
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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As usual first turn the mind inwards and generate the motivation of bodhicitta thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings, and in order to accomplish that aim I am now going to listen to this profound teaching, and then I will put it into practice'.

3.5.1.2.2.1.5. Showing the self to be similar to the chariot in being labelled dependently, while being free from the seven extremes (cont.)

Last time we went through the verses showing the self to be similar to the chariot in being labelled dependently while being free from the seven extremes. We analyse how the chariot is not findable in the seven ways, which is used as an example for the self, which is also not findable in the seven ways.

The seven reasons consist of the five reasonings expounded by Nagarjuna and the two extra reasonings that Chandrakirti added. These extra two are that the mere accumulation of the aggregates is the self, and that the shape of the accumulation of the parts is the chariot.

Let us review the first five points that were originally expounded by Nagarjuna.

1. Not intrinsically one

First of all the self is not of intrinsically of one nature with the aggregates. This is different from saying that the self is not of one nature with the aggregates, which would be incorrect, because in Buddhist tenets the self is asserted as being of one nature with the aggregates. What is being refuted is that the self is *intrinsically* of one nature with the aggregates.

If the person were to exist inherently, then it would have to exist as inherently one or inherently many. If this reasoning is applied to the aggregates, the person would have to exist as either inherently one with the aggregates or inherently different from the aggregates.

If the self were to exist as inherently one with the aggregates, then we arrive at the faults that we have been through before. Since the self is only one then we would have only one aggregate, and since there are many aggregates we would have many selves. With these consequences one then can refute that the self is of intrinsically one nature with the aggregates.

The **Prasangika** say that the person is posited without investigation and analysis as existing only nominally, while under investigation and analysis, the person is unfindable. The **lower tenets**, however, assert that the person is actually findable under investigation and analysis, that at the time of investigation and analysis the

person is findable. The **Prasangika** say that the person is not findable at the time of analysis, but the way the person is posited is in accordance with the worldly way of just positing something without analysis or investigation.

If the self were of intrinsically one nature with the aggregates, then it would also be difficult to posit the self as that which continuously takes the aggregates. Nominally we can say that the aggregates are that which does the self continuously take. However if the self and the aggregates are intrinsically one then that becomes unreasonable. Likewise, if the self and the aggregates were intrinsically one, then we would also get other faults, such as the self being generated from other since the aggregates are generated from other; the self that creates the karma would not be the self that experiences the karma; and we would have intrinsic generation and disintegration before death and so forth.

2. Not intrinsically different

The self is also being refuted as being intrinsically different from the aggregates. Here again the self is accepted as being different from the aggregates, but it is not accepted as being *intrinsically* different from the aggregates.

There is no problem with the position that the self is different from the aggregates. However if the self were intrinsically different from the aggregates, then problems would start to arise. The self and the aggregates would become as unrelated as a vase and a piece of cloth; one would be able to apprehend the self without making the aggregates an object of mind just as one would be able to apprehend the vase without making the piece of cloth an object of mind.

3. The self doesn't intrinsically possess the aggregates

The self possesses the aggregates, but if the self intrinsically possesses the aggregates, then again we have two possibilities. It possesses aggregates that are of a different nature from the self, or it possesses aggregates that are of one nature with itself.

If the self possesses intrinsically existing aggregates that are of one nature with itself, then again various problems start to arise. Here the analogy of Devadatta possessing a cow and Devadatta possessing form is used. Devadatta possessing a cow is an example of possessing something that is of a different nature from oneself, and Devadatta possessing form is used as an example of possessing something that is of one nature with oneself. We have previously said that if A possesses B, there are only two ways in which A can possess B - either B is one nature with A, or B is of a different nature from A.

4. & 5. The self and aggregates are refuted as being intrinsically dependant and basis

Nominally we can say that the self and the aggregates are dependent and basis, however they are not intrinsically dependent and basis.

