
Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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

[Meditation]

Now, based on a bodhicitta motivation and attitude, we generate the motivation for receiving the teachings as usual.

2.3.1.2. REFUTING THE INTELLECTUALLY ACQUIRED SELF

This is subdivided into two:

2.3.1.2.1. Refuting the self asserted to be consciousness by the Enumerators

2.3.1.2.2. Refuting the self asserted to be matter by the Particularists

2.3.1.2.1. Refuting the self asserted to be consciousness by the Enumerators

The self that is being refuted here is the self that is asserted by the non-Buddhist Samkhyas or Enumerators¹, which is a mere consciousness.

The commentary begins with:

Although there are infinite kinds of substantially established types of self asserted by non-Buddhists, as they are all either asserted to be matter or consciousness, they can be subsumed into either matter or consciousness by refuting these two, one is able to refute all others, two are refuted here.

It is quite clear that all *types of self* that are posited by *non-Buddhists can be subsumed into either matter or consciousness*. So by refuting these two views i.e. the self as either being matter or consciousness, one is effectively refuting all other non-Buddhist views of the self.

This section of the text is sub-divided into two:

2.3.1.2.1.1. The actual refutation

2.3.1.2.1.2. Refuting the reply

2.3.1.2.1.1. The actual refutation

First there is a presentation of how the Enumerators posit the self:

The Enumerators posit exactly twenty-five types of objects of knowledge, out of which twenty-four, including the great principle are matter, and the twenty-fifth is a consciousness, a knower, experience, or the self endowed with mind.

We don't need to go into all the categories now.² What one needs to understand is that the *twenty-fifth is consciousness*, and that this is what is being asserted here as the self. For the Enumerators there are no other aspects to a person besides the consciousness; basically the self is a mere consciousness.

The commentary further explains:

The great principle knows how to produce expressions but does not know how to use them, ...

The Enumerators assert that *the great principle* is the cause while the expressions are the effects. Furthermore, the great principle *knows how to produce expressions but does not know how to use them*,

... and the person, which is referred to as the knowing consciousness, knows how to use objects but does not know how to produce them.

The Enumerators assert that the person or self has five qualities, which are that it engages – in happiness, suffering and so forth; it is a permanent functionality; it is not the creator; it lacks qualities; and it lacks action. So, they assert these five qualities to be the attributes of the self or person.

As further explained in the commentary:

... This person is asserted to be a permanent functionality.

The specific assertion here is that *the person is a permanent functionality*, which is contrary to the Buddhist assertion of permanence as non-functional and non-produced phenomena.

At the time of using the object, to that called 'awareness' and 'the great' appear outwardly the five mere objects of sound and so forth, and inwardly appears the person, ...

As explained here, the mere person *appears inwardly*, while *outwardly* the person engages in the *five sense objects* such as *sound and so forth*.

As explained further:

Cyclic existence is asserted to come about through the awareness grasping at that used and the user as one.

The Enumerators assert that the user (i.e. the self) and what is being used (i.e. the five sense objects) are actually separate. So, sentient beings circle in cyclic existence because of the misconception that sees objects and object possessor as one.

There are more detailed explanations of the assertion of the Samkhyas in *Precious Garland of Tenets*. Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland of Advice*³ also has a summary of these explanations, and I also taught it when we did the *Madhyamakavatara* or Middle Way teaching⁴. So I do not need to explain it in detail here.

The commentary also states:

I will not explain it here in detail, but you should understand their presentation from other sources, because it appears that through misinterpretation there are many assertions that the school of the Enumerators are the view of Highest Yoga Tantra.

As an introduction to the verse, the commentary then states:

Although there are four possibilities with regard to sound and consciousness being permanent or not, the Enumerators posit both as permanent.

The *four possibilities with regard to sound and consciousness being permanent* means that there are some - such as the Enumerators - who posit that both sound and

¹ These two terms are used interchangeably in this transcript.

² These can be found in the teachings of 31 May 2005.

