and activity is imputed by the Forders.
In dependence on very slight distinctions of that;
There are the different systems of the Forders.

² See the teachings of 22 April 2003, 29 April 2003, and 18 May 2004.

³ See the teachings 31 May 2005 (which contains a complete list of the twenty-five categories of objects asserted by the Samkhyas, 23 August 2005, and 13 September).

⁴ See the teaching of 9 September 2007.

⁵ See the teaching of 6 July 2010.

¹ Jeffery Hopkins translates these terms as motility, darkness and lightness

So, according to the Forders or the Samkhyas, there are five characteristics of the self:

1. It is a consumer of pleasant and unpleasant objects.
2. It is a functional permanent phenomena.
3. It is not a creator.
4. It lacks qualities.
5. It lacks activity.

When we understand their assertion of the self, and what the five characteristics are, then we can assess whether such a self is reasonable or not. With some slight variations, all the non-Buddhist schools, in general, assert a self as being a single, permanent, and independent entity. It is this self that is being refuted here.

As the commentary explains, the principle itself cannot be generated independently to begin with, as it is non-existent like the horns of a rabbit. So it follows that the result cannot be generated independently. The absurdity, which is highlighted here, is that if the cause itself is not generated, then how can the result be generated? So the syllogism used here refutes the assertion of a primary principle that is the cause of all existence.

What is being refuted here is the manifestation of a primary principle. When that is refuted, then the next step is to refute the knowledge-being (or conscious principle) that experiences objects independently, by showing that this cannot be independently existent either.

1.2.1.2.1.2. Refuting that the knowledge-being engages objects independently

The next two lines of the verse read:

*28cd. Since it would always be distracted by objects
It will also not cease.*

While you have some understanding of the basis of what is being presented here, it is good to know how the actual logic works. Once you understand this, you can then relate it to all other instances using the same line of logic, using syllogisms and so forth. To summarise the sequence: first the generation of independent expression by the principle is refuted, and then the individual being (the conscious principle or knowledge-being), who engages with the objects that they have caused, is refuted.

The commentary explains the meaning of these two lines:

Does the knowledge-person cease when it does not engage objects? It follows it does not because it is accepted to be a permanent functionality and if it is that, then it will always be distracted by objects, because there will be no time when it is not apprehending objects.

This refutation is based on pointing out the absurdity of a knowledge-being with this rhetorical question, *Does a knowledge-being cease when it does not engage objects?* According to this assertion, the absurdity is that engagement with an object is by a self that is a permanent functionality. As such it would perpetually apprehend objects. A simple example to illustrate this absurdity is that when a self is engaged in, for example, hearing sound, it would be perpetually engaged in apprehending sound. The same would apply for the other four senses: taste, sight, tactile sensations and smell. It would be difficult for the Samkhyas to accept this, as it goes beyond the bounds of obvious reality. So the refutation is based on the absurdity of their assertion.

1.2.1.2.2. Refuting the independent self of the Logicians

This has three subdivisions:

- 1.2.1.2.2.1. It is impossible for something permanent to produce a result
- 1.2.1.2.2.2. It is impossible for such a self to depend on conditions
- 1.2.1.2.2.3. Such a self cannot be related to conditions

The assertions of another non-Buddhist school are being presented here. It is similar to the earlier one, but with slight variations, which is why it is included separately.

1.2.1.2.2.1. It is impossible for something permanent to produce a result

The non-Buddhist Naiyayika school asserts a self that is by nature a permanent entity, but which temporarily becomes impermanent due to certain conditions.

The commentary first presents their assertion:

The Naiyayika assert a self that has form and is a permanent functionality, and they say it creates harm.

The next verse reads:

*29ab. It is clear that if the self is permanent
Then, like space, it cannot act*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then refutes their assertion:

However, it is very clear that if such a self is a permanent functionality then, similar to non-compounded space, it cannot produce a result.

The commentary presents a refutation that points out the absurdity of their assertion. *It is very clear that if such a self is a permanent functionality then, it will be similar to a non-compounded space.* This means that like empty space the self is a permanent phenomenon, and so cannot produce anything. Like space, such a self cannot produce a result. This should be clear.

1.2.1.2.2.2. It is impossible for such a self to depend on conditions

Next they say that the self depends on conditions, but it is impossible for such a self to depend on conditions.

First, their argument is presented:

Argument: Although its nature is permanent, if this self meets with conditions then it can produce a result.

