

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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

Now we can generate the usual positive motivation for receiving the teachings.

2.3.2.1.2. The close placement of mindfulness on feelings

2.3.2.1.2.2.2. Refuting the inherent meeting with the consciousness

The verse reads:

96. *That primary consciousness without body
Can be met is simply invalid;
There is also no phenomenon on the collection,
Similar to the earlier analysis.*

The commentary explains:

The assertion that primary consciousness, which is without a form or body, can be met inherently is simply invalid because it does not have form.

The refutation of meeting with the coarse: Also the meeting with a coarse object that is a collection of many atoms does not exist inherently because no truly existent object exists on that. It is similar to inherent existence which was refuted earlier through the analysis of the collection of joints.

As quite clearly presented here, *the assertion that primary consciousness can be met inherently is simply invalid because it does not have form.*

The next part of the commentary is *the refutation of meeting with the coarse object that is a collection of many atoms.* This coarse object *does not exist inherently because no truly existent object exists on that collection.* As mentioned, *it is similar to the refutation of inherent existences that was refuted earlier through the analysis of the collection of joints.* So, as explained previously, the body is not the collection of its parts, such as the joints, limbs and so forth.

2.3.2.1.2.2.3. Thus, contact arising from the meeting of these three does not exist inherently

Here 'these three' refers to the object, the sense power, and the consciousness. It is the combination of these three that induces contact, and contact induces feelings. So one needs to understand that a feeling is preceded by its particular cause, which is contact, and that contact is preceded by the combination of the object, sense power, and consciousness. There are other states of mind that can arise simultaneously, but here we need to understand that feeling is preceded by the contact that serves as its particular cause, and that contact is preceded by the meeting of these three; the object, the sense power, and consciousness. The point being explained here is that the meeting of these three does not exist inherently.

We can also take note that this understanding about how contact arises, and how feeling arises is derived from the

study of Mind and Awareness, or *Lo Rig*; earlier studies form the basis of a more enhanced understanding of later subjects. Mind and Awareness was taught in 2001 over eight weeks, and these classes were attended by seventy-five people who made the commitment to come to all of the sessions.¹ At that time we didn't have time to cover the twenty secondary mental factors, but these were presented during the teachings on *Precious Garland*.

The first verse under this heading is:

97. *If thus there is no contact
From what does feeling arise?
What is the purpose of this exertion?
What is giving harm to whom?*

The first part of the commentary is an assertion by **Madhyamikas**.

Madhyamika: As explained earlier, the meeting of object, sense power and primary consciousness do not exist inherently. If, when looking at it from that point of view, contact does not exist inherently, then from what cause does truly existent feeling arise? A false cause does not have the power to generate a truly existent result. If there is no inherently existing feeling, then what good is the exertion and effort for its sake? It is meaningless.

This is again quite clear. Earlier it was explained that *the meeting of object, sense power and primary consciousness does not exist inherently.* The combination of the meeting of these three, which are the causes of contact, does not exist inherently. So the contact that is a result of these three also cannot possibly exist inherently.

As mentioned here *contact does not exist inherently*, because the causes do not exist inherently. So if there is no inherently existing cause *then from what cause does a truly existent feeling arise?* If there is no truly existent contact then how can there be truly existent feelings? *A false cause does not have the power to generate a truly existent result.* If contact itself does not exist inherently, then the feeling that is a result of that contact could not possibly exist inherently either, because a false cause does not have the power to generate a truly existent result. This is quite clear.

The *Madhyamika* then conclude that *if there is no inherently existing feeling, then what good is the exertion and effort for its sake?* So if feeling itself does not exist inherently, then what is the point of exerting oneself to acquire that feeling? In this context 'feeling' relates to a pleasurable feeling. Having presented that absurdity, the *Madhyamika* say that exerting oneself for non-inherently existing feelings *is meaningless.*

Then the **Realists** argue:

Argument: The exertion is for the sake of abandoning inherently existing feeling of suffering.

What the **Realists** are saying is that 'I'm not exerting myself to overcome pleasurable feelings, rather I'm exerting myself to overcome *inherently existent feelings of suffering.*

¹ These can be found on the CD of teachings available in the bookshop or downloaded from <http://www.tarainstitute.org.au/transcripts>.

The **Madhyamikas** refute that objection.²

Madhyamika: This is a fallacy because, as there is no inherently existing feeling, who is the person that receives harm from which cause?

