
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

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23 July 2002

Please generate a virtuous motivation as usual.

2.2.3.1. Showing that the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis* Explains that Hearers and Solitary Realisers Realise Phenomena as Lacking Natural Existence (cont)

Last time we started with the outline explaining how the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis* shows that hearers and self-liberators realise the lack of natural existence of phenomena. This is done in two sub-sections. Firstly, how Chandrakirti's *Self Commentary* shows this, which we covered last time. We went through the three faults that Chandrakirti said would occur if hearers and self-liberators didn't realise the selflessness of phenomena.

2.2.3.1.2. Showing this also to be according to the *Bodhisattva Charyavatara*

Today we come to the second sub-section, where the great bodhisattva Shantideva proves the same point.

The Point of Dispute

The point of this whole debate is to prove the Prasangika point of view that in order to attain liberation one needs to realise the selflessness of phenomena.

The point of dispute between the Prasangika tenets and all of the lower tenets is that the lower tenets assert that it is not necessary to realise the selflessness of phenomena in order to attain liberation. It can be done, they say, merely by realising the coarse selflessness of person.

However, the Prasangika make the point that in order to attain liberation one needs to also realise the selflessness of phenomena. That is the point of the dispute, and this is the point that Chandrakirti was proving.

The *Bodhisattva Charyavatara*¹ summarises the point of view of the lower tenets in two lines when it says:

*By seeing the truth one becomes liberated,
what need is there to see emptiness?*

Basically what these lines are saying is that by seeing the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths one will be liberated from the afflictions. Therefore it is not necessary to see emptiness in order to exhaust the afflictions.

From *Illumination* to the above two lines:

*Since one can attain liberation from the afflictions
merely through the path seeing the sixteen aspects of*

*the Four Noble Truths there is no need to see
emptiness in order to exhaust the afflictions.*

Shantideva's next two lines reply, saying:

*According to the scriptures, without
this path one cannot attain enlightenment.*²

In response to the point being made by the lower tenets - that it is possible to attain liberation just by meditating on the coarse sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths without realising selflessness of phenomena - Shantideva refers to the *prajna paramita* sutras and so forth. These state that without realising the lack of natural existence of phenomena it is not possible to attain any of the three types of enlightenment.

Without the path that realises the lack of inherent existence then it is taught that neither of the three types of enlightenment can be attained. According to the great commentary of the Bodhisattva Charyavatara this is taught in the prajna paramita sutras, 'Those with recognition of phenomena will be without liberation. All the stream enterers up to the self-liberated arhats of the three times rely for their attainment on this perfection of wisdom alone.' It is as quoted here and as such doesn't refer just to the highest enlightenment. The four lines of 'If one is a bikkhu, the doctrines root,' etc. also show that liberation can't be attained by a path that has the object of true grasping.

'If Arhats didn't realise emptiness then it wouldn't be possible to posit those arhats as the root of the Buddhadharma.'

This is making the same point again, showing that Hinayana practitioners, arhats, have to realise emptiness, and also that emptiness is taught in the Hinayana scriptures.

Arhats are referred to as the root of the Buddhadharma because firstly, the arhats at the first council such as Kashapya, Upali and Ananda assembled the teachings of the Buddha, and secondly, the sixteen arhats are responsible for the continuation of the Buddhadharma.

Coarse and Subtle Aspects of the Four Noble Truths

Here it is important to mention the difference between the coarse Four Noble Truths, and the subtle Four Noble Truths. This refers to the difference between the Four Noble Truths from the point of view of grasping at the self as being a self-supporting substantially existent, and the Four Noble Truths that arise from the view of the transitory collection grasping at inherent existence.

Coarse Four Noble Truths

Here the root is the view of the transitory collection grasping the person to be a self-sufficient substantially existent. From that, craving is generated because of which one then accumulates throwing karma, and then from that karma the contaminated suffering aggregates are established. The contaminated suffering aggregates are the first noble truth of **suffering** and the view of

¹ *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Chapter 9, verse 41ab

² *ibid*, Ch.9, v.41cd

the transitory collection grasping a self to be a self-sufficient substantially existent, the craving arising from that and the accumulated karma are the second noble truth of **origin**.

The coarse truth of **cessation** is the adventitious abandonment of the manifest grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient substantially existent. This is just an adventitious abandonment that certain lower tenet practitioners sometimes attain. The coarse truth of cessation is arrived at by meditating on the coarse truth of the **path** which is the yogic direct perceiver realising the person to be empty of being a self-sufficient substantially existent.

Apart from impermanence which doesn't have the division into coarse and subtle the other fifteen aspects of the coarse Four Noble Truth have to be related to the view of the transitory collection grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantially existent.

