
Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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དབུ་མ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་པོ།

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Generate a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I have to attain complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, and towards that end I am now going to listen to this profound teaching. Then I am going to put it into practice'.

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.4. Explaining the intent behind teaching that the aggregates are the self (cont.)

If one asserts the aggregates to be the self

Because the teacher said 'the aggregates are the self',

The first two lines state the Sammitiya Vaibashika's position and their reason. The next six lines refute that position. Also, by stating explicitly that none of the aggregates are the self, they implicitly state that the self is labelled on the aggregates.

*This is to refute a self apart from the aggregates,
Because in other sutras it states 'form isn't self' etc.*

*That neither form nor feeling is the self, recognition
Also isn't the self, compositional factors aren't and
Neither is consciousness, is taught in other sutras.*

Therefore

*I don't accept that the brief teaching says 'aggregates
are self'.*

The reason for this is because aggregates that are substantially existent cannot be the self that is imputedly existent. Being an imputed existent and being a substantial existent is mutually exclusive, which is one reason why the aggregates cannot be posited as the self that is labelled onto them. This verse also gives us the reason that the aggregates that are the basis of imputation cannot be that which is being imputed, and that's why the aggregates cannot be the self. The aggregates are not the self because they are the basis of imputation, and on the basis of one object the basis of imputation and that being imputed are mutually exclusive.

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.4.2. Explaining the mere collection of the aggregates not to be the self

*In the sutras it teaches that it is dependent on the
aggregates.*

*Therefore the mere combination of the aggregates isn't
the self.*

The self is merely labelled in dependence upon the aggregates, and as such the self, which is imputed, cannot be the basis in dependence upon which it is labelled. Here, the 'merely' in 'merely labelled' is to eliminate the basis of imputation, i.e. the aggregates, as being the object of imputation.

The definition of the self as being merely labelled in dependence upon the aggregates is a common definition to all the schools. However, the lower schools differ from

the Prasangika in the connotation they give to the 'merely'. In the **lower schools** the 'merely' doesn't eliminate the basis of imputation as that which is imputed. Here in the **Prasangika** system, the 'merely' is included to make it very, very clear that no part of the basis of imputation is the self. The 'merely' here means it is merely imputed in dependence on the aggregates, and that no part of the aggregates is the self.

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.4.3. The shape of the collection of aggregates isn't the self

If stated 'shape', since existent on form

You can say they are the self.

The collections of mind etc. don't become the self

Because they don't possess shape.

This concerns the point made by the **Prasangika** that if the collection of the aggregates were the self then the mere collection of the parts would also be the chariot and so forth. Here the **Sammitiya Vaibhashika** assert, 'Well of course, if one just has all the parts lying there in a heap, then that is not the chariot. But if the parts are assembled in the appropriate shape, then that can be labelled as a chariot. That's why they say, "The distinctive shape of the accumulation of the aggregates is the self".' They say that the distinctive shape of the collection of the aggregates is what is labelled as the self.

To this **Chandrakirti** replies, 'You can say that the collection of form, i.e. the form aggregate, is the self, however you can't say the collections of mind etc. are the self, since shape exists on forms but doesn't exist on mind and so forth'. If the Sammitiya Vaibhashika say that the shape is the self, then since the shape is existent on form, one could say that the form aggregate is the self. However the collections of the mind and so forth don't become the self, because they don't possess shapes. That's pretty clear.

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.4.4. Showing other reasons contradicting the assertion that the mere collection of the aggregates is the self

The taker is unsuitable to be one with that taken.

According to that view karma and agent become one.

If ones mind thinks 'karma exists without agent',

It doesn't, because without agent there is no karma.

The taker, i.e. the self, is unsuitable to be one with that taken, i.e. the contaminated aggregates, since according to that view karma and agent would become one, just like the elements and the elemental derivatives would become one, and just like the clay vase and the potter would become one.

This uses the reasoning that if two things are intrinsically one, then they become completely and indivisibly one. In general, just because two things are of one nature it doesn't mean that they have to be inseparably one. For example, sound and the impermanence of sound are of one nature, but they still have a different isolate. They are of different isolate because they have different sounds expressing them.

The aggregates and the self are also of one nature but have a different isolate. If the aggregates were intrinsically of one nature with the self, then they would be completely and inseparably one, and then karma and

the agent would also become one, etc. This uses the same reasoning we explained before - if two things are intrinsically one they become completely inseparable and when they are intrinsically different they become completely unrelated.

Mirror:

*If one **thinks** in **one's mind**, 'Even **without** a self that is an **agent**, the creator of **karma**, the mere collection of the aggregates **exists** inherently', then that would also be incorrect, **because without agent** there is **no karma**.*

Here when the **Sammitiya Vaibhashika** say 'Even without self there is an agent', they relate the absence of the self to the absence of a permanent, single, independent self. But from the point of view of the analysis of the **Prasangika**, one has to always relate it to the lack of an intrinsic self.

The **Vaibhashika** think that if karma doesn't exist inherently, it would exhaust by itself. But one of the characteristics of karma is that it doesn't exhaust by itself. The Vaibhashika say that this is only possible if karma exists inherently. Then the self also has to exist inherently, because it is the creator of the karma. The **Prasangika** say that the creator doesn't have to exist inherently, and that the karma that is created also doesn't have to exist inherently. They say that even though it doesn't exist inherently, the fault that it would exhaust by itself does not arise.

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.4.5. The Buddha taught that the self is labelled in dependence on the six spheres etc.

*The Able One emphatically showed the self
In dependence on the six spheres, earth,
Water, fire, air, consciousness and space;
On the six bases of knowing, the eyes etc.*

*He taught it having clearly held phenomena
Such as mind and mental factors. Therefore
It isn't them or that, not the mere collection.
Therefore the awareness grasping 'I' isn't on them.*

Here the aggregates are individually refuted as being the self, and also the collection of the aggregates is refuted as the self. Then the root text explains in a condensed way what that means.

Mirror:

Take the subject that 'the innate **awareness grasping at 'I'** - it follows that **it isn't** focusing **on them**, the aggregates individually and also not on their collection - because **it**, the self, **isn't them**, the aggregates individually, **or that, the mere collection of the aggregates...**

Because the innate awareness grasping at 'I' focusses on neither the aggregates individually nor on their collection, this shows that neither the aggregates individually nor their collection are the self. We have to this relate back to what was explained earlier - that the **focal object** of the innate 'I'-grasping is the mere 'I'. You might remember that the mere 'I' is the focal object of the innate 'I'-grasping, while the inherently existent 'I' is the **apprehended object** of innate 'I'-grasping. Here by saying that neither the aggregates individually, nor the collection of the aggregates are the focus of the innate 'I'-

grasping, it is saying that neither the collection of the aggregates nor the aggregates individually are the mere 'I'. Why?

Mirror:

*... - because **the Able One emphatically showed the self in dependence on the six spheres - earth, water, fire, air, consciousness, space.***

The Buddha taught that the self exists in dependence on the six spheres - earth, water, fire, air, consciousness and space. The sphere of space refers to the space in the depths of the ear according to the *Abhidharmakosa*, which might refer to the inner ear.

Mirror:

*... **he also taught** the self **having clearly held** the **phenomena** of mind and mental factors as basis.*

When the Buddha taught the self, he taught the self in dependence on the six spheres, and also in dependence on the six bases of contact, which are the six faculties, i.e. the eye faculty and so forth. The Buddha clearly taught the self by holding the mind and mental factors as the basis of the self.

In conjunction with the six faculties and the six types of consciousness we have the various types of mental factors, such as the **six types of contact**, and also the **six types of feeling**, which then can be elaborated into the **eighteen types of contact** and the **eighteen types feeling**.

One can have a pleasant object, an unpleasant object or a neutral object for each of the six faculties. Then in conjunction with the object a type of contact arises and one type of feeling. In conjunction with a pleasant object, the feeling of pleasure arises, in conjunction with an unpleasant object, the feeling of suffering arises, and in conjunction with a neutral object, a neutral feeling arises. In this way one arrives at eighteen types of feelings.

The eighteen types of contact and the eighteen types of feelings are included in the **mental factors**. They all form part of the basis in dependence upon which the self is imputed. **The faculties** in dependence on which the different types of feelings and different types of contact arise are also part of the basis. Likewise, the different types of mind, the **six types of primary consciousness** that arise in dependence upon those faculties are also part of the basis. When the Buddha taught the self he always taught the self by holding all of those different types of aggregates, faculties, primary and secondary consciousnesses as the basis for the self.

So the different spheres individually and as a collection are not the object of innate 'I'-grasping. But the focal object of the innate 'I'-grasping, the mere 'I', exists in dependence upon the six spheres. For example in dependence upon the different types of feelings the 'I' is labelled, but these different types of feelings are not the self. Yet the self exists in dependence upon those different types of feelings. The different types of feelings are not the focal object of the innate 'I'-grasping. Rather it is the mere 'I' that exists in dependence upon the different types of feelings that is the focal object of the mere 'I'-grasping.

Did you understand it well? So is the form aggregate the

self or not? The form aggregate is the first of the five aggregates. Then you just go through the different aggregates – the aggregate of recognition, the aggregate of feeling, the aggregate of compositional factors and the aggregate of primary consciousness, then the sphere of space. One just meditates on how none of them individually are the self.

Student Question: inaudible

The primary consciousness isn't the self? Why not? There are not many persons?

Student: There is only one person.

Is there not a person of last year and a person of this year? So that makes two already! Isn't there an Anthony, a first year Anthony, a second year Anthony, a third year Anthony and so forth? Then if there are many Anthony's, it follows that there are many, many persons.

