
Study Group - “Buddhist Tenets”

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Please establish a virtuous motivation as usual.

5.6 Method of Asserting Selflessness

All tenets below the Svatantrika-Madhyamika assert that the subtle selflessness of a person is the absence of a self-sufficient substantially existent person and that the coarse selflessness of a person is the absence of a single, permanent and independent self. Basically that covers subtle and coarse selflessness.

As we have already said, one special point is that the person who is engaging outer objects, such as a vase and so forth, is empty of being self-supporting in terms of being a substantially existent. There is also the selflessness of a person relating to the object which is being engaged. So the vase is empty of being that which is engaged by a self-supporting substantially existing person.

Selflessness of phenomena is the emptiness of form and the valid cogniser apprehending form, being of different substance.

5.7 Principles of Grounds and Paths

The seventh division is positing grounds and paths. Here there are two sub-sections, objects of abandonment and the actual positing of grounds and paths.

5.7.1 Objects of abandonment

Obscurations are what has to be abandoned. The meaning of *obscurations* is **that which obstructs the attainment of liberation and omniscience**. An obscuration that primarily obstructs the attainment of liberation is called an afflictive obscuration, and an obscuration that primarily obstructs the attainment of omniscient mind is called an obscuration of knowledge. An example for the afflictive obscuration is grasping at a self of person together with the seeds, the three delusions that arise through the force of grasping at a self of a person, and also their seeds.

The seeds of self-grasping are posited as obscurations to liberation, and the karmic latencies of self-grasping are posited as obscurations to omniscience. The difference between karmic seeds and karmic latencies is that karmic seeds possess the power to produce further delusions within the mind. So the **seed** of self-grasping at the person has the power to produce further self-grasping within the mental continuum, while karmic **latencies** do not possess the power to produce further self-grasping. The karmic latencies produce mistaken appearances within the mind, but they don't produce further delusions. Therefore karmic seeds are the obscurations to liberation, and karmic latencies are obscurations to enlightenment.

The truth of cessation or liberation is the absence of the grasping at a self of person together with the karmic seeds. So the truth of cessation is a negative phenomenon, and its object of negation is grasping at a self of a person, together with the seeds.

Both the Mind Only and the Prasangika assert that the truth of cessation is emptiness and the object of negation for the Mind Only is the grasping at the self of person including the

seeds.

Here the text says that the *obscurations to omniscience* are **true grasping including the seeds, and also the karmic latencies, and the dualistic mistaken appearances that arise through the power of those karmic latencies**. Even though it says here 'true-grasping' it is referring to the grasping at a self of phenomena according to Mind Only.

In the Mind Only tenet, both other-powered and thoroughly established phenomena are regarded as being truly existent. Therefore for this tenet, grasping at true existence is not generally regarded as a wrong mind. What this is talking about is the various types of grasping at the self of phenomena, such as grasping at form and its valid cogniser as being of a different substance, or grasping at form being inherently the determined object of the conception apprehending form.

7.2 Principles Of Paths And Grounds

7.2.1 Hearers

Here the text says that the Hearers combine the view of the selflessness of a person, which is the view of the absence of a self-supporting substantially existing self, with the accumulation of merit and combined with single-pointed concentration or calm abiding for three lifetimes at the most. Then after three lifetimes they attain their own purpose, which is the liberation of the Hearer *arhat*. The motivation of these practitioners is for their own happiness. They say, 'At the most I will remain in cyclic existence another three lifetimes, and after three lifetimes I will definitely have attained my own liberation from cyclic existence.' Therefore they are called practitioners of the small vehicle, because their attainment, which they reach after three lifetimes, is a lesser one when compared to other attainments.

7.2.2 Solitary Realiser

The next Hinayana practitioner is the Solitary Realiser. In order to attain liberation, this practitioner, having generated spontaneous renunciation towards cyclic existence, combines the view of the absence of a person, which is self-sufficient in terms of being substantially existent, with the accumulation of merits which comes through the practice of patience, morality, generosity and so forth, for a period of from three lifetimes up to a hundred aeons.

A person who belongs to the lineage of a Solitary Realiser has a greater strength of mind than the practitioner following the Hearer vehicle, but they are the same in that they generate spontaneous renunciation towards cyclic existence. However one of them wants to get out of cyclic existence very quickly and saying, 'the most I will spend to attain liberation is three lifetimes.' While the Solitary Realiser practitioner has a greater strength of mind saying, 'I want to accumulate merit for a greater length of time', and therefore spends a greater length of time accumulating merit while practising the learner's path. The Solitary Realiser's purpose is for them selves.

7.2.3 Mahayana Practitioners

There is a question in regard to practitioners who abide within the Mahayana lineage. When do they generate spontaneous renunciation? I think that they Mahayana practitioners first generate a spontaneous renunciation towards cyclic existence. Then, only after having generated that spontaneous renunciation towards cyclic existence, will they generate spontaneous bodhicitta, and completely enter the Mahayana path. When practitioners who abide within the Mahayana lineage generate spontaneous renunciation towards cyclic existence they don't immediately enter any

of the three paths. Strictly speaking, they haven't entered yet the Mahayana path, rather they are abiding within the family of the Mahayana path.

