

Study Group - *Bodhicharyavatara*

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

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Please generate a good motivation, thinking 'I have to attain enlightenment to achieve the welfare of all sentient beings, and in order to achieve this aim I am now going to listen to this profound teaching. Then I am going to put it into practice'.

2.1.2.1.2. Refuting the *Sautrantika*¹ (cont.)

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

Here there are five sub-outlines, and last time we completed the objection that illusory-like sentient beings cannot take rebirth.

2.1.2.1.2.2.4. Refuting that it would be invalid to have a distinction between virtue and negativity

The Realists argue that good and bad would not be possible if sentient beings are only like an illusion.

Here we have ten lines:

*The killing and so forth of an illusory being [11]
Does not contain negativity because there is no mind.*

*Relative to those endowed with an illusory mind,
Merits and negativities arise.*

Since mantras and so forth do not possess the power [12]

The illusory mind does not arise.

*The illusion arises from various conditions
And is likewise manifold*

That one condition can do it all Is totally non-existent anywhere. [13a]

All these debates turn around the inherent or non-inherent existence of phenomena. All the objections are based on the assumption that if something does not exist inherently, then it has to be completely non-existent. The *Sautrantika* say that if phenomena don't exist inherently and are merely like an illusion, then killing another sentient being would not create any non-virtuous karma. The objection here is that if sentient beings are like an illusion, then one would not accumulate any negativity if one were to kill, or do other non-virtuous activities to another sentient being. They say one does not create any negativity if one kills an illusion, and therefore one does not create any negativity if one kill an illusory sentient being.

Here *Shantideva*'s reply is that if a magician creates the illusion of a human being and if one imagines that illusion to be another human being, then killing that imaginary sentient being would not be the complete action of killing. Although there would not be a complete action of killing, one would, for example, create the

negativity of engaging in the action. But there would be not be the full karma of killing, because for that there needs to be the object of an actual sentient being - something that possesses mind. Because an illusion does not possess any mind, confusing an illusion with an actual sentient being and then engaging in the action of killing that imaginary sentient being would create some non-virtuous karma, such as the karma of engaging in the action of killing. But one would not get the complete karma of killing.

*Relative to those endowed with an illusory mind,
Merits and negativity arise.*

If one engages in a positive action with regard to something that possesses mind, then that will create virtue; if one engages in harmful action with regard to something that possesses mind, then one creates negativity.

How does this difference arise? Even though the illusion as well as the sentient being are the same in lacking true existence, the difference lies in one possessing mind, and the other not possessing mind. Relative to the one possessing mind complete merits and negativities arise.

*Since mantras and so forth do not possess the power
the illusory mind does not arise.*

What this means is that the mantras and the different substances of the magician do not possess the power to create something that possesses mind. Therefore the illusory mind does not arise within an illusion.

*The illusion arises from various conditions
And is likewise manifold.*

*That one condition that can do it all
Is totally non-existent anywhere.*

This shows how the illusion is generated in dependence upon a multitude of causes and conditions and not one single condition. It shows the dependent arising of the illusion. Even though phenomena are like illusions they still fall within the realm of cause and effect, so cause and effect still apply to them. If the causes and conditions arise then the illusory horse and elephant will come into existence. But if the conditions are incomplete, then the illusory horse and elephant won't come into existence.

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

Here the *Sautrantika* say that the division into *samsara* and *nirvana* would be invalid if everything lacks inherent existence.

*Should nirvana be the ultimate, [13bcd]
And samsara be the relative,*

Then also the Buddha would circle. [14]

*What would be the point of the bodhisattvas
practice?*

*If the continuum of the conditions is not cut off,
Then the illusion will also not be reversed.*

*If the continuity of the conditions is cut-off, [15ab]
Then it won't arise even conventionally.*

This debate is aimed at the *Madhyamaka* view of natural *nirvana*. First of all, there is the assertion that nominally *samsara* is generated from causes and conditions, which are ignorance, karma, consciousness and so forth. The lack of inherent existence of the *samsara* thus generated is asserted to be **natural nirvana**.

