

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

༄༅། །བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་རྒྱུད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

26 July 2016

Based on the motivation we generated during the refuge and bodhicitta prayers, we can engage in our regular meditation practice. [meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: "For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I will listen to the Mahayana teachings and put them into practice well." Generating such a motivation, even for a few moments, will definitely establish very strong positive imprints in our mind.

2.1. The presentation of the two truths

2.1.1. Actual

2.1.1.3. IDENTIFYING A PERSON THAT HAS UNDERSTOOD BOTH (CONT.)

2.1.1.3.2. Explaining the difference of high and low awareness

This is quite straightforward, and should be quite easy to understand. The verse under this heading is the second line from the earlier verse and the next two lines:

- 3cd. *The ordinary transitory being
Is outdone by the yogic transitory being,*
4ab. *And yogis are outdone as well through
distinctions
Of awareness by the one above.*

The commentary explains:

Ordinary transitory beings who assert partless particles, partless moments of consciousness and functionalities as existing truly are transitory beings, as well as yogis. The yogic person who realises the transient world as lacking inherent existence outshines the lower tenets that propound realism, and among the yogis who have attained a union of calm abiding and special insight, the higher ones outdo the lower ones. With reasoning the Madhyamikas refute the Cittamatras' assertion of truly existing mind, which is in turn refuted with reasoning the assertion of partless particles by the Sautrantikas.

Here, *ordinary transitory beings* refers to the Realists, such as the Sautrantika. They assert *partless particles* i.e. particles which cannot be divided, *partless moments of consciousness* (i.e. consciousness that cannot be divided into earlier and later moments), and *functionalities, as existing truly*.

The verse and commentary further state that the ordinary transitory being is outdone by the yogi or *yogic transitory being*. And *yogic transitory beings* such as the Madhyamikas, who realise the transient world lacking inherent existence, outshine the lower tenets that propound realism. This is quite straightforward.

Where the commentary next says that *among the yogis who have attained a union of calm abiding and special insight, the higher ones outdo the lower ones*, the literal translation of the

Tibetan word is to 'harm' the lower ones. The context of 'harm' here should not be misinterpreted: it does not refer to any malicious intent. Rather, the intended meaning here is that the assertions of the lower schools are harmed i.e. outshined by the higher schools through logic and reasoning.

The commentary thus explains that the higher ones harm, i.e. outdo, the lower ones through logic and reasoning: *with reasoning the Madhyamikas refute the Cittamatras' assertion of truly existing mind, which [referring to the Cittamatras] in turn refutes with reasoning the assertion of partless particles by the Sautrantikas*. Thus, through reasoning and logic, the assertions of proponents of the higher schools, that is the Madhyamikas, outshine those of the Cittamatras, and the Cittamatras' proponents, in turn, outshine those of the Sautrantika and Vaibhashika schools.

Next, a hypothetical doubt is raised and resolved:

If one wonders whether the yogis who realise emptiness outdo each other or not: Also among the yogis who have realised emptiness, those on the higher grounds such as on the second ground and so forth, harm, i.e., outshine, those on the lower grounds, such as on the first ground and so forth, due to a distinction of their awareness.

Thus, what is being explained is that because of their qualities, *those on the higher grounds naturally outshine those on the lower grounds*. For example, bodhisattvas on the first ground are said to have twelve hundred qualities, and bodhisattvas on the second ground have twelve thousand qualities. The qualities of each of the grounds above are multiplied by a thousand times. This was covered in detail when we were doing the Madhyamaka teachings. Thus, bodhisattvas on higher grounds, because of their significant extra qualities, naturally outshine the bodhisattvas on the lower grounds.

Those who recall the explanations in the Madhyamaka will be able to immediately understand the presentation here. With that earlier understanding what is presented will not be new and complicated, but for those who have not done that study it will be something completely new. So it is important to refresh what you had learned by reading your notes from the Madhyamaka teachings. For example, as I presented in detail during the Madhyamaka teachings, those on the first ground have hundred-fold qualities such as being able to see a hundred fields of the buddhas, being able to ripen the minds of one hundred disciples, taking a hundred births and so forth.

The second ground is multiplied by a thousand, so being able to see a thousand fields of the buddhas, being able to ripen the minds of one thousand disciples, and so forth. These qualities are progressively multiplied on each of the higher grounds. This is how, with the extra qualities obtained on the higher grounds, these bodhisattvas naturally outshine the beings on the lower grounds.