Subtle Four Noble Truths

Here the root is the view of the transitory collection grasping the person to be inherently existing. From this craving arises, through which one accumulates throwing karma, which then in turn generates the suffering aggregates. The view of the transitory collection grasping the person to be inherently existing, the corresponding craving and the karma accumulated through them are the subtle noble truth of **origin**. The suffering aggregates generated by them are the subtle noble truth of **suffering**. The subtle truth of **cessation** is the abandonment of true grasping. This results from meditating on the subtle truth of the **path**, which is the wisdom realising the lack of true existence.

Apart from impermanence which doesn't have the division into coarse and subtle, the other fifteen aspects of the subtle Four Noble Truth have to be related to the view of the transitory collection grasping at an inherently existing person.

So the four truths have a coarse level and a more subtle level. At the coarse level the truth of origin is the coarse view of the transitory collection grasping at the self as being a self-supporting substantially existent, and from that arises the coarse truth of suffering.

The subtle truth of origin is the view of the transitory collection grasping at the self as being an inherently existent, and also the craving arising from that, which establishes the subtle truth of suffering.

Because there are two different levels to the Four Noble Truths, it is said that by meditating on the coarse sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths one can temporarily abandon the manifest coarse delusions.

The Four Aspects of the Truth of Suffering

The very first of the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths is impermanence. Here there is no difference in the level of subtlety, since impermanence refers to something that is momentary. So there's no coarse or subtle impermanence. The other three aspects have coarse and subtle. We explained last week how the interpretation of empty and selfless differs according to the coarse and subtle systems.

These difference will appear very vividly to our mind if we reflect on them. It's necessary to think about the difference between those two sets of the Four Noble Truths, and then it will appear very clearly to our mind.

Why Meditating on the Coarse Aspects Alone Does Not Lead to Liberation

There are many quotations in *Illumination*, which all try to establish the point that, according to the lower tenets the root of cyclic existence is the grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient substantially existent. Through that grasping then one creates karma and from that the contaminated suffering aggregates are established. Since the root is grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantially existent, by investigating that ignorance then the meditator realises the lack, or the emptiness of the person as a self-sufficient substantially existent. They then meditate on that selflessness, which is coarse selflessness. By meditating on and realising the person's emptiness of being a self-sufficient substantially existent, the meditator can temporarily pacify or subdue manifest grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient substantially existent. There are certain Hinayana practitioners who then believe that, because they have temporarily subdued the manifest coarse self-grasping, they have actually attained liberation.

The significance of saying 'temporarily' is that they haven't even abandoned the manifest coarse afflictions, not to mention that they haven't abandoned the seeds of the coarse afflictions, because by meditating on the coarse sixteen aspects one can't even attain the abandonment of the manifest coarse afflictions. If that did happen no coarse affliction would arise in post-meditational period. All one can attain by meditating on the coarse sixteen aspects is a temporary abandonment of the coarse afflictions during the meditation session.

That is the whole point of this debate. What it is trying to establish is that in order to actually abandon even the grasping at a person as being a self-sufficient substantially existent, one needs to abandon the seed of that grasping. The seed of this coarse self-grasping can only be abandoned by realising the person's emptiness of inherent existence, by realising that the view of the transitory collection viewing the person as being inherently existent is a mistaken consciousness.

Did you understand all that? If so we can go on. What are the Four Noble Truths?

Students: Truth of suffering, truth of origin, truth of cessation and truth of the path

Of the noble truth of suffering and the noble truth of origin, which is the cause and which is the effect?

Student: The truth of origin is the cause, and the truth of suffering is the result

Then how is it with cessation and the path?

Student: The path leads to the cessation.

Since the truth of origin is the cause, why is the truth of

suffering taught first?

Student: Everyone can relate to suffering.

Maitreya explained the reason why they are taught in this sequence when he said that,

The sickness is to be known
The cause is to be abandoned,
The cure is to be attained,
The medicine is to be relied upon.

First we have to know the sickness. The main thing is that one first has to know the problem. After that one comes to understand the cause of the problem. Then, by understanding the cause of suffering, one understands that one can free oneself from that suffering, and then one arrives at the third noble truth, the cessation of suffering and its cause.

So that which is to be understood, the truth of suffering, is taught first. The reason why they are taught in that sequence is because of the way the meditator has to understand them. The order reflects the way an understanding of the Four Noble Truths is generated within the practitioner's mind. So they are taught from the point of view of the way they are realised.

That's why it is said that

- The noble truth of suffering is that which is to be understood
- The noble truth of the cause is that which has to be abandoned
- The noble truth of cessation that which has to be attained, and
- The noble truth of the path is that which has to be meditated upon.

