
Study Group - "Buddhist Tenets"

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Please establish a virtuous motivation for listening to the teaching.

Out of the four Buddhist tenets we have completed the Vaibashikas, Sautrantikas and the Cittamatrins. Today we are going to start with the Madhyamika tenets.

The pioneer of the Madhyamika tenet was Nagarjuna. Later there were various practitioners who followed the school that he pioneered. They included such practitioners as Bhavaviveka, Shantarakshita and Kamalashila and Chandrakirti and so forth.

Nagarjuna pioneered the Madhyamika tenet that asserts that true existence doesn't exist even in mere name. This interpretation of ultimate truth according to the Madhyamika tenet is based on the sutra called *The Sutra of Inexhaustible Wisdom*. Nagarjuna composed various texts based on this sutra. One text is called *The Compendium of Sutras* in which he establishes the point of view of the Madhyamika with quotations. Then he composed what are called *The Six Works of Nagarjuna* in which he establishes the point of view of the Madhyamikas through reasoning. These texts are called *Root Wisdom*, *The Precious Garland*, *The Seventy verses on Emptiness*, 60 verses on reasoning, refutation of wrong views and profound analysis.

The point of view, which Nagarjuna pioneered, was the view that all phenomena are empty of true existence. This is uncommon to the Madhyamika School. For example, the Mind Only School was still asserting that other-powered phenomena and thoroughly established phenomena are truly existent.

6.1. Definition

The meaning of 'Madhyamika' in English is 'the middle way', as in abiding free from the two extremes. The two extremes are the extreme of nihilism, and the extreme of eternalism.

The Madhyamika are also called proponents of identitylessness. The text says that the definition of a proponent of identitylessness is **a person asserting Mahayana tenets who doesn't accept truly existent phenomena even in mere name**.

6.2. Division

Followers of identitylessness have a twofold division into Svatantrika-Madhyamika and Prasangikas.

We have finished the definition and the division.

6.3. Explanation

Now comes the third point, which is the explanation of the individual Madhyamika tenets. There is a twofold division that has just been mentioned.

First the text explains the Svatantrika-Madhyamika tenet. They are also sometimes called the Autonomist Middle-Way School in English. In this section we have, first the definition, then the division and the etymology.

7.1. Definition of the Svatantrika-Madhyamika¹

The text gives the definition of Svatantrika-Madhyamika to explain what an Svatantrika-Madhyamika actually is. The definition of *an Svatantrika-Madhyamika is a Madhyamika who doesn't assert truly existent phenomena even in mere name by way of verbally asserting autonomous reason*.

The section of the definition saying, who asserts 'verbally autonomous reason', refers to the fact that this school asserts the three modes, which is the definition of perfect reason as existing from its own side. Then through positing a reason that exists from its own side the opponent can understand emptiness.

Compare the definition of Svatantrika-Madhyamika with what is asserted by Cittamatrin. We find that the Cittamatrin also accept the existence of autonomous reason. The Cittamatrin are also followers of Mahayana tenet, but not a follower of a Mahayana tenet who doesn't assert truly existent phenomena. The Cittamatrin assert truly existent phenomena. So here the difference [lies in whether or] not true existence is asserted.

If we compare the Mind Only school with the Svatantrika-Madhyamika and the Prasangika, then first of all we find that the Svatantrika-Madhyamika assert natural existence, inherent existence and existence from its own side. They assert that all phenomena are inherently existent, existent from their own side and exist naturally. They say that natural existence, inherent existence and existing from their own side are all basically synonymous, and that is how everything exists.

What the [Svatantrika-Madhyamika] don't assert is true existence. The reason why they assert inherent existence is because they say that there has to be a certain essence to every phenomenon. Basically what they are saying is that the basis of imputation can be found at the time of analysis. The Prasangikas say that at the time of analysis, the imputed meaning cannot be found. The [Svatantrika-Madhyamika] say that at the time of analysis there is something that can be found, and that is the way of asserting inherent existence.

If you go down to the Mind Only point of view, the Mind Only assert that all phenomena exist from their own side, and they exist naturally, but they don't exist inherently and truly. This is because even though they assert that other-powered and thoroughly established exist truly; wholly labelled phenomena are empty of inherent and true existence. So there is a slight difference in the meaning the Mind Only give to the words 'inherently existent', and the meaning the Madhyamika tenet gives to the words 'inherently existent'.