This is a fallacy because, as there is no inherently existing feeling, who is the person that receives harm from which cause? This argues that, since the feeling of suffering does not exist inherently, it could not possibly harm the person who is experiencing it. So what point is there in exerting yourself to overcome a suffering that does not exist inherently?

The commentary continues:

In this world it is merely the happiness that alleviates earlier suffering that exists. While there is true suffering, there is no true happiness. For example, the experience of happiness that one experiences when, on a cold day, one stands in the sun and the suffering of cold recedes a little, is the feeling of happiness. But at that time the suffering of cold still exists. As soon as that suffering of cold ceases, uninterruptedly the suffering of heat begins. Thus, one needs suffering as the basis for imputing happiness, but one does not need happiness as the basis for generating suffering awareness; e.g. like blue and, short and long.

As presented earlier, contaminated or worldly happiness is the mere pleasurable sensation of alleviating an earlier suffering, and because of that it is experienced as happiness. The point here is that *while there is true suffering, there is no true happiness*. This is followed by the example of the *experience of happiness when, on a cold day, one stands in the sun, and the suffering of cold recedes a little*.

The commentary goes on to explain that *at that time the suffering of the cold day still exists, because as soon as that suffering of cold ceases the suffering of heat immediately begins*. Just as the suffering of cold begins to recede, the suffering of heat begins. This is establishing that one needs suffering as the basis for generating happiness, but one does not need happiness as the basis for generating an awareness of suffering.

What we perceive as happiness, i.e. worldly pleasure - which is contaminated happiness, or samsaric happiness - is based on suffering. As mentioned earlier, the alleviation of an earlier suffering is experienced as happiness, and therefore happiness is based on suffering. But one does not need happiness as the basis for generating an experience of suffering.

When we reflect on this from our own experience, we can actually see the truth of this fact. Any worldly pleasure that we experience is based on alleviating some kind of earlier discomfort, and the relief that one experiences when an earlier discomfort is lessened is experienced as pleasure or happiness.

These pleasurable experiences are mostly related to attachment. Nagarjuna said that the pleasure that we experience from attachment is like the pleasurable sensation one gets from scratching an itchy rash. One experiences pleasure from the relief of the itch. But, as Nagarjuna presents very logically, given a choice one would not opt to have the rash just to experience the

pleasurable feeling of scratching it. That is how the analogy that happiness is based on suffering is explained. Many people seem to really relate this to their own experience. Basically, worldly pleasures are just the relief of an earlier discomfort, and that's why they are not true happiness.

The further analogy is that it is *like blue and distance*. The colour blue is not dependent on anything for it to appear as blue - it is blue by nature. This is likened to the experience of suffering, which is that it does not have to be based on happiness for it to be experienced as suffering.

Whereas the experience of happiness is like short and long. The awareness of short is dependent on something that is longer, and the awareness of long is based on something that is shorter. Therefore the perception of long and short are dependent on each other. The perception of long is dependent on the perception of short, and likewise the perception of short is dependent on the perception of long. Whereas the perception of blue is not dependent on anything else, it perceives blue just as it naturally appears - blue.

The commentary doesn't explain the example further in detail, however I think that suffering is like the colour blue, i.e. just as blue is not dependent on another factor to be blue, suffering is not dependent on happiness. Whereas just like long depends on short and *vice versa*, worldly happiness is dependent on the alleviation of suffering.

As an introduction to the next verse the commentary states:

Presenting that craving is reversed, if one realises the non-existence of inherent feeling:

The verse reads:

98. *When there is no-one experiencing feeling,
And when the feeling does not exist as well,
Having seen this circumstance at that time,
Why should craving not be reversed?*

Then the commentary explains:

When there is comprehension that there is no inherent person experiencing feeling, and that the experienced feeling also does not exist inherently, then at this time, having seen this circumstance of no inherent experience and experiencer at the time, why should craving not be reversed? The craving wishing to attain happiness and the craving wishing to be separated from suffering are induced through the force of true-grasping.

As the commentary explains, *when one comprehends that there is no inherently existing person experiencing feeling, and that the experienced feeling also does not exist inherently then, as there is no inherently existing experience and experiencer, why should craving not be reversed?* The implication is that with this understanding of the lack of inherently existent experiences and inherently existent experiencers, craving would indeed be reversed.

The reason why craving can be reversed is that *the craving wishing to attain happiness and the craving wishing to be separated from suffering are induced through the force of true grasping*. It is this true grasping that causes these two

² There are a few typos in the Tibetan text at this point, which have been corrected in this transcript.

cravings of wishing to experience happiness and wanting to be separated from suffering.