¹ Described last week as Refuting that one's position is contradicted by the sutras

Here the opponent confuses natural nirvana with actual nirvana that is attained through overcoming adventitious obscurations. That's important to know. The Sautrantika say, 'On the one hand you accept the conventional samsara that is generated through causes and conditions. Then at the same time you assert that the lack of inherent existence of that samsara is **ultimate nirvana**. In that case everybody would have attained nirvana, since everybody has natural nirvana'.

Here the opponent confuses natural abiding nirvana with actual nirvana. The same thing applies to the natural abiding perfection of wisdom. By confusing natural abiding nirvana with nirvana, the opponent says, 'Should nirvana be the ultimate nirvana?'

Ultimate nirvana is the natural abiding nirvana, the lack of true existence of samsara. At the same time, the samsara that the relatively existing contaminating aggregates experiences - birth, ageing, sickness and death - comes about through ignorance, the other delusions and karma.

In that case everybody would have attained nirvana, since everybody has natural nirvana. It would follow that even a person like the Buddha who is actually accepted by both schools to be beyond samsara would then circle in cyclic existence.

Is there a problem if one were to posit the natural abiding nirvana as nirvana? Is the natural abiding nirvana, nirvana or not?

Student: No.

What's the reason for it not being nirvana?

Student: Because it hasn't overcome the causes for samsara.

But what is the reason for it not having abandoned the causes for samsara? In general we say that nirvana is the non-affirming negation that is the absence of suffering and its causes and so forth. So why is the natural abiding nirvana not nirvana?

Student: Because the causal chain, cyclic existence, has not been cut.

Why is the cause of samsara not abandoned?

Student: Because the natural abiding nirvana is just a mere lack of an inherently existent suffering, not of a dependent arising suffering.

To give a word commentary to the first verse, it says that if the Buddha circled in cyclic existence there will be no point to a bodhisattva's practice because if there is an existence that is already there, there would be no need to attain it, because it is already there. Actual nirvana needs to be attained through meditating on the path and through engaging in different practices. If the natural abiding nirvana were the actual nirvana then the need to practice the path would fall away.

One should know the difference between natural abiding nirvana and actual nirvana, what the cause of cyclic existence is, and how the causes actually generate cyclic existence and so forth. Then, it is asserted there is no fault - the fault that is pointed out by the Sautrantika is not there.

If the natural abiding nirvana is actual nirvana then ordinary sentient beings would already abide within

nirvana. Then one could also say that a buddha actually abides within cyclic existence. This fault does not exist here.

If the continuity of conditions is uninterrupted, then the illusion does not cease to exist. So therefore as long as the causes and conditions of samsara are not interrupted, then samsara will continue to exist and the experience of birth, ageing, sickness and death will continue to exist.

If the continuity of the conditions is cut, then samsara will not exist even conventionally or nominally. There is no need for samsara to exist in a buddha's mind, because a buddha has cut off the conditions for samsara to arise. Because a buddha has cut the conditions for samsara, then samsara does not exist in that buddha's mind. Apart from not arising ultimately, samsara does not arise in a buddha's mind even conventionally. Because ordinary sentient beings have not cut off the conditions for samsara, then their mind is a samsaric mind and they experience samsara.

2.1.2.2. REFUTING THE MIND ONLY POSITION

2.1.2.2.1. Presentation of the position of the Mind Only

2.1.2.2.2. Refutation of the position of the Mind Only

2.1.2.2.1. Presentation of the position of the Mind Only

These two lines present the position of the Mind Only:

*When even the mistaken is non-existent [15cd]
What takes the illusion as its object*

The 'When' in the first line refers to all objects lacking true existence and in that way being like an illusion. The Mind Only assert that mind exists truly and ultimately. They assert that all compounded phenomena are truly existent.

Therefore, when all impermanent phenomena exist non-truly, then even the mistaken mind is non-existent. If everything is like an illusion in that it lacks true existence then everything becomes non-existent. In that case the mistaken awareness that ordinarily perceives the illusion would also have to be non-existent.

This would mean that there would be nothing that could perceive the illusion, and one would arrive at this fault. Therefore impermanent phenomena have to have true existence.

The problem for the Mind Only arises because the Madhyamaka completely refute true existence, but in the Mind Only system compounded phenomena and thoroughly established phenomena have to exist truly. They don't assert that all phenomena exist truly; they don't say that mental fabrications exist truly; but they do say that compounded phenomena and thoroughly established phenomena exist truly. Therefore according to them, when one refutes true existence then it is not possible for consciousness to exist. Then there would be no object possessor that could perceive the object.

2.1.2.2.2. Refutation of the position of the Mind Only

The answer uses the same reasoning, but in reverse. It comes in two parts:

2.1.2.2.2.1. Offering a similar debate

2.1.2.2.2.2. Refuting the answer to that debate

2.1.2.2.1. Offering a similar debate

This is covered in these two lines:

*When for you the illusion is non-existent, [16ab]
Then at that time, what becomes the focus or the
object.*

The **Mind Only** say the object appears as an outer object, but it doesn't exist as an outer object.

So **Shantideva** says to them, 'If the object actually existed in the way it appears to exist, then it would have to be an outer object. In that case, there would be no illusion and there would be no object possessor. If the object does not exist the way it appears, then it has to lack true existence, because that is the actual meaning of not existing in the way it appears to exist. If there is a discrepancy between appearance and existence then the object does not exist truly. 'If you say that the object does not exist in the way it appears to exist, then it has to lack true existence. If it lacks true existence, then again according to you, the object such as the illusion becomes non-existent, and in that case there would be nothing that could make an illusion its object'.

Gyaltsab Rinpoche says something similar in his explanation of these two lines.

When the object exists in the way it appears to exist, as an outer object, then the object would have to be an outer object. In that case, in your system, illusions and its object possessors would be non-existent. If the object does not exist in the way it appears to exist, then it would lack inherent existence, and according to you, it would have to be completely non-existent. In that case, then it would be impossible to have, for example, an illusion that appears as an outer object. Also there would be no other objects such as a form, sounds or so forth that could become the objects of awareness, and also there would be no mind that could focus on that object.

We can stop here. For now, if you can understand the fundamental position of each side then that's a good foundation. After this more debates between the Mind Only and the Madhyamaka will come.

This is the fourth class, so you will have discussion group next week. It's important to have a fruitful discussion where one just doesn't refute the other person with verbal cleverness. When one actually debates on the basis of understanding, one debates on the basis of having thought about the topic.

Student: What is a compounded phenomena? Is it like an illusory object?

The 'compounded' actually refers to the coming together of the causes and conditions that cause the phenomenon in question. The phenomenon is compounded. Why? Because it arose from this composition of causes and conditions.

Geshe-la holds a glass

The glass is impermanent, it is momentary, it is compounded, it is a cause, it is a result. The Mind Only say that it is an other-powered phenomenon, a functionality. The glass is an effect, because it arose from causes and conditions. At the same time, of course, it has its own effect, for example if the glass breaks. Also the

succession of moments of glass cause each other. The first moment of glass causes the second moment of glass, which causes the third moment of glass and so forth.

Student: So it follows from that it's not an illusory object?

The 'illusory' part refers to its lack of inherent or true existence. The 'illusory' refers to the discrepancy between the appearance of inherent existence and the lack of inherent existence. The glass is said to be like an illusion because, while on the one hand it appears as inherently existent or as truly existent, on the other hand it does not actually exist in the way it appears, because it lacks inherent existence or true existence. So that's why the glass is referred to as 'illusory'. It doesn't mean that the glass is completely non-existent.

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Edited Version

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