According to the Mind Only point of view, the meaning of 'inherent existence' is **being not merely labelled by conception, and existing out of its uncommon characteristic**. So if a phenomenon is not merely labelled by conception, and exists out of its uncommon characteristic, then that phenomenon exists inherently. Therefore they say that wholly labelled does not inherently exist, because it is merely labelled by conception. However other-powered phenomena and thoroughly established phenomena do exist inherently according to the Mind Only tenet.

Mind Only tenet doesn't say that the meaning of inherent existence is whether or not it is found at the time of analysis. This is a different interpretation of inherent existence from that of the Madhyamika point of view.

From the Madhyamika point of view, whether or not something is inherently existent is determined by whether

¹ Ed. Although not strictly correct, starting a new category of numbering enables comparability across the different systems.

or not the imputed meaning can be found at the time of analysis. The Svatantrika-Madhyamika asserts that at the time of analysis there is something that can always be found and therefore all phenomena inherently exist. However they still assert that they are empty of true existence. As all phenomena are empty of true existence, there is a difference to the Mind Only. The Prasangika say that all phenomena are empty of true existence and inherent existence, because for every phenomenon the imputed meaning can never be found at the time of analysis.

7.2 Classification

The text says that Svatantrika-Madhyamika is synonymous with the Madhyamika asserting natural existence. Here we can see Svatantrika-Madhyamika is a Madhyamika who asserts natural existence. So the Svatantrika-Madhyamika has a twofold division into the Sautrantika Svatantrika-Madhyamika and the Cittamatrin-Svatantrika-Madhyamika.

7.2.1 Sautrantika-Svatantrika-Madhyamika

The definition of a *Sautrantika-Svatantrika-Madhyamika* is **the proponent of Madhyamika tenet whose terminology is mostly concordant with the Sautrantika tenet**. Here the definition of Sutrist Autonomist Madhyamika mentions that they are Sutrist Autonomist Madhyamika because their terminology is mostly concordant with the Sutrist tenet, the Sautrantika. Here the meaning of being 'mostly concordant' refers to the common assertion that the focal condition of the sense consciousnesses is an outer phenomenon, which is established through a collection of particles. That is a common assertion between this Madhyamika School and the Sautrantika School - the focal objects of the consciousnesses are outer-established phenomena, and they are established on a collection of particles.

7.2.2 Mind Only-Svatantrika-Madhyamika

The other Autonomist Madhyamika School is the Mind Only Autonomist Madhyamika School. Their terminology is mostly concordant with the Mind Only. That means of that they don't accept outer existent phenomena.

Here the text gives two examples of the Sautrantika-Svatantrika-Madhyamika as Bhavaviveka, and Jnanagarbha. The Sutrist Autonomists Madhyamikas do not accept self-knowers.

The terminology of the Mind Only Autonomists is mostly concordant with the Mind Only tenet because neither asserts outer existent phenomena. They say that even though there is the appearance of outer existence, phenomena are actually established from the mind. Then various examples such as Shantarakshita, Haribhadra and Kamalashila are given.

7.3. Etymology

We come to the third division, the etymology of Autonomists. The text says, 'Take the subject Bhavaviveka, it follows that there is a reason he is called Autonomist Madhyamika, because he is a Madhyamika who asserts autonomous reason'. The meaning of autonomous reason is inherently existing reason or inherently existent three modes.

7.4. Mode of Asserting Objects

The fourth division is the positing of objects. The text mentions inherent existence; existence from its own side and natural existence are synonymous. Then it goes on to say that non-compounded space, the truth of cessation, the past, future, and the self, the subtle selflessness of a person

are non-affirming negatives, as well as conventional truth.

It says that inherent existence; existence from its own side and natural existence are synonymous. Then non-compounded space, the truth of cessation, past, future and the subtle selflessness of a person are conventional truth, as well as non-affirming negatives. Here the text says that this school asserts that selflessness of a person, the subtle selflessness of a person is conventional truth as well as a non-affirming negative.

Ultimate truth, suchness and the subtle selflessness of phenomena are synonymous.

At this point of positing the objects the text gives a twofold division of objects into conventional truth and ultimate truth, saying that ultimate truth is synonymous with suchness.

I'm going to leave it here for tonight.

Please give me the definition of a Buddhist tenet holder.

One who accepts the three objects of refuge.

That was very good. So what are those three refuges? What is the cause of going to refuge to those three objects of refuge?

The three objects of refuge are Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The cause for going for refuge is, according to the Mahayana great scope, fear and faith for oneself and others.

What you say is correct. If you wanted to state it in a more beautiful way, then it is better to first give the cause for the common refuge, and then to specify the uncommon Mahayana refuge. Then so slowly, slowly you arrive.

