
Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

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Generate a virtuous motivation for listening to the teachings thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings. In order to be able to do so then I'm now going to listen to this profound Dharma, and then I'm going to put it into practice as much as possible.'

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.3. Explaining the individual nature of the two truths (cont.)

Last time we began the outline that deals with the presentation of the two truths, and we finished the etymology of the two truths. Even though it is not present in *Mirror, Illumination* adds an outline, the uncommon presentation of afflictions, which I think it is good to go through.

Uncommon Presentation of Afflictions¹

Regarding the uncommon presentation of afflictions, there are two categories of self-grasping: self-grasping at person, and self-grasping at phenomena

We have already talked about the categories of afflictions according to the lower tenets, so it is also good to know the Prasangika presentation of the different afflictions.

Affliction in general

In general, the Prasangika idea of what an affliction is is similar to the other tenets. One regards an affliction as a mental factor that disturbs the mind and causes unsuitable mental states to arise. One posits only mental factors as afflictions, and not primary minds.

In particular - Afflicted Ignorance

What is the definition of *afflicted ignorance*? It is *the contrapositive of the transcendental wisdom-knowledge realising selflessness*.

One doesn't just posit afflicted ignorance as a state of not knowing or not understanding. Rather one actually posits the exact opposite of the transcendental wisdom-knowledge realising selflessness. Afflicted ignorance contains both self-grasping at phenomena and the transitory view grasping at 'I' and 'mine'.

The presentation of self-grasping at phenomena according to the **Prasangika** is different from the view of the lower schools. Also, according to the Prasangika system the transitory view is posited as grasping at 'I' and 'mine' as inherently existent.

However, the **lower tenets** posit as the transitory view the grasping at 'I' and 'mine' as a self-sufficient

substantially existent. So there is a difference in the presentation of the transitory view between the lower tenets and the Prasangika tenet.

The lower tenets posit as the transitory view the grasping at 'I' as being a self-sufficient substantially existent, and then the grasping at 'mine' as being a self-sufficient substantially existent user. These are the two forms of transitory view according to the lower tenet.

Being an Imputedly Existent and Being a Substantially Existent

The lower tenets assert that the person is an imputedly existent, and not a substantially existent. Since the person is not regarded as a substantially existent it is therefore not accepted as a self-sufficient substantially existent. They say the person is an imputedly existent and not a self-sufficient substantially existent. However the person is still accepted as being substantially established².

Here we are talking about being a substantially existent and being an imputedly existent according to the lower tenets.

Being a substantially existent according to the lower tenets means that the appearance of the object to the mind does not depend upon the appearance of another object to the mind. So if an object can appear to the mind independently of another object appearing to the mind as well, then it is said that object is a substantially existent. Since the person cannot appear to the mind without another object, the aggregates, appearing to the mind as well, the person is said to be not a substantially existent. Therefore it also not a self-sufficient substantially existent. If it were a substantially existent then it could appear by itself, it would be self-sufficient and so could appear under its own power.

The Mind Only and the Svatantrika-Madhyamika both accept the person to be an imputedly existent, and the aggregates as a substantially existent.

The **Prasangika** don't accept any kind of substantially existent. They say that if it exists then it is necessarily an imputedly existent. However, the Prasangika and the lower tenets have a different meaning for 'imputedly existent' and 'substantially existent'.

According to the **Prasangika** the meaning of being an imputedly existent is to be merely imputed by conception. Therefore the Prasangika say that if it exists it is necessarily an imputedly existent, since everything is merely imputed by conception. Therefore the aggregates are not regarded as substantially existent but as imputedly existent. However the aggregates are still regarded as being substantially established.

So you can see that there's a difference between the lower tenets and the Prasangika tenet in the presentation of the transitory view, and it is important to comprehend that difference.

Illumination goes on to mention that the innate transitory view grasping at the person as a self-sufficient

¹ Ed: The numbering that we are using is based on *Mirror*, so this heading has no number.

² Translator's note: Since the person is substantially established it is also substantially existent. Therefore I have made a distinction between being a substantially existent and being substantially existent.

substantially existent is present in the mental continuum of any type of ordinary individual, whether it is a tenet holder or a non-tenet holder. But the transitory view grasping at the 'I' as a self-sufficient substantially existent of different nature from the aggregates is present only in the continuum of tenet holders. So the transitory view grasping the 'I' as a self-sufficient substantially-existent exists in the continuum of sentient beings regardless of whether the sentient being is a tenet holder or not. But the transitory view grasping at the 'I' as a self-sufficient substantially existent of different nature from the aggregates is only present in the continuum of lower tenet holders.