The text says that for the purpose of all sentient beings the Bodhisattvas combine the view of the emptiness of object and mind being of a different substance, with the accumulation of great merit over three countless great aeons. Then in dependence upon that they attain their enlightenment. Here the main object of meditation is the selflessness of phenomena, or the absence of form and mind being of different substance. The main objects of abandonment are the obscurations towards omniscience, and the object of attainment is complete enlightenment or omniscience.

In the case of practitioners who abide within the Hearer and Solitary Realiser lineages, the main object of meditation was the absence of a self that is self-supporting in terms of being substantially existent. The main objects of abandonment were the obscurations towards liberation, and the main object of attainment was the enlightenment of the Hearer *arhat*, and the enlightenment of the Solitary Realiser *arhat*. So there are differences with regard to the main object of meditation, the main object of abandonment and the main object of attainment.

The Three Higher Trainings

The Bodhisattvas accumulate merit for three countless great aeons. This is done while they continue to practise generosity, patience, morality, the three higher trainings and so forth.

As you know the three higher trainings are wisdom, concentration and morality. Those three trainings are dependent upon each other. The higher training of wisdom refers to the union of calm-abiding and special insight. The higher training of concentration refers to the attainment of calm-abiding and meditative absorption, and the higher training of morality refers to the practice of keeping the vows of individual liberation.

Keeping the vows of individual liberation purely is the basis upon which one can attain concentration, because if we have a pure morality the coarse disturbing minds, which distract us towards outer and wrong objects, will be pacified. Those coarse disturbing thoughts prevent our attainment of concentration. If we practise pure morality those coarse disturbing thoughts will be pacified, and our mind will remain calmer and more focused. We can also further pacify the mind through the attainment of calm abiding. Then this attainment of calm abiding can act as the cause for thoroughly pacifying the mind with the union of calm-abiding and special insight, which can purify the disturbing thoughts completely from their root. This is good to know.

Then the text goes on further to say that from the point of view of the Mind Only True Aspectarians, the mental continuum of the Hearer and Solitary Realiser *arhats* will be severed when they attain nirvana without remainder. However, when one attains complete enlightenment the continuum will not be severed. The reason for this is that the Bodhisattvas become enlightened in the pure land of *Og-min*, and having become enlightened in the pure land of *Og-min*, they attain the enjoyment body of a Buddha. The enjoyment body of a Buddha remains for as long as cyclic existence remains, and only stops existing when cyclic existence is empty. Therefore the mental continuum of a Buddha is not severed.

This is a very similar explanation to the one in tantra, where it talks about taking the three bodies into the path. The wisdom truth body of the Buddha is only accessible to other Buddhas, and not accessible to sentient beings below the level of a Buddha. Therefore in order to benefit sentient beings the Buddhas need to manifest various forms.

The first form that is manifested is the enjoyment body of the Buddha, but then not all sentient beings have access to the enjoyment body of the Buddha, and further bodies need to be manifested. These are called emanation bodies. So it is said that the bases of imputation of the emanation bodies are the enjoyment bodies, and the base of imputation of the enjoyment bodies is the wisdom truth body of the Buddha. This explanation of the three bodies is very similar to what we find in tantra, at the time of taking the three kayas into the path.

Mind Only True Aspectarians assert that the individual lineages of the three paths are definite. What they say is that the various practitioners have what one calls a particular lineage. They can belong to the Hearer lineage, the Solitary Realiser lineage or the Mahayana lineage. This is determined by the various dispositions and abilities of the disciples. If the Buddha sees that a particular disciple has the disposition to follow the Hearer vehicle, then it will be more beneficial for that disciple to first follow the Hearer vehicle. As he or she doesn't have the ability, the interest, the space of mind to follow the Mahayana vehicle, the Buddha will first teach that person the Hearer vehicle.

The True Aspectarians assert that these three lineages are definite. From those three lineages, three kinds of wishes are generated according to the path the practitioner wants to follow. Those of the lowest capacity just follow the Hearer's path; those of slightly greater capacity, and greater strength of mind say, 'I will follow the Solitary Realiser's path and will accumulate merit for many, many lifetimes and aeons.' Practitioners of the greatest capacity and strength of mind say, 'I am going to work for complete enlightenment which takes three countless great aeons, for the benefit of all sentient beings'.

From those three kinds of wishes we get three kinds of paths, which are referred to as the three kinds of accomplishments. From the practice of those paths we get three kinds of results - the enlightenment of the Hearer, the enlightenment of the Solitary Realiser and enlightenment of the Buddha.