If we were to think about it in terms of the paths, then bodhisattvas on the **path of accumulation** are outshined by bodhisattvas who have reached the **path of preparation**. Then bodhisattvas on the path of preparation would be outshone by those who have obtained the **path of seeing**, and are outshined by the bodhisattvas on the **path of meditation**, and they in turn

are outshined by bodhisattvas on the **path of no-more-learning**. For each ground and path, the later bodhisattvas outshine the ones on the lower grounds and paths. This is how we need to understand how the higher ones outshine the lower ones.

What follows next in the commentary are the actual words of Lama Tsong Khapa, which would have been taken down as notes by Gyaltzab Rinpoche. So these are very profound points being presented here:

In addition, one should understand the implicit meaning, that also from the point of view of one continuum, an increased awareness through meditation of the higher grounds can harm the seeds that are to be abandoned, whereas the lower grounds cannot harm them.

So, while the earlier context of 'outshining' referred to beings of different continuums, or higher beings outshining lower beings, here the text clarifies that this principle applies even within the mental continuum of one individual being. We can understand that, as the qualities gained as one's realisations of *meditation* increase, and as one gains *higher grounds*, one is able to *harm the seeds that are to be abandoned* on that particular ground, which cannot be abandoned whilst on the *lower grounds*.

For example, the uninterrupted path of seeing can harm the seeds that are to be abandoned on the path of seeing, but cannot harm the seeds that are to be abandoned on the path of meditation, which has not been obtained yet. Thus, within the mental continuum of one individual being, the seeds that are to be abandoned on that particular path cannot be abandoned whilst abiding on a lower path.

The significant point of the statement, *whereas the lower grounds cannot harm them*, is that while the qualities obtained on the higher grounds would outshine the qualities obtained on the lower grounds, the qualities obtained on the lower grounds cannot possibly outshine those obtained on the higher grounds. In other words, by explicitly presenting here that the qualities of the higher ground outshine those of the lower, the implicit meaning is that the qualities of the beings on the lower ground cannot possibly outshine the qualities of the beings on higher grounds.

The commentary further explains:

The purpose of stating these scriptures is to gain the certainty that awareness is divided into awareness that realises the illusory and awareness that realises the ultimate. If an awareness realising the ultimate is not harmed by a prime cognition realising the illusory, then what need is there to mention it being harmed by the grasping at partless particles?

As explained clearly, what is to be realised by awareness falls into the category of either illusory truth or ultimate truth. So what is being explained here is that if it is an awareness that is a prime cognition realising a truth, then it has to be either an awareness realising illusory (or conventional) truth or an awareness realising ultimate truth. But of course awarenesses do not necessarily have to realise either of the two truths. For example the mind grasping at true existence is an awareness, but it doesn't realise either of the truths.

Then it further mentions *if an awareness realising the ultimate is not harmed by a prime cognition realising the illusory, then what need is there to mention it being harmed by the grasping at partless particles?*

A concluding statement is then presented:

The purpose [of presenting all this] is to understand that the awareness realising the ultimate harms all extreme views.

This is the main point: the awareness realising the ultimate completely extinguishes all extreme views.

The commentary then explains:

Further, it is to understand that a mistaken assertion by the lower is refuted with logic by the higher.

This has been presented previously.

Through the distinction of their awareness, yogis of the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika harm with logic the assertion of permanent functionalities accepted by the non-Buddhist schools, the acceptance of partless particles by the two Asserting Meaning¹ is harmed with logic by the Mind Only, and the acceptance of truly existent mind by the Mind Only is harmed with reasoning by the Madhyamaka.

Here, we are succinctly reminded of the incredibly skilful means by which the Buddha taught his disciples, leading them from views of the lower tenets up to the highest tenets. The main point here *is to understand that a mistaken assertion by the lower is refuted with logic by the higher*.

To give an example of overcoming wrong views and assertions with reasoning and logic, some proponents of non-Buddhist schools would accept sound as being permanent. Thus a logical syllogism to prove that this is incorrect would be: The subject 'sound' is impermanent – because it is produced". For someone who initially had the wrong view of sound being permanent, when the reasoning of that syllogism becomes apparent to their mind, they would be able to replace that mistaken view with the understanding that sound is impermanent, because of the reason that it is produced.

