
Study Group - *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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Establish a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I have to attain complete enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings. In order to do so I am going to listen to this profound teaching, and then I am going to put it into practice well.

It is important to generate a virtuous motivation, and it is also important to generate the wisdom that can discriminate right actions from wrong actions. With the wisdom that distinguishes right from wrong one is able to purify wrong actions; so one needs to develop this wisdom. It is like having a discussion with oneself about what is the right thing to do and what is the wrong thing to do, and then following that wisdom. By identifying wrong actions then one can also direct the mind to right actions. That is very important.

2.1.2.1. REFUTING THE REALISTS IN GENERAL

Here we have two sub outlines:

2.1.2.1.1. Refuting that one's position is contradicted by direct perception

2.1.2.1.2. Refuting that one's position is contradicted by sutras

2.1.2.1.1. Refuting that one's position is contradicted by direct perception

Forms and so forth, those merely perceived directly [6ab]

Through renown, and not by valid cognition.

First of all it is important to understand the view of the Sautrantika school. Realists in general are called that because they assert objects to exist truly. A more literal way of translating the Tibetan word Realist is 'those who assert objects'. They are called Realists because they assert objects to exist truly.

Secondly, you probably remember from the Tenets that for the Sautrantika conventional truth, objects that lack true existence, and generally characterised phenomena are synonymous, and that truly existent phenomena, ultimate truth and self-characterised phenomena are synonymous. Also, the Sautrantika assert that all phenomena exist inherently. So according to them it is not possible to assert an object that does not exist from its own side. For them, if an object exists it has to exist from its own side. This is important to keep in mind.

The **Sautrantika** argue that the objects of the five senses, which are forms and so forth, could not be objects of direct perception if they were to lack inherent existence.

The idea is that if forms and so forth were to lack existence from their own side, i.e. if they were to lack inherent existence, then they could not become the objects of direct perception. Why? Because according to them direct perceptions have to be direct perceptions with regard to the intrinsic nature of the object that they perceive. Hence, if there is no intrinsic nature then the direct perception could not become a direct perception with regard to that object. That is where they are coming from.

According to the **Prasangika** there is no such fault that if objects such as form and so forth were to lack intrinsic existence then they could not become the object of direct perception. This is because forms and so forth are only objects established nominally, through renown, and are the objects of conventional direct perception. And conventional direct perceptions don't become valid cognitions with regard to the ultimate nature of these forms. Forms and so forth, while objects of direct perception, are only a nominal phenomenon that cannot be found at the time of analysis. So these direct perceptions don't become valid cognitions with regard to the final or ultimate nature of these objects.

Conventional direct perceptions don't become valid cognisers engaged in ultimate analysis realising the ultimate nature of forms and so forth. They are only nominal valid cognisers which realise the object that cannot be found at the time of analysis. That is why there is no fault.

As an answer to the same point there is a quote in the *King of Concentration Sutra* where it says, 'Likewise eyes, ears, and nose are not valid cognitions'. As we have said before this means that the valid cognition that understands them does not understand their ultimate nature, and is only a nominal valid cognition.

In answer to the same point *Introduction to the Middle Way* says:

*If worldly perceptions are valid cognisers, [6.30]
Since transitory beings see suchness, what need
For other arya, through the arya path?*

What this means is if the nominal cognitions of ordinary beings realised the intrinsic nature of the object then they would become ultimate valid cognisers. They would become realisers of suchness. Then there would be no need for arya beings any more because every ordinary being would see suchness directly.

The difference between an arya or superior being, and an ordinary individual is posited as realising emptiness directly. A person who realises emptiness directly is regarded as a superior being, and a person who doesn't see emptiness directly is regarded as an ordinary individual. Hence, if ordinary individuals were to see emptiness directly then there would be no need for superior beings.

The **Realists** make this further point. They say that if everything exists only nominally, and since objects are renowned as existing from their own side amongst ordinary transitory beings, then they should actually exist from their own side.

The answer is given in the next two lines which read:

*False, like impurity and so forth [6cd]
Are renowned as purity and so forth.*

The answer is that even though objects are renowned as existing inherently that doesn't mean that they have to exist inherently. For example, for ordinary beings the contaminated aggregates are objects that are renowned to be pure, happiness, permanent, and possessing a self, even though in reality they are objects that are impure, suffering and misery, impermanent, and lacking self.