Reasons four and five relate to the self and the aggregates being intrinsically dependent and basis. Here the same faults arise again. The self and aggregates would either be intrinsically separate, or intrinsically one. So actually, one

has to consider the first two of the seven points of analysis very well, and then one can also understand the other points.

Understanding a difficult subject is easier if we analyse it on the basis of an easier example, such as a chariot. Otherwise it becomes very difficult if one goes straight into an analysis, for example trying to find the intrinsic table and then analysing whether the atom possessing the eight characteristics is the table, or whether the shape of the table is the intrinsic table, or the colour and so forth.

3.5.1.2.2.1.5.2. An extensive explanation of the two remaining cases not explained before.

This has two outlines:

3.5.1.2.2.1.5.2.1. Actual refutation

3.5.1.2.2.1.5.2.2. Transferring the same logic to other objects

3.5.1.2.2.1.5.2.1. Actual refutation

This is subdivided into:

3.5.1.2.2.1.5.2.1.1. Refuting assertion that the collection is the chariot

3.5.1.2.2.1.5.2.1.2. Refuting the assertion that the shape is the chariot.

3.5.1.2.2.1.5.2.1.1. Refuting the assertion that the collection is the chariot

*If the mere collection becomes the chariot
That very chariot exists where they lie scattered.
Because that possessing parts doesn't exist parts
don't exist,
Hence the mere shape is also unsuitable as
chariot.*

Here the special presentation of the **Prasangika** is that the mere collection of the parts is not the chariot. This is very difficult to understand, because if the mere collection of the parts is not the chariot, then it becomes very difficult to posit a chariot apart from those parts. It becomes very difficult to posit something that is able to fulfil the function of a chariot apart from those parts. However this special presentation of the **Prasangika** asserts that the basis of imputation also cannot be found at the time of analysis.

The **lower tenets** all assert that the basis of imputation has to be findable at the time of analysis. They feel if the basis of imputation is unfindable at the time of analysis, then one could not posit any object nominally.

For the **Prasangika** it is the other way around. And when something is merely labelled on a basis, the basis has to be also a valid basis. Just merely labelling something doesn't make that object an existent. It has to be labelled on a valid basis. If after investigation the object is unfindable on the basis of imputation at the time of analysis, and if the basis is a valid basis, then one implicitly, or on the side, comes to understand the actual object that is able to perform the function of the object. If that happens then that is a sign that the basis is a valid basis.

However, if the basis is an invalid basis, such as the ears of the rabbit being used as the basis for the imputation of the horns of a rabbit, then by not finding the horns of a rabbit on that basis, there is also nothing on the side, or

implicitly, established as that which can fulfil the function of the horns of a rabbit. This shows that the ears of the rabbit are not a valid basis for the horns of a rabbit.

For example, when the self is unfindable on the aggregates at the time of analysis, then implicitly on the side, the nominal self or that which can nominally fulfil the function of a self is understood. However, for example, on the basis of analysing the table, nothing that can fulfil the function of self will be implicitly established. Why? Because the basis, the table, is not a valid basis on which to label the self. The aggregates, however, are the valid basis for labelling self and that is why there is that which can nominally fulfil the function of a self.

Mirror:

Where they, the parts of the broken chariot, lie scattered, that very chariot exists because the mere collection of the chariot's parts becomes the chariot.

The mere collection of the chariot's parts and *the mere shape* of the parts *also* are *unsuitable as the chariot* - because the *parts* of the chariot *don't exist* - because *that possessing the parts*, the chariot, *doesn't exist* - because neither the parts individually nor the collection of the parts are the chariot and according to you there is no other chariot.

The meaning behind the consequence that even if the parts of the broken chariot lie scattered on the ground, the very chariot would still have to exist there is that the Realists assert those parts to be wholly intrinsically the parts of the chariot. If they are intrinsically the parts of the chariot while they are fitted together, then afterwards, when the chariot has broken and all the parts of the chariot lie scattered on the ground, then those parts are still intrinsically the parts of the chariot. That is why at that time the chariot would also still be there - since the parts of the chariot are there.