In this way, each misconception, such as grasping at permanence in general and grasping at true existence, can be overcome with correct reasoning to prove that it is a mistaken conception. When logical syllogisms are presented in the teachings, we need to study them and get an understanding of them. Then we must utilise this understanding to overcome the wrong conceptions that we personally hold, rather than just using them for theoretical debate. It is much more meaningful for one to apply this understanding to one's own misconceptions; we all grasp at permanence, holding things as being permanent, and likewise we all grasp at true existence.

When these reasons are applied to one's own mental continuum as a way to overcome misconceptions, they act as antidotes. For example, we can all relate to the shortcomings of anger. That which serves as an opponent or antidote to anger is patience. The more we practise patience, the weaker our anger becomes.

So if, when we engage in study, we relate it to our own mental continuum, we will really begin to taste the true

¹ Euphemism for the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika i.e. those who assert external meaning.

essence of the teachings. This will not be apparent to one right away; when we read the text, the understanding will not dawn upon us immediately. However gradually, time after time, if we are persistent, things will become clearer and clearer. Then we can apply our understanding to our practice. That would be the proper way.

The explanation ends here with:

The earlier explanation is the view of the *Great Commentary*.

2.1.2. Refuting objections of no-need and no ability regarding emptiness

That is subdivided into two:

2.1.2.1. Actual

2.1.2.2. Defending one's position

2.1.2.1. ACTUAL

The verse under this heading is preceded by the argument:

Argument: If you say, it is not valid that the yogi who realises that all phenomena lack inherent existence harms ordinary tenets, because there is no evidence for the lack of inherent existence. If there is no inherent existence, then there would be no point in training in generosity and so forth to attain the result of enlightenment.

Then the first two lines of the verse are presented as the answer:

*4cd. Through examples asserted by both,
There is no investigation towards a result.*

Answer: It follows that it is not the case that there is no evidence for the lack of inherent existence, because for both Madhyamaka and Realists, the lack of inherent existence is established in dependence on examples that were well known and accepted as being false, such as dreams and illusions.

Further:

If there is no inherent existence, it does not follow that training in generosity and the other perfections is pointless. Although generosity and so forth, which are practised in order to attain the result of enlightenment, are not truly established, one engages in them without investigation or analysis while holding them with the wisdom realising them to be false, like an illusion. If the remaining perfections are not held by the wisdom realising the lack or absence of inherent existence, then they do not gain the name 'having gone beyond' [which is another term for perfection] and they, as well as their objects, need to be guided up to the city of enlightenment.

What is being presented here in the commentary, which serves as the answer to the earlier argument, is that basically it is not true that there is no evidence for the lack of inherent existence. What the Madhyamikas are saying is that for both we the *Madhyamikas* and you the *Realists*, it follows that it is not the case that there is no evidence for the lack of inherent existence because for both *Madhyamika* and *Realists* the lack of inherent existence can be established in dependence on examples which we both accept as being false, such as dreams and illusions.

So the lack of inherent existence can be established by examples, such as dreams and illusions. Since we both [i.e. the Realists and Madhyamikas] agree that these are

examples of falsity, these examples can be used as reasons to prove the lack of inherent existence.

The second part of the earlier argument said: If there is no inherent existence, then there would be no point in training in generosity and so forth to attain the result of enlightenment.

However this is not the case. As explained here, *although generosity and so forth, which are practised in order to attain the results of enlightenment, are not truly established, one engages in them without investigation or analysis while holding them with the wisdom realising them to be false, like an illusion*. Using the example of an illusion, one can establish the lack of inherent existence of the training in generosity and so forth.

If, without going into specific investigation or analysis, *the remaining perfections are not held by the wisdom realising the lack or absence of inherent existence, then they do not gain the name 'having gone beyond' [or do not bear the name 'perfection'] and they, as well as their objects, need to be guided up to the city of enlightenment*.

The point here, as I've explained previously many times, is that not only the perfection of wisdom, but all the earlier perfections need to also be combined with wisdom – otherwise it would be as if they were blind. The earlier practices such as generosity, morality and so forth cannot, in themselves, become a means to achieve full enlightenment without the wisdom realising emptiness. Without the wisdom realising emptiness they are like a blind person who cannot go to a faraway destination by themselves. Thus, the earlier practices of generosity and so forth, need to be complemented with the wisdom realising emptiness, whereby they become the perfection of generosity and so forth.

