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## Study Group - Bodhicharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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Please sit yourself comfortably in the meditation posture and generate a virtuous motivation. Initially turn the mind inwards, and then generate the virtuous motivation of wanting to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings thinking, 'In order to achieve this purpose I am now going to listen to this profound teaching, and then I am going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

### 2.2.1.2.2. Refuting the position of the Particularists (Vaishesika) that the self is matter

*The inanimate is also not the self [68]  
For the very reason that it is inanimate, like a vase.  
Then if, 'because it is endowed with consciousness  
It is conscious,' it follows not knowing becomes  
redundant.*

*If there is nothing that becomes the self [69]  
How does the mind affect it?  
Thus, devoid of consciousness and action,  
It is as if space has been made the self.*

**Madhyamaka:** Not only is consciousness not the self, but neither is matter the self. The assertion that the self is matter, as posited by the Particularists, is invalid. The inanimate is not the self for the very reason that it is inanimate, for example, like the vase. The self has to be something that possesses mind, and form does not possess mind. Therefore it cannot be the self.

If something that is inanimate were to be the self, then it would follow that, since it does not possess mind, it would not know anything.

**Particularists:** Even though the self is matter, because it is established through dependent arising it can possess mind.

**Madhyamaka:** That the person later comes to know the five sense objects through outer conditions, refutes the assertion of a truly existent person who initially does not know the five sense objects.

Also, if there is nothing that becomes the self, then how does the mind affect it? Since the self is permanent then how could it know something through conditions? As the Particularists assert that the self is devoid of impermanence, and assert that the self is permanent, it follows that the self is also devoid of action and activity. It also implies that the self cannot actually be affected by causes and conditions, which means that it cannot know through causes and conditions.

'To sum up, if you assert such a self you might as well say that space is the self.'

The **Particularists** assert a self that they say is form, but at the same time they say that it is permanent and truly existent. The **Madhyamika** initially presented the argument that that which does not have mind, the

inanimate, is also not the self for the very reason that, like a vase, it doesn't have mind. To this the **Particularists** replied that the self does have mind, because it is established through different causes and conditions. Then the **Madhyamaka** say, 'Well if you say that the self knows through different causes and conditions, then that negates your assertion that the self exists truly. Further, if the self is permanent and is devoid of any action or activity, then it also cannot be affected by anything. To sum up, if you assert a self that does not know and is devoid of action, you might as well assert that space is the self'.

### 2.2.1.2.3. Refuting objections regarding the Buddhist position on the self

This deals with the argument by the non-Buddhists saying that the self has to be permanent, because the self has to pervade all past and future lives. They say this would not be possible if the self were impermanent. The Buddhist view is that the self is impermanent; it changes on a basis that it is momentary. The non-Buddhists say that since the self comes from past lives to future lives, it therefore has to exist in all past and future lives, and therefore the self has to be permanent.

Here there are three objections:

1. If the self were impermanent then the karmic cause and effect could not exist.
2. If the self were impermanent then it would be invalid to meditate on compassion.
3. (The non-Buddhists say that the permanent self has not been refuted.<sup>1</sup>)

### If the self were impermanent then the karmic cause and effect could not exist

*In case it is said, 'Should the self not exist, [70]  
Karmic cause and effect relationships  
Become invalid because if one disintegrates upon  
Creating the karma, whose karma does it become?'*

This is an important point since the self is that which is bound to cyclic existence, and that which is liberated from cyclic existence. The self creates karmic causes and has to experience the effects. The **non-Buddhists** say that if the self is not eternal then the karmic cause and effect relationship would be invalid, because, for example, the person who creates the karma would not exist at that time when the karmic fruits are experienced. For the same person to experience the karma that he or she created earlier, that person has to be permanent. They say that only on the basis of a permanent self does the law of karmic cause and effect make sense, and that it does not make sense on the basis of an impermanent person.

The non-Buddhists assert an eternal self, because they say that if the self were impermanent, the person who experiences the karmic result would be different from the person who created the cause. But at the same time they do say that the self changes. The person who creates the karma is not the person experiencing the karmic result. But the person is permanent.

### Answer by parallel reason

*The basis of action and result is different, [71]*

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<sup>1</sup> This outline might be incorrect

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*And though the creator self does not exist then,  
Since this is the same for both of us,  
Isn't this debate here pointless?*

The **Madhyamaka** make use of this view saying, 'Well, both of us accept that the person who experiences the karmic results is not the same person who created the karmic causes. This means that according to your reason both our systems would be erroneous. According to you the person experiencing the karmic results is different to the karmic causes were created. The self who created the karmic causes in one life does not exist in the life when the karmic effects are experienced. Even though you assert that the self is permanent in both instances, are we not both basically saying the same thing? Therefore isn't this debate here pointless?'

The Madhyamaka are saying that if the fault ascribed to them really existed then the non-Buddhists would have the same fault in their own system.

*Or do you say that with a cause is also [72]  
Endowed with the result? This is not observed.  
In dependence on one continuum  
We refer to agent and engaged.*

**Madhyamaka:** Further, the persons of the earlier life and the later life are two different people. If the person experiencing the effect is permanent then that person should exist at the time of the cause. This means that the person creating the cause would also experience the result at the same time. That is something which is not observed.

