
Study Group - *Bodhicharyavatara*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual, please sit yourself comfortably and relax. Place your mind inwards, not engaging with external objects. Then generate a virtuous motivation, thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings. In order to do so I am now going to listen to this profound teaching, and then I am going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

2.2. Practising selflessness through meditation

2.2.1. Establishing the selflessness of person through reason

Last time we completed talking about the way of meditating on the lack of the object of innate self-grasping of person.

2.2.1.2. MEDITATING ON THE SELFLESSNESS THAT IS THE LACK OF THE OBJECT OF THE INTELLECTUALLY ACQUIRED TRUE-GRASPING AT PERSON¹

What is being refuted here are the different types of self that are posited by non-Buddhists. Even though there are a great variety of positions taken by different non-Buddhist tenets, Shantideva concentrates on the two main positions of the Samkya and Vaisheshika. By refuting these two positions, all the other various non-Buddhists views regarding the self will also be implicitly refuted.

2.2.1.2.1. Refuting the self to be consciousness (as posited by the Enumerators or Samkya)

2.2.1.2.2. Refuting the self to be matter (as posited by the Particularists)

2.2.1.2.3. Refuting objections regarding selflessness

2.2.1.2.1. Refuting the self to be consciousness

The view of the Samkya

The Samkya assert a permanent, isolated, independent self, which is consciousness. They refer to the self as sentient being, knower, consciousness or experience. They attribute to this self five qualities:

1. Engaging - engaging happiness, suffering, and so forth.
2. Permanence - being a permanent functionality
3. Not being the creator, i.e. not being the creator of the different manifestations of the primary principle
4. Lacking qualities - lacking qualities of particles, darkness and courage
5. Lacking action - being pervading

Here the question arises, is the grasping at the person possessing these five previously mentioned characteristics intellectually acquired self-grasping not?

This question arises because if it is intellectually acquired self-grasping, then one realises selflessness by realising the absence of its apprehended object. What do you think?

Here one can draw a fine distinction between intellectually acquired self-grasping and self-grasping generated through tenets. Even though this is self-grasping that is generated through tenets, by realising the absence of its object, one does not realise selflessness. Therefore it might be mistaken to classify it as intellectually acquired self-grasping *per se*. One has to make a fine distinction here.

The Enumerators classify objects of knowledge into twenty-five categories.

- The primary principle. It exists truly and ultimately, and is only a cause and not an effect. The qualities of courage (happiness), particles (equanimity), and darkness (suffering) are perfectly balanced within it.
- The person, also exists truly and ultimately, but is neither cause nor effect.
- The five sense objects of form, sound, smell, taste and tactile sensations, plus awareness and pride, are both cause and effect.
- The eleven faculties, which are effects but not causes
- The five elements (4 + space), which are effects but not causes

The faculties and elements are only effects because they are only expressions of the primary principle. The Enumerators, or Samkya, say that the expressions of the primary principle are all of one partless nature with the primary principle.

They have their own view of how sentient beings circle in cyclic existence, and how they then attain liberation. When the person generates the desire to engage objects such as sounds, the nature of the primary principle is aware of that, and emanates these sounds. From the nature of the primary principle arises awareness, from which arises pride. From pride arise the eleven faculties and five sense objects. From the five sense objects arise the five elements.

They say that awareness is like a double mirror, externally reflecting the expressions of the primary principles such as forms and so forth, and internally reflecting the self. Through that the self is able to engage the different objects. They say that the reason why the self circles in cyclic existence is because it grasps at the action and at the agent as being one.

In order to attain liberation one has to apprehend the solitary self. This is done by initially reflecting on the disadvantages of the sensory objects, and so attaining calm abiding. Then, through the union of calm abiding and special insight, one generates meditative absorption. In dependence on the meditative absorption one generates the clairvoyance of the divine eye, with which one is able to see the primary principle. When one looks at the primary principle it will withdraw just like a modest girl, who has been surprised in the nude. The primary principle will withdraw from the self, and all its expressions will absorb in reverse sequence into it. The

¹ Last week this was described as 2.2.1.2. The way of refuting the object of intellectually acquired true grasping

only thing that is left is the solitary self, at which point one has attained liberation. You can read up more about this in the *Precious Garland of Tenets*.

THE ACTUAL REFUTATION BY THE MADHYAMAKA

*If the consciousness of sound were permanent [60]
One would apprehend sound all the time.
If there are no objects of knowledge how can
One say what is known by what?*

The **Samkya** say that consciousness of sound is a permanent functionality. Sound is that which is being engaged, and consciousness is that which engages sound. In this context, when it refers to consciousness it refers to the self.

Madhyamaka: 'If the knower of sound is permanent, then regardless of whether or not external sound is present, that knower would apprehend sound constantly, because of being a permanent functionality. But that is invalid because if there is not object of knowledge then how can one say this consciousness is the object-possessor of such and such an object.'

The **Samkya** reply, 'That is not established because even though there might be no sound, the consciousness apprehending sound is permanently established'.

*If it is consciousness without that known [61]
Then it follows that also wood is conscious.
Therefore one has to say that without proximity of
The object of knowledge consciousness does not
exist.*

Madhyamaka: 'It follows that even wood is conscious, because it is possible to be consciousness without having an object. Considering all of this one has to say if you do not accept that it is ascertained that without the proximity of sound the consciousness of sound does not exist, then there is no time when sound is not apprehended.'

*If, 'they know form', [62]
Why do they not hear anything at that time?
If, 'because there is no proximity to sound,'
Then there is also no consciousness of it.*

The **Samkya** reply, 'The fault of an objectless consciousness does not exist, because at the time of no sound the consciousness that is the permanent person engages form'.