Grasping the person and the aggregates to be of different nature only exists in the continuum of tenet holders. So grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient that is of a different nature from the aggregates, is only present in the continuum of tenet holders.

Why is Grasping at an Intrinsic Person and Aggregates Afflicted Ignorance?

Lama Tsong Khapa goes on to ask,

How does one prove to those that assert an inherently existent person and inherently existent phenomena that grasping at that is afflicted ignorance and the two types of self-grasping?

First of all the inherent existence of a person and phenomena is refuted with analytic reasoning. This establishes that the grasping at those two are true grasping that is mistaken with regard to the determined object, which establishes them as the two types of self-grasping. One has also established that ignorance is the opposite of transcendental wisdom-knowledge. This proves that until that ignorance has ceased one will not be able to overcome the transitory view.

By establishing that the two types of grasping are the two types of self-grasping, one also establishes that true-grasping is the opposite of the understanding of suchness; by establishing that one establishes self-grasping as ignorance. In such a way then, it is shown that true-grasping is afflicted ignorance, and then one can understand the uncommon presentation of the afflictions.

That's how one establishes the uncommon presentation of afflicted ignorance, and then one goes onto the presentation of how attachment and the other afflictions work through the influence of the ignorance of true-grasping.

Attachment and Anger

Here ignorance refers to the ignorance that is part of the trinity of ignorance, attachment, and anger; attachment and anger arise from that ignorance.

*The Four Hundred Verses say,
In the same way as the body is pervaded by the physical faculty,
Ignorance also abides everywhere.*

The physical faculty pervades the four other sense powers. The physical faculty pervades the whole body; it pervades the visual (eye) faculty, the audio (ear) faculty and so forth. Likewise ignorance pervades all the other afflictions.

Why is ignorance called such? Because it fabricates something that is not actually there. It grasps at phenomena that actually lack inherent existence as existing inherently. It is ignorant with regard to those phenomena, because it imputes something on those phenomena that is not actually there.

Ignorance is ignorance regarding the reality of the object, and it imputes an inherent existence on the object. Then attachment desires that inherently existent object. So attachment is actually generated with regard to the fictitious inherently existent object.

Ignorance grasps at an object that actually lacks inherent existence as being inherently existent. Ignorance imputes inherent existence on the object, and then that exaggerated object is the object that one sees. For example, the form that one sees is already embellished by ignorance into inherently existent form. Then that fiction of inherently existent form is seen by the distorted belief as either very attractive or as very undesirable. In the first case one generates attachment, and in the second case one generates aversion. If the fabricated object is not perceived as either desirable or undesirable but neutral, then it becomes the cause for subsequent further ignorance.

Here attachment and anger really arise from ignorance, because the object on which attachment and anger are focussed is the object that is fabricated by ignorance. First, ignorance amplifies form into an inherently existent form. This inherently existent form is seen and further distorted by distorted belief into very desirable, and then one generates attachment. In this case ignorance forms the basis for the attachment to arise. If the fictional form is perceived as very undesirable through the distorted belief, then one generates aversion. In this case ignorance was the basis for the generation of aversion. If one perceives the fictional form as neither desirable nor undesirable then it becomes the cause for further later ignorance.

In the Prasangika presentation of the development of different afflictions, first we have true-grasping, which then exaggerates the object such as form into an inherently existent form. That fabrication of inherently existent form becomes further distorted by a distorted belief as to it being either very desirable or being undesirable, which acts as the basis then for the generation of attachment or aversion.

So you can see that here the generation of attachment and aversion is different from the presentation in the lower tenets, where the grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantially existent is the root generating attachment and aversion. So first one has the grasping at person as a self-sufficient substantially-existent, and then from that arises attachment and aversion.

However here one can see how the attachment is really pervaded by ignorance. You can see very clearly that the basis is true-grasping that imputes inherent existence onto form, and then that inherently existent object is further distorted by distorted belief. Then one generates attachment or aversion. So you can see how by removing ignorance one will remove all of the afflictions.

