
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

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Generate a virtuous motivation, thinking that I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and in order to become enlightened I'm now going to listen to this profound Mahayana Dharma, and then put into practice what I have heard.

We have covered the qualities that beautify the continuum of the practitioner, and begun the qualities that outshine the mental continuum of others.

2.2. The Qualities That Outshine the Mental Continuum of Others (cont)

2.2.2. The Way a Bodhisattva on the Seventh Ground Outshines the Hearers and Self-liberator Vehicles Through Awareness

The question arises, if a bodhisattva on the first ground outshines hearers and self-liberators through lineage, then when does a bodhisattva outshine hearers and self-liberators through the power of awareness? The answer is that this happens from the seventh ground onwards.

From the seventh ground onwards bodhisattvas outshine hearers and self-liberators through the power of their awareness, as well as through their lineage.

Bodhisattvas on the first ground outshine hearers and self-liberators through their lineage. The reason given in the sutras is that it is because they have attained bodhicitta with pure superior intention. Why do the bodhisattvas on the first ground have the bodhicitta with pure superior intention? It is because they have attained ultimate bodhicitta.

On the seventh ground the bodhisattva outshines hearers and self-liberators through the power of awareness. The reason is that a bodhisattva on the seventh ground can enter into, and come out, of non-dual meditative equipoise on cessation in one instant. This is a special quality that bodhisattvas on the previous grounds don't have. There are various types of 'instant'. For example there's the instant of 'for however long the action is going to take to be completed'. That is not what this is referring to here, where the instant is not a great length of time. Here the instant is the instant of the mind, a mental instant, which is a very short period of time. In one instant of the mind, a bodhisattva on the seventh ground can enter into non-dual meditative absorption on emptiness and then exit.

These are very special qualities that lower bodhisattvas don't possess. The reason is that when one enters non-dual absorption on emptiness, it is a very deep

meditation on emptiness, and it is very difficult to exit from that absorption very quickly. At the beginner bodhisattva stages in the stages of the conceptual realisation of emptiness, one can very easily enter into that meditation, and also exit from that equipoise. However once the meditation becomes a non-dual meditation on emptiness, then it is difficult to enter and to exit quickly. Bodhisattvas on the seventh ground, however, are so accomplished that they can enter and exit in one instant of the mind.

2.2.3. Explaining the Meaning That Has Been Established Through the Previous Points

Here the point made by the previous outlines is explained. This has several sub-sections.

2.2.3.1. Showing that the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis* Explains that Hearers and Self-liberators Realise Phenomena as Lacking Natural Existence

2.2.3.2. Sources Proving This

2.2.3.3. Eliminating Doubts with Regard to the Subject

2.2.3.1. Showing that the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis* Explains that Hearers and Self-liberators Realise Phenomena as Lacking Natural Existence

The points we have just covered, which prove that self-liberators and hearers realise the selflessness of phenomena, are that bodhisattvas on the first ground outshine hearers and self-liberators merely through their lineage, and not through the power of their awareness. This point shows that hearers and self-liberators have realised emptiness directly. Therefore these bodhisattvas don't outshine hearers and self-liberators through the force of awareness.

Chandrakirti himself explained very clearly how the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis* shows hearers and self-liberators realise the selflessness of phenomena. That's one of the subheadings. The second is that this is also explained in the *Bodhisattva Charyavatara*¹.

2.2.3.1.1. Clarification of the Thought of Chandrakirti

According to this system, which is the Prasangika system, hearers and self-liberated buddhas also realise all phenomena as lacking a natural existence. It is very clearly ascertained in the Prasangika system that hearers and self-liberated buddhas also realise that all phenomena lack natural existence.

If this were not the case, and hearers and self-liberators didn't realise the selflessness of phenomena, then various faults would arise.

Do you see any problem if hearers and self-liberators don't realise the selflessness of phenomena?

Student: There would be no reason why they outshine bodhisattvas.

That is correct. If hearers and self-liberators didn't realise the selflessness of phenomena, then the first ground bodhisattvas would also outshine them through the force of their awareness. That first ground

¹ *Entering the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, or A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*

bodhisattvas don't outshine hearers and self-liberators through the force of their awareness is an indication that hearers and self-liberators have realised emptiness directly.

If hearers and self-liberators did not realise emptiness directly then bodhisattvas who have the first mind generation would outshine them through the force of their awareness, in the same way as they outshine those who have the worldly abandonment of desires.

