

Study Group - “Buddhist Tenets”

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24 April 2001

Generate the motivation of listening to this teaching in order to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Also generate the motivation to put these teachings into practice.

3.7 Explaining the Principles of Grounds and Paths (cont)

3.7.2 The Actual Teaching on the Principles of Grounds and Paths

Under the heading of the presentation of the grounds and paths we learn about the different paths according to the three vehicles [of practice].

Generally the terms ‘path’, ‘ground’ and ‘exalted knowledge’ are synonymous as they all denote the same meaning. In Tibetan the term for path is *lam*. It refers to the exalted knowledge of inner realisations, which are conjoined, with a genuine sense of renunciation, or seeking liberation.

One characteristic of the definition of path is that it should be qualified with a genuine unfabricated renunciation. We have already studied the meaning of renunciation in detail; it is one of the three principle aspects of the path. Renunciation is a genuine thought to seek liberation from samsara (or worldly cyclic existence), and for all the objects of desire or attachment, as a result of feeling a sense of disgust or distaste from the depth of one’s heart.

The Term ‘Vehicle’

Before we go any further it is also important to explain the meaning of the term ‘vehicle’ in terms of lesser vehicle and greater vehicle. In Tibetan the term for vehicle is *theg pa*. It technically refers to the inner knowledge or realisations, which literally takes the responsibility for the well being of oneself or for all others¹. Based on this meaning of the term vehicle, the meaning of ‘lesser vehicle’ is the inner knowledge or realisation which takes the responsibility or burden merely for oneself, whereas the greater vehicle [is the inner knowledge or realisation which takes the responsibility or] burden of all other beings.

The lesser and the greater vehicles are sometimes called the small and the great vehicles. It might occur to ask why one path in Buddhism is called a small or lesser path? It sounds like an inferior path and the other path sounds like a greater superior path. When we say the path of the lesser vehicle is a small or lesser path we are not saying that it is an inferior path of less value or meaning. The main implication, however, is that it is a lesser, smaller or inferior path compared to the path of the greater vehicle. The reason there are two vehicles is also because there are two types of spiritual practitioners. The difference between the lesser and greater vehicles is the difference between the ultimate spiritual goal of these two types of followers.

The ultimate spiritual goal for a person of lesser vehicle is the state of nirvana, or peace, which is a state of the mere cessation of the sufferings of cyclic existence. The purpose for which the person of lesser vehicle is pursuing that goal is merely for one’s own sake.

The path that a person of the great vehicle follows is said to be the supreme one, because of the superiority of that person’s

motivation. Their motivation is not just for themselves, but principally for the sake of all other beings. Therefore their motivation is much broader and greater compared to the motivation of the person of the lesser vehicle. Furthermore the ultimate spiritual goal for a person of the great vehicle is the state of buddhahood, or complete enlightenment, which is also greater than, and superior to, the ultimate goal of a person of the lesser vehicle.

Just as there are two types of beings who follow the spiritual path, so there are also two types of teachings that are given. In other words there are two baskets of the Buddha’s teachings in terms of the teaching of the two vehicles. There is the basket of teachings of the lesser vehicle, which give all the guidelines needed for the person of the lesser vehicle to achieve on his or her respective goal. There is also the basket of the teachings of the great vehicle for the person following the greater vehicle.

Stages on the Spiritual Path

In explaining this teaching in terms of the path there are five [stages on the] spiritual path which show the progression towards the final spiritual goal. They are:

1. Path of Accumulation
2. Path of Preparation
3. Path of Seeing
4. Path of Meditation
5. Path of No-More-Learning

1. The Path of the Accumulation is the stage in one’s spiritual journey when one first enters onto the path, and while on the actual path begins to amass merit for the first time.
2. The Path of Preparation is the stage where one is, literally speaking, preparing oneself to directly realise the truth.
3. The Path of Seeing is the stage of gaining direct realisation of the truth.
4. The Path of Meditation is the stage of achieving further familiarisation with the direct realisation of the truth.
5. The Path of No-More-Learning is the stage of achieving the final goal. It is the completion of one’s effort on the path to liberation.