*How cause and effect is valid despite the person being impermanent*

**Madhyamaka:** It is invalid to say that because the person is impermanent the karmic relationship is invalid, because the person who experiences the result is of the same continuum as the person who created the cause, labelled in dependence on one continuum. Here the person who experiences the result is of one continuum with the person that created the cause, because they have the same root consciousness.

In general one says that sentient beings are of one continuum with the superior Buddha because everyone becomes enlightened, but this is a different reason. Here, one says that the early and later persons are of one continuum, because they share the same fundamental consciousness. Because the earlier and later persons have the same fundamental consciousness they are of one continuum. That is why the person can create actions and causes and later experience the results, and why karmic relationships are valid. Of course, here one is not talking about a truly existent person, but a person who is labelled in dependence on the mental consciousness.

*The past and future minds [73]  
Are not the self because they do not exist.  
Then, should the generated mind be self,  
There is no self because it disintegrates.*

At the time of the present consciousness the past consciousness has disintegrated, and the future consciousness has not yet arisen. Neither the mind that has generated and disintegrated, nor the mind that will arise through causes and conditions is the self. That is why one says that both the past and future consciousnesses are not the self.

One could think that the present mind that has been generated and not yet disintegrated is the self. But the present mind is not the self, because in the next moment it disintegrates. When its nature disintegrates the self does not exist, so the present mind is also not the self. This argument is designed for the non-Buddhist view of self.

*For example, like the banana tree, [74]  
When taken apart nothing is there.  
Similarly, when looking with analysis  
The self also is not perfect.*

On analysis the self is not found to exist inherently. The **non-Buddhists** assert that at the time of analysis there is a self to be found. This is refuted by the **Madhyamaka**, who say that when one analyses the different parts of the basis of imputation, such as the mind and so forth, then the self is not to be found. It is like the banana tree which is made up of an accumulation of leaves. One can pull off one leaf after the other to see what is inside, but after the last leaf there is nothing left. Similarly, when analysing whether or not the self exists truly, at the end of the analysis one will arrive at the lack of a truly existent self.

**If the self were not to exist inherently then there would be no object of compassion**

*If, 'If there is no sentient being, [75]  
Then to whom does one practice compassion?'  
That accepted to achieve the result,  
Labeled by ignorance.*

**Non-Buddhist:** If a person does not exist inherently then it is meaningless to generate compassion for that person, because that person does not exist.

**Madhyamaka:** Just because the sentient being does not exist inherently, that does not mean that there is no sentient being. The sentient being labelled by ignorance, accepted to achieve the result of buddhahood, is the object of compassion. The term *ignorance* here is not used literally for the ignorance that grasps at true existence, but figuratively, because sentient beings are merely labelled without differentiating them as truly existent or non-truly existent. That is, the absence of investigation and analysis becomes ignorance in a figurative sense.

**(The permanent self has not been refuted)**

*Without sentient being whose effect is it? [76]  
True, but even though, it is posited by ignorance.  
For the purpose of pacifying suffering  
Ignorance of the result should not be opposed.*

**Non-Buddhists:** If the person does not exist inherently, then there would be no person who could experience the effect of enlightenment.

**Madhyamaka:** That is true; if there were no sentient beings then there would nobody to experience the effect of enlightenment. But even though sentient beings lack true existence, they still exist nominally. So the sentient being can experience an effect. There is no ultimately existing person who creates causes and experiences effects, but there is a labelled person who creates causes and experiences effects.

Here *ignorance* again is only figurative. When meditating on compassion to pacify the sufferings of sentient beings, one should not oppose the ignorance which merely labels sentient beings without investigation and analysis. This

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means that one should not negate the nominal world while meditating on compassion.

This compassion is meditated upon without investigation and analyses into the person pertains to the view of the Madhyamaka that the mere person is the person for whom one experiences compassion. That person is not posited through investigation and analysis. In order to pacify the sufferings of sentient beings one should not refute the mere person, who exists independently of investigation and analysis, and for whom one can practise love and compassion.

*Pride, the cause of suffering, [77]  
Increases because of ignorance regarding the self.  
If, 'This can not be reversed.'  
The meditation on selflessness is supreme.*

**Non-Buddhists:** Well, what is the ignorance that has to be refuted in order to attain liberation?

**Madhyamaka:** The ignorance that has to be refuted is the ignorance of self-grasping, which creates and increases the causes for suffering in cyclic existence.

**Non-Buddhists:** Well, this type of ignorance has been present in minds since beginningless time, and therefore it is not possible to oppose it.

**Madhyamaka:** Ignorance is an invalid mind that has no foundation in reality. It is a distorted consciousness and therefore it is weaker than the wisdom realising selflessness, which is rooted in reality and is valid. That is why wisdom can overcome ignorance.

This completes the outline of the selflessness of person. Next comes the selflessness of phenomena, which we can do next time. This meditation on the selflessness of phenomena is explained in the context of meditating on the four close placements by mindfulness.

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