Worldly abandonment of desires refers to the pacification of coarse manifest desires for the objects of the desire realm through having attained states of meditative absorption, after first having attained calm abiding. On the basis of calm abiding one attains superior insight. On the basis of superior insight and having meditated on viewing what is below as coarse, and what is above as peaceful and desirable, one pacifies the desires of the desire realm and achieves a concentrative absorption.

Chandrakirti's Three Reasons

If hearers and self-liberators have not realised emptiness directly then the bodhisattvas on the first ground would outshine them through the force of their awareness in the same way as they outshine those who have pacified their manifest attachment through the force of their concentration.

If hearers and self-liberated arhats have not realised emptiness directly then they would be like Hindu practitioners who haven't abandoned the subtle and coarse of the three realms. By focussing on the nature of forms and so on, their minds would become mistaken.

Hearers and self-liberators would be like Hindus who haven't abandoned the basic delusions of the three realms. We have already explained on previous occasions that the various delusions are also contained within the sphere of the various realms. Of the ten root afflictions, the five afflicted views basically exist throughout the three realms. Of the non-view root afflictions, anger is the only delusion that doesn't exist in the higher realms. Apart from anger, however, all the other delusions can be found in all of the three realms.

The third reason is:

If hearers and self-liberators haven't realised emptiness directly then also they wouldn't have realised the selflessness of person. Why? Because they focus on the basis for imputing the self, which is the aggregates.

Then the text gives a quote from the *Precious Garland* by Nagarjuna.

As long as there's grasping at the aggregates
There will also be grasping at the self,
For that long
The person will remain in cyclic existence.

Here the *Self Commentary* is giving three reasons proving that hearers and self-liberators realise the selflessness of phenomena.

Hearers and self-liberators realise the selflessness of phenomena because otherwise three faults would

occur.

1. The first reason basically says that:

If hearers and self-liberated arhats haven't realised selflessness of phenomena then it would follow that first ground bodhisattvas would be able to outshine them through the force of their awareness, in the same way as they can outshine those who have the worldly abandonment of desires.

2. Then comes the second reason, which reads:

Take the subject hearers and self-liberated arhats - it follows that they haven't abandoned the delusions of the three realms - because they lack the wisdom that directly realises the selflessness of phenomena, for example like Hindu practitioners.

3. The third reason is:

Take the subject object of knowledge - it follows that hearers and self-liberated arhats don't realise the selflessness of person - because they elaborate the basis for the imputation of the person, the aggregates, as being truly existent.

They elaborate the basis for imputation, the aggregates, as being truly existent because they haven't realised the basis for the imputation of the person, the aggregates, as lacking true existence. It follows that they haven't realised this, because they haven't realised the selflessness of phenomena.

That covers the three reasonings. There's a text called the *Madhyamaka Gone Far* that explains those three reasonings very clearly.

Regarding the third reason, the meaning has to be explained as before, because it also states in the art of definitive and interpretative, that if one posits the self of phenomena as a tenet then it will be impossible to realise selfless of a person.

Here it is saying that if someone accepts by tenet the self of phenomena, having the intellectually acquired view that a self of phenomena exists, then it is impossible to realise the selflessness of a person. So that is the Prasangika standpoint.

Did you get that?

Do hearers and self-liberators realise selflessness of phenomena?

Student: Yes

If they haven't realised the selflessness of phenomena then what faults would occur? How many are there - there are not many?

Student: Three

How do we arrive at those three faults? If you contemplate it a bit, it will make some sense. The *Self Commentary* stated three faults. Look at the first fault. How does that arise? Can somebody explain it to me?

[student answer unclear]

The first fault was that bodhisattvas on the first ground outshine arhats in the same way as they outshine those with only worldly abandonments. How do you arrive at that fault?

Student: Are they seeing things as inherently existent?

Of course what you say is correct, but how do we arrive at that through the first reasoning? The first reasoning says that bodhisattvas outshine arhats exactly in the same way as they outshine those with worldly abandonments.

Student: They have only abandoned delusions in a worldly fashion, not in an ultimate fashion. That's correct isn't it?

First you give an explanation and then you ask whether its correct. [laughter] Actually I didn't quite hear what you said.

Student: If they haven't realised the selflessness of phenomena they can't have abandoned all delusions completely.

No, that's not the first reasoning. The second reasoning is that arhats haven't abandoned the delusions of the three realms in the same way as Hindu practitioners. So the abandoning of the delusions comes in the second reasoning.

What is the third reasoning?

Student: Because they haven't abandoned the basis of imputation as being empty, they can't abandon the imputation itself as being empty.