According to the Great Exposition School, the main object of observation for the person of lesser vehicle, in particular the lesser vehicle of Hearer, is the Four Noble Truths. This is their main meditative contemplation. The main spiritual qualities or inner realisations to be achieved along the path are called the 37 Qualities or Harmonies of the state of enlightenment. The list of 37 qualities can be broken down into: four types of mindfulness; four pure states of abandonment; four types or legs of miracles; five powers; another list of five forces; seven branches of enlightenment, and, finally, the eight-fold path of superior beings.

Criterion of Entering the Path

As to the followers of this lesser vehicle, there are those who have the lineage or the nature of the lesser vehicle, like for instance a Hearer nature or lineage. For a person who has the nature of the Hearer vehicle, the moment that person generates true renunciation is when they enter the actual path of the Hearer vehicle. Whereas for someone with a lineage or nature of the greater vehicle, the moment they first enter the path is the moment they generate the bodhicitta mind for the first time.

Here we are learning a little bit about the criteria of entering into the path of Hearer vehicle and the greater vehicle. This is quite different from the criteria of being a proponent of a school of tenet of the lesser vehicle or the greater vehicle. Let us consider the difference between a person who has entered into the path of, say, the lesser vehicle, and a person who is a proponent of a tenet of the lesser vehicle. Recall from our study of the tenets that only two of the four schools of tenets are schools of lesser vehicle, the Great Exposition school, and the Sutra school. Therefore to be a proponent of a tenet of the lesser vehicle, you have to be a proponent of either of the Great Exposition school or the Sutra school.

¹ Tsepa Rigzin, *Tibetan-English Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology*, Spiritual path or means along which a practitioner is led to liberation according to his particular disposition; a path or means to lead sentient beings to higher states depending upon their capabilities., p 177

Is it necessary for someone who has entered the path of the lesser vehicle to also be a proponent of the tenet of a lesser vehicle? Of course the answer is that it is not necessary. This is because with respect to the path you have entered, you can be someone who has entered the path of lesser vehicle, but with respect to the tenet that you hold in your mind, you can be a proponent of even a tenet of the greater vehicle. In other words you can be someone who has entered the path of the lesser vehicle, but at the same time you can be a proponent of a school of the greater vehicle, such as the Mind Only² school or even the Autonomous³ or the Consequence⁴ school.

The Three Vehicles of the Great Exposition School

There is a question as to whether the Great Exposition school even accepts the term 'greater vehicle' or Mahayana, because of the way this school names three types of vehicles: Hearer, Solitary Realiser and Bodhisattvas. Furthermore this school says that each of these three vehicles is an ultimate vehicle in itself. In other words it says that each vehicle offers an ultimate goal beyond which no further goal can be achieved. So according to this school each vehicle can be treated as an ultimate vehicle. Therefore there are three ultimate vehicles.

The root text describes the length of time and the level of determination a person of each of these three vehicles needs to achieve their spiritual goal.

A person with a lineage of **Hearer** of the lesser vehicle meditates on their view of emptiness - a person's emptiness of being substantially existent in the sense of being self-sufficient. At the same time they accumulate a small amount of merit over three lifetimes, as that is how long they want to take to achieve their goal. The text says that the level of merit they accumulate is a small level and they amass this accumulation in three lifetimes and meditate on the view of the selflessness of person. They want to achieve their goal in three lifetimes.

Hearers have generated a very strong sense of renunciation, and are impatient to achieve liberation from cyclic existence. So with this thought they decide that they wish to achieve their goal within three lifetimes. Within those three lifetimes the main meditation they do is on the selflessness of the person, and also the sixteen attributes of the Four Noble Truths. Meditating on that they acquire the merit for achieving their goal. This is described as a small accumulation of merit.