For example, when generosity is complemented with the wisdom realising emptiness, it is practised with the understanding that all three – the individual who is being generous, the substance that is being given, and the recipient of the generosity – are empty of inherent existence. With that realisation, generosity becomes a perfection of generosity. These particular characteristics are similarly applied to the rest of the perfections. The reason the perfections practised in this way are referred to as practices that are 'gone beyond' is that they lead to the state of enlightenment which is to go beyond samsara. *They, as well as their objects, need to be guided up to the city of enlightenment*.

The point here is that when we really pay close attention to what is being explained and really contemplate it, the meaning will become clearer and clearer as we read through the text.

As part of an argument, the commentary further says:

Argument: If also you accept that fire, that which can perform the function of cooking and burning, and other functionalities and their functions, are established by direct perception, then our debate is pointless, because we both call that truly existent. If you do not accept this, then you receive the harms of being contradicted by direct perception and the like.

This argument is from a lower school, the Realists, who are proponents of true existence. They argue, *if you – meaning the Madhyamikas – accept that functionalities like*

fire, which can perform the function of cooking and burning, and other functionalities and their functions, are established by direct perception then our debate is pointless. Here, the Realists are saying that the true existence of a fire is demonstrated by the fact that it can cook, burn and so forth, which is established by direct perception. The Realists argue *we both call that truly existent. If you do not accept this, then you receive the harms of being contradicted by direct perception and the like.*

However, that which serves as part of the answer here is:

Answer: This argument is based on the view that the two truths contradict each other, i.e., if functionalities do not exist inherently, they become completely non-existent, and if they do exist, then they have to exist inherently.

In other words, it is because you fail to know this subtle distinction, that you raise your argument.

The next verse under the earlier heading is:

5. *Transitory beings see objects
And think they exist perfectly,
Not like an illusion; therefore here
The yogi and the transitory being disagree.*

The commentary explains the meaning:

Both Madhyamika and Realist worldly beings² see fire and the like with prime cognition and accept them, but the Realists think of and accept them as being wholly perfectly established objects, and do not comprehend them as being illusory-like and lacking true existence. The Madhyamikas do comprehend them as such, and therefore also in this regard do the Madhyamika yogis and the Realist worldly beings have a dispute.

While the commentary says that *both Madhyamika and Realist worldly beings see fire and the like with prime cognition* i.e. the eye consciousness *and accept them*, it points out that the difference is that the Realists don't comprehend them as being like an illusion and as lacking true existence. On the other hand, *the Madhyamikas do comprehend them as such*, meaning that the Madhyamikas comprehend fire and the functions of fire and so forth as being like an illusion, and lacking true existence.

And therefore also in this regard do the Madhyamika yogis and the Realist worldly beings have a dispute, meaning that this is where the actual debate or disagreement in perceiving the fire lies.

2.1.2.2. DEFENDING ONE'S POSITION

This is subdivided into three:

2.1.2.2.1. Refuting realists such as the Sautrantika in general

2.1.2.2.2. Refuting the Mind Only in particular

2.1.2.2.3. Refuting the argument that the path realising emptiness has no use or purpose for a Madhyamika

2.1.2.2.1. Refuting realists such as the Sautrantika in general

This is further subdivided into two:

2.1.2.2.1.1. Refuting harm through direct perception

2.1.2.2.1.2. Refuting harm through quotations

2.1.2.2.1.1. Refuting harm through direct perception

The argument presented here under the heading first is:

Argument: If you say, if the five sense objects are not established inherently, then it would contradict them being seen with direct perception.

The argument is that if the five sense objects are not established inherently, this would contradict them being seen with direct perception.

The first two lines of the next verse are:

*6ab. The mere direct perception of forms and so forth
Exists through renown and not by prime
cognition.*

The commentary then provides the answer to this argument:

Answer: This is not valid. The prime direct perception of form and the other objects is merely a prime cognition of the renowned illusory aspect. It does not establish their suchness, and does not become a prime cognition in relation to their suchness. In that case, as even ordinary individuals would see suchness, there would be no need to generate a superior path. Also, the quote from the *King of Concentration Sutra*, "the eye, ear and nose are also not prime cognition" is to be understood as refuting them being prime cognitions of suchness.

As clearly explained here, the earlier argument is *not valid* because *the prime perception of form and the other objects is merely a prime cognition of the renowned illusory aspect*, meaning that they're accepted as prime cognition of conventional appearance, but this *does not establish their suchness*.