The lines that serve as an answer to the assertion read:

*29cd Although conditions meet
How can they affect the unchanging?
30ab. If it is like before during the action
What did the action do to it?*

As an answer the commentary states:

It is impossible for a permanent phenomenon to meet with conditions. Although the conditions of striving and so forth meet with other conditions, how could these conditions affect the self?

What is being highlighted here is that as they have already asserted the nature of the self as permanent, how then could it possibly change when it meets certain conditions? How can conditions affect the self so it can be temporarily impermanent, when its very nature is permanent? The very definition of permanent indicates that it does not change. This again points out the absurdity of the assertion.

The non-Buddhist schools such as the Samkhyas and the Naiyayika (or Logicians) assert a permanent self, based on their acceptance of past and future lives. According to their reasoning the self has to be permanent in order to have come

from a past life to this life, and to be able to go from this life to the next life. They think that if the self was impermanent then it could not come from a past life to this, and from this life to the next? So while they accept past lives and future lives, and understand that some effects arise due to the past causes etc., the self, they say, has to be permanent, because if it changes or degenerates, then what would be left to go on to the next life? This is the reason for their assertion that the self is permanent.

We can readily relate to their limited reasoning, because we are not able to see the subtle momentary changes that occur in functional phenomena ourselves. The actual definition of impermanence implies that change occurs from moment to moment, and it is this momentary nature of change that we do not readily perceive. Thus we carry the perception of ourselves as being more or less the same self as yesterday, or the day before, etc.

Actually, the real understanding, and thus the realisation of impermanence, is actually quite difficult to obtain. While selflessness or emptiness are more profound than impermanence, and thus more difficult to realise, it seems that it is easier to understand the meaning of emptiness, rather than the subtle changes that occur from moment to moment. I definitely feel that understanding impermanence in terms of the momentariness of the existence is not easy to grasp. When we talk about impermanence it is usually in relation to the gross impermanence of phenomena, such as when a glass breaks. Because we see it break, we feel the impermanence of the glass is presented. In this way we can perceive and relate to the gross level of impermanence, whereas the actual impermanence of functional phenomena, the change which occurs from moment to moment, is subtle and difficult for us to realise.

While some of the non-Buddhist schools like the Samkhyas and the Naiyayika assert past and future lives, others do not. The self asserted by the non-Buddhist schools who don't believe in past and future lives is a self related to the body, i.e. the physical aggregate. Therefore, when the physical aggregate disintegrates, the self, which is dependent on that, also disintegrates. The analogy they use is that it is like drawings on a wall. When the wall falls down, the drawings that are dependent on the wall also disintegrate, because their very support has disintegrated.

The Christian faith, for example, does not assert past and future lives, or more specifically, reincarnation, but they do accept an individual being, which, in essence, seems to be called the soul, which doesn't disintegrate at the time of death. There is a continuity of the soul, as they present it. So, this is accepted in their religion.

His Holiness compares the Christian soul with what we call the self that goes on from past life to future lives. The common ground here is that both traditions posit a continuity that goes from the past to the future.

It is interesting to note that although there are differences between religions, there are also similarities. For example, when His Holiness speaks to other religions, he relates to them on the basis of commonality. That is something for us to also consider.

2.1.2.2.3. Such a self cannot be related to conditions

The commentary first presents the Naiyayika argument:

Argument: Although the self does not facilitate an action due to its own nature, actions are performed in relation to other factors.

30cd "These are its actions," you say.
How do they become related?

What they are saying is basically that, although the self itself does not facilitate an action by its own nature, it does perform actions in relation to other factors. So, this is what is being refuted here. The commentary presents:

Answer: This is also not valid—because if one says that the action which creates the result of this self is of a different entity, then how does it become related to the self? It could not be related to the self by nature or cause.

The assertion being refuted here is that of a self, which is permanent, but which can perform actions, and produce results in relation to other factors. What the commentary highlights is how these other factors are related to the self. If it is not related to the self by nature, or by cause (i.e. as a cause and effect), then there is no third option, and no other way to relate them. An example of something that is related through nature would be function and impermanence. Wherever there is a function, it is naturally related to impermanence through nature. Everything that functions is by nature also impermanent; so that is the relationship. Whereas the relationship between smoke and fire is that of cause and effect; fire being the cause and smoke the effect. If you assert that there is an independent, permanent self which produces some result, then there would have to be some relationship there. Any relationship has to have a relation either by nature, or by cause and effect. But that is not tenable here.

1.2.1.2.3. Understanding all beings to resemble emanations, anger is unsuitable

We can clearly see that interdependent origination is really the basis of the presentation here.