³ See teaching of 6 July 2010.

⁴ See teachings of 22 April 2003, and 29 April 2003.

consciousness are permanent, and others who posit them as being impermanent.

For the **Enumerators**, consciousness is a mere awareness, whereas in our own system, consciousness includes mind and mental factors, as well as many other aspects of the mind. The Enumerators assert that this consciousness, or this mere awareness, is the person, which doesn't have any other aspects. They also assert that both consciousness and sound are permanent.

Madhyamika: If sound and consciousness were permanent then it would have to be the case that the consciousness constantly perceives sound; there would be no occasions when there's no perception of sound. If there are any instances where there is sometimes an awareness of sound and sometimes not, then it would be impossible to say that sound is permanent. If the consciousness were permanent, then whatever is perceived or apprehended would have to be constantly apprehended. This is the main point.

As adherents to a system of tenets, we assert that the person is impermanent. However as ordinary beings we instinctively grasp at the person as being permanent, don't we? We actually hold the notion that the self is permanent. So when the person is refuted as being permanent, we need to try to apply that understanding at a personal level, as a way to gain a real sense of what is being refuted. For this, we need to first acknowledge our own instinctive grasping at the permanence of the person.

It is not sufficient to just dismiss the view of the Enumerators by saying "oh, it's quite absurd that they assert that the person is permanent!" In fact, the core of their position in asserting that a person is permanent is because they cannot possibly see how it would otherwise be possible for a person to migrate from one life to the next. From a conventional point of view then, they seem to have a valid reason for asserting the self as being permanent, which we can relate to from our own false perceptions. In fact that is exactly how we perceive a person. We consider that the person we see today is the same person we saw yesterday. We may reason, if the person we saw yesterday doesn't exist today, then how could they be here now? And how could the person we see today actually continue to exist tomorrow? With that way of thinking it is easy to assume that the person or self is permanent.

The Prasangika system asserts that while a person is impermanent, its continuum migrates from past lives to this life and from this life to future lives. In Christianity there is no belief in reincarnation, is there? They don't believe in future lives, yet they believe in a soul which is permanent. So, if the soul is permanent but it doesn't reincarnate, then at the time of death where does it go? As Buddhists we believe that the self is impermanent, yet it reincarnates and continues to migrate to a future existence.

Some non-Buddhist schools of thought do not believe that there's a continuity of the self. They hold the view that at the time of death, the self simply ceases to exist. These non-Buddhist schools adhere to the notion that the self and the aggregates are actually of the same substance. Therefore when the aggregates disintegrate, the self

(which is dependent on the aggregates) also disintegrates. The example they give is of drawings on a wall. When the wall collapses the drawings naturally collapse as well, and so therefore the drawings cease to exist. Likewise, according to these schools, when the body disintegrates, the self or the soul also disintegrates and ceases to exist.

Does the person of yesterday exist today or not? Conventionally we would have to say that they do exist. What we have to understand here is that although we might easily say, "the correct view is to assert the person as being impermanent", we need to also understand how the continuum of the person continues to exist. So, while the person or the self is impermanent, it doesn't contradict the continuum of the person as existing continuously. What comes from yesterday exists today and goes on to tomorrow all the way into many future lives, and that is the continuum of the person. So when we hear comments that someone hasn't changed much over the years, we are actually referring to the continuum of that person, which is a similitude of the person that existed in the past.

Next comes the verse from the root text:

60. *If the consciousness of sound were permanent
One would apprehend sound all the time.
If there is no object of knowledge, then what is known
To say it is such a consciousness?*

Here the commentary explains:

If the knowledge consciousness person who engages the five mere objects of sound and so forth is a permanent functionality, then it follows that the knowledge consciousness person has sound as its apprehended object at all times, when sound exists and when sound does not exist – because it is a permanent entity that has made sound its object and apprehends it.

This thesis is unsuitable to be accepted – because if there is no object of knowledge, then what would be the known object in order for the consciousness to be the object-possessor of such and such an object? It would be unsuitable to say such a thing.

