
Study Group - *Bodhicharyavatara*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual, please generate the virtuous motivation of bodhicitta.

Last time we reached the point saying that the ignorance that has to be abandoned is the ignorance that grasps at the self of person and phenomena, which is the root of all suffering. The more figurative ignorance is not an obscuration and is not to be abandoned.

Then the **non-Buddhists** reply that it is impossible to abandon this ignorance grasping at the self of person and phenomena, because it has been in the mental continuum since beginningless time. To this the **Madhyamaka** replied that this ignorance can in fact be abandoned through meditating on selflessness, which is the method to abandon ignorance. It is possible for the wisdom realising selflessness to counteract ignorance, because the wisdom realising selflessness is rooted in reality. The ignorance grasping at the self of person and phenomena is a distorted consciousness and not rooted in reality, and therefore it is weaker.

2.2.2. An elaborate explanation of the selflessness of phenomena

Grasping at the aggregates as inherently existent is self grasping at phenomena. The non-existence of the apprehended object of that grasping is the selflessness of phenomena.

2.2.2.1. EXPLAINING THE SELFLESSNESS OF PHENOMENA BY WAY OF THE FOUR CLOSE PLACEMENTS BY MINDFULNESS

The definition of close placement by mindfulness is *an exalted knower on the path that is contained either in mindfulness or in wisdom*.

In the **lower tenets** the close placements by mindfulness meditate on the conventional general and specific characteristics of the body, feelings, mind or phenomena with the goal of liberation from the contaminated aggregates, while in the **higher tenets** the close placements by mindfulness meditate on the ultimate characteristic that is the emptiness of body, feelings, mind or phenomena in order to attain non-abiding nirvana. In both cases the focus is body, feeling, mind and phenomena.

Meditating on the four close placements by mindfulness according to the **lower schools** is for the purpose of being introduced to and realising the four noble truths.

- Meditating on the close placement by mindfulness on the body is done to realise that the body is in the nature of misery and suffering.
- Meditating on the close placement by mindfulness on feelings is to realise that the feelings of happiness and suffering are the cause for craving. Through the experience of happiness and suffering, craving for happiness and craving for the absence of suffering are generated. This makes one realise that the craving needs to be abandoned.

- Meditating on the close placement of mindfulness of the mind is to realise that the mind is impermanent, not the self, and so forth, and to eliminate the fear of becoming non-existent when entering nirvana without remainder.
- Meditating on the close placement by mindfulness on dharmas of phenomena is to realise all afflicted phenomena as the cause of suffering, and therefore something to be abandoned, and to realise all pure phenomena as the cause for happiness, and therefore something to be adopted. In this way one becomes induced into the four noble truths.

The way of meditating on the four close placements by mindfulness is by way of the general characteristic of the object, as well by way of the individual characteristic of the object.

Meditating on the four close placements by way of the **general** characteristic of the object, for example, in relation to the body, would be to meditate the body as impermanent, being in the nature of misery, being empty and being selfless.

To meditate on the body by way of its **specific** characteristics is to meditate on the body as being in the nature of the elements and the derivatives of the elements.

- In the context of this meditation the meditator comes to realise that the **body** is impermanent, suffering, empty and selfless, and in the nature of the elements and the derivatives of the elements. In this context the meditator also comes to realise the impurity of the body, which would be one aspect of this meditation.
- When one meditates on the close placement by mindfulness on **feeling**, one can do it from the point of view of the general characteristics of impermanence, misery, empty and selfless, or one does it from the point of view of the specific characteristic of the nature of experience.
- The specific characteristic of **mind** is the nature focusing.
- The specific nature of **phenomena** is mental factors, which refers to the different virtuous and non-virtuous mental factors.

For example, in the context of the body, the mindfulness keeps the mind focussed on the object of the body, while the wisdom investigates the different general characteristics of the body such as its impermanence, being in the nature of misery, being empty and selfless, or the specific characteristics of being in the nature of the elements and the derivatives of the elements. Meditating on the impure nature of the different parts of the body or the body as a whole and so forth, all fall into this category. This is a very useful meditation that you should try to do.

This heading is discussed under four points.

2.2.2.1.1. Meditating on the close placement by the mindfulness of body

2.2.2.1.2. Meditating on the close placement by the mindfulness of feeling

2.2.2.1.3. Meditating on the close placement by the mindfulness of mind

2.2.2.1.4. Meditating on the close placement by the mindfulness of phenomena

2.2.2.1.1. Meditating on the close placement by the mindfulness of the body

Here in the context of the *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, the close placement by mindfulness on the body is meditation on the emptiness of the body.