Have you understood the point that by meditating on the coarse aspects of the four noble truths one is not able to attain liberation? Do you understand that point? So what is the point?

[student answer unclear]

Why can't one abandon the afflictions from the root by meditating on coarse selflessness?

Student: Because they don't realise subtle selflessness like the lack of inherent existence.

The lower tenets assert that the grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient substantially existent is the root of the cyclic existence. Therefore, according to them, by realising the person's lack of being a self-sufficient substantially existent, one can cut through the root of cyclic existence and attain liberation.

According to the Prasangika system this is not possible. Understanding the lack of the person being a self-sufficient substantially existent doesn't harm the actual root of cyclic existence, because the actual root of cyclic existence is the view of the transitory collection that grasps at the self as being inherently existent. So realising a person's lack of being a self-sufficient substantially existent doesn't harm the ignorance grasping at the person as being inherently existent.

Therefore not only do meditators who meditate only on the person's lack of being a self-sufficient

substantially existent not abandon the afflictions together with the seed, but of course they also don't abandon the manifest afflictions.

The explanation of the coarse truth of cessation refers to the momentary or adventitious abandonment of the coarse afflictions. Here this doesn't say that it abandons the adventitious abandonment of the afflictions, but one cannot even say that they abandon the manifest afflictions. If they did so, then the manifest afflictions also wouldn't arise again.

Here one talks about the momentary or adventitious abandonment of the afflictions at the time of meditation. While in meditation the afflictions don't arise for the time being, but then when they arise from meditation those afflictions again become manifest. So therefore one can't say that they have abandoned even the manifest afflictions. They have only achieved a temporarily abandonment of the manifest coarse afflictions while in meditative equipoise.

In order to abandon the afflictions from the root one needs to acquaint one's mind with the person's lack of inherent existence. By familiarising the mind with the person's lack of inherent existence then one can harm the root of cyclic existence, which is the view of the transitory collection grasping at the inherently existent 'I'.

Even though practitioners of the lower tenets have this shortcoming from the side of view, from method side of the path there's no lack. They can generate bodhicitta, they can practise the various perfections, generate love, compassion, bodhicitta, and so on. They can enter the path of accumulation but they won't be able to proceed from the path of accumulation to the path of preparation. In order to induce the path of preparation one needs the realisation of emptiness. So you can see that why the realisation of emptiness is called the door or gateway to liberation. It is because it is essential to understand emptiness if one is to attain liberation. Even though we might not realise emptiness in this life, at least by reflecting on and contemplating emptiness we will place very good karmic imprints on our mind, so that we will be able to realise emptiness in a future life.

Later on in this text, particularly in the sixth chapter, the primary subject will be emptiness. Then you can understand the importance and significance of studying it.

Review

Outshining by Lineage and Awareness

The point where we began was that first ground bodhisattvas outshine hearers and self-liberators by lineage but not by the force of their awareness. What was the reason for that?

Student: Their lineage is a Mahayana lineage, which is superior. The force of awareness is less because they haven't realised emptiness.

Why do first ground bodhisattvas outshine hearers and self-liberators through their lineage and not through the force of their awareness?

[student answer unclear]

Who doesn't realise emptiness?

[student answer unclear]

First ground bodhisattvas outshine hearers and self-liberators by lineage because they have attained bodhicitta with pure superior intention. They have this bodhicitta with pure and superior intention because they have attained ultimate bodhicitta. So here the reason is not because they have ultimate bodhicitta, but because they have bodhicitta with pure and superior intention. However that bodhicitta of pure and superior intention comes about because they have ultimate bodhicitta.

They do not outshine hearers and self-liberators through the force of their awareness because hearers and self-liberators realise emptiness. If hearers and self-liberators did not realise emptiness then the three faults as outlined by Chandrakirti would occur.

If we are informed that first ground bodhisattvas don't outshine hearers and self-liberators through the force of their awareness but only by lineage then the next question automatically arises. At what stage do bodhisattvas outshine hearers and self-liberators through the force of their awareness? The answer is that this happens once a bodhisattva attains the seventh ground. So from the seventh ground onwards, called 'gone far' onwards, the bodhisattva will outshine hearers and self-liberators by both lineage and through the force of awareness.

Types of Compassion

What are the three types of compassion?

Students: Compassion merely focussing on human beings, compassion focussing on dharmas, compassion focussing on non-focus.

What is the first compassion?

Student: Compassion merely focussing on sentient beings.

What is the second one?

Student: Compassion merely focussing on sentient beings.

The third one?

Student: Compassion focussing on non-focus.