Before we stated the consequence that if the self were to be the aggregates, then there would be the fault that there would have to be many selves - since the aggregates are many, the self would also have to be many. That is then not really a fault because there are many selves from the point of view of earlier or later moments.

But it doesn't follow that there are many selves. If one says that there are many selves from the point of view of earlier and later moments, then the answer to that reason would have to be, 'absolutely no pervasion, there is only one self'.

This clock is only one. In the course of a 24-hour day we don't get 24 clocks. They couldn't fit all on the table. It would be also very difficult, for example, to make the acquaintance of somebody, or to meet somebody again whom one has met before if a new person arose every hour! Then you would also end up with many girlfriends or boyfriends. That is the type of logic that one has to employ to refute this point. The person is only one and if someone argues that there are many selves because there are many earlier later moments of the self, then the answer would be 'no pervasion'. Just because there are many early and later moments of the self, it doesn't follow there are many selves.

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.5. Showing the other systems to be unrelated

Abandoning the permanent self when realising selflessness

It isn't even posited as basis of 'I'-grasping.

*Therefore, to say that through knowing selflessness
Profound self-view is abandoned is most remarkable.*

Clearing doubt, saying, 'There is no elephant'

When seeing a snake living in one's cave.

That this abandons fear of the snake

Becomes the joke of other excellent ones.

This relates to the **lower tenets**, where 'mine' is asserted to exist inherently. In the **Prasangika** tenet 'mine' exists non-inherently. If 'mine' were to exist inherently, then there couldn't be any grasping at 'I' and 'mine' as inherently existent.

Mirror:

because even though one *abandons the permanent self when realising selflessness*, this permanent

self *is not even posited as the basis* or object of the innate 'I'-grasping.

All we have to think about when we abandon the grasping at a permanent, single, independent self is whether or not that harms the innate 'I'-grasping.

Student Question: inaudible

Why?

Student: Because it doesn't lead to liberation.

When you realise the lack of a permanent single independent self, why does that not harm the innate 'I'-grasping?

Student: Because it is intellectually acquired.

We also have the intellectually-acquired transitory view. So your answer wasn't quite a pervasion. The innate 'I'-grasping apprehends an inherently existent 'I' and 'mine'. The realisation of the lack of a permanent, single, independent self is not the counter-positive for the the grasping at an inherently existent 'I'. It doesn't really harm that grasping.

For that the mode of apprehension needs to be mutually exclusive, and the completely opposite in order to harm the distorted awareness. That is why by just generating love and compassion and so forth alone one cannot eliminate 'I'-grasping.

Mirror:

Saying that through knowing the selflessness that is the mere absence of a permanent, partless and independent self, the *profound self-view* present since beginningless time *is* also *abandoned, is most remarkable* because even though one *abandons the permanent self when realising selflessness*, this permanent self *is not even posited as the basis* or object of the innate 'I'-grasping.

The permanent single independent self is not the focal object of the innate 'I'-grasping and neither is it the apprehended object of the innate 'I'-grasping. Therefore since it is not an object of the innate 'I'-grasping in any way, realising the absence of the permanent self does not harm the innate 'I'-grasping in any way. To attain the wisdom that can harm the innate 'I'-grasping it is necessary to realise the absence of the apprehended object of the innate 'I'-grasping. Its mode of apprehension needs to be the direct counter-positive to the mode of apprehension of the innate 'I'-grasping. Therefore saying that with the realisation of the absence of a permanent, single, independent self, one could purify all the seeds of the transitory view is most remarkable.

It is like saying that the realisation, 'there is no elephant in my cave' helps to abandon the fear of a snake in the cave. Realising that there is no elephant in my cave clears any doubt about whether or not there is any elephant there, and so there is no fear about having an elephant in the cave. However, seeing that there is no elephant in the cave, will not have any effect on the fear of having a snake in the cave. Saying to somebody who his frightened of having a snake in the cave, 'Don't worry, because there is no elephant in the cave', will not alleviate their fears about a snake.

The elephant is an example of the permanent, single, independent self. So realising the absence of a permanent, single, independent self won't do anything with regard to innate 'I'-grasping. In fact, to use the form of the analogy, the person thinks, 'I'm all right, there is no elephant in the cave', they relax, and then they get bitten by the snake!

What does it mean when it is said that the permanent single independent self is neither the focal object of innate 'I'-grasping, nor the aspect of the innate 'I'-grasping.

Student: Because the innate 'I'-grasping arises on the basis of the mere 'I' in conjunction with the ignorance of grasping at inherent existence.

The reason is because the innate 'I'-grasping arises only in relation to the basis of the mere 'I'. It doesn't arise in relation to the aggregates, or in relation to the perception of a permanent single independent self.

You have look at what is there when the mere innate thought thinking 'I' arises. When you have that grasping strongly in your mind, analyse the focus of that mind. In relation to what does it arise? By doing that, then the mind also doesn't escape to the outside to external objects. Rather it stays focussed internally.

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Edited Version

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