A person who has the lineage of **Solitary Realiser** of the lesser vehicle has, it says, more patience and determination compared to a person with the Hearer's lineage. The Solitary Realiser has more spirit in the sense that he or she is prepared to meditate to achieve their goal even if it takes hundreds of aeons. What they meditate upon is the same - the view of the selflessness of a person. As a supporting cause to that meditation the amount of merit they need to accumulate is a middling accumulation of merit.

The person with the lineage of a **Bodhisattva** meditates in order to achieve their goal of great enlightenment. They meditate on the [same] view [of selflessness of person] in conjunction with the accumulation of the great amount of merit over the period of three countless great aeons. Compared to the previous two, the spirit and the determination of the Bodhisattvas is much higher, in the sense that to achieve their goal the Bodhisattva is ready to sacrifice and accumulate merit over three countless great aeons.

We have just discussed the differences in the way beings of each of these three vehicles follow the path to achieve liberation. The text, which we shall discuss next week, also shows the differences between beings of these three vehicles in terms of the way each accumulates the required amount of merit.

Student: Why are Hearers called Hearers, and why are Solitary

Realisers called Solitary Realisers?

To explain the literal meaning of hearer, the term in Tibetan is *nyan thos*. The term *nyan* means to hear from others and the term *thos* means to expose to others, or to make others hear about. Literally it means a person of the lower vehicle.

Another explanation is that a person who is a Hearer has complete knowledge not only of their own vehicle, but also the greater vehicle. However they do not apply the greater vehicle to their own practice, even though they teach it to others. Their main basis of progression on the path is by listening to, and depending upon others.

The Tibetan term for Solitary Realiser is *rang gyal*, which means awaken self-victorious. Solitary Realisers have a very strong determination to achieve their goal independently. They wish to achieve that goal in a place where there is no Buddha, where there are no Hearers, and no practitioners of Hearers. They just want to work by themselves to achieve their goal. Solitary Realisers are likened to the Rhinoceros. Both have the nature of not mixing with the others, and of being alone. Solitary Realisers hate socialising with other beings.

In the past I gave a teaching on Chandrakirti's text *Supplement to the Middle Way*. That teaching gave a detailed explanation of the answer to your question.

Student: In relation to the school of Great Exposition, they gave a gross definition of a person as being empty of being permanent, partless and independent. Do they take that to be ... an artificial or innate view? And if it is regarded as an innate view, how do you explain that? [Many parts of the tape were unclear]

Reply: With regard to the gross form of the self of the person, we can have both artificial and innate views. Generally the innate view comes from beginningless time. We have always had it. Whereas the artificial view is one that we have acquired. We have constructed it in our mind, through the influence of our study of a school of tenets.

One of the sub-schools of the Great Exposition school is the Vasiputriyas, who assert that the person has a substantial existence. So a person who follows that sub-school of the Great Exposition school has this artificial view of the self of the person in terms of the person having a substantial existence. This is as a result of having asserted this philosophical view. So as a matter of principle, the view that they hold and believe in, is an artificial one. Whereas if we have not adopted this view that the person has a substantial existence, we have the assumption that it does not exist that way. If in fact we do not have [such an] artificial view of the self of the person, and someone asks or posits that the person has such a substantial existence then we would reply 'no'. However we still have the misconception of the self of the person, and we still generate the consciousness which conceives the person as being substantially existent [so we still have the innate view].

Student: Does the Vasiputriya school actually assert that someone can have the innate perception of the self being permanent ... argument that suggested that they accept ... innate levels ... That would mean that a self would ... without any doctrine or learning ... [Many parts of the tape were unclear]

Sandup: Your question is that if everyone already has an innate view in their mind, how can you have that innate view at the same time as an artificial one?

Answer: If you take this glass as an example, then we may not have the belief that it is permanent. We would not say that the glass is permanent, rather we would say, assert or propose that the glass is impermanent. This means that we do not have the artificial view of this glass being permanent. However we do have what we call the innate conception of this glass being permanent, because there is still a part of [our] mind which holds this glass as being a permanent object.

² Cittamantrin

³ Svantrika Madhyamika

⁴ Prasangika Madhyamika