Further, *and does not become a prime cognition in relation to their suchness* means that, if it were the case that prime cognition of form and other objects related to the object's suchness, then *as even ordinary individuals would see suchness*, or emptiness, *there would be no need to generate a superior path*. If, through their prime cognition, ordinary beings could realise the ultimate nature of things — suchness or emptiness — there would be no need for the superior path. That is what is being presented quite clearly.

The commentary then shows how one should understand the quote from the *King of Concentration Sutra* in its proper context. The quote itself reads: *the eye, ear and nose are also not a prime cognition*. If one were to take that literally, it would sound as if the sutra is saying that the eye, ear, nose and remaining five sense faculties are not prime cognitions. But, as the commentary explains, this *is to be understood as refuting them to being prime cognitions of suchness or emptiness*.

A further explanation of the next verse is presented again with the argument from the Realists:

Argument: If forms and the other objects do not exist inherently [as the Madhyamikas assert] then how can they be renowned, and although being renowned, how are they false?

This argument is presented to contradict the Madhyamikas. It posits that if objects *do not exist inherently* (as the Madhyamikas assert) but are renowned conventionally, then how can they be false? If they're

² Gyaltsab Je: Or one relates the earlier worldly beings only to the Realists.

renowned as conventionally existent, how can they be false at the same time? That's what the Madhyamikas assert: while objects are true conventionally, they're called illusory truths, because ultimately they do not exist in the manner in which they appear.

The next two lines are presented:

*6ab. They are false, just as impurity and so forth
Are renowned as purity and so forth.*

These two lines of verse serve as an answer to the argument that if an object is renowned, how can it be false?

The meaning of these two lines is presented in the commentary:

Answer: Functionalities are false in the same way as the impure body of a woman, among other things, is renowned to be pure and so forth.

What is renowned in the world, or known conventionally, is that the body is pure and thus desirable. But in reality the body is not pure; there are many impure substances within the body. So, although the body is perceived as pure by worldly people, this perception is false, because the body is not pure. Other functionalities are false in the same way. This is the point emphasised here.

2.1.2.2.1.2. Refuting harm through quotations

This is subdivided into three:

2.1.2.2.1.2.1. Showing the sutras which state that compounded phenomena are impermanent and so forth to be interpretative

2.1.2.2.1.2.2. Refuting them to be definitive

2.1.2.2.1.2.3. Refuting that one is in contradiction

2.1.2.2.1.2.1. Showing the sutras which state that compounded phenomena are impermanent and so forth to be interpretative

The argument presented here is:

Argument: If you say if forms and other objects are not established inherently, then it is contrary to the sutras stating that they are impermanent.

The next two lines that serve as an answer to this:

*7ab. For the purpose of introducing transitory beings
The protector showed functionalities.*

The commentary explains the meaning of these two lines that serve as an answer to the argument:

Answer: There is no contradiction as the Protector showed forms and the other functionalities to be impermanent in order to lead the transitory beings gradually to emptiness.

2.1.2.2.1.2.2. Refuting them to be definitive

The line from the verse:

7c. They are not momentary in suchness.

From the commentary:

These functionalities are not momentary in suchness because in suchness they are not established as one or many.

Here, the older students will recall the presentation in the *Madhyamakavatara*, which I've covered numerous times, of the reasons that prove the lack of inherent existence. It is said that inherent existence has to be either established as being inherently one or inherently separate. The

reasoning that I've presented previously is presented here.

This reasoning is presented in the *Madhyamaka* text, as well as in *The Four Hundred Verses*, and *Precious Garland*, which we have also studied. These texts have presented this reasoning, so you can refer to them.

2.1.2.2.1.2.3. Refuting that one is in contradiction

This has five divisions:

2.1.2.2.1.2.3.1. Refuting that they are not even established as illusory

2.1.2.2.1.2.3.2. Refuting that the build up of the accumulations would be invalid

2.1.2.2.1.2.3.3. Refuting that taking rebirth would be invalid

2.1.2.2.1.2.3.4. Refuting that the division into virtue and negativity would be invalid

2.1.2.2.1.2.3.5. Refuting that the distinctive individual realisation of samsara and nirvana would be invalid

We will conclude here. You'll be aware that the next session will be a discussion?

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

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute