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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

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25 May 2004

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Generate a virtuous motivation of bodhicitta please, thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment so that I can achieve the welfare of all sentient beings. In order to be able to do that I'm now going to listen to this profound teaching, and then I'm going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

It is very important that one always precedes one's action with a virtuous motivation. Then, even if one engages in an unsuitable action, with a virtuous motivation there is at least some merit to be gained by that - depending of course on the strength of the motivation.

### 3.5.1.2.2.1.1. Refuting a Self That Is Of Different Nature From the Aggregates As Mentally Fabricated By Non-Buddhist Schools

#### 3.5.1.2.2.1.1.1. Expressing the Position Of the Opponents (cont.)

Last time we talked about the non-Buddhist views of the self of the Vaisheshikas and the Samkyas, which each have their own version of a self that is endowed with five characteristics.

#### 3.5.1.2.2.1.1.2. The refutation

This outline deals with refuting those ideas of self. The root text begins with,

*Because of being separated from generation, like a mule's foal, Such a self does not exist, and It is unsuited to be the basis of T'-grasping. It also isn't asserted to exist in an illusory manner.*

Basically what is being refuted here is a permanent, solitary, independent self. If we analyse the different non-Buddhist positions on the self then we find that they all posit this permanent partless independent self that is of a different nature from the aggregates. They think it is **permanent** because they think it doesn't change moment by moment; they assert that it exists **independently**, meaning that it is independent of causes and conditions; and separately from the aggregates and that's why they assert it to be **solitary**.

When the self that is asserted by those non-Buddhist schools is refuted, then essentially what one refutes is a self that is of a different nature from the aggregates. In Buddhism there is no Buddhist school that posits such a self.

*Mirror:*

Take the subject 'such a self, as mentally fabricated by the heathen' - *it doesn't exist* in suchness - *because of being separated from generation, like the foal of a mule.*

'It is also unsuited to be the basis of 'T'-grasping' refers to what we said the other day about the self that is propounded by the non-Buddhist schools not being suitable to be even the focal object of the innate 'T'-grasping. We talked about the focal object of the innate 'T'-grasping, and the aspect of the innate 'T'-grasping, and we said that the focal object has

to be the existent self.

*Mirror:*

Out of the focal object and the aspect of the innate 'T'-grasping, such a self *is* also *unsuited to be the basis* that is the focal object, because it is not generated.

Take the same subject - *it also isn't asserted to exist in an illusory manner* - because of not being nominally established by valid cognition.

You can see here that the 'it' refutes the self that is asserted by the non-Buddhists to be non-existent, both ultimately as well as in the conventional illusory manner. The last line of the root text says, 'it also isn't asserted to exist in an illusory manner'. Because it doesn't exist in an illusory manner as well as in an ultimate manner it is therefore unsuited to be the focal object of 'T'-grasping.

The line 'Because of being separated from generation like a mule's foal' uses the example of a mule's foal, which is non-existent. The self asserted by the non-Buddhists is non-existent just like a mule's foal, because it is separated from generation, meaning it is not generated. Therefore because it is separated from generation it doesn't exist ultimately. It also does not exist in an illusory manner, because it is not established by valid cognition. Therefore it is not the focal object of the innate 'T'-grasping.

The above verse refutes the entity of the self that is asserted by the non-Buddhists. Then the root text goes on to refute the characteristics of the self asserted by the non-Buddhists.

*Whatever its features, all of them, Shown by the heathen in treatise upon treatise Are contradicted by their own reason of non-generation. Therefore all those features do not exist.*

*Mirror:*

*All of the features of the self that is asserted by the heathen do not exist, because whatever the features of the self shown in the treatises of the Enumerators and in the treatises of the Particularists are, they are contradicted by their own reason of non-generation.*

The non-Buddhists accept the self as not being generated, so here their own acceptance of the reason of non-generation of the self actually harms their own position of a self that possesses the five attributes (which we went through last week).

Next the root text says,

*Therefore no self exists apart from the aggregates, Because without aggregates its apprehension is not established. It also isn't posited as the basis of worldly beings' T'-grasping-Awareness, because one views the self even without knowing.*

If the self were to exist in a nature apart from the aggregates then it should be possible to apprehend this self without apprehending the aggregates as well. However one can't make the self an object of mind without making the aggregates an object of mind.

You have to think about the focal object of the innate 'T'-grasping and whether the focal object of the innate 'T'-grasping is the permanent, single, independent self, or whether the focal object of the 'T'-grasping is the mere 'I'. We

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have already said that actually the permanent, single, independent self is non-existent, but if we try to establish that from the point of view of analysing whether or not such a permanent, single, independent self could be the focal object of the innate 'I'-grasping, then one will generate some understanding. If such a permanent, single, independent self of a different nature from the aggregates were to exist then one should be able to make that self an object of mind without making the aggregates an object of mind.

This permanent, single, independent self is asserted as being unrelated to the aggregates. When we say that the self that is posited by non-Buddhists is unrelated to the aggregates, one can also relate that to being intrinsically unrelated to the aggregates.

There is *no self* that *exists* in nature apart from the aggregates, because one cannot apprehend the self without making the aggregates an object of mind. *It also isn't posited as the basis of worldly beings' 'I'-grasping-awareness, because one views the self even without knowing that particular self.*

If a permanent, single, independent self were to exist then it would have to be the focus of worldly beings' 'I'-grasping. However that is not the case, because we can find that there is 'I'-grasping in the continuum of sentient beings who don't know about such a permanent, single, independent self.

So this self that is of a different nature from the aggregates isn't even posited as the focal basis of the innate 'I'-grasping-awareness of worldly beings, because one views the self even without knowing that particular self.

*Whoever, staying as an animal for many aeons  
Even they don't see this non-generated permanent.  
One can also see the hold of 'I'-grasping over  
them.  
Then, there is absolutely no self apart from the  
aggregates*

Even those beings who remain in samsara for many eons as animals don't see this non-generated permanent self. However, one can see the hold of 'I'-grasping over those beings. Even though they don't perceive this non-generated, permanent self they still are under the hold of 'I'-grasping.

The outline that we have just been through explains how there is no self of a nature different from the aggregates, which is a very important point to contemplate. By refuting this notion of the self that is asserted by the non-Buddhists, then one also implicitly refutes the self that is of a different nature from the aggregates.

Now, try to meditate for a minute and try to look within yourself for the actual focal object, the focal basis for the thought that thinks 'I' for the 'I'-grasping? On the one hand there's definitely a focal object for the innate 'I'-grasping, however if one sits down and looks for that focal object it disappears - it can't be found at the time of analysis.

### **3.5.1.2.2.1.2. Refuting the Notion Of Some Buddhists That the Aggregates Are the Self.**

Here we have five sub-outlines,

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1. Showing proofs harming the assertion that the aggregates are the self

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.2. Offering proof that shows these assertions are invalid

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.3. Showing other proof contradicting those asserting the aggregates to be the self

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.4. Explaining the intent behind teaching that the aggregates are the self

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.5. Showing the other systems to be unrelated

### **3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1. Showing Proofs Harming the Assertion That the Aggregates Are the Self**

This has two sub-outlines,

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.1. Actual

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.2. Refuting attempts at damage control by the Realists

#### **3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.1. Actual**

This has two sub-outlines,

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.1.1. Stating the assertion

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.1.2. The refutation of those assertions

#### **3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.1.1. Stating the Assertion**

We have already refuted a self that is of a different nature from the aggregates. So the next step is to refute the idea that the aggregates are the self.