The verse reads:

31. Thus, everything is other-powered,
Through the power of this they are powerless.
Having understood this, do not become angry
At emanation-like phenomena.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Thus, all actions that produce a result are other-powered, and these conditions are again powered by earlier causes and conditions. Therefore, the result does not have any say in whether it arises or not, and hence is like an illusion or emanation.

When one understands that all functionalities perform actions while being empty of existence from their own side, one does not become angry at these emanation-like functionalities. Therefore one should train in realising the dependent arising that is the lack of existence from its own side, which destroys the seed of the afflictions.

The commentary presents the meaning of this verse. *All actions that produce a result are other-powered* implies that an action doesn't have control over itself, therefore actions are other-powered, meaning they are dependent on their previous causes and conditions. The point here is that *the result does not have any say in whether it arises or not, and hence is like an illusion or emanation.*

The commentary further explains that *When one understands all functionalities perform actions while being empty of existence from their own side, one does not become angry at these emanations like functionalities. Therefore one should train in realising the dependent arising that is the lack of existence from its own side, which destroys the seed of afflictions.*

The crux of the Prasangika view is presented here: that all things lack independent and inherent existence; that things are empty of inherent existence or they do not exist from their own side. If one understands these key points, then one really destroys the seed of the afflictions.

The very definition of illusion, or emanation, is something that is unreal or untrue, like a trick conjured up by a magician, and one should understand that phenomena arise like this, completely empty of existing from their own side. When one incorporates that understanding in one's perception of phenomena, then there is no room for one to become angry, because the very object which appears to exist from its own side as an independent entity harming us, does not actually exist in that way. Therefore there is no room for one to become angry towards it. Basically this is the crux of the explanation.

As I have presented many times before, when strong afflictions such as anger arise, it is because we relate to the object that is causing us harm, as if it were an independent object, completely arising from its own side. This is how it appears to us, so anger arises, and we feel justified in becoming angry. When one trains oneself to see that this appearance is false, that it is beyond reality, that the object one perceives is not inherently and independently existent, then that definitely helps to reduce the afflictions that arise in relation to the object of anger etc. This is hard for us initially, because we are habituated to perceiving things as independent and inherently existent. So overcoming that seemingly natural perception is not an easy task. However, to reduce the intensity of the negativities in one's mind, and eventually overcome the seeds of afflictions, we need to understand these points, and train our mind so that we can gain that realisation.

Having refuted some of the non-Buddhist schools in earlier verses, this verse is refuting the views held by all the Buddhist schools below the Prasangika, which assert inherent existence.

When one understands that all functionalities perform actions while being empty of existence from their own side, one does not become angry at these emanation-like functionalities. Therefore one should train in realising the dependent arising that is the lack of existence from its own side, which destroys the seed of the afflictions

The commentary implies the lack of inherent existence, which is the main point of the Prasangika presentation, and this refutes the earlier Buddhist schools.

1.2.1.3. THE NEED FOR REVERSING ANGER

The verse reads:

32. *If it is said: What is supposed to oppose what? Also, opposing is unsuitable. There is nothing unsuitable about asserting That in dependence on that the continuity of suffering is severed.*

Argument: If there is not even the slightest particle of inherent existence, then what antidote is supposed to oppose what object of abandonment? Since action and activity are invalid, even the action of opposing is unsuitable.

The argument is presented in the first two lines of the verse: *If it is said: What is supposed to oppose what? Also, opposing is unsuitable.* Then the counter argument, or answer, is presented in the next two lines *There is nothing unsuitable*

about asserting that in dependence on that the continuity of suffering is severed.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary expands upon the meaning:

There is nothing unsuitable about the lack of inherent existence of the conception that grasps at the two truths as mutually exclusive, and due to which one cannot posit action and activity of something that lacks inherent existence; i.e., there is nothing unsuitable about the lack of inherent existence of the object of abandonment and the antidote.

It follows it is like that—because in dependence on realising the lack of inherent existence of the object of abandonment, and the antidote all afflictions of anger and so forth become extinct and the continuum of suffering is severed.

What is being presented here is the validity of the realisation of the lack of inherent existence. Thus, gaining the understanding that inherent existence is the object of abandonment, and its antidote is the realisation of emptiness, is valid. That is so because by abandoning the grasping at inherent existence, one will overcome all afflictions, as this is the very root of samsara. So when grasping at a truly and inherently existent self is completely abandoned, the consequence of afflictions such as anger and so forth, will also be completely severed. Thus the continuum of one's suffering is completely severed, and samsara will cease.

