
Study Group - Bodhicharyavatara

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual, generate the motivation of wanting to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings thinking, 'Towards that end I am then going to listen to this profound teaching and then I am going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

2.1.3.2. ESTABLISHING EMPTINESS AS THE ANTIDOTE (CONT.)¹

2.1.3.2.1. It is not even possible to attain nirvana without realising emptiness

If the root of the teachings is the essential bikkhu,
[44]

Even the essential bikkhu has a problem.

The mind endowed with an object,

Has difficulty even to abide beyond sorrow.

There are two reasons why essential bikkhus are referred to 'the root of the teachings'.

First of all, the term *essential bikkhu* refers to arhats. In general, it is said that the *root of the teachings* are the vows of individual liberation. The ultimate practitioners of those vows are arhats, and therefore arhats are referred to as roots of the teachings.

Secondly, arhats such as Mahakashyapa, Ananda and Upali kept the teachings preserved in their perfect memory and were able to recite it to others. Therefore they are regarded as roots of the teachings. At the first Buddhist council of five hundred arhats, Mahakashyapa recited the sutras belonging to the Abhidharma basket, Ananda recited the sutras belonging to the sutra basket, and Upali recited the teachings belonging to the Vinaya basket of teachings.

2.1.3.2.2. The consequence of becoming an arhat merely by abandoning the manifest afflictions

If 'liberated through abandonment of the afflictions'
[45a]

Here, the followers of the **Hearer** vehicle say that one can eliminate mental afflictions and be liberated from cyclic existence by meditating on the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths, such as impermanence and so forth. Therefore, they say, it is not necessary to realise emptiness in order to abandon mental afflictions.

Madhyamaka: It is, of course, possible to realise the lack of a person as a self-sufficient substantial existent, and by meditating on that selflessness abandon a certain level of manifest afflictions. However, according to the Prasangika system, one will not be able to abandon the manifest afflictions as asserted by the lower tenets. This is because according to the Prasangika system, the lack of a person that is a self-sufficient substantial existent is not, strictly speaking, even the selflessness of person.

Immediately afterwards one becomes that [45b]

The Madhyamaka posit this consequence: if one can be liberated by meditating on the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths then it follows that by merely abandoning the manifest afflictions as taught in the two texts on knowledge, *The Compendium of Knowledge*, and *The Treasury of Knowledge*², one would *immediately afterwards become* an arhat. This means that non-Buddhist practitioners who abandon the manifest afflictions would also be arhats.

Though not having afflictions, [45cd]
One can see that their karma is still potent.

Madhyamaka: Though such a person does *not* have any manifest *afflictions* in their mental continuum, one can observe that the *karma* to project a future life *is still potent* in their continuum.

2.1.3.2.3. Refuting the answer to the consequence

If, 'Occasional craving taking forcefully, [46ab]
It is certain I say it does not exist.'

Hearer follower: 'It is not a mere occasional abandonment but certain liberation because, even though the karma in the person who has abandoned the manifest afflictions might still be potent, the conducive condition of craving that induces the next existence does not exist in that person's continuum. At the time of death the potent karma has to be ripened through the conducive conditions of craving and grasping, and though the karma might still be potent, it will not ripen as the conducive conditions of craving and grasping are lacking.'

One can say that at the time of death, craving relates to appearances of this life, while grasping relates to appearances of the next existence.

Though this craving is not afflicted, [46cd]
Why should it not be like ignorance?

Madhyamaka: 'Though the craving arising from the transitory view grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial existent might be a non-manifest affliction at that time, but why should it not be the same for craving as it is for ignorance? We have common ignorance as explained in the *Two Knowledges*, and uncommon ignorance according to the Prasangika.'

There is the **common ignorance** that is taught in the *Two Knowledges*, which is the ignorance grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial existent. Then there is the **uncommon ignorance** as taught in the Prasangika system, which is the ignorance grasping at an inherently existent self. The line 'Why should it not be like ignorance?' means that since that are two levels of ignorance, why should it not also be the same for craving? There is the coarser craving that is induced by the transitory view grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial existent, and the more subtle craving that is induced by the transitory view grasping at an inherently existent self.

In the first system the root is the grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial existent, from which arises attachment to pleasure and anger to suffering. This then gives rise to the other root and affiliated afflictions. There

¹ This heading wasn't actually used last week.

² Known as the *Two Knowledges*.

is a whole set of root and affiliated delusions which have the grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial existent as their root.

Then there is the more subtle level of root and affiliated afflictions, which have as their root the grasping at inherent existence. Through meditating only on the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths as taught in the *Two Knowledges*, a person may have abandoned the manifest craving that is induced by the grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial existent, but that will not even dent the manifest craving that arises from grasping at the self as inherently existent. The craving that arises from the grasping at the self as inherently existent will not be harmed in the slightest by the meditation on the sixteen aspects alone. Although it can abandon the manifest coarse afflictions to a degree, it will not abandon the seed of the afflictions at all.

