

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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

As usual, let us set our motivation for receiving the teachings:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and then put them into practice well, not just merely in words but in actual actions and deeds.

Thinking in this way is most meaningful.

2.3.2. Explaining extensively the reasoning that established the selflessness of person (cont.)

2.3.2.3. STATING THE REASONS THAT ESTABLISH THE LACK OF TRUE EXISTENCE¹

This is subdivided into three:

2.3.2.3.1. The vajra sliver reason

2.3.2.3.2. The reason of dependent arising

2.3.2.3.3. The reason of refuting generation and cessation of existence and non-existence

2.3.2.3.1. The vajra sliver reason

This is subdivided into five:

2.3.2.3.1.1. Refuting generation without cause

2.3.2.3.1.2. Refuting generation from a separate permanent cause

2.3.2.3.1.3. Refuting generation from a permanent principal

2.3.2.3.1.4. Summarising the meaning of generation from no-cause

2.3.2.3.1.5. Refuting generation from both self and other

The main essence of this presentation was presented in the *Madhyamaka* teachings and also in the *Four Hundred Verses* teachings.² It refutes the self as being generated from either the self, other, both and without a cause.

Although I've presented the meaning previously, I'll remind you of the analogy that is used to explain the name 'vajra sliver'. Adamantine is one of the hardest substances in existence. Even a splinter of it is so powerful that it can destroy huge mountainous rocks and so forth. This analogy indicates that the reasoning presented here can completely shatter the very core of the notion of grasping at the self.

2.3.2.3.1.1. Refuting generation without cause

We need to note here that *generation without cause* does not refer to generation from all causes. Rather it refers to the specific causes that are presented by the **Hedonists** and so forth, who assert that there is a result that does not have to depend upon a specific cause. That is what is being refuted here.

The commentary first presents their assertion:

Hedonists and others: Because one cannot see the products of the colours of the eye in the peacock's feather and others, and one does not see any creator of the movement of the lotus petals or their smooth shape, or the sharpness of thorns and so forth, therefore they exist out of their own nature.

The Hedonists, and others who follow similar systems of thought, use the example of the different *colours of the eye of a peacock's feathers*, which are very detailed. However we can't observe any immediate cause that created them. So the posed question is 'who creates them'? Another analogy they use is the *movement of lotus petals*, which open at different times: some already open, and some are about to blossom. So, who causes the subtle movements of the petals, as well as their smoothness. Another example is the *sharpness of thorns*. How did the sharp tip of the thorn come about?

What they are saying is that since we cannot see anyone actually creating them, and no other immediate causes are apparent, they must exist of their own nature.

These examples are quite obvious: we can see the results, but we cannot see their causes. For this reason, the Hedonists argue that there is no cause for them, and that they must exist out of their own nature.

The first verse under this heading is:

116. In this instance, the direct perception of worldly beings

Sees all causes.

The different petals of the lotus

Are generated by different causes.

117. If it is asked, 'By which different causes?'

Of course by the preceding different causes.

Why can a cause generate an effect?

From the mere force of that preceding cause.

The commentary explains the meaning of these verses as follows:

Madhyamika: This is invalid. In this instance, the direct perception of worldly beings sees most of the generating causes for the various inner and outer functionalities such as crops and the like. The different results such as the colours of the different lotus petals, their number and the like are generated by different causes. If it is asked, 'By which different causes?', then of course by preceding different causes.

Argument: Why are different causes able to produce different results?

Madhyamika: The fault that they cannot do this does not exist. Through the very force possessed by a preceding cause, different causes have the ability to generate different results.

Thus, these functionalities are not without cause because they are observed as adventitiously generated in relation to place and time.

¹ This heading was first introduced on 22 November 2016.

² The vajra or diamond sliver reasoning was taught:

In the *Madhyamaka* teachings between 15 April 2003 and 20 April 2003

In the *400 Verses* teachings on 8 April 2008

In the Shantideva teachings of 2005 between 16 August 2005 and 13 September 2005

The *Madhyamika* reply to the Hedonists saying, your argument is invalid, because the direct perception of worldly beings sees most of the causes that generate the various inner and outer functionalities.

The implication here is that 'although there are inferential reasons that can be used to refute your assertions, I'll begin by using reasons that can be seen by ordinary valid perception'. It is obvious we can see the causes of many of the things that are produced in this world. For example, it is obvious to worldly beings that when you plant barley seeds, they will produce barley sprouts. Thus a farmer who wishes for a crop of barley will sow barley seeds and not any other. Likewise a crop of wheat is dependent on wheat seedlings, and a crop of peas is produced from pea seedlings. It is obvious that the results of particular crops come from their own particular causes, which are the seeds of each. This is something that is readily perceived.