Meditation of the mindfulness of the body comes in three outlines:

2.2.2.1.1.1. Establishing the lack of inherent existence of that possessing parts, the body

2.2.2.1.1.2. Establishing the lack of inherent existence of the parts

2.2.2.1.1.3. Showing that it is unreasonable to be attached to the illusory-like body

2.2.2.1.1.1. Establishing the lack of inherent existence of that possessing parts, the body

The body is not the feet or calves, [78]
The thighs and buttocks are also not the body,
The stomach and back are also not the body,
The chest and upper arms are also not the body,
The rib cage and hands are also not the body, [79]
The armpits and shoulders are also not the body,
The internal organs are also not it.
If the head and neck are also not the body,
Then what of this is the body?

If the body were to exist inherently, then it would have to exist completely from its own side, completely independently from anything else. It would have to exist independently from its parts, such as the different limbs and so forth. It would have to be findable at the time of analysis and investigation. If a person's body were to exist inherently, then it should be findable when looked for. Here one goes through the different parts of the body: *the feet are not the body; the calves are not the body; the thighs and buttocks are also not the body; the stomach and back are also not the body.* Why? Because the body is merely labelled in dependence on these parts. The inherently existent body is not to be found in any of these parts of the body.

The chest is also not the body, the upper arms are also not the body, the rib cage is not the body and the hands are also not the body because the body is labelled in dependence on these. *The armpits and the shoulders are not the body, also the internal organs are not the body and also the head and the neck are not the body* because the body is labelled in dependence on these. None of the individual parts of the body are the body, because the body is labelled in dependence on them.

In case this body abides [80]
In all parts separately
Then of course the parts abide in parts.
How can it abide in itself?

Here the opponent asserts the coarse body exists separately from its parts. This is then analysed.

If the coarse body is a phenomenon separate from its parts, does this body abide in all parts by dividing itself up, or does this body abide as a whole in each part individually?

In case the coarse body abides in all parts by dividing itself up then also the parts themselves abide in parts. The idea here is that each part of this coarse body abides within the parts of the body. If this coarse body abides in all parts by dividing itself out throughout all the parts, then the parts themselves would have to abide in a similar manner in their own parts. But this would become endless.

For example, if the coarse body abides within its parts, then one of those parts is the hand. The hand would also have to abide within its own parts, for example, within the different fingers. These too would then abide in their own parts and so forth. Thus it would become limitless. Thus, how can it abide in itself?

In case the entire entity of the body [81]
Abides in the hands and so forth,
How ever many, such as hands etc.,
Are found, they become bodies.

In the other case, if the entire entity of the body abides in individual parts, such as the hands and so forth, then the logical conclusion arises that however many parts there are, one would end up with that many bodies.

If there is no body inside or out [82bcd]
Then how is there a body in the hands etc.
If it does not exist apart from the hands etc.,
Then how can it exist?

If there is no body inside or out, then how is there a body in the hands and so forth? This inherently existent body that is of a different entity (as asserted by the non-Buddhists), or the inherently existent body that is of one entity with its parts inside, (as asserted by Buddhists) does not exist, because such a body is not found inside or out. If this intrinsically existent body were to exist, then it would have to exist either as the entirety of the collection of the body parts, or it would have to be findable in the individual body parts, or it would have to be findable separately from the body parts. Since the intrinsically existing body is not findable in any of these ways, then it does not exist.

Then, there is no body, body awareness is generate [83]
Through ignorance regarding the hands etc.,
Similarly to awareness of a person generated for
A heap of stones through the specific shape they are
placed in.

As long as the conditions are there [84]
The body will appear the being.
Likewise, as long as they are there regarding
The hands etc., they will appear as the body.

If such a body does not exist apart from the hands and so forth, *then how can it exist* ? There is no independently existing inherent body, however there is *awareness* of a truly existent *body* that *is generated through* the condition of *ignorance* grasping at the true existence of the body parts, such as the *hands* and so forth.

This is *similar* to the *awareness of a person generated for a heap of stones*, coming about through the *specific shape* of that heap of stones, and the ambiguity of dusk. Because of the presence of these conditions the mind mistaking that heap of stones for a person is generated. Similarly, because of the ignorance grasping at the true existence of the body parts, and the presence of the accumulation of body parts, the mistaken awareness of a truly existent body is generated.