*Craving arises from feeling,
And those with feeling have it;
It abides for some, whose
Mind is endowed with an object.* [47]

These lines establish that the person who has abandoned the manifest afflictions according to the *Two Knowledges* still has craving, and therefore can still take rebirth.

Madhyamaka: By grasping at the feeling of happiness as truly existent one generates craving to make contact with happiness. By grasping at suffering as truly existent one generates the craving to be separate from the feeling of suffering. Practitioners with feeling who have not abandoned the grasping at true existence will always have craving.

Therefore, to counteract craving it is not enough to just to realise the lack of true existence of something in general. One needs to realise the lack of true existence of happiness and suffering. Otherwise, by grasping at the feelings of happiness and suffering as truly existent, one will generate the craving to meet with the feeling of happiness, and to be separated from the feeling of suffering.

The mind endowed with a truly existent object is true grasping. We previously said that true grasping is the grasping at the basis, path and result as truly existent. As long as one is endowed with that grasping, one is endowed with true grasping. As long as the mind is endowed with true grasping, and has not realised that the absence of the apprehended object of true grasping, then that mind will also have craving.

2.1.3.2.4. Showing the need to meditate on emptiness to even achieve just liberation

*The mind lacking emptiness
Will arise again despite ceasing,
Like the absorption without recognition.
Then, meditate on emptiness.* [48]

Even though the manifest afflictions might have ceased momentarily through meditating on the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths, these afflictions will arise again, for as long as the mind lacks the realisation of emptiness - the realisation of the lack of true existence of person and aggregates. It is similar to *absorption without recognition*, where the manifest afflictions have ceased temporarily, but then rise again. That's why one needs to meditate on

emptiness in order to attain liberation and enlightenment. That's the instruction.

Then come three verses that establish the Mahayana sutras as authentic Buddhist teachings. However there is some doubt amongst some scholars as to whether or not these three verses were part of the original text, because they repeat a point that was made earlier.

*If the words regarded as sutras
Are regarded as teachings of the Buddha
Why do you not regard the sutras
Of the Mahayana likewise?* [49]

This asks the question, 'If the words that teach the superior training of the mind are regarded as Sutra basket, and those dealing with the morality are regarded as Vinaya basket, and those dealing with wisdom are regarded as Abhidharma basket, and since the *Mahayana sutras* also mostly deal with the three higher trainings, then why don't you also regard the *Mahayana sutras* as authentic sutras?'

*If, because of only one
All become faulty,
Then why, through one concordant sutra,
Are not all teachings of the conqueror?* [50]

'If you feel that the Mahayana sutras are not authentic scriptures because there is one Mahayana sutra that doesn't fit your definition of an authentic sutra, then one could likewise say, "Why wouldn't you accept all of the Mahayana sutras" as valid sutras, if there is even just one valid sutra according to your definition.

'If all the Mahayana sutras become faulty because there is one sutra that doesn't fit your description of a valid sutra, then by the same reasoning, one could say that they are all valid as long as there is one sutra that fits your description of a valid sutra.' The sutras that they have a particular problem with are the *Extensive, Medium and Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*.

*The words are not comprehended
By the great Mahakashyapa and so forth.
Who would disregard them,
Just because you do not realise them?* [51]

Here the **Hinayana** say that the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* are not comprehended even by such great beings as the Mahakashyapa and so forth, and therefore they are not authentic sutras.

Madhyamaka: 'Who would disregard the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*, which have actually been pronounced as being very profound by the great Mahakashyapa, just because you do not realise their have profound meaning? Nobody in their right mind would disregard the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* as authentic sutras just because you don't realise them.'

2.1.3.2.4.1. Showing why emptiness is the path to nirvana while avoiding the two extremes

Ordinary individuals are bound by true-grasping and attachment and abide in the extreme of existence, because they have to take rebirth through karma and afflictions. Hearer and self-liberated arhats who have attained individual liberation while not abiding in the extreme of existence, abide in the extreme of peace. Arya Bodhisattvas don't abide in the two extremes of existence

and peace: on the one hand they are not bound by cyclic existence, and on the other hand they have not gone to the extreme of peace. They take rebirth in cyclic existence out of compassion for sentient beings. This is a result of their realisation of emptiness, and that is why the attainment of non-abiding nirvana is the fruit of the realisation of emptiness. The attainment of the non-abiding nirvana is the fruit of the wisdom of realising emptiness, and therefore it is inappropriate to refute the view of emptiness. That is why one must meditate repeatedly on emptiness.

Review

What is the meaning of afflictions?

Student: Any thought that may upset the peace of mind.

Are you sure? How many root afflictions are there?

Students: Six.

Name them.

Student: Attachment, ignorance, hatred, pride, deluded doubt and wrong view.

What is attachment?

Student: The mind that doesn't want to be separated from an object.

That could also be virtue, such as the mind that doesn't want to be separated from bodhicitta, or the Buddha.

What is the meaning of liberation?

Student: Being free from cyclic existence.

Is this vase liberated?

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