

Study Group - "Buddhist Tenets"

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As usual please establish a virtuous motivation for listening to the teaching.

7.6 Method of Asserting Selflessness

Now we proceed to the sixth point, the positing of selflessness. Here the text says, "The emptiness of the person being permanent, single and independent is the coarse selflessness of person, and the emptiness of the person being a self sufficient substantially existent is the subtle selflessness of person". The way the selflessness of person is posited is the same as in the Mind Only school.

Then the text goes on to say that, "From the point of view of the Mind Only Svatantrika Madhyamika, the absence of form and its valid cogniser being of different substance is the coarse selflessness of phenomena. The emptiness of true existence of all phenomena, is the subtle selflessness of phenomena."

Here, coarse selflessness and subtle selflessness for both the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena, are posited. Of the Svatantrika Madhyamika sub-schools, one posits the division of selflessness of phenomena into coarse and subtle, and the other doesn't.

The sub-school positing coarse and subtle selflessness of phenomena is the Yogacara Svatantrika Madhyamika. Because their terminology is mostly concordant with the Yogacara, they also accept the absence of form and its valid cogniser being of different substance. Since this emptiness cannot fall into the category of selflessness of person, they posit it as coarse selflessness of phenomena.

7.6.1 Differentiation of Selflessnesses

Then the text says, "The two selflessnesses are differentiated by way of the object of negation, and not by way of the basis of negation".

The Prasangika Madhyamika differentiate the two selflessnesses by way of the basis of negation. However the Svatantrika Madhyamika differentiate the two selflessnesses by way of the object of negation. Here is also a difference in subtleness between selflessness of person and selflessness of phenomena. Later on, the Prasangika don't posit one selflessnesses as being coarse, and the other as being subtle.

On the basis of person, both the selflessness of person as well as the selflessness of phenomena is posited. As was said before:

- The negation of the object of negation, true existence, on the basis of the person is subtle selflessness of phenomena.
- The negation of a self-supporting, substantially existent on the basis of the person is the subtle selflessness of person.

We mentioned before that, for example, the negation of inherently existent aggregates is the subtle selflessness of phenomena, but the absence of the aggregates being the object of engagement of a self-supporting, substantially

existent person is the selflessness of person. We can apply the same reasoning to all objects. For example, a truly existent glass would be a subtle object of negation.

- The absence of a truly existent glass would be the subtle selflessness of phenomena, and
- The absence of glass being the object of engagement of a self-supporting, substantially existent person would be selflessness of a person.

We have the grasping at the person being a self-supporting, substantially existent, which would fall into the category of that which engages the engager. That which is being engaged is the glass. So if the glass is empty of being the object of engagement of a self-supporting, substantially existent person, then that is the selflessness of person.

In the same way the two self-grasping are differentiated by way of their mode of grasping, and not by their focus.

- The grasping at true existence, which focuses on the basis of the person, is the self-grasping of phenomena. It is grasping at the self of phenomena.
- The grasping at a self-supporting, substantially existent which focuses on the basis of the person is the self-grasping of a person. It is grasping at a self of person.

So the grasping at a self of person and the grasping at a self of phenomena are differentiated by way of their mode of grasping, and not by way of focus.

7.7 Principles of Paths and Grounds

We now turn to the seventh point, the positing of grounds and paths.

7.7.1 Yogacara Svatantrika Madhyamika

From the point of view of the Yogacara Svatantrika Madhyamika the difference between the practitioners of the three vehicles lies in the fact that there are three different kinds of main obscurations, and three main objects of meditation.

7.7.1.1 Hearers

Practitioners belonging to the family of Hearers take as their main object of abandonment the grasping at a self-supporting, substantially existent, and the entourage of that grasping.

The view which realises the emptiness of the person being a self-supporting, substantially existent is the main object of meditation. By relying on that main object of meditation, they obtain their object of attainment, which is the small enlightenment.

Main Object of Abandonment

The practitioner belonging to the family of Hearers takes as their main object of abandonment the grasping at the person being a self-supporting substantially existent, because that grasping is the root of samsara. Therefore they take that grasping, as well as the entourage, as the main object of abandonment. We have to understand 'the entourage' as being the various delusions that arise from the grasping at root of cyclic existence.

We can also relate this to the first two Noble Truths. The entourage can also be the Noble Truth of Suffering, which arises from the root of the grasping at a self of a person, and the second noble Truth. In order to overcome this obscuration, the main object of meditation is the view realising the absence of the person being a self-supporting, substantially existent. Here we should also understand that first of all this view is the union of calm abiding and special

insight, which is of course supported by the other higher training of morality and concentration.

The Hearer's Progress Through The Stages

As mentioned before, when those practitioners who belong to the family of Hearer attain the spontaneous thought of fully qualified renunciation, then they enter the Hearer's Path of Accumulation.

While in the Hearer's Path of Accumulation they meditate on calm abiding, focusing on emptiness. When they progress in their meditation, and they attain the union of calm abiding and special insight focusing on emptiness, then they proceed to the Hearer's Path of Preparation.

When they again attain the non-conceptual direct realisation of emptiness through continuous meditation, they attain the Hearer's Path of Seeing. First they attain the Uninterrupted Path of Seeing, which is the direct antidote to the objects of abandonment of the Path of Seeing. After that they attain the Liberated Path of Seeing, which completely frees the mind from the objects of abandonment of the Path of Seeing, liberates the mind from the objects of abandonment of the Path of Seeing. Then they attain the first instance of the Truth of Cessation.

After completing the liberated path of seeing, they will arise out of their meditative equipoise. When they later engage again in the various meditative equipoises, they further progress along the path, entering the Path of Meditation until there comes a moment when they will be able to completely free the mind from true-grasping and its seeds.

When that moment comes, they will again enter the meditative equipoise, which is called the vajra-like concentration of the Path of Meditation. In this meditative equipoise they will free the mind completely from all delusions, and when the mind is freed from all the delusions, they will progress to the Hearer's Path of No-More-Learning and become an Arhat.

This has been a very short overview.

7.7.1.2 Solitary Realiser

The practitioner who belongs to the family of Solitary Realiser takes as their main object of abandonment the grasping at subject and object being of a different substance¹. As the main object of meditation they take the view that realises the emptiness of subject and object being of a different substance. This becomes the antidote towards their main object of abandonment, which is the grasping at subject and object being of different substance.

Here a question arises. Since the practitioners who belong to the family of Solitary Realiser also aim mainly for liberation, or the middling enlightenment, wouldn't they also meditate on the selflessness of a person? The answer of course is that they also meditate on the selflessness of person, since the grasping at a self of person is the root of cyclic existence. However they don't take the view that realises the selflessness of person as their main object of meditation. They take the view that realises the absence of subject and object being of different substance as their main object of meditation, and that already includes abandoning the grasping at a self of person.

One difference also between practitioners belonging to the Hearer and Solitary Realiser families is the way they meditate on the nature of cyclic existence. The solitary realiser will consider how one is bound to cyclic existence,

and then how one has to free oneself from cyclic existence by way of meditating extensively on the 12 Interdependent Links. Practitioners belonging to the Hearer family will do the same by meditating extensively on the Four Noble Truths. So there is this difference.

7.7.1.3 Bodhisattvas

The text says, "Bodhisattvas take as their main object of abandonment true-grasping together with the karmic latencies. As their main object of meditation they take the antidote that is the view that realises the emptiness of true existence of all phenomena. Through that they attain the great enlightenment."

When the practitioner generates spontaneous bodhicitta in the mind then they become a bodhisattva. Afterwards, on the basis of that bodhicitta they practise the six perfections, and they will actually practise the six perfections combined together. They take as their main object of abandonment true grasping together with the karmic latencies.

Again the same question arises as before. Don't they take also the grasping at the self of person as their object of abandonment? The answer is yes, they take that also as the object of abandonment. However it is not their main object of abandonment, because the main attainment for which they aim is complete enlightenment. If their main attainment for which they aim were liberation from cyclic existence, then their main object of abandonment would be the grasping at a self of person. However because they are bodhisattvas their main object of attainment is complete enlightenment, rather than liberation from cyclic existence. Again the same reason applies.

Liberation from cyclic existence is an object of attainment of the bodhisattva, but it is not their main object of attainment. If somebody takes liberation from cyclic existence as their main object of attainment, then what one understands is that they mainly want to become free from cyclic existence for their own purpose only. The main object of attainment for bodhisattvas is complete enlightenment, and therefore their main object of abandonment is true grasping together with karmic imprints.

This explanation has been according to the point of view of the Yogacara Svatantrika Madhyamika.

2.7.2 Sutrist Svatantrika Madhyamika

The text says that, "according to the Sautrantika Svatantrika Madhyamika, the Sutrist Svatantrika Madhyamika, there is no difference with regard to the main object of abandonment, and the main object of meditation between the practitioners belonging to the Hearer and Solitary Realiser families. Why? Because they are the same in taking the obscurations towards liberation as their main object of abandonment, and the selflessness of person as their main object of meditation".

It is good to mention here that according to the Yogacara Svatantrika Madhyamika there was a difference between the Hearers and the Solitary Realisers with regard to the object of abandonment and so forth. Here the grasping at subject and object as being of different substance, which was the main object of abandonment of the Solitary Realiser, is classified as a coarse obscuration to omniscience.