Furthermore, different results such as the colours of the different lotus petals, their number and the like are generated by different causes. The different kinds of lotus seedlings produce lotus plants with different types of petals and so forth. That is also readily seen.

The Hedonists then ask, if there are different causes for these different results then who creates these causes?

The *Madhyamika* answer to that is that the various causes are created by the preceding different causes, a fact which is quite obvious. The *Madhyamikas* make this comment to the Hedonist question: the fault that different causes cannot produce different results does not exist. Through the very power possessed by a preceding cause, different causes have the ability to generate different results. The power of a preceding cause has the ability to produce certain types of results. Therefore different causes all have the ability to generate different results.

As a concluding remark, the *Madhyamika* say, these functionalities are not without cause because they are observed as adventitiously generated in relation to place and time. This reason is very profound. If things were to be causeless then they would have to be generated at all times, regardless of time and necessary conditions. The fact that different results are produced only at a certain time and place indicates that they have particular causes. Do bananas or avocados grow in Victoria? No, because it's not the right place - they grow in Queensland. The point here is that growing crops or flowers or fruit depends on an appropriate time and place. Even if the immediate or substantial cause, the seed, is there, it won't produce a result unless the other factors it is dependent upon are there as well, such as water, fertile soil, warmth and so forth. People say 'it's the cherry season now', 'mango season', or 'strawberry season'. If it's out of season then you won't be able to get a particular crop or fruit; you only get the results when the time is right.

2.3.2.3.1.2. Refuting generation from a separate permanent cause

The reason for this refutation is because there are some non-Buddhist schools who say, 'yes there is a cause, and that cause is permanent'. So they assert that a result can come from a permanent cause. This section refutes that.

Here we can understand why different schools of tenets have arisen. Each system of tenets comes about as a result of the different ways of investigating things, and each comes to different conclusions based on their method of investigation. Proponents of some religious tenets, for example, would say there is a creator god, and use their own reasons to present that argument. Others, like we Buddhists, say that there's no creator as such, but we believe in karma. And karma is asserted with reasoning and many examples. This section of the text is subdivided into three:

2.3.2.3.1.2.1. Refuting Ishvara with questions to its meaning

2.3.2.3.1.2.2. If it is permanent, it is unsuitable to be the cause of anything arising from conditions

2.3.2.3.1.2.3. Reminder that permanent particles without cause were already refuted

2.3.2.3.1.2.1. Refuting Ishvara with questions to its meaning

Prior to actually refuting the assertion that Ishvara is the cause, the Hedonists are asked 'What do you mean by Ishvara? What does Ishvara actually mean?

So the first line of verse is:

118a. If Ishvara is the cause of migrators,

Then the commentary explains:

The Naiyayika, Enumerators and Particularists that accept Ishvara as divine: The self-arisen all-knowing Ishvara, produced all places, bodies and enjoyments with a preceding movement of his mind, and is therefore the cause of migrators.

The implication of the *Naiyayika* (or Logicians), *Enumerators and Particularists* who accept *Ishvara as divine* is that there are some non-Buddhist schools that do not accept *Ishvara* as a divine creator. There are other non-Buddhist schools that assert the fundamental principal as the cause of all existence. They say that their classifications of causes and effects are due to the various manifestations of the fundamental principal. However all these non-Buddhist schools are the same in asserting a cause that is a permanent substance. The difference between the two lies in the fact that one accepts *Ishvara* as a divine creator, and the other does not.

As the commentary explains quite clearly, their assertion is that *Ishvara* the divine creator is a *self-arisen and all-knowing*, i.e. he has arisen as an omniscient being by his own accord, without depending on any other causes. This self-arisen all-knowing entity called *Ishvara* produces all places such as the environment, *bodies* such as the beings or migrators who live in the environment, and *enjoyments*, which are all the objects of the sense enjoyments. These are all created by a preceding movement of *Ishvara's* mind. It is *Ishvara's* movement of the mind or thought that creates the things and events in the environment. This is negated in the later verses.

The relevant lines of verse read:

118bcd. First, declare what is *Ishvara*?

If you say, 'the elements,' that may be, but
Why stress yourself over a name?

The *Madhyamika* reply:

Madhyamika: First, declare what is posited as the meaning of *Ishvara*.