*Because a self apart from the aggregates isn't established*

*Aggregates alone are the focus of self-view.*

*Some assert all five aggregates as the basis*

*Of self-view, some assert mind alone.*

After having refuted that the self is of a different nature from the aggregates, some Buddhist schools think, 'Oh, then the aggregates must be the self'. Here there are different ideas with regard to the aggregates being the self. Some Buddhists assert that all five aggregates are the basis of the self-view (the aggregates are the self), while other Buddhists assert that mind alone is the basis of the self-view. There is a particular sub-school of the Vaibhashika, the Sammitiya Vaibhashika school and within that sub-school we can find these different views.

*Mirror:*

Different Sammitiya Vaibhashikas assert, 'The *aggregates alone are the focus of the self-view because a self apart, i.e. of a different nature, from the aggregates isn't established*'.

Here 'self-view' refers to the view of the transitory collections. This school says, 'The transitory collections refers to the aggregates; the collection is the collection of the aggregates and the aggregates are impermanent so they are transitory. They say that it's called the view of the transitory collections because it focuses on the aggregates. Therefore the aggregates are the focus of the self-view, and that's why the aggregates are the self.

As we just said, since there's no self that is of a different nature from the aggregates then the aggregates are the self, and as such form the focus of the transitory view, the view of the transitory collections.

Of those Sammitiya Vaibhashikas who assert the aggregates as the focus of the self-view, some assert that all five aggregates are the basis of the self view.

*Mirror:*

Out of those Buddhists *some*, the Sammitiya Vaibhashika, *assert all five aggregates as the basis of self-view [self-image] because the Tathagata taught, 'Oh Bhikkhu, whatever practitioner of virtue or whatever Brahmin, their gaze perfectly following, thinking, 'Ah the self, their gaze follows perfectly the five aggregates alone''.*

Based on this quote they assert that the five aggregates are the focus of the self-view. Really, this quote is their only reason for assuming that the five aggregates are the focal object of the self-view.

Then there are other Sammitiya Vaibhashikas who assert that mind alone is the self. They base this view on two quotes from the sutras which say, 'Oneself is one's protector; who else would be one's protector; by subduing oneself well; the sages attain higher status,' and 'Subduing the mind is good; subduing the mind brings forth happiness'. They say if one looks at those two quotes then it becomes obvious that the Buddha talks about subduing the mind and subduing the self in the same context. Sometimes the Buddha talks about subduing the self, and sometimes he talks about subduing the mind. So they say that what he is really referring to is same thing, therefore, they say, the mind is the self.

Knowing these two quotes and their relationship is also very important. By subduing the mind then the person also becomes subdued and through that the person attains happiness. Similarly one can also relate the two quotes with the quote<sup>1</sup> where it says that the mind is the source of one's happiness. There's no way to attain happiness if one doesn't subdue the mind. If one subdues the mind then the self also becomes subdued, and the subdued mind is a happy mind. Why? Because the subdued mind induces the happy mind.

If the mind is subdued then the self will also be happy, and with an unsubdued mind then the self won't be happy. If ones looks at it from this point of view then the corollary of these two quotes is that if oneself is unhappy it is really because one's mind is unsubdued, and one can't really blame anybody else for one's unhappiness. So the reason for meditating is to subdue the mind so that the self can be happier.

At this point there is also another debate. At one stage Bhavaviveka gave the mental consciousness as the example of the person. That becomes a little bit confusing because in Bhavaviveka's school the mental consciousness of course is a substantially existent, while the person is an imputed existent. Bhavaviveka refutes the person as a self-sufficient substantially existent, so how then can he give the mental consciousness as an example for the person? The reason is that while on the one hand saying that in general the person is only an imputed existent, there can be instances of the person that are a substantial existent.

### 3.5.1.2.2.1.1.2. The Refutation Of Those Assertions

Then comes the refutation of these assertions, and we have these two verses,

*If the aggregates are the self then,  
Since they are many, the self becomes many.  
The self becomes substantial, and looking at it,  
Since engaging substance, doesn't become distorted.  
When passing beyond sorrow the self definitely gets cut  
off  
One moment before passing beyond sorrow  
Generation and disintegration. Because no agent, no  
fruit.  
Others will experience that accumulated by another.*

1. *If the aggregates are the self then* it follows that *the self becomes many* - because the self and the aggregates are one and *they*, the aggregates, *are many*.