Summary of the three reasons

It is important that you get the point of what Chandrakirti is saying.

Firstly, if hearers and self-liberators don't realise the Prasangika point of view of emptiness then those three faults would occur. They would be outshone by bodhisattvas on the first ground in the same way as those with only worldly abandonments are outshone through the force of awareness.

Secondly, they wouldn't have abandoned the delusions of the three realms in the same way as non-Buddhist practitioners.

The **third** reasoning is they wouldn't even realise the selflessness of person, because they wouldn't realise the basis for the imputation of the person, which are the aggregates, as lacking true existence.

In the third reasoning in Chandrakirti's *Self Commentary* it says that:

If they haven't realised the selflessness of phenomena then it would follow that they wouldn't realise the selflessness of person. The reason is because they would actually grasp at the person's basis of imputation, the aggregates as being truly existent. Why would they grasp at a persons basis of imputation, the aggregates, as being truly existent? Because they wouldn't realise the aggregates' lack of true existence. Why would that be? Why would it follow that they wouldn't realise the person's basis of imputation, the aggregates as lacking true existence? It is because they wouldn't realise the selflessness of phenomena.

The Prasangika Point of View

Those three faults are posited from the Prasangika point of view. As it says, if one doesn't realise

emptiness from the Prasangika point of view then those three faults would occur.

The Svatantrika-Madhyamika Point of View

We also have the point of view of the lower tenets such as the Svatantrika-Madhyamika point of view. There it is not necessary for arhats to realise the selflessness of phenomena in order to become liberated. It is enough to attain just the direct yogic perception that realises the selflessness of a person directly. This assertion has to be shown as being interpretative reasoning.

According to the Svatantrika point of view, the person basically lacks substantial existence and, so it is possible to first of all realise that a substantially existing person is neither of one nature with the aggregates, nor of a different nature from the aggregates. In such a way it is possible to realise the selflessness of a person.

After that, if possible, one can also realise the other fifteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths. Once one has realised the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths then the practitioners who take those sixteen aspects as their main object of meditation intensely acquaint their mind with those.

After they have done so, then the practitioner will realise the selflessness of a person directly. Why? Because this is established through the reasoning that proves yogic direct perception. The reasoning that proves yogic direct perception is that if the mind is intensely acquainted with its object then it will be able to generate an extremely clear appearance of the acquainted object.

When the extremely clear appearance of the acquainted object, selflessness, is generated that means that one has realised selflessness directly. So because this reasoning proving that yogic direct perception exists, relies on this quality of the mind, that if the mind is intensely acquainted with its object of meditation, then sooner or later it will be able to generate this extremely clear appearance. This is the way yogic direct perception is generated.

The Svatantrika-Madhyamika say that a practitioner can generate a yogic direct perception that directly realises the selflessness of a person. Once the practitioner has directly realised only the selflessness of a person in such a way, then they have attained the path of seeing that abandons the intellectually acquired afflictions. After having done so, then the practitioner can further acquaint their mind with the already generated direct realisation of the selflessness of person, and in such a way establish the path of meditation, which then is able to overcome the innate afflictions. Even though the practitioner doesn't realise emptiness, all afflictive contamination has still been completely exhausted.

The Svatantrika-Madhyamikas assert that it is not necessary to realise emptiness to abandon mental afflictions. Their concise explanation is that practitioners with the main aim of abandoning afflictions would first of all conceptually ascertain the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths. Without having realised emptiness, they would ascertain the selflessness of a person as the lack of a substantially

existing self-supporting person. Then, through continued and intense familiarity with this selflessness of person, that conceptual understanding would become a direct realisation.

The reasoning is that if their mind is intensely acquainted with the object of meditation, it will attain the final clear appearance of the meditation object, which means it will attain a direct realisation of the meditation object. By attaining this direct realisation of the selflessness of person in such a way, they have then attained the path of seeing that sees directly the selflessness of person. The path of seeing acts as the antidote to the intellectually acquired afflictions. Then the practitioner can further habituate their mind through the already established direct realisation of the selflessness of phenomena on the path of meditation. They do this in such a way as to overcome even the innate afflictions, thereby completely eliminating the afflictions from the mind.

Here *Illumination* says:

Even though emptiness is not realised they are able to abandon all the afflictions of the three realms including their seeds.

This mode of abandoning the abandonments through seeing and meditation is superior. It's not a worldly abandonment but it is an abandonment that has gone beyond. This means that it is not just a worldly abandoning of the delusions, but it is the final abandonment of the delusions.