At this point there was a lengthy dialogue between Geshe-la and Ven. Tenzin.

Translator: I asserted that there is no problem with the parts of the chariot lying there. You wouldn't need an actual chariot right there at that place, because you buy things in sets and then put them together later and so forth.

I didn't accept that you have to have the chariot there in order for the parts of the chariot to be there. I said that even after the chariot is broken, those parts are still the parts of the chariot. But the argument goes that the parts of the chariot have to be related to the chariot. If they are related to the chariot, then they are either related by nature or they have a causal relationship with the chariot. Since they don't have a causal relationship, they are related by nature. So if the parts of the chariot are there, then the chariot has to be there.

Geshe-la: Is the mere collection of the chariot's parts the chariot?

Student: No.

If that were to be the case, then what fault would occur?

Student: The possessor and object would be one.

The reasoning is that if the mere collection of the chariot's parts is asserted as the chariot, then the fault that would occur is that when the parts lie scattered on the ground, the chariot should still be there. The thought behind that reasoning is that when the Realists say that the mere collection of the parts is the chariot, what they mean is that the mere collection of the parts is intrinsically the chariot. They assert this intrinsic relationship between the chariot and its parts. If the parts of the chariot were intrinsically the parts of the chariot, then the chariot should still be there even when those parts lie scattered on the ground, because those parts would still be the parts of the chariot. The presence of the parts of the chariot equals the presence of the chariot. That is the actual thought process behind the words.

Since the Prasangika also don't assert the mere collection of the parts to be the chariot nominally, this point doesn't have to be related to intrinsic existence.

After having thought about an example we then have to relate it to the meaning.

1. How the self is not intrinsically different from the aggregates.
2. How the self is not intrinsically one with the aggregates.
3. How the self is not intrinsically endowed with the aggregates.
4. How the aggregates are not intrinsically the basis for the self.
5. How the self is not intrinsically dependent on the aggregates.
6. How the collection of the aggregates is not the self.

If two things are of one nature, then they have to be different. Only two different things can be of one nature - if two things are of intrinsically one nature, then the fault arises that they should be completely one.

If the self is intrinsically one with the aggregates then since there are many aggregates there should be many selves. This is a fault because in relation to one person there is only one self. In general, if we have an assembly of people then of course there are many selves. If you have one hundred people, then you have one hundred selves. So generally, it is not a fault if you have many selves. From the point of view of one individual however, if that person is intrinsically one with his or her aggregates, then that person should be actually many people.

Another fault that would arise is that one couldn't remember one's past lives. How does that fault arise?

Student: One wouldn't be able to remember the past life because one's aggregates would be different.

It doesn't actually have to relate it to the aggregates, You can analyse it from the point of view of the self. If the self were to exist inherently, then it would have to be unrelated to the earlier and later moments, and as such couldn't remember its earlier moments. That we can remember what we said yesterday is a sign that shows that the person of yesterday is related to the person of today. If yesterday's person is unrelated to today's

person, then today's person couldn't remember what yesterday's person said. You have to relate this to the mode of inherent existence. If something were to exist inherently, it would have to exist totally independently of anything else. If the self of today were to exist inherently, it would have to exist totally independently of anything else including the self of yesterday. Therefore it could not remember what the self of yesterday did.

Does the self exist?

Students: Yes.

Does the self of person exist?

Students: No.

What's the reason for the person existing, but not the self of person?

Student: The person exists imputed on the aggregates, but the self of person does not.

Are you saying that there is no inherently existent self of person?

Student: There is no self of person but there is a self.

If the self exists, how would it have to exist?

Student: It's merely imputed.

What do you mean when you say that it's merely imputed?

Student: It doesn't exist from its own side.

Why doesn't it exist from its own side? Does the self exist on the aggregates?

Student: Yes.

Then the basis of imputation is really established as the self?

So you say that the self does not exist from its own side, the aggregates also don't exist from their own side, and the basis of imputation, the aggregates, also don't exist from their own side. Does the self exist on the aggregates or not? That is a question that comes up.

If it is selfless of person, is it necessarily the subtle selflessness of person?

Student: No.

Consider the subject Majola - it follows that he is selfless of person - because he exists. What do you say to that reason?

Take the subject Majola - it follows he is selfless of person (predicate) - because he exists (reason). Does that reason have a pervasion?

Student: No.

That is where you are confused. You think that if it exists, there is no pervasion that it is the selfless of person. Can you give an example? Just give an example of something that is existent, but it is not selfless of person.

Take the subject 'the selflessness of phenomena' - it follows that it is the self of person - because it isn't selfless of person. Then take the subject 'self of person' - it follows it exists - because there is something that is it.

Take the subject Majola - Is Majola a person? Since Majola is a person, he is selfless of person.

Student: Accept.

What reason would you give for Majola being selfless of person?

Student: Because he is neither inherently one nor many.

You have to have a reason when you meditate on yourself as the subject. You have to have a reason why you say, 'Take the subject 'I', - I'm lacking the self of person'. Similarly when you say, 'Take the subject 'I' -it is impermanent'. You need to have a reason why you say that you lack the self of person.

Student: Geshe Doga, I am new to this discussion. If we can't find the self, therefore we say the self does not exist. But one could say that there are lots of other things that we cannot perceive, but they do exist. No one has ever seen an atom or the components of an atom and we cannot see the [unclear], but we can see their effect or the effect if they are missing. Therefore similarly with a self, we can see the intended self or whatever self is there because the person is alive. But if that self is disappearing, then the person is dead. So can you please explain that to me. Thank you.

Because of the unfindability of the self during investigation and analysis, we say that the self of person doesn't exist. What we just said was that the self exists, but the self of person does not exist. The self appears to the mind very strongly. When we look for that 'I', it cannot be found at the time of analysis, however it still performs functions, creates effects and so forth. That's why Chandrakirti said, 'I'm positing the self in a worldly way', meaning 'I'm positing the self according to worldly convention'.

Geshe-la holds up a clock

For example, this is nominally labelled as a clock and at the time of analysis and investigation, it can nominally perform the function of a clock. But if you start to analyse where the clock can be found, whether it is one with the parts and so forth, then the clock becomes unfindable at the time of analysis. That doesn't contradict it nominally existing at the time of no analysis.

In the third volume of Lama Tsong Khapa's *Great Exposition On The Stages Of The Path*, which deals with superior insight and calm abiding, he explained the reasoning of Chandrakirti's seven-fold reasoning very well. He establishes the selflessness of person with Chandrakirti's seven-fold reasoning. The section is divided into two major parts, first outlining the example of the chariot, and then relating that to the meaning, which is the person.

In Lama Tsong Khapa's *Small Exposition On The Stages Of The Path*, he used the reasoning of the four point analysis - identifying the object of negation, understanding the pervasion, and then refuting being one or many. The important point of that reasoning is actually contained within the seven-fold reasoning, and it is good to think about how they relate to each other. The occasion of this teaching was when Lama Tsong Khapa explained the important points of the Lam Rim to Gyal-tsab Rinpoche, and in the course of that teaching he taught the four-point analysis, which is regarded as something specific to Lama Tsong Khapa.

The great sages of India meditated on emptiness in such a way, and likewise the great yogis of Tibet have meditated on emptiness in such a way. So if oneself follows the tradition, then it is very likely that one will also get a good result. One should also combine it with prayers to be able to realise emptiness in this life. If possible of course the best is realising it in this life. So you pray, 'May I realise emptiness in this life, but if not possibly in this life then in the next life. May I never be separated from emptiness throughout my lives'.

Is the selflessness of person emptiness?

Students: Yes.

The selflessness of person is emptiness. If it is selfless, is there pervasion that it is emptiness?

Student: No.

Why do you say no? You mean that all phenomena are selfless, but not all phenomena are emptiness. That was a good answer

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