Objects that in nature are impure, misery, impermanent and lacking a self, specifically the contaminated aggregates, are renowned by ordinary worldly beings to be pure, to be happiness, to be permanent and to possess a self. That is, the popular perception amongst sentient beings is actually the opposite of the truth. Objects are false in this way, and likewise they are also false in the other way. They are renowned for possessing an intrinsic nature but actually lack

that intrinsic nature. But that is not a problem because even though phenomena are false like an illusion, they still exist nominally.

2.1.2.1. Refuting the Sautrantika

2.1.2.1.2. Refuting that one's position is contradicted by sutras

2.1.2.1.2.1. Establishing those sutras to be interpretive

2.1.2.1.2.2. Refuting that one's position is contradicted by scriptural quotation

2.1.2.1.2.1. Establishing those sutras to be interpretive

For the purpose of introducing transitory beings [7abc]

The protector showed phenomena.

They are not momentary in suchness.

The **Realists** say, 'Isn't your position contradicted by the sutras, which teach that functionalities are intrinsically impermanent'. This is actually a very good point, because there are sutras that teach intrinsically impermanent functionalities. It is very good for one's own understanding if one can relate the debates to the sutras, and then identify where the different sutras are coming from. This, for example, is from the third turning of the wheel.

The answer here is that the Protector Shakyamuni Buddha in his great compassion taught intrinsically existing impermanent functionalities for the purpose of introducing different transitory beings gradually to the idea of suchness and emptiness. This is because there are some sentient beings for whom it is not suitable to be immediately shown the final nature. For them it is better to be initially shown intrinsically existing impermanent functionalities. Then slowly, slowly, by meditating and thinking about the path and the views more and more, their view becomes more and more profound and subtle. For the purpose of introducing transitory beings gradually to the concept of emptiness the Buddha taught intrinsically existent impermanent functionalities at different times. In actuality, even though functionalities are momentary, they don't exist inherently or truly.

It is good to apply this concept of a gradual approach to selflessness to one's own practice; one cannot understand subtle selflessness without first understanding coarse selflessness. It doesn't make sense to say that one can immediately jump to subtle selflessness without understanding coarse selflessness.

So rather than thinking, 'Oh, having the Buddha teaching all these different views at different times is all very confusing', one should see the actual purpose behind those teachings as being a gradual path guiding one from coarser views to more subtle views. That the Buddha taught different views actually shows the greatness of the Buddha and his qualities. Being able to teach according to the disposition and ability of different disciples is really only possible when one possesses clairvoyance.

2.1.2.1.2. Refuting that one's position is contradicted by scriptural quotation

This is covered in five outlines

2.1.2.1.2.1. Refuting that objects wouldn't even exist conventionally

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

2.1.2.1.2.3. Refuting that it would be invalid to go to take rebirth

2.1.2.1.2.4. Refuting that it would be invalid to have the distinction between virtue and negativity

2.1.2.1.2.5. Refuting that it would be invalid to ascertain the difference between samsara and nirvana

2.1.2.1.2.1. Refuting that objects wouldn't even exist conventionally

This has five lines:

If said to be contradictory even with the conventional;[7d]

There is no fault because of yogi's convention [8]

It is seeing suchness according to transitory beings.

Otherwise the realisation of a woman's impurity

Would be harmed by transitory beings.

Here the **Realists** argue, 'Well let's not even talk about whether it would be impossible to have ultimate truth. According to your point of view it would not even be possible to have conventional truth. That is because it would not be possible for functionalities to exist in a momentary manner since the popular perception is that earlier functionalities exist later. Therefore according to you it would be impossible to have momentary functionalities'.

The answer of the **Madhyamaka** is, 'Even though the popular perception amongst ordinary transitory beings is that earlier functionalities also exist later, that doesn't make them permanent. It does not take away their momentariness, because these very functionalities are actually realised by certain ordinary transitory beings to be momentary. Therefore your fault does not apply. A yogi's conventional valid cogniser does realise the momentary nature of functionalities'.

To that the **Realists** reply, 'Well, then there is really no need to realise suchness if this yogi's realisation of these four aspects of impurity, impermanence and so forth already realises the nature of the object'.

The answer is that relative to the ordinary being's view that phenomena are pure, happiness, permanent and possess a self one can say that the realisation of the impure, miserable, impermanent selfless nature of the object is the realisation of the actual nature of the object. That does not mean that one has literally realised the actual nature of the object in an ultimate sense. One says one has realised the actual nature of the object when one realises the impure, miserable, impermanent and selfless nature of the object, relative to this misconception of grasping at the object as a pure, happy, permanent and possessing a self. But that does not mean that one has not realised the final nature of the object in an ultimate sense.

When the verse says 'otherwise' that means that if a popular perception were to be valid just because of being a popular perception, then the realisation of impurity would be harmed by transitory beings. The female yogi meditates on the impurity of the man's body, and the male yogi meditates on the impurity of the female's body.

The reason for meditating on the impurity of the other person's body is because there is a popular perception of the body as pure. Through meditating on the impurity one ascertains the impurity of the other's body. That realisation would be harmed by the more popular perception of the body as being pure. If a perception were to become valid just by being a popular perception, or consensus, then that is what would happen. But a yogi can actually ascertain the impurity of the body, and as Nagarjuna says, 'If one wants to know the impure nature of the other person's body the

only thing that one needs to do is to look into one's own body'.

If just being popular makes that perception a valid perception, then it would become a valid perception just because of the consensus. In that case the meditation on impurity would be contradicted by the popular perception of the body as pure.

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

Merits from the illusory like conqueror [9ab]
Equal the ones from a truly existent.

Here the **Realists** argue, 'Well if there is no intrinsic existence then it would be impossible to build up the two accumulations.'

The **Madhyamaka** reply, 'If one can accumulate merits by making truly existent offerings to a truly existent Conqueror, then I can also accumulate merits by making offerings to an illusory Conqueror'.

The Conqueror is like an illusion but he taught true existence, because for some it enhances their practice of virtue. By believing in a truly existent Conqueror they make offerings to that Conqueror and accumulate merits in this way. Then Shantideva says here, 'I accumulate merits likewise by making offerings to an illusory Conqueror lacking true existence'.

These two lines refer to the merits that arise from making offerings to an illusory Conqueror. These boundless merits equal the boundless merits that are made towards a Conqueror who is believed to exist truly.

In the second line 'he is truly existent' means that the merits attained from making offerings to an illusory Buddha equal the merits made to a Conqueror who is believed to exist truly.

2.1.2.1.2.3. Refuting that it would be invalid to take rebirth

If sentient beings are like an illusion [9cd]
Then how can they be reborn after death?

These two lines are the objection offered by the **Realists**. If sentient beings are like an illusion, then how could they be reborn? An illusion does not continue after its disintegration.

For as long as the conditions come together [10ab]
For that long even the illusion exists.

The **Madhyamaka** say, 'For as long as conditions come together objects arise that are like an illusion. If an illusion lasts for as long as the collection of its conditions then why shouldn't a sentient being?'

Sentient beings exist because of the accumulation of karma and afflictions, and because of the aggregation of karma and afflictions. For as long as there is this aggregation of karma and afflictions sentient beings will exist. For example, an illusion exists for as long as the conditions for it to arise exist.

At this point it is good to remind oneself of how one takes rebirth in cyclic existence.

1. Initially there is the root cause of ignorance.
2. Because of ignorance one accumulates projecting karma.
3. This projecting karma fades away and its potential is placed on the mind stream. So we have the third link of consciousness.
4. At the time of death the potential of that projecting karma that has been placed on the consciousness is ripened.

5. As one goes through the process one realises more and more that one has to give up the aggregates. As the mind starts to withdraw from the body strong craving is generated in the mind.

6. Because of the concern over losing one's body this craving intensifies into grasping and one then grasps for the particular type of future life.

7. Then comes the establishing karma, the link of becoming or existence.

8. When that happens then one takes rebirth in a rebirth that was projected by the karma.

The first link and the seventh and eighth links¹ are mental afflictions and the second and the ninth links are karma.

Just because of a long continuity [10cd]
Sentient beings are truly existent?

The **Realists** argue that because sentient beings have a much longer continuity than an illusion they are truly existent.

Shantideva then says, 'Well, you cannot really base true existence on the length of time that an object exists, because illusions, dreams and so forth exist for different lengths of time. You would have to say that long dreams exist truly while short dreams do not exist truly. Likewise your assertion basing whether something exists truly or not on the length of time that it exists is not really valid'.

In short one can sum up by saying that regardless of whether something exists for a brief amount of time or whether it exists for a long amount of time it still always will be a false illusory-like phenomenon.

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Edited Version

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¹ The twelve links are:

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|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Ignorance | 7. Feeling |
| 2. Compositional factors | 8. Craving |
| 3. Consciousness | 9. Grasping |
| 4. Name and form | 10. Becoming |
| 5. The six senses | 11. Rebirth |
| 6. Contact | 12. Old age and death |