That completes the uncommon presentation of the afflictions.

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.3.2. Ultimate truth

Now we move onto the second truth, ultimate truth. Last time we completed the etymology.

Ultimate truth is explained with an example. The reason is that one can neither express ultimate truth, nor can one know ultimate truth in the way that ultimate truth is directly understood.

In the *Self Commentary* it says that ultimate truth is not an object of expression. This doesn't mean that ultimate truth cannot be expressed, nor does it mean that ultimate truth cannot be known. There are many sutras and teachings on ultimate truth, so it can definitely be expressed. Likewise there's the wisdom that realises selflessness, emptiness. So ultimate truth is also something that can be known.

Saying that ultimate truth cannot be expressed and cannot be known means that it cannot be expressed in the way it is known by direct perception. Nor can it be known by conceptual awareness in the way it is understood by direct perception. Therefore one has to try to generate a feeling for ultimate truth by contemplating an example.

*Mistaken identities such as hairs etc.
Imagined because of the vitreous humour,
Similarly to pure eyes seeing their nature
One should know suchness here.*

Mirror:

Pure eyes see the nature of mistaken identities such as hairs etc. imagined because of the vitreous humour to be non-existent on whatever basis. Similarly to this being the nature of the hairs etc., here at the time of the meaning it should be understood likewise.

The meaning has to be understood similarly to the example because, even though the aggregates appear to ordinary individuals as being truly existent, in reality they lack that existence. Whereas the aggregates' lack of true existence is the reality that is seen by the buddhas.

What ordinary individuals see, truly existent aggregates, is not the actual reality of the aggregates. It is not the mode of abiding of the aggregates. What ordinary individuals see is not the actual mode of abiding of the aggregates. However the buddhas see the aggregates' lack of true existence that is the aggregates' actual mode of abiding. That is the actual meaning of the example that has to be understood.

Because of a fault within one's eye, one perceives mistaken identities such as hairs and so forth. Even though they try to analyse the object, because of the mistake within, they perceive this mistaken identity of hairs and so forth. However someone with pure healthy eyes who investigates their situation can see the actual reality or nature of the situation. They can see the absence of the hairs that were perceived by the afflicted eye-consciousness.

So here in this verse we have an analogy and the meaning of the analogy. The analogy is that the faulty eye-

consciousness perceives falling hairs, while a healthy eye-consciousness can perceive the falling hairs perceived by the faulty eye-consciousness to be non-existent. The healthy eye-consciousness understands the mistaken identity of falling hairs that is perceived by the afflicted eye-consciousness to be non-existent, and so it understands the actual nature.

Likewise the unafflicted awareness of a buddha, an unafflicted enlightened awareness, can perceive the actual mode of abiding of phenomena that are perceived by ordinary individuals as existing truly. So ordinary individuals perceive phenomena as existing truly. However that mistaken identity of true existence is perceived as non-existent by an enlightened consciousness. That is the meaning. So this verse has both the analogy and the meaning. Did you understand that?

What is seen by a person with a healthy eye-consciousness is concordant with reality, and what is perceived by a person with an afflicted eye-consciousness is discordant with reality.

In the case of the analogy the person who has faulty eyes perceives falling hairs. In order to understand that those falling hairs actually don't exist the person with the afflicted eyes needs to rely on a person whose eyes are unafflicted. Likewise at the time of the meaning the person whose consciousness is afflicted by true-grasping exaggerates the objects into truly existent objects, and in dependence upon that exaggeration attachment and anger are generated. Then through attachment and anger one accumulates karma, and in such a way circles in cyclic existence.

Because of the karmic imprints of true-grasping, ordinary individuals to whom phenomena appear as truly-existent also grasp at that appearance, and then that generates attachment and aversion and so forth. Those ordinary individuals need to be shown the absence of the perceived object's true existence by enlightened beings. Enlightened beings who can see the mode of abiding of a phenomena in the way it really is have to show the absence of true existence of the perceived object to ordinary individuals.

The buddhas don't perceive true existence, and out of that non-perception of true existence they then teach the lack of true existence to ordinary individuals. However ordinary individuals are not able to understand the lack of true existence in that way initially. Ordinary individuals understand the lack of true existence in conjunction with the appearance of true existence. So ordinary individuals meditate on the lack of true existence even while phenomena still appear as truly existent. In such a way they arrive at an understanding of the lack of true existence.