Why is the first type of compassion called compassion merely focussing on sentient beings, what is the significance of merely focussing on sentient beings'?

Students: [Many answers suggested.]

It doesn't take away the realisation of impermanence or emptiness. What it does say is that this compassion focuses on sentient beings without those sentient beings being characterised or discerned as either impermanent or selfless.

Normally when we focus on other sentient beings then we don't discern them as being impermanent or lacking a self. However if we reflect on the impermanence or selflessness of other beings then we have discerned them as being either impermanent or

lacking a self. The other two types of compassion then focus on sentient beings after having then discerned them as such.

So the compassion focusing on phenomena dharmas needs to be directly held by the wisdom realising impermanence, and the compassion focussing on non-focus needs to be directly held by the wisdom realising selflessness.

What are the three dharmas explained at this particular point in the text?

Student: Mind of compassion, non-dual awareness and bodhicitta

What type of bodhicitta is it?

Student: Bodhicitta through the force of meditation.

We talk about the bodhicitta that comes with effort. So by meditating on the various stages of the bodhicitta meditation such as equanimity, recognising all beings as one's mother, love, wanting to repay kindness, superior intention, great compassion then bodhicitta will naturally arise within one's mind. However that's still the generation of bodhicitta with effort, which is what one is talking about here.

There is also innate bodhicitta, where one has meditated on bodhicitta so much that it becomes a natural part of one's mind.

The Five Paths

What are the five paths?

Students; Path of accumulation, path of preparation, path of seeing, path of meditation, path of no-more-learning.

When does one attain the path of accumulation?

Student: When they generate bodhicitta.

When does one attain the path of preparation?

Student: When one realises calm abiding.

Then when do we attain the path of seeing?

[student answer unclear]

When you attain the path of seeing which of the ten grounds do you attain?

[student answer unclear]

The Grounds and the Perfections

When you attain the first ground then what title do you attain?

[student answer unclear]

What is the name of the first ground?

Students: Extremely Joyful/very joyful.

Why is the first ground called extremely joyful?

Students give various answers.

Please posit the ten grounds together, very loudly and in unison.

Students; Extremely joyful, the stainless, the luminous, the radiant, difficult training, ...

The bodhisattva on the first ground becomes proficient

in the practice of which one of the ten perfections?

Students: Generosity.

What are the ten perfections?

Students: Generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort, meditation, wisdom, method, power, prayer, transcendental wisdom.

When we talk about the various perfections such as the perfection of generosity, the perfection of morality and so forth, we talk about the generous attitude having been perfected, the mental attitude of giving having been perfected. It is the difference between going somewhere and having arrived there.

Even though at the learner's stage one hasn't achieved the perfection of generosity of a buddha, one still says that the perfection of generosity exists at the learner's stage from the point of view of being the causal perfection of generosity. At the learner's stage one trains to achieve the resultant perfection of generosity. So the perfection of generosity exists at the learner's stage but it is the causal perfection of generosity rather than the resultant perfection of generosity.

In general to become a perfection it needs to be held by bodhicitta, dedication, and the wisdom realising emptiness. For example it is said that the realisation of emptiness that is being held by bodhicitta and dedication becomes the perfection of wisdom. So if one meditates on the wisdom realising emptiness out of the motivation of bodhicitta then that wisdom realising emptiness becomes the perfection of wisdom. A training that is held by bodhicitta, dedication, and the wisdom realising emptiness becomes a perfection.

Correction from last week

Please substitute this corrected version of the translation of *Illumination* under the heading, 'The Prasangika Response', at the foot of page 3.

Illumination says:

If it is said that it is possible to abandon all afflictions by meditating on the sixteen aspects of impermanence and so forth, here this is to be said,

We don't say that it isn't possible without understanding emptiness to understand the sixteen aspects of impermanence and so forth with valid cognition and then for the disciples to meditate on them with great effort, and then after having meditated on them to see directly coarse selflessness of person and then to continue to meditate on what has been seen.

What then is our point? Since this path isn't a path that realises selflessness of person completely we don't posit it as path of seeing or path of meditation having gone beyond transitory existence. Since it therefore can't abandon the abandonments through seeing nor the abandonments through meditation it is an interpretive system to posit this path as path of seeing or meditation, to say it can abandon the abandonments of seeing and meditation and that one

can attain arhatship through it.

For example, it is established that partless particles, an outer existence that is an accumulation of those partless particles and a mind that is of different nature with this accumulation of partless particles are negated by valid cognition. If the disciples then meditate on that for a long time they can see it directly and then meditate on what they have seen, but it is interpretive to say they can attain the ten grounds and progress along the later three paths depending on that realisation.

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Edited Version

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