If the self were to be intrinsically one with the aggregates, then the self actually would have to become many. Why? Because the aggregates are many.

2. Take the subject '*self*' - it follows *it becomes a substantial* existent - because the aggregates are the self. It contradicts the view of the Sammitiya Vaibhashika themselves, which is that while the aggregates are a substantial existent, the self is an imputed existent.
3. Take the subject 'the view of the aggregates' - it follows it *doesn't become distorted* - because of being an object possessor *engaging substance*.

In the Prasangika-Madhyamaka system there's no substantially established self, indeed there's no substantially established existence at all, because substantially established existence is synonymous with the object of negation. So an object-possessor engaging something that is substantially existent would have to be an undistorted object-possessor.

4. It follows that *when passing into nirvana* without remainder *the self definitely gets cut off* - because at that time the aggregates get cut off.

According to all the **other tenets apart from the Prasangika**, first nirvana with remainder is attained, and then nirvana without remainder (when one leaves behind the contaminated form body) is attained. According to the **Prasangika**, first the nirvana without remainder is attained and then nirvana with remainder. This is because they relate 'remainder' to the remainder of the appearance of true existence. In meditative equipoise there is no remainder of true appearance, and in the post-meditational period there is the remainder of true appearance.

5. It follows that *one moment before passing into nirvana* the self *generates and disintegrates* out of its own nature - because the self and the aggregates are one and the aggregates generate and disintegrate out of their own nature.

Sometimes this can also be related to the self being intrinsically one with the aggregates. All those faults occur on the one side by just the aggregates were the self, but then one can relate those faults to the case if the self were intrinsically one with the aggregates.

6. It follows that karma has *no* relation to its *fruit* - *because* there is *no* self that can function as the *agent*.

If there were an intrinsically existing self, and intrinsically existing karma, then they become two unrelated phenomena. As such, the self then couldn't then act as the agent for the karma. Here we might remember back to when we said that if the cause exists inherently, then because it is completely unrelated to the effect, it has no relationship to the effect at all. Another fault is that it would generate all types of effect all the time. Maybe you remember that point.

If the self exists inherently then it cannot act as the agent for karma, and it also couldn't experience the fruit of that karma later. Karma created by one person would be experienced by another person. Remember the faults of inherent existence. If the self exists inherently and creates karma, and then a subsequent moment of self were experiencing the results of that karma, it would be like one person experiencing karma that was actually created by a completely different person.

You have to think about it from the point of view of being totally unrelated. If something exists inherently then it is totally unrelated to anything else. If the self exists inherently then it is unrelated to anything else, so it becomes another person. If the self exists as intrinsically one with the aggregates as these tenets assert then the self exists

<sup>1</sup> Not quoted here

intrinsically, and if it were to exist intrinsically then it would actually have to exist totally independently of anything else. Then one would arrive at the case that the karma created by one person would be experienced by another person.

We have talked a lot about how the law of cause and effect becomes unworkable if it were to exist inherently. We said that normally the karma is always experienced by the person that creates it. So, for example, Max can't experience the karma that is created by Peter. However, if cause and effect were to exist inherently then cause and effect become totally unrelated, and then Max would experience the karma that was actually created by Peter.

You have to remember these points that we talked about before when we explained why cause and effect can't exist inherently, and think about them. Then next time, if it is still not clear, we can explain it in greater depth.