Upon being asked that question: If you say due to the increase and decrease of the four elements of earth, water, fire and wind the results also increase or decrease.

That may be so. However we also accept that from the increasing and decreasing of the elements, the results also increase or decrease, why stress yourself over a difference in name of the same meaning out of a great attachment to establish Ishvara? That it is unsuitable to be Ishvara if there is a big difference in reality whether if it is permanent or impermanent and so forth, is shown in the lines '[However....] and so forth.

Furthermore:

Because the four elements are in the nature of different substances, are impermanent and producing generation and disintegration, are not moved in the sense of preceding the production of results with awareness or mind, are not divine and is the very ground that is walked upon, and because they are impure, they are not Ishvara. Ishvara is permanent, unitary and precedes the production of a result with awareness, is accepted to be divine, not to be the very ground walked upon and not as impure.

Having been asked what Ishvara is, the reply from the **opponent** is *due to the increase and decrease of the four elements of earth, water, fire and wind the results also increase or decrease*. So they argue that if there's an increase in the four elements, then the result will also increase, and if there's a decrease in the four elements then the results will also decrease, and that the cause of this is Ishvara.

To that the **Madhyamika** reply, *we also accept that*. If that is what you mean by Ishvara then *why stress over a name?* You may call it Ishvara but if it is in fact relating to the increase and decrease of the elements, then it is the same as we posit.

The commentary then explains, *that it is unsuitable to be Ishvara if there is a big difference in reality whether if it is permanent or impermanent and so forth is shown in the following verse*.

119. *However, since earth and so forth are many,
Impermanent, not moved and not divine,
Since they are the very ground walked upon and
impure
They are not Ishvara.*

The explanation in the commentary is:

Because the four elements are in the nature of different substances, are impermanent and producing generation and disintegration, are not moved in the sense of preceding the production of results with awareness or mind, are not divine and is the very ground that is walked upon, and because they are impure, they are not Ishvara. Ishvara is permanent, unitary and precedes the production of a result with awareness, is accepted to be divine, not to be the very ground walked upon and not as impure.

The refutation by the **Madhyamikas** is that *if the four elements are in the nature of different substances* then they could not be a unitary divine being Ishvara.

The opponent posits that Ishvara is permanent, which our system refutes by pointing out that the four elements are *impermanent* as they are generated and disintegrate.

Since the opponent posits that Ishvara produces things with a preceding awareness, there would have to be a

movement of the mind that produces the four elements. Yet they *are not moved* in the sense of preceding the production of results with awareness. It is not necessary for there to be a movement of the mind in order for the elements to be produced.

Furthermore, the opponents say that Ishvara is divine, but the four elements *are not divine*. For example ordinary beings walk on the earth.

Also the earth and other elements have unclean aspects, so *they are not Ishvara*.

In summary, you assert Ishvara as being permanent, unitary and precedes the production of a result with an awareness, is accepted to be divine, and so therefore is not the very ground to walked upon and is not impure. Because the elements do not fit your description of what Ishvara is, they could not be Ishvara.

Having refuted the four elements as being Ishvara, the next argument by the **non-Buddhists** to be refuted is that space is Ishvara.

Argument: Space is Ishvara.

The next verse is:

120. *Space is not Ishvara because it does not move.
That the self is not Ishvara has been proven
earlier.
Also, a creator beyond thought,
What good is it to describe that beyond
thought?*

As the commentary explains, the **Madhyamika** presentation is:

Madhyamika: Take the subject 'space': it is not Ishvara—because it does not move for the purpose of a result. A permanent self is also not Ishvara—because this has been refuted earlier both from the point of view of matter or consciousness.

The commentary quite clearly explains this with a syllogism. *Take the subject 'space': it is not Ishvara* (which is the predicate)—*because it does not move for the purpose of a result* (which is the reason). According to the assertion of these non-Buddhist schools, Ishvara produces things through the movement of the mind, or with the thought to produce. Space doesn't have any movement to produce things.

Furthermore, *a permanent self is also not Ishvara because this has been refuted earlier both from the point of view of matter or consciousness*. This is as was presented previously.

Then a further argument by the **non-Buddhists** is presented:

Argument: Because Ishvara is a creator beyond thought these faults do not apply.

The **Madhyamaka** refute this by saying:

Madhyamaka: What is the point of taking something that is beyond thought as the creator? In addition, you cannot know who Ishvara is as he is beyond thought.

If Ishvara is beyond thought as you say, then how could you even possibly describe Ishvara? How would you even begin to conceive of him?