With respect to these three results, and the three kinds of wishes for those results, the Mind Only True Aspectarians assert that once one has attained one of these three kinds of enlightenment, then one cannot progress to a higher form of enlightenment. According to the Mind Only True Aspectarians there is only one final path.

The result of the Hearer *arhat* is the abandonment of the obscurations towards liberation. The attainment of the Solitary Realiser *arhat* is the same - the abandonment of the obscurations towards liberation. However the liberation of the Solitary Realiser *arhat* is regarded as slightly better than that of the Hearer *arhat*. Then there is the attainment of complete enlightenment, which is the abandonment of the obscurations to omniscience.

7.2.4 Bodies of A Buddha

The Mind Only asserts the four bodies of the Buddha - two form bodies and the two truth bodies. The two form bodies

are the emanation body¹ and the enjoyment body, and the two truth bodies are the nature truth body of the Buddha, and the wisdom truth body of the Buddha, the enlightened mind.

7.2.4.1 Nature Truth Body

The definition of a nature truth body is *the final sphere possessing the two purities*. Here the two purities refer to the purity of being free of the natural obscuration, and the purity of being free from the temporary obscuration. **Natural obscuration** refers to the subtle object of negation, and **temporary obscuration** refers to the two kinds of obscurations mentioned before - the obscurations towards liberation and enlightenment. So the final sphere, which is free from the natural impurity and the temporary impurity, is the identity body of the Buddha.

7.2.4.2 Emanation body

A final form body possessing the five definiteness.
(Definition)

The definiteness of **place**, refers to the emanation body definitely residing in the pure land of *Og-min*. This *Og-min* should not be confused with the *Og-min* that can be found among the 17 different places in the form realm, because that *Og-min* is still within cyclic existence. The *Og-min* referred to here is a higher place which is free from cyclic existence: it is the pure land of *Og-min* and all bodhisattvas become enlightened there, and their emanation body resides there.

The definiteness of **body** means that all emanation bodies are endowed with the marks and signs of an enlightened being.

The definiteness of **entourage** means that they will only be surrounded by arya bodhisattvas.

The definiteness of **Dharma** means that they will teach only the Mahayana Dharma.

The definiteness of **time** means that the emanation body will definitely abide until cyclic existence is completely empty.

This is according the sutra system! In the tantric system we can become enlightened on the basis of our present five aggregates

Then as the emanation body alone is not enough to benefit sentient beings, the Buddha will emanate further other form bodies that don't have the five definitenesses and those other bodies are called emanation bodies. The definition of *an emanation body is a final form body, which doesn't have the five definitenesses.*

Within the emanation bodies there is a threefold division into supreme emanation body, the born emanation body and the artistic emanation body. The **supreme emanation body** would be for example Shakyamuni Buddha. Actually there are many different kinds of emanation bodies that I should mention first. For example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is an emanation body. We cannot see his aspect as Chenrezig but as the guru devotion chapter of the *lam rim* it explains, the Guru is actually Buddha. So we can understand how His Holiness can actually be Chenrezig, and how viewing one's Guru as Buddha is the root of all attainments.

To return to the three divisions of emanation body, at the present time the **born emanation body** is, for example, Maitreya Buddha. Maitreya Buddha is presently residing in

Ganden pure land waiting for the right time to be reborn as a supreme emanation body of a realm such as ours in order to again start Buddhism. Each supreme emanation body is first reborn in Ganden, and that rebirth in Ganden is called the born emanation body.

An example of an **artistic emanation body** is that at one time Shakyamuni Buddha assumed the aspect of a sitar player, and entered into this contest with another sitar player. This player was incredibly conceited, thinking he was the best player in the whole universe - until he saw the Buddha playing without any string!

Actually this very conceited sitar player is said to have been the last disciple to be subdued by Shakyamuni Buddha. The place is in Northern India close to Kushinigar. When you drive along the road there you see a stupa by the side of the road. It is explained that the story of the sitar player happened there, and also the sutra of Paranirvana was taught there.

7.2.4.3 Wisdom Truth Body

The wisdom truth body of a Buddha is the final transcendental wisdom with regard to both conventional and ultimate phenomena. *The wisdom truth body of a Buddha is defined as the transcendental wisdom that has the final realisation with regard to suchness, and with regard to conventional phenomena.* Here we also have the conventional wisdom truth body, and the ultimate wisdom truth body. Of course every part of the omniscient mind realises the two truths simultaneously but, for example, the appearance of emptiness to the ultimate wisdom truth body is unmixed with conventional appearance. Even though every part of the enlightened mind is completely omniscient and realises the two truths simultaneously, still we can talk directly about the main object of the particular aspects of enlightened mind. Then through the division of the main object, we get the various divisions of the uncontaminated wisdom, such as conventional omniscient mind, and ultimate omniscient mind.

That completes the Mind Only chapter. Next week we can start with the Svatantrika-Madhyamika tenet.

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Edited Version

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¹ This was discussed earlier.