When the inherent existence of craving itself is reversed, i.e. when one realises the emptiness of craving, then that understanding will overcome the misconception of inappropriate attention that causes the craving to arise in the first place. It is ignorance that is responsible for this inappropriate attention. So when that inappropriate attention is overcome through the realisation of the non-inherent existence of things, the craving itself will be reversed, or cease.

When we really investigate how attachment arises, we come to see that behind every attachment there is always a mind of ignorance. The mind of ignorance is the forerunner of attachment as well as aversion. This mind exaggerates the qualities of an object through inappropriate attention. So there's this combination of exaggerating qualities that is induced by inappropriate attention, which then develops into attachment to the object.

When there is strong attachment one sees qualities in the object that don't actually exist. And we can verify from our own experience that when strong attachment starts to subside, then one starts to see defects in the object that initially appeared to be so beautiful and desirable in the heat of attachment.

Likewise aversion is due to the exaggeration that is induced by an inappropriate attention that sees only faults in the object, and that is what causes anger. Again, we can verify from our own experience that when the fire of strong anger starts to subside, then one can start seeing qualities in that object. This shows how it is an underlying ignorance that drives craving.

Of the two types of craving, we relate more readily to the craving of wishing to attain happiness. That is because at the most basic level we want to experience happiness, and because we wish for happiness, craving naturally arises. We don't wish for any unpleasant experiences, and when we do actually experience something unpleasant, the craving of wanting to be separated from that unpleasantness arises. That is how we can relate craving to ourselves.

2.3.2.1.2.3. Refuting that the focal object exists inherently

The next two lines of the verse are:

*99ab. Whether seen or felt,
It is due to its dream-like illusory nature*

The commentary explains:

Regardless of whether it is seen by eye consciousness or felt by the body consciousness, because of the dream-like or illusory-like nature of the object empty of inherent existence generating the feeling, the feeling also does not exist inherently.

This is a very cogent explanation. *Regardless of whether it is seen by the eye consciousness or felt by the body consciousness* refers to either the beautiful forms that we see with our eye consciousness, or the pleasant sensations we experience from touching smooth tactile surfaces. Since these objects of the sensory consciousnesses *are like dreams or illusions, they are empty of inherent existence.*

When we see forms, they don't actually exist in the way they appear, so they are like dreams or illusions. When we relate this idea to emotions such as attachment, then these emotions will naturally subside. Attachment arises from thinking that what is perceived is real, and exists as it appears. The more we see and believe an object as being real and attractive, the more our attachment to that object increases. As soon as you see that the object lacks inherent existence, and that it does not exist as it appears to our eye consciousness, this understanding of the emptiness of the object will help cut through our delusions.

As explained in the teachings, while in meditative equipoise the mind of someone who has realised emptiness is completely absorbed in that emptiness. There is no conventional appearance and nothing but emptiness appears to their mind. As a consequence the delusions that arise in relation to conventional appearances naturally subside.

When that meditator comes out of their meditative equipoise into a post-meditative equipoise, they reflect on how things still appear as being inherently or truly existent when, in fact, they don't exist in that way. While in post-meditative equipoise, the trainee bodhisattva sees things as being like illusions or dreams, and thus not truly existent or inherently existent. Then strong negative emotions such as attachment or aversion will subside. This is a very significant point.

We need to understand that the analogies of dreams and illusions are very significant examples that illustrate how our mind is affected by ignorance, and thus misapprehends the things and events around us. In a dream, we believe that there are horses and elephants when in reality there are no such horses or elephants. That perception of horses and elephants is due to the mind being affected by the consciousness of sleep, which alters the mind so that it perceives things that don't actually exist and believes them to be real.

Another analogy given in the teachings is someone whose mind is affected by a spell during a magic show. When an illusionist conjures up horses and elephants, the people in the audience, who are under the spell of the illusionist, will see elephants and horses. Although there are actually no horses or elephants on the stage, they appear to the minds of the audience because their consciousnesses are affected by the spell.

Using these analogies we can understand that even though phenomena don't exist inherently, we perceive them as inherently or truly existent because our mind is affected by the ignorance that grasps at true existence and inherent existence, along with the imprints of that wrong perception.

For as long as one grasps at true existence due to the very imprints of that grasping at true existence, one will have mistaken perceptions, which will be followed by grasping at those mistaken perceptions. The only way to get rid of those mistaken perceptions is by removing their cause, which means removing that grasping at true existence and the imprints of grasping at true existence.