For as long as the conditions are there, the body of stones will appear as the person. Likewise, for as long as the conditions of ignorance and so forth are there, body parts will appear as the truly existent body. This explains how the appearance of true existence is a mistaken appearance, or an illusion, which comes about because of the delusion of true grasping.

2.2.2.1.1.2. Establishing the lack of inherent existence of the parts

In the previous outline, the truly existing body was refuted, and now the basis of imputation of the body, the body parts, are refuted as being inherently existent.

Likewise, because of being the collection of fingers, [85]

The hand also becomes that.

They in turn are a collection of digits.

The digits are also divided by their parts,

And the parts are divided into particles, [86]

Should the particles be divided into directions,

Since the partitioned directions lack parts,

They are like space. Hence, there are also no atoms.

Just as the body is not inherently existent, as it is labelled in dependence on its parts, the hand also is merely imputed on the collection of fingers, and does not exist inherently from its own side. In turn the parts of the hand such as the fingers also don't exist inherently from their own side, because they are imputed on the collection of their parts. When one says that the hand is merely labelled in dependence on the collection of its parts, this also shows the lack of inherent existence of their basis of imputation.

If one checks, none of the individual parts of the arm such as the upper arm, the lower arm, the elbow or the hand and so forth are the arm. The reasoning for the parts of the arm is the same. They are divided by their parts, and are merely labelled in dependence on their parts. Those parts are again divided further into particles, and the particles are divided into their directions. The partitioned directions also lack inherently existent parts, so they are like space. No matter how much further one goes, one will never find truly existent parts. Rather, one will arrive at the lack of truly existent parts. That's why they are like space, and therefore there are non-truly existent atoms.

Similarly to space being the mere absence of obstruction and contact, here one also has the mere absence of truly existent parts. If there were truly existent particles, then there will have to be partless particles, because truly existent particles would have to be particles that exist independently of their own parts. As such there would have to be partless particles, and since there are no truly existent particles, then there are also no partless particles.

2.2.2.1.1.3. Showing that it is unreasonable to be attached to an illusory-like body

Thus, who with discerning faculty, [87ab]
Is attached to an illusory-like form?

What person that has discerned that the body is merely labelled in dependence on its parts, and as such is illusory-like, would generate attachment for the illusory-like form?

Here, the idea is that attachment generated for the body is generated on the basis of the distortion of the body into a truly existent body existing from its own side. We have previously introduced the idea that attachment to the body is generated in dependence on a mistaken conception of the body as attractive and truly existent. The perception of a truly existent body comes about because of true grasping at the body, and on the basis of that one generates attachment for the body, which appears to exist completely independent of any conditions.

By contemplating the four noble truths one's experience of cyclic existence will be lessened. With an understanding of selflessness one correspondingly lessens the experience of

cyclic existence. The reason for this is that when one understands selflessness, one also understands that the apprehended object of attachment is non-existent.

Here in the Prasangika system attachment can be regarded as true grasping. Attachment is generated in dependence on the mistaken conception elaborating the body as attractive, but also elaborating the body as truly existent. One then generates attachment for that truly existent attractive body.

It would be really good for you to sit down and do this meditation, analysing how attachment is generated in one's mind. By realising the lack of a truly existent body one has realised the absence of the object of attachment; one has removed the basis on which attachment is generated. Attachment disappears when one realises that there is actually no object there.

Did you understand that if there were an intrinsically existing body then it would have to be the one entity with its parts, or a different entity. If it is of one entity with its parts, then either the collection of the parts would have to be the body, or the individual parts would have to be the body.

Review

What is the focal object of the self-grasping at the body, and what is the apprehended object?

Student: The focal object of self grasping is the parts of the body, and the apprehended object is the appearance of the body as truly existent.

Aren't the parts of the body different from the body? Isn't there a different true-grasping for each of those? Also, the appearance of a truly existent body does exist. There's a danger that you might mistake that.

Student: The focal object would be the body and the apprehended object is the inherently existent body.

What is the focal object of the wisdom that realises the lack of a truly existent body?

Student: The lack of a truly existent body.

If the focal object is the lack of truly existent body, then what is the apprehended object?

Student: The lack of a truly existent body.

Didn't we talk about these two types of mind: they are of a different, mutually exclusive mode of apprehension, while have the same focus? They both focus on the body, but one grasps the body as truly existent, while the other one realises the lack of the truly existent body.

Student: Isn't it the case that to overcome attachment you have to accept that there's an object there? Yet you just said that there's no object and that is what makes attachment go away.

It is the apprehended object of the true grasping that is non-existent.

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Edited Version

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