As explained here, the **Enumerators** or Samkhya assert that *the knowledge consciousness person engages the five mere sense objects of sound and so forth, which are permanent functionalities.*

Madhyamika: If they were a permanent functionality then it follows that *the knowledge consciousness person has sound as its apprehended object at all times.* As mentioned earlier, they would have to be apprehending sound at all times. What kind of object possessor would it be if there was no object to be apprehended, or perceived? If it is an object possessor then because you Enumerators assert it as being permanent, it will perceive that object at all times.

Can there be a consciousness that does not perceive an object? The point is that if it is a consciousness, it has to be an object possessor. The very function of a consciousness is to perceive objects. Without an object, how can it be an object possessor? The very term 'object possessor' means that if it is a consciousness it has to perceive objects, whatever the object may be.

In the teachings three types of object possessors are presented: person, consciousness and sound. The very term object possessor means that it has to engage with an object. So from the Buddhist point of view we need to understand that if it is consciousness, it necessarily has to perceive an object.

The next verse reads:

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

The argument of the Enumerators is:

Argument: The reason is not established because even if there is no sound, there is the permanent consciousness that apprehends it.

To this the Madhyamikas say:

Answer: It follows that even wood becomes consciousness because it is permitted to accept consciousness without object of knowledge.

Hence, it is confirmed that without the proximity of the object of knowledge of sound or the like, one has to say there is no consciousness. As there is no way to posit consciousness if there is no object of knowledge, you would have to accept there is no time when the person does not apprehend sound.

The Samkhya assert that *the reason is not established because even if there is no sound, there is the permanent consciousness that apprehends it.*

The Madhyamika answer, as explained in the verse, is that *it follows that even wood becomes consciousness.* If one can posit a consciousness that does not apprehend sound, or indeed apprehend any particular object, then even a piece of wood could be considered as consciousness. That is because you Samkhya are saying that *it is permitted to accept consciousness without object of knowledge.* Hence, *it is confirmed that without the proximity of the object of knowledge of sound or the like, one has to say there is no consciousness.* There is no way to posit consciousness if there is no object of knowledge.

The conclusion reached by the Madhyamikas is that according to your assertions *you would have to accept that there is no time when the person does not apprehend sound.* The absurdity of the Enumerator's view is that the person constantly apprehends sound.

2.3.1.2.1.2. Refuting the reply

The Enumerators present this reply:

Enumerator: The consequence that there would be a consciousness without objects of knowledge is not tenable.

The consequence that there would be a consciousness without objects of knowledge is not tenable. Next the following verse is presented:

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

The Enumerators reason that:

Because at the time when sound does not exist, this permanent person is conscious of form by taking it as the object of apprehension.

Then the Madhyamika refute that by saying:

Madhyamika: Take the subject 'the being' – at the time of apprehending form by taking it as the object, why does it also not hear sound? It follows it should – because it is a permanent entity that engages the mere five objects without discrimination.

The Enumerators reason that *when sound does not exist, the permanent person is conscious of form, and takes it as the object of apprehension.*

The Madhyamika present their refutation in the form of the following syllogism. *Take the subject 'the being': at the time of apprehending form by taking it as the object, does it not also hear sound? – it follows that it does.*

The reason is that according to you Enumerators it *is a permanent entity that engages the mere five objects without discrimination.* So the Prasangika are saying "You're saying that the person is permanent and it also engages with the five objects equally.

The Enumerators then present this argument:

Enumerator: Because it does not abide close to sound at the time of being conscious of form, it is not conscious of sound at that time.

The Madhyamikas reply to that saying:

Madhyamika: When the object of sound does not exist, then the consciousness that is its object-possessor also does not exist. If you accept this, then the thesis of a permanent pervasive person is lost.

This explanation is quite clear.