1.2.2. Summary

33. *Therefore, whether it is friend or enemy, If one sees them acting unsuitably, Say 'it came due to those conditions'. Keeping this in mind be firm in happiness.*

Under the first verse the commentary explains that:

For those reasons, if one sees someone, whether it is friend or enemy, doing something unsuitable that harms, think "this person has only become like this due to their afflictions. They do not have any freedom". Keeping this in mind, stop anger and make your mental happiness firm by not letting it degenerate. Be patient in such a way.

What is being presented here, in relation to one's practice, is that you will reach a point where, whenever you see someone—be it friend or enemy—engaging in an activity which seems inappropriate or harmful, you will immediately recognise they are doing this only due to the afflictions in their own minds. They do not have control over their own mind, and thus do not have control or real freedom over their actions, because they are dominated by the afflictions. When you hold this in your mind at all times, you will naturally not immediately react with anger. It will stop the anger and you will maintain your mental happiness. Because you are not getting angry, your mental happiness will not degenerate, and will be maintained. This is the way you tolerate harm and engage in the practice of patience. Within the different categories of patience this relates more to the patience of willingly accepting harm and suffering from others.

The main point here is that in order to protect the happiness in one's mind, the practice of patience is indispensable—one cannot do without it. As we all wish to have a happy state of mind—no-one voluntarily wants to have a sad or despondent state of mind—protecting it, by engaging in the practice of patience, becomes essential.

You need to take these points on board, and practise them regularly in your everyday life, particularly with close relations, associates or companions. As you have daily contact with them, you are prone to becoming upset or angry with them. Rather than immediately reacting, you can recognise that they don't have control over what they are doing and saying, because they are under the control of the afflictions, and that they are not in a happy state of mind themselves.

Use your own experience as a basis to understand how others act. When you are affected by the afflictions, and when you get upset and angry, you are not in a happy state of mind. In that sense, rather than taking it personally and retaliating, this approach gives you the distance to not react immediately, and allows your anger to subside.

An analogy I have given previously, demonstrating how those afflicted by afflictions do not have control over their own mind and actions, is when a car bumps your car from behind. When you look back, your immediate reaction might be to become upset with the car behind you. But when you see that the car behind you had no control, because it was pushed by the car behind it, then you realise there is no point getting upset with the car behind you, because they had no control at all about running into you. The afflictions are the one behind you, and they, themselves are also dependent on causes and conditions. If we understand that there is no independent entity that is voluntarily causing us harm, then our reasons for becoming angry will definitely subside.

These illustrations are effective in relation to our mind. Using the car example, we are in the first car, the one in the car behind is the individual that we perceive to be harming us. Whether it is our friend or companion or enemy, the only reason they would harm us is because they themselves are affected by delusions such as anger. Therefore the afflictions are like the third car. Just as we don't blame the person who crashes into us, we cannot blame the person who harms us, because they are affected by their afflictions. Therefore it is the afflictions which we need to overcome. This is how we protect our mind.

These ways of reasoning are supreme methods to protect our own mind so that our happiness does not degenerate. If we react with our normal perceptions and reasoning we will find every reason to become upset and angry in response to those who perpetrate harm. Blaming them only causes our own mind to become agitated and disturbed. When we become angry, the happiness in our mind completely degenerates, and we actually allow the conditions for our own happiness to degenerate, and our mind to become despondent and agitated etc. So the optimum protection is using these methods and reasoning as the way to actually protect oneself from harm.

Some make comments like, 'I could not give up the Buddhist principles or path because it is based on reasoning that gives me the freedom to use my own intelligence and reasoning. Why would I want to give up that? It gives me the freedom to rule my own life with reasoning and logic, rather than being completely dominated by others. Why would I want to give that up? I could never give it up.' These are actually very good points.

As you are aware, the next session is the discussion night. I have confidence that you will do the discussions well. Keep in mind that what is being discussed is a form of revision to make the topics we have covered a little clearer. Doing the exam fulfils the same purpose. Studying serves the purpose

of revision, and discussion needs to be done with the same approach.

If one sees someone, be it friend or enemy, acting in an unsuitable way, think along the lines of the points of the teaching tonight. Who could disagree with them? No-one in a rational state of mind would disagree that practising in this way is beneficial.

One needs to understand from these presentations that the very reason that one is applying these protective measures is because not doing so is uncomfortable. We do not like to experience harm and we find ways to prevent ourselves from being affected by it. If it is our experience that the harms, inappropriate gestures etc. inflicted by others are uncomfortable, then we need to find the ways and means to protect ourselves. Applying these principles will do that. As much as they protect oneself from the harms of others, they are also a means of protecting oneself from harming others. That is how we need to understand it. These are really profound ways to understand the main points being presented here.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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