Madhyamaka: 'Why should the person that is engaging form not hear sound even though there is no sound? After all, that person is a permanent functionality engaging the five objects without distinction.'

The **Samkya** reply, 'When there is no proximity to sound there is no consciousness of sound'.

Madhyamaka: 'If there is no knower of the object when there is no object then there is no permanent person.'

What you have to keep in mind is that the **Samkya** start out with the root proposition that the person is this permanent consciousness of sound. When asked, 'Why would one not hear everything all the time?' they say, 'Because there is no immediate proximity to sound'.

The **Madhyamaka** recognise that this is an opening where the **Samkya** have contradicted themselves. They say, 'Well, that actually contradicts your assertion of a permanent person. Because if you say that if there is no object there is no object-possessor, then there is no consciousness of the object, which contradicts your

assertion that the person is a permanent knower of sound'.

*How could that which is in the nature of the
apprehension [63]
Of sound become the apprehension of form?
One is labelled as father and son
But is not perfect.*

Madhyamaka: That which is in the nature of the apprehension of sound does not become the apprehension of form. because they are two mutually exclusive aspects.

The **Samkya** reply, 'Well, one person can be simultaneously labelled as father and son. Similarly, one consciousness can be labelled simultaneously as the apprehension of sound and the apprehension of form. Even though the *manifestation* of sound might not be present, since sound and form are of one *nature*, when form is present the nature of sound is also present. And therefore at that time the apprehension of form is also the object-possessor of sound.'

They have this notion that the person is this solitary partless entity of consciousness. They don't have the possibility of positing a consciousness that is made up out of parts, where one part is the apprehension of form and one part is the apprehension of sound. Instead, what they say is that it depends on how you look at it. If you look at it from one perspective, it is the apprehension of sound; if you look at it from another perspective, it is the apprehension of form. That is as valid as saying that one person is simultaneously father and son. That is how they posit the person as being the object possessor of form and sound simultaneously.

Madhyamaka: 'But it is not perfect'. What this means is that one person can be both father and son simultaneously, but not as a perfectly established phenomenon. This means that it is only a merely imputed phenomenon, and not ultimately established on the one person. That person is not ultimately both father and son, but only nominally on an imputed level. Being perfectly established is a synonym for being inherently established.

The **Madhyamaka** say, 'Your example does not really fit here because you assert that one consciousness is ultimately both the apprehension of sound and the apprehension of form. In the example it is possible for one person to be both father and son, because that person does not exist ultimately as father and son, but is only merely labelled as father and son'.

*Thus, courage and particles [64]
As well as darkness are neither father nor son.
It is not seen as possessing
The nature of apprehending sound.*

This explains to the **Samkya** why something that ultimately exists cannot be labelled both as father and son at the same time.

Madhyamaka: 'Within the primary principle, where the three qualities of courage, particles and darkness are in a state of balance, the natures of father and son do not exist, since you yourself say, 'the supreme nature of qualities is not something that can be seen; Whatever can be seen is an accumulation, like an illusion.'

Courage refers to happiness; particles refer to equanimity; darkness refers to suffering. The natures of father and son can not exist within the primary principle, or ultimate truth, because the primary principle cannot be observed. It is not possible for the primary principle to be both son and father on different occasions, because it is the primordial substance. The reasoning is that since it is the primordial substance, it cannot be present within the expressions of that substance.

Madhyamaka: 'Further, if the apprehension of form were to possess the apprehension of sound, then that would be something observable, which it is not.'

If, 'like an actor, it is seen [65]
In a different guise,' - it is impermanent.
In case, 'the different guise is one
With it,' that is without precedent.

Samkya: 'The different apprehensions are different expressions of the one consciousness, like an actor who is seen in different guises at different times.'

Madhyamaka: 'It follows that the person is not a permanent functionality because at one time is in the mode of the apprehension of sound, and then later it is in the mode of the apprehension of form. It is not a permanent functionality, because it is later something that it wasn't earlier, and it is earlier something that it won't be later, which makes it an impermanent object.'

The **Samkya** reply, 'There is no fault because the earlier and later apprehension of form and sound are of one nature'.

Madhyamaka: 'If you say that the subsequent apprehension of form is of one nature with the earlier apprehension of sound, then that is without precedent because they exist at completely different instances.'

In case, 'the different guise is not true,' [66]
That is how you assert your nature.
If you say, 'only consciousness', according
To that it follows that all beings are one.
Also the animate and inanimate [67ab]
Become one because of their shared existence.

Samkya: 'There is no fault, because the different appearances are not true. The appearance of a different guise is misleading.'

Madhyamaka: 'If consciousness does not appear the way it exists, then when you refer to consciousness as being truly existent, what consciousness are you talking about? If it is not true it can not be truly existent'.

Samkya: 'The very person that is knowing consciousness is truly existent.'

Madhyamaka: 'Then it follows that all beings that are actually of different continuum would be one, because they are truly existent, permanent, pervasive, partless consciousnesses. Further, not only would all beings be one, but all animate and inanimate objects would be one, because of being permanent, partless, and pervasive.'

When the particulars are distorted [67cd]
Then what could be their shared basis?

Out of the twenty-five categories of objects, the Samkya say that twenty-three are false, while the person and the primary principle are true and are truly existent. How could these various distorted false expressions of the

primary principle have the truly existent primary principle as their shared basis? That is not possible because the expressions are false.

Next time is discussion group and then exam. Have a good discussion. Also, everybody should come to the exam, do their best and write a good exam!

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