Then the next verse is presented:

63. *How could that in the nature of the
apprehension of sound
Become the apprehension of form?
Although one is labelled as father and son
This is not absolute.*

The Madhyamika response is:

Further, it follows that which is in the nature of a consciousness apprehending sound does not become a consciousness apprehending form – because their aspects are mutually exclusive.

Then the Enumerators say:

Enumerator: One person can be presented as father and son from two different points of view. Similarly, from the points of view of expression and nature the expression of sound does not exist at the time of the apprehension of form, but the nature of sound exists because form and sound are of one nature. Therefore one can also posit the object-possessor of sound at that time.

In the verse the Madhyamikas have explained that the aspect of *apprehending sound* and the aspect of *apprehending form* are mutually exclusive.

To that the Enumerators reply that *one person can be presented as father and son from two different points of view. Similarly, from the points of view of expression and nature, the expression of sound does not exist at the time of the apprehension of form.* So they say that the expression of sound does not exist at the time of the apprehension of

form, but the nature of sound exists because form and sound are of one nature. *Therefore one can also posit the object-possessor of sound at the same time.*

The **Madhyamika's** response is:

Madhyamaka: It follows the example does not fit the meaning [of the example of the father and son] – because although one person is labelled father and son from two different points of view, that person does not exist ultimately in either. Yet you accept these natures to be ultimately established.

Then the next two lines of verse are presented:

*64ab. Thus, courage and particles
As well as darkness are neither father nor son.*

The commentary explains:

You accept that the equilibrium of courage, particles and darkness is the great principle, nature and ultimate truth. Regarding this, the very nature at the occasion of the son is not the nature at the occasion of not being the son, i.e., the father, because the Enumerators state,

The supreme nature of qualities
Does not become something visible.
That which becomes visible
Is without any essence like an illusion.

The nature is accepted as something that does not become visible, and the directly visible father and son and the like are accepted as illusory. From this point of view, the very father becomes the son, and the very son becomes the father because both their natures are one.

Having quoted from their own source, the **Madhyamikas** are saying *you accept that the equilibrium of courage, particles and darkness is the great principle.*

For the **Enumerators** the 'great principle' is the equilibrium of courage i.e. happiness; *particles* i.e. equanimity; and *darkness* i.e. suffering. When these three are in a state of equilibrium, then that is the *principle* or *nature*, which is an *ultimate truth*. Therefore, for the Enumerators *the very nature of the occasion of the son is not the nature of the occasion of not being the son or the father.* They cannot be the one entity at the same time.

The Enumerators quote from a text, saying that *the supreme nature of qualities does not become something visible; that which becomes visible is without any essence like an illusion.* They are saying that the supreme nature of qualities is not visible, and that what is visible is like an illusion. They say *that nature is accepted as something that does not become visible, and the directly visible father and son and the like are accepted as illusory.*

The **Madhyamika** respond that *from this the point of view, the very father becomes the son, and the very son becomes the father, because both their natures are one.* This is the absurdity of your system. If that is the case:

Then, because the natures of the father and the son are accepted as one, it is also impossible to posit individual occasions in dependence on the basis.

So it is not possible to refer to *individual occasions in dependence on the basis.*

The next lines from the root text are:

*64cd. It is not seen as possessing
The nature of apprehending sound.*

65ab. If it is seen in a different guise

Like an actor, then it is not permanent.

The explanation in the commentary reads:

If the apprehension of sound is seen in the different manifestation of the apprehension of form, just like an actor who puts on a new costume upon having abandoned the earlier costume, then it follows that the consciousness knowledge is not a permanent functionality because it takes on a different mode upon abandoning another one.

According to the **Samkhyas**, *the apprehension of sound is seen in the different manifestations of the apprehension of form, just like an actor who puts on a new costume upon having abandoned the earlier costume.*

The **Samkhyas** assert that there is only one consciousness. When engaging through the eyes the consciousness will see forms; when engaging through the ears the consciousness will hear sounds; when engaging through the nose the consciousness will smell odours; and the same with taste and so forth. So there is only one consciousness but function through the five senses. There are no separate consciousnesses that apprehend the different sense objects. One analogy is that it is like a person in a house who looks out through the different windows of the house.