2.3.2.3.1.2.2. *If it is permanent, it is unsuitable to be the cause of anything arising from conditions*

What is being refuted here is that if something is considered as permanent then it cannot be a cause of

anything, because anything that arises from a condition has to have an impermanent cause.

Then these lines of verse are presented:

121. *Also what does it desire to create?
Aren't the nature of the self,
Earth and so forth and Ishvara permanent?
Consciousness is generated from the object of
knowledge,*

122ab. *And beginningless happiness and sufferings
from karma.
Tell, what is generated by him?*

The explanation in the commentary begins with a question from the **Madhyamika**:

If the feelings of happiness, suffering, equanimity and other functionalities are generated from previous karma and other causes, then what is the result that the Ishvara asserted by you desires to create?

The **non-Buddhist** replies:

Argument: It is the self.

Then the **Madhyamika** refutation follows:

Madhyamika: It follows that it is not valid—because it follows that this self, the four elements of earth, water, fire and air, and also subsequent similar types of Ishvara are not produced by Ishvara—because aren't the self, the particles of the four elements and Ishvara permanent?

Following this rhetorical question the commentary continues:

So because you accept them to be permanent they are invalid as that which is generated and the generator.

Thus, because the different sense consciousnesses to which blue and so forth appear are generated from the objects of knowledge blue and so forth, and because the feelings of suffering and happiness are generated from virtuous and non-virtuous karma, therefore state the result that is generated by Ishvara. The result generated by Ishvara does not exist.

This explanation is quite clear. There is however one important point. The point that *feelings of happiness, sufferings, and equanimity, and other functionalities are generated from previous karma* is mutually accepted, and the question posed by the **Madhyamika** is 'what causes that?'

The counter argument here is that if the feelings of happiness, suffering, equanimity and other functionalities are generated from previous karma and other causes, *then what is the result that the Ishvara asserted by you desires to create?* In other words, if we both accept the results of karma, then what does Ishvara create?

The **opponents** say that *it is the self* that is created by Ishvara.

The **Madhyamika** say that *this is not valid—because this self, the four elements of earth, water, fire and air, and also subsequent similar types of Ishvara are not produced by Ishvara*. If there's a first Ishvara then that implies that there must be a similar subsequent Ishvara. The self, the four elements (earth, water, fire and air) and subsequent similar types of Ishvara, could not be *produced by Ishvara—because*, according to the opponent, *the self, the particles of the four elements and Ishvara are permanent*. If you accept them as being permanent they cannot be both the

generated and the generator. If something is permanent then how can it be both the generated and a generator?

The **Madhyamika** refutation refers to *the different sense consciousnesses, to which blue and so forth appear, as they are generated from the objects of knowledge blue and so forth*. In other words, the consciousness perceiving blue is generated in dependence on an object that is blue, and the consciousness perceiving yellow is dependent on an object that is yellow. Each consciousness is generated in relation to a particular object.

The next part of the refutation begins by acknowledging that we both accept that *feelings of suffering and happiness are generated from virtuous and non-virtuous karma*. So the **Madhyamikas** state the result that is generated by Ishvara. Can you actually say that they are created by Ishvara? There is not much left that you can claim is created by Ishvara. Therefore, *the result generated by Ishvara does not exist*, and you have to conclude there is no result created by Ishvara.

The next lines of verse under this heading are:

122cd. *If there is no first cause,
How could there be a first result?*

123. *Why should he not always produce?
He does not rely on others.
If there is nothing other that is not produced by
him,
How could he rely on these?*

As the commentary explains:

Because the causal Ishvara is a permanent functionality, if he were to exist since beginningless time, then how can there be a first of his resultant feelings and other results? The direct cause of the feeling generated today possesses its ability since beginningless time.

As he produces all results without depending on other conditions, why would he not produce all results on a continual basis? It follows it is like that—because if there is no other separate result that is not created by Ishvara, then in dependence on what condition does this Ishvara generate these results? That asserted as simultaneously acting condition needs to be created by Ishvara and it is acceptable that it is produced by him.

Again the explanation in the commentary is clear. You state that *the causal Ishvara is a permanent functionality*. So if he were to have existed *since beginningless time*, then how can there be a first of his resultant feelings and other results? The absurdity is that if the cause existed from beginningless time, then the results would also have to also exist from beginningless time. The feeling that you have today would have been there perpetually. If, for example, you were feeling happy today, then because the cause was beginningless, that happy feeling would have to have been a perpetual happy feeling from beginningless time. If the causes exist from beginningless time then the results also have to have existed from beginningless time. That is the absurdity that is being pointed out.