That was an explanation of how the Svatantrika-Madhyamika assert that it is possible to abandon the afflictions without realising emptiness. Next is the way the Prasangikas refute that assertion.

The Prasangika Response

Illumination says:

If it is said that it was possible to abandon all afflictions by meditating on the sixteen aspects of impermanence and so forth, so here this is to be said, it is not asserted by our own system that without realising emptiness merely by understanding the sixteen aspects of impermanence and so forth with valid cognition, and then by with intense and great effort meditating on those sixteen aspects in such a way then seeing directly the coarse selflessness of a person, and then also after having seen it furthermore acquainting oneself with it, we don't accept that mode of practice. Because through that type of path one won't be able to realise the selflessness of person completely in all aspects, or in all characteristics. It's not asserted as a path of seeing nor as a path of meditation that has gone beyond transitory existence. Therefore since one is not able to abandon the abandonment through seeing and the abandonments through meditation together with their seeds, and since it is therefore not possible to assert those paths and paths of meditation, to say that arhats have attained those two paths, and that arhats have eliminated both of those abandonments together with their seeds, is interpretative system. It is an interpretative meaning in the same way as a Mind Only assertion of partless particles and other

existence as an accumulation of those partless particles, and the absence of a mind that is of a different nature with this accumulation of partless particles.

If you remember the various tenets it gives various views of the mind only such as the existence of partless particles. This assertion by the Svatantrika-Madhyamika in which they sort of prove the above quite extensively is similar to when the Mind Only say that they have realised with valid cognition that there is no mind apprehending the object that is different from the nature of the object. So this assertion that there is no subject of different nature is, according to the Prasangika also just an interpretative meaning, and not a definitive meaning. Where do the Svatantrika-Madhyamika base their view? It is on this quote from the Pramanavatika where it says,

*Being liberated through viewing emptiness
Meditating on the rest, that is the meaning.*

Here they think that there is a distinction to be made between those abandonments that can be achieved without the realisation of emptiness, and those that require the realisation of emptiness to be achieved.

Next week we can go into how the *Bodhisattva Charyavatara* proves the points discussed tonight.

The Four Aspects of the First Noble Truth

Do you know the sixteen aspects? First of all what are the four aspects of the first noble truth of suffering?

Student: Suffering, impermanence, selflessness and emptiness

Impermanence, then

[student answer unclear]

There's a slight difference also between the way the sixteen aspects are asserted according to the lower tenets and the Prasangika tenets. It's empty and selfless. What are the four aspects of the four noble truths of origin?

[student answer unclear]

Next time you have to be able to posit those. You have to be able to relate those sixteen aspects to your own practice and meditation using this form: Take the subject the afflicted aggregates - they are suffering then because of such and such a reason, or take the subject afflicted aggregates they are impermanent and then because you know you can give a reason. You have to relate it to your own aggregates.

First Aspect: Impermanence

What reason do we state in the proof statement: Take the subject contaminated aggregates - they are impermanent because?

Student: They are products

What is the necessity that if it is a product it has to be impermanent?

[student answer unclear]

Second Aspect: Suffering

What would you posit as a reason for: Take the contaminated aggregates, they are suffering because?

[student answer unclear]

We always say the aggregates are suffering for the reason that they are under the control of karma and delusions.

Third Aspect: Empty

Take the subject contaminated aggregates - they are empty because?

[student answer unclear]

It is empty because there is no person that is self-empowered. This refers to the coarse selflessness of person, the lack of the person being empty of being self-sufficient and substantially existent.

Fourth Aspect: Lacking natural existence

The fourth aspect refers to the person lacking natural existence. This is according to the Prasangika point of view.

Relationship between the Four Aspects

When we meditate on those four aspects of the first noble truth, there is a certain evolution of ideas as one leads onto the next. **First** we realise that the aggregates are impermanent, then that leads to the **second** understanding that they are suffering. Why they are suffering? Because they are under the control of karma and delusions. Then that realisation acts as a building block for the **third** realisation, that there's a lack of self-empowered person, which is the coarse selflessness of person. That leads to the **fourth** realisation, which is the subtle selflessness of person - that a person lacks inherent or natural existence.

The realisation of those four aspects acts as an opponent to the four misconceptions regarding the first noble truth.

- The realisation of impermanence counteracts the grasping at permanence.
- The realisation of suffering counteracts the grasping at purity
- The realisation of empty counteracts the grasping at the self empowered person
- The realisation of selflessness counteracts the grasping at an inherently inherent person.

You can study those for yourself.

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