Someone who has completely removed not only grasping at true existence, but its very imprints from their mental

continuum is an enlightened being, a supreme being, who does not have mistaken conceptions and perceptions. A supreme being sees the world as illusory, and so does not have any mistaken conceptions and perceptions. Thus they are not affected by any of the falsities caused by those mistaken perceptions, and hence do not experience any of the sufferings of worldly existence.

If we see the Buddha as a supreme being who is free from mistaken conceptions, then we will be inspired to become like the Buddha. Otherwise we might see the Buddha just as someone sitting there who seems to be very peaceful. If we don't know what the Buddha is free of, we might not be inspired to achieve the same state.

All of the sufferings that we experience are said to arise from the misconceptions that we hold. In the *Lama Chopa* text, after the tsog offering, there's this one particular line that says may all beings be free from the mistaken conceptions. I find that to be a very powerful line because not only does it point out the suffering that sentient beings experience, but it also explains that the very cause of that suffering comes from mistaken conceptions.

When we recite the *Lama Chopa*, as we do regularly, it is good to reflect on that line when we come to it. When we relate it to ourselves rather than thinking about other sentient beings who are suffering because of their mistaken conceptions, it becomes much more profound. Our own mind is affected by misconceptions, and because of this we experience the shortcomings of worldly existence.

If we can actually incorporate more visualisations during the *Lama Chopa* practice it will become much more profound. The tsog you take out is not just to satisfy them by temporarily relieving the suffering of hunger. As the deity when ones visualises transforming oneself into the tsog, then merely coming into contact with sentient beings will help them to be free from all their sufferings, i.e. the sufferings arising from their misconceptions. This is indicated in the verse. That then becomes not only a temporary relief from suffering, but also relieves all the forms of suffering that have arisen from mistaken conceptions.

We will conclude the session for this evening and dedicate the Tara Praises we are going to recite to Helen's oldest son Martin who has undergone surgery today. I've already done my part of doing prayers and as a group we can do the Tara Praises and dedicate them for the success of that operation. As we wait for the results let us pray that everything goes well and that he will be relieved from all physical ailments and recover soon.

As many of you have experienced, there is a definite benefit from prayers.

When they arrived in Australia, some Tibetans lived here at Tara Institute for a while; one of them came to teachings once in a while, on special occasions. One day she came to me looking very anxious. She told me that her sister, who lives in Scotland, had been missing for two days and that the police were looking for her. So she was very, very anxious.

I said: "Don't worry too much. Maybe you will speak to your sister in the future. You can even say that she can

come here if she wanted. Her immediate response was: "Well how can I speak to her when she's missing? I've really come to see you hoping that you can do an observation, a *mo*, to see where she is". My response was: "Well I'm not someone who does *mos*, but I'll do prayers for her", but she didn't seem very pleased about that.

The next day I got a message from her saying that they had found her sister that morning. A year later she introduced me to her sister when they came here recently for a puja. I didn't mention anything then but it did remind me that when I'd suggested that she could bring her sister over she had said: "How could I ever bring her here? She's lost", and she hadn't seemed to relate to what I'd said about doing prayers at all. This is one instance of where prayers definitely seemed to help.

I have quite a few stories like that. Once I was asked to do prayers for a Kopan monk known as Cherok Lama (the older Cherok Lama). He had come to Australia and was in prison in Perth – I don't know what had happened. At that time Lama Zopa happened to be here, and he said to me: "Geshe-la we just got news that Cherok Lama has been imprisoned in Perth, maybe you can do some prayers?" Then the next day Rinpoche said to me: "Geshe-la I think your prayers have worked, because he's been released from prison".

The point is that prayers definitely seem to work if one does the prayers with a sincere mind, wishing to benefit the other, while making strong supplications to the gurus and the deities. The Kadampa masters said: don't rely on humans; rely on the deities. There's definitely a positive effect from prayer.

Your prayers will be very strong when you relate to deities such as Tara, thinking that you are the guru, you are the deity, you are all the protectors and dakas and dakinis, and that you are an unflinching friend and companion.

I have many stories from my days in Kopan when Lama Zopa Rinpoche would ask me to do prayers for certain things. Rinpoche could have done those prayers himself but he asked me, saying, "Oh, it's better for you to do them as they will be more beneficial". So I would do these prayers, and it seems that there were some benefits from them.

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

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