How many Buddhist tenets holders are there?

Four.

Don't just keep them in your mind. If you express the four then your understanding becomes more stable. Sometimes it is very strange that we can't express what we have understood in our mind. So it is actually very good to express the understanding we have gained. So please, everybody.

Vaibashika, Sautrantika, Cittamatrin and Madhyamika.

Please give me the definition of a Vaibashika tenet-holder?

One who doesn't assert true existence and doesn't assert the self-knower.

The answer given was, the tenet-holder who asserts outer existence but doesn't assert a self-knower. The definition should include 'Hinayana tenet holder.' If you don't want to say 'Hinayana tenet-holder' then you have to specify a tenet holder who asserts truly existent outer existence, and doesn't assert a self-knower. Then the only possibility for that description is the Vaibashika tenet. There are some tenets that assert outer existence, but then they don't assert a truly existent outer existence.

When we posit the definition of phenomenon the definition has to be completely synonymous with what it is defining, so the eight doors of pervasion have to completely 100% apply. It is not permitted that something could be the definiendum that that is not contained within the definition, or that you could posit something which is contained within the definition, but not contained within the definiendum. This is not allowed when we give the definition of a phenomenon. When we define a phenomenon the definition has to fit 100% with that phenomenon. Sometimes when we just try to explain the essential meaning of something, then the eight doors of pervasion don't have to apply 100%.

What is the etymology of Vaibashika? Why are they called

that?

Because they spell out the meaning.

You probably forgot that they are called the Vaibashikas because they follow the text that is called *Chedrak She Tso Chen-mo*. As these tenet holders base their view on this text, they are called the Particularists or Vaibashikas. I've explained this before, so if you look it up you will find it.

The next point is the way of positing objects so how do they posit objects? What do they posit as the definition of functioning phenomena?

(Inaudible)

So the definition of functioning phenomena is able to perform a function they say a functioning phenomena is synonymous with objects of knowledge. They assert that all objects of knowledge have the ability to fulfil their own particular function. Then they say that a functioning phenomenon has a twofold division into impermanent functioning phenomena and permanent functioning phenomena. So this is an uncommon assertion of this tenet. None of the other tenets assert permanent functioning phenomena. What is an example for a permanent functioning phenomenon?

Non-compounded space.

Non-compounded space and the truth of cessation. Then what is an example for impermanent functioning phenomena?

Person; Things that change from moment to moment

That's not difficult - we are all impermanent functioning phenomena! We are all examples for impermanence, and it is very useful to think about one's own impermanence. The more we understand our own impermanence the less self-grasping we will have. The less self-grasping we have, and the less grasping we have at our body, then the happier we will be in life. When we were young we didn't have many wrinkles on our face, but then as we grow older the wrinkles start to appear. So that's very easy to understand how one is impermanent. Even though we grasp at ourselves as being permanent, from its own side our body is showing us its impermanence. People who could walk quickly suddenly find they cannot walk quickly any more. They could once eat lots of food, and then suddenly they cannot eat lots of food and so forth. There are people who used to be healthy, and then all at once they start to get sick. Our body degenerates slowly, slowly.

There is another twofold division into ultimate truth and conventional truth. What is referred to as ultimate truth, and what is referred to as conventional truth?

It is conventional truth when the discernment holding an object stops. For example if you have a pot it ceases to exist when it is broken.

Correct. For example if the vase is destroyed by being fragmented into many pieces with a hammer, then the mind that used to apprehend that vase is also fragmented into many pieces. My *zen* for example is also a conventional truth. If you pull out one thread after the other then slowly, slowly my *zen* will cease to exist, and in the same way the mind apprehending that *zen* will also cease to exist. Likewise if we rip out page after page from a book then the book will stop existing, and together with that the mind apprehending the book will also stop existing. So that is the reason why a book is conventional truth.

Ultimate truth refers to something that cannot break, which are part less particles and also non-compounded space.

How do they posit object-possessors?

The Vaibashikas say that the mere collection of the five aggregates is an example for the person. The separation of our awareness into valid cognisers, and awarenesses that aren't valid cognisers is the same as in the other tenets. The Vaibashikas also have a twofold division into direct valid cognisers, and inferential valid cognisers. Direct valid cogniser has a threefold division into sense direct cognisers, mental direct valid cognisers and yogic direct valid cognisers. So one difference is that sense direct cognisers are not pervaded by being consciousness. The physical sense power can also be a direct valid cogniser.

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