Buddhas, however, don't see even the slightest atom of true existence and because of this they understand the lack of true existence. Then ordinary individuals are shown the lack of true existence by the buddhas. But when ordinary individuals first meditate on the lack of true existence, they meditate on it in conjunction with true existence.

The Discrepancy between the Analogy and the Meaning

There is a debate which asserts that there is a slight discrepancy between the analogy and the meaning. Basically it says that in the analogy the healthy eye-consciousness understands that there's not even the appearance of falling hairs to the afflicted eye-consciousness. However the enlightened consciousness of a buddha still perceives the appearance of true existence. That's what the debate turns on. Does enlightened consciousness perceive the appearance of true existence or not? What do you think?

[student answer unclear]

That is correct. There is the appearance of true existence to the minds of ordinary individuals. So the appearance of true existence exists and hence it is also perceived by the buddhas. However the debate states that the healthy eye-consciousness understands that the falling hairs don't exist even in mere appearance. Would you agree with that?

[student answer unclear]

How one arrives at the debate is because in the analogy it says that the falling hairs don't even exist as appearance to the afflicted eye-consciousness. That's stated in the analogy. If the meaning is exactly as it states in the analogy, then an enlightened consciousness shouldn't perceive the appearance of true existence.

The difference is that if the healthy eye-consciousness doesn't perceive the falling hairs even in mere appearance, then that doesn't mean that the appearance of falling hairs is non-existent. Just because the healthy eye-consciousness perceives the appearance of falling hairs, that doesn't mean that the appearance of falling hairs is non-existent. It states in the analogy that the falling hairs don't even exist in appearance to the healthy eye-consciousness, and that doesn't mean that the appearance of falling hairs is non-existent. However since the meaning deals with enlightened consciousness, since the appearance of true existence is actually existent, then the enlightened consciousness sees the appearance of true existence and existence.

One has to be quite discerning here. The buddhas perceive the appearance of true existence that is present in the minds of sentient beings. The buddhas don't have an appearance of true existence because of a consciousness that is tainted by the imprints of true-grasping. That is different. Sentient beings' consciousnesses are tainted by the imprints of true grasping and therefore they have the appearance of true existence. Buddhas understand this appearance of true existence in the mental continuum of sentient beings, and therefore they see the appearance of true existence. That's why one has to be very discerning here.

Discussion about the *Heart sutra*

[student question unclear]

The clear knowing is the conventional nature of the mind, and the lack of true existence is the ultimate nature of the mind. The mind is both clear knowing as well as empty of inherent existence.

So how do you posit the reason for their difference?

[student answer unclear]

That answer is correct, because if two things have a different name then they are different. The meaning of being different is having a different name, but here also you could just simply have stated 'because they are mutually exclusive'. However what you say is correct. For example 'impermanent' and 'produced' are basically synonymous, but they are different. Sound is impermanent and sound is also produced, however 'impermanent' and 'produced' are different although synonymous. Why are they different? Because they have a different name.

Are conventional truth and ultimate truth mutually exclusive or not?

[student answer unclear]

If that is so then what is the meaning of what you have just recited, 'form is emptiness, emptiness is form'?

[student answer unclear]

That's true, the ultimate truth pervades conventional truth.

It says form is emptiness, so form lacks inherent existence. Form is empty of inherent existence hence form is emptiness. That one can comprehend. But then when it says 'emptiness is form' that doesn't seem right. What does that mean?

[student answer unclear]

The second line refers to the nominal existence of form. Even though there is emptiness there is still the appearance of form, the conventional existence of form.

There's the appearance of form because of emptiness. By using the reason of emptiness one arrives at the existence of conventional existence. We say that totally independent form is non-existent. By refuting totally independent form we arrive at form that is existent in dependence upon parts and causes and conditions. So the non-existence of one acts as the proof for the existence of the other.

When it says 'emptiness is form' what it means is that form is an emanation, an appearance of emptiness. There's the appearance of empty of form.

Did you understand those two lines?

So we say that form is like an emanation of emptiness. All conventional phenomena are like an emanation of emptiness. By saying that there's the appearance of form, then automatically one arrives at the form's lack of inherent existence. So the appearance of form lacks inherent existence.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson
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Edited Version

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