If the grasping at subject and object as being of different substance were to be classified as an obscuration to liberation, then the practitioner belonging to the Hearer family would have to also abandon that grasping. That is because the Hearer Arhat has attained liberation, and has

¹ Grasping at form and it's valid cogniser being of different substance.

therefore abandoned the obscurations towards liberation. So that is good to mention.

7.7.2.1 Main Difference Between Hearer and Solitary Realiser

There is no difference between the main object of abandonment and the main object of meditation between the Hearer and Solitary Realiser according to the Sutrists Svatantrika Madhyamika. However there is still a difference with regard to their object of attainment, or the result that they attain. This is because there is a difference with regard to the length of time they engage into the path and accumulate merits. The Hearer Arhat accumulates merit for three lifetimes, and the Solitary Realiser Arhat accumulates merit for 100 aeons. So that is the point of difference.

7.7.3 The Accepted Sutras

Both Mahayana and Hinayana sutras are accepted. As discussed the other day, the difference between the Hinayana sutras and the Mahayana sutras is made with regard to the disciples for which each was taught. If a sutra were taught to subdue disciples who were mainly interested in attaining liberation, then those sutras were classified as Hinayana sutras. If the sutras were taught to subdue disciples who were mainly interested in attaining complete enlightenment, then those sutras were classified as Mahayana sutras. Sutras which were taught both for the benefit of Hinayana and Mahayana practitioners are called a common Hinayana Mahayana sutras.

7.7.4 Classification of Sutras

Sutras are classified into definitive and interpretative sutras in the same way as the Mind Only do. Interpretative meaning refers to conventional truth, and definitive meaning refers to ultimate truth.

The definition of an interpretative sutra is Either or both a sutra that takes as its main explicit subject conventional truth or/and a sutra that cannot be accepted literally.

According to Svatantrika Madhyamika a definitive sutra is a sutra that takes emptiness as its main explicit subject and is acceptable literally.

The division of sutras into interpretative and definitive is the same as in Mind Only, but this school uses different examples.

According to the Mind Only system, the first and the second turning of the wheel are interpretative sutras, and the last turning of the wheel is definitive sutra. The reason for this classification is because in the first turning of the wheel it says that all phenomena are inherently existent, which the Mind Only doesn't accept literally. The second turning of the wheel says that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence, which the Mind Only also doesn't accept literally. Therefore they are both interpretative sutras. The last third turning of the wheel is a definitive sutra, because it explains the categorisation of phenomena according to the three characteristics, in accordance with the Mind Only point of view.

According to the Svatantrika Madhyamika the first and the third turning of the wheel are interpretative sutras, and the second turning of the wheel has a definitive part and an interpretative part.

The first turning of the wheel is interpretative sutra because its main subject is the Four Noble Truths, and the Four Noble Truths are conventional truth. Therefore the first turning of the wheel becomes a sutra that takes as its main explicit subject conventional truth, which full fills the

definition of an interpretative sutra.

The same applies for the third turning of the wheel, which is an interpretative sutra because it is a sutra that has as its main explicit subject conventional truth, and is also not acceptable literally. So both parts of the definition apply.

The second turning of the wheel has two parts: a definitive part and an interpretative part. The interpretative part is the Heart Sutra, and the small, middling and great Prajnaparamita sutras are the definitive part. The small, middling and great Prajnaparamita sutras are definitive sutras because their main explicit subject is emptiness or ultimate truth, and they are acceptable literally.

Even though the main object of expression of the Heart Sutra is ultimate truth, it is not acceptable literally because it doesn't attach the object of negation to its enumeration of the bases of negation. The Heart Sutra says, "There is no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind." It doesn't say, "There is no truly existent eye, no truly existent ear" and so forth. That is mentioned only once at the beginning when it says, "Form is empty, emptiness is form" and so forth.

The Svatantrika Madhyamika say that because the Heart Sutra only enumerates the basis for the emptiness one after the other, without attaching the object of negation, or the absence of the object of negation, it is not accepted literally. It cannot be accepted literally, as it has to be interpreted. Therefore, even though its main explicit subject is emptiness, it doesn't become a definitive sutra, because it is not accepted literally. Rather it becomes an interpretative sutra.

The Prasangika Madhyamika have a slightly different point of view. They say that because the beginning, when it says "Form is empty, emptiness is form" and so forth, already expresses the object of negation, and the absence of the object of negation. Then later literally one can understand that it is attached after each of "No eye, no ear, no nose" without actually expressing it. Therefore it is, according to the Prasangika point of view, actually acceptable literally.

That finishes the Svatantrika Madhyamika. Next time we can start with Prasangika Madhyamika.

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