Then as the commentary explains, *as Ishvara produces all results without depending on other conditions, why would he not produce all results on a continual basis?* That is the logical conclusion of your argument, *because if there is no*

other separate result that is not created by Ishvara, then in dependence on what condition does this Ishvara generate these results?

As explained here, having posed that rhetorical question, then *that asserted as simultaneously acting condition needs to be created by Ishvara and it is acceptable that it is produced by him*. The generation of something depends on another condition. The question, then, is what condition does Ishvara depend on? The conclusion would have to be that the *simultaneously acting condition needs to be created by Ishvara and it is acceptable that it is produced by him*. This is saying that the other condition that Ishvara depends on is Ishvara himself. That is what you would have to conclude from this argument.

What is being as clarified in the next two verses is that for anything to be produced it needs both a substantial cause and a simultaneously acting condition. There has to be the substantial cause as well as a simultaneously acting condition for something to be produced.

124. *If he relies, then the aggregation
Is the cause and not him.
If there is aggregation, he is powerless to
prevent generation.
If there is no aggregation, he has no power to
generate.*
125. *If he creates despite not wishing to do so,
Then he is under the power of others.
Although wishing, it depends on the wish.
Although creating, how can it be Ishvara?*

The commentary explains:

With regard to Ishvara generating a result, if it is in dependence on the simultaneously acting condition, the combination of substantial cause and simultaneously acting condition becomes the cause, then it follows there is no cause that Ishvara controls – because once the causes and conditions are complete Ishvara has no power to prevent the result, and if they are not complete, then he does not have the power to generate the result.

If the results of suffering of the lower realms and the like are generated from karma against Ishvara's wish, then it follows that Ishvara is controlled by other conditions, and the position that he is independently the creator of all is lost.

Even if Ishvara creates results upon wishing to create the result, the result would depend merely on the wish, and also if the wish is creating the result, how can that be Ishvara? The wish is impermanent.

As presented here, *if Ishvara generates a result in dependence on a simultaneously acting condition, the combination of substantial cause and simultaneously acting condition would become the cause*. For anything to be produced there has to be a *substantial cause, and a simultaneously acting condition*. For example, when a seed produces a sprout, the four elements serve as *simultaneously acting conditions* in that: the earth holds the seed so that it doesn't fall through; by gathering the essence of the nutrients in the earth the water causes the seed not germinate; fire or warmth ripens the seed; and the wind element expands the growth of the seedling. So the four elements work together as a *simultaneously acting condition*.

In other words, *the combination of substantial cause and simultaneously acting condition becomes the cause*. From that it follows that there is no cause that Ishvara controls. For a result to be produced, there has to be a combination of both the substantial cause as well as the simultaneously acting condition, therefore Ishvara does not have control over the production of a result. Once the causes and conditions are complete, Ishvara has no power to prevent the result. When the causes and conditions are complete and intact, they will definitely produce a result without Ishvara. And if the substantial cause and the simultaneously acting conditions are not complete then Ishvara does not have the power to generate a result. Therefore, claiming that Ishvara is the cause for everything that is produced is spurious.

Next comes the refutation of *the result of the suffering of the lower realms and the like are generated from karma against Ishvara's wish*. Although Ishvara does not wish for the sufferings of the lower realms and so forth, these sufferings are still produced by karma. If that is the case then it follows that Ishvara is controlled by other conditions, and the position that he is independently the creator of all is lost, is not tenable.

What is also implied here is that if Ishvara is a divine being with compassion for all beings and so forth, then why would he create the hell realms and allow beings to experience the sufferings there? This is yet another absurdity.

The next refutation is that *even if Ishvara creates results upon wishing to create the result, the result would depend merely on the wish, and also if the wish is creating the result, how can that be Ishvara?* If Ishvara has to depend on a wish in order to produce things, then it is not Ishvara who is the sole cause, i.e. he is dependent on a wish. Once again, it is not tenable to hold that Ishvara is the primary cause for everything.

2.3.2.3.1.2.3. *Reminder that permanent particles without cause were already refuted*

The relevant verse reads:

*126ab. Those asserting permanent particles
Also they have been refuted earlier.*

The commentary explains:

The position of the Particularists that permanent particles create migrators was refuted earlier with the reasoning refuting partless particles, and there is no need to add anything to that which has already been said.

As the commentary itself comments, there is no need for further explanation.

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

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