### Views of the Transitory Collection

The **common view of the transitory collection** is the grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient substantially existent after having focussed on the 'I' and 'mine' contained within one's continuum. In the sutras this view of the transitory collection grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient substantially existent after having focussed on the 'I' and 'mine' in one's continuum is explained again and again. The common view of the transitory collection is the view of the transitory collection according to the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka and below. While the **uncommon view of the transitory collection** is the grasping at inherent existence having focussed on the 'I' and 'mine' in one's own continuum, which is seen as an afflicted wisdom, and this is the Prasangika view.

### Imputed Existents and Substantial Existents

*Student: Could you explain a bit more about the debate on Bhavaviveka's point that the person is sometimes an imputed existent and sometimes as a substantially existent*

Bhavaviveka asserts the person as being an imputed existent, but at the same time he asserts that the mental consciousness is an example for the person, and the mental consciousness is a substantial existent. So that's where the debate comes. According to Bhavaviveka, from the point of view of the self-isolate of person, person is an imputed existent, but if you posit a particular instance of person, such as the mental consciousness, then it is also acceptable to say that that instance of the person is a substantial existent.

In the **Prasangika** system everything that exists is an imputed existent, there is no such thing as a substantial existent. In the **lower tenets**, of course, we have both types of existence - things that are a substantial existent, and phenomena that are an imputed existent. According to the lower tenets the person is always an imputed existent, and some of them posit the mental consciousness as an example for the person. The mental consciousness is a substantial existent, so there seems to be a contradiction there. The only tenet without that contradiction is the **Mind Only**, who posit the universal mind foundation as an example for the person - they assert that the universal mind foundation is also an imputed existent.

According to the **lower tenets**, the definition of a **substantially existent** is *an object that, when making it an object of mind doesn't require making something else to be made an object of mind as well*. If, in order to make it an object of mind, one needs to make something else an object of mind, then it is an **imputed existent**. And the person is an imputed existent because in order to make the person an

object of mind one needs to make the aggregates an object of mind. The reason why consciousness is a substantial existent is because making consciousness an object of mind doesn't depend upon making something else an object of mind. We have already said this many times before but now you got an extra one for free!

### Relating It Back To Yourself

You should analyse the view of the transitory collection in your mind and analyse the mode of perception of that view. Then analyse whether or not the object of that view exists. If it were to exist the way it is apprehended then how would it have to exist, and does it exist the way it is apprehended. In such a way one generates some understanding of emptiness. If one doesn't do that then even though one always says, 'emptiness', 'emptiness', there won't be any understanding.

A very good meditation is to contemplate one's transitory view and self-grasping, and how the self-grasping leads to the other mental afflictions such as attachment and anger, which then leads then to further problems. This will enable you to understand this psychological chain-reaction leading back to the original cause - the transitory view. You have to beat the self-grasping with the hammer of wisdom realising selflessness.

According to Shantideva a person who can confront their own self-grasping and go about beating it up is a truly courageous person. As for beating up other people - there is not very much courage needed there.

Self-grasping has given us innumerable problems from lifetime to lifetime, and also temporarily in this life. So it is very important to be able to overcome it by sitting down, and then slowly, slowly analysing its nature, its way of apprehending and so forth. Then one can really get some understanding of emptiness. By overcoming the inner enemy of self-grasping, then the outer enemy will not be able to harm one.

As Shantideva said, 'If one tries to vanquish all one's outer enemies then that is an impossible task. But by vanquishing the inner enemy of self-grasping then one has implicitly vanquished all outer enemies, because they will not be able to harm one<sup>2</sup>. For example is it still possible to have an outer enemy when you have abandoned anger? What do you think?

Anger is that which transforms a friend into an enemy. When one generates anger the person who one moment ago was a friend is now an enemy. By looking at it in this way one can understand the disadvantages of anger. For example we can see that sometimes when people sit down to have a meal together they are quite cordial and friendly at the start of the meal, but then something happens and an argument erupts, and sometimes they start to throw the plates at each other. Sometimes you go to sleep together as friends but then when you wake up in the morning you start to abuse each other. There are many stories like that - it is not just made up.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson*

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*Edited Version*

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