The **Madhyamika** assert that there are different consciousnesses that perceive the different sense objects. Thus, there are the five sense consciousnesses plus the mental consciousness.

As mentioned earlier, the **Samkhya** assert that there is only one consciousness. They use the analogy of an actor who changes their costume in accordance with whatever role they have to play.

The **Madhyamika** refutation is that *it follows that the consciousness knowledge is not a permanent functionality, because it takes on a different mode upon abandoning another one.* How can you Samkhya assert that the consciousness is a permanent functionality if it changes its mode of apprehension, as you say, just like an actor changes their costume? You say that each time the consciousness perceives a different object it changes to that particular perception. So if there is a change occurring, then it goes against your assertion that it is permanent.

The next two lines of verse read:

*65cd. In case, 'the different guise is one
With it,' that is without precedent.*

Basically this is saying, such a thing has never been known before. Then the **Enumerators** say:

Enumerator: Because the apprehension of form, which is a different mode from the apprehension of sound, is of one nature with the apprehension of sound, there is no mistake.

Basically, according to the Enumerators there's no fault.

To this the **Madhyamika** say:

Madhyamaka: This one nature is without any earlier precedent because it only abides individually.

Further: It follows it is unsuitable to accept the later mode as said earlier mode itself – because the later one is one without any past. As it states in the *Great Commentary*.

If this very one is this very one at the time of later generation, then this one is without a past because they are accepted as mutually exclusive ones.

The *Great Commentary* says that *If this very one is at the time of later generation, then this one is without a past because they are accepted as mutually exclusive.* You are saying what was in the past is the same as now, yet you have also said that they are mutually exclusive. This absurdity is quite easy to understand.

The first two lines of the next verse read:

*66ab. If, 'The different mode is not true,'
It is its own nature I say.*

In reply the **Enumerators** begin by stating:

Enumerator: There is no fault because what appears in another mode is not true in the way it appears.

Then the **Madhyamikas** state:

Madhyamaka: It follows that you should, yet cannot, say that it is the singular true nature of that consciousness – because you accept that whatever mode appears, is not true in the way it appears.

Again this is quite clear. The **Enumerator's** assertion is that *there is no fault, because what appears in another mode is not true in the way it appears.*

The refutation presented by the **Madhyamika** is that *it follows that you should, yet you cannot, say that it is the singular true nature of that consciousness – because you accept that whatever mode appears is not true in the way that it appears.*

*66cd. If you say, 'only consciousness', according
To this it follows that all beings are one.*

*67ab. Also the animate and inanimate
Become one because of their shared existence.*

Thus the **Enumerators** say:

Enumerator: Only the continuum of the knowledge consciousness person exists truly.

Then the **Madhyamikas** response to that is:

Madhyamaka: In this case, it follows that all people of different continua become one – because all people are accepted as partless permanent pervading entities.

It follows that also the animate knowledge consciousness and the inanimate matter and principle become one – because they are the same in existing as partless permanent pervading entities. Or, one relates it to the answer that their mere existing nature is true.

Again, this is a clear presentation. In response the **Madhyamaka** are saying that *in this case, it follows that all people of different continua become one, which is an absurdity, because all people are accepted as partless permanent pervading entities.* Then *it follows that also the animate knowledge consciousness and the inanimate matter and principle become one as well, because they are the same in existing as partless permanent pervading entities* according to you **Samkhyas**. That is the absurdity being presented here.

The next two lines of the verse read:

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

Then the commentary explains:

Consider: When the different particulars of expression are distorted falsities, then it follows that their

concordant basis, the primary principle, which exists truly, also does not exist – because the expressions are false.

According to the **Enumerators** *the primary principle exists truly, yet according to them, their expressions are false.*

Madhyamaka: *The primary principle, which exists truly, also does not exist because the expressions are false.* So the absurdity is how could something that is true produce something that is false?

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

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