
Study Group - “Buddhist Tenets”

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Please establish a virtuous motivation for listening to the teachings.

8.7. Principles of Grounds and Paths

We have reached the seventh point of the Prasangika tenets, which is the explanation concerning grounds and paths. Grounds and paths have a twofold division into objects of abandonment, and the actual explanation of grounds and paths.

8.7.1. Objects of Abandonment

8.7.1.1. Obscurations to Liberation

The text says that ‘the two, the Coarse and subtle self-graspings together with their seeds, and the delusions of attachment and so forth together with their seeds, which arise through the force of the self graspings and their seeds, are what is called afflictive obscurations.’

The meaning of ‘afflictive obscurations’ is those **obscurations that primarily obstruct the attainment of liberation.**

The text mentions ‘Coarse and subtle self-graspings’.

- Subtle self-grasping refers to grasping at the person as being inherently existent, and grasping at phenomena as being inherently existent.
- Coarse self-grasping refers to the grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient substantially existent.

This is an important point that you should keep in mind: true grasping at the person and true grasping at phenomena are the two subtle self-graspings, and they are classified in the Prasangika system as afflicted obscurations.

The text says ‘Coarse and subtle self-graspings together with their seeds’. So if you go through them individually,

- The potential to again create the grasping at the person as being inherently existent in the future, is the seed of the self-grasping at person.
- The potential to again create the grasping at phenomena as being inherently existent in the future, is the seed of the self-grasping at phenomena.
- The potential to again create the grasping at the person being a self-sufficient substantially existent in the future, is the seed of the coarse self-grasping at a person.

When the text says ‘attachment and so forth which arise through the force of those’, ‘the force of those’ refers to the various kinds of self-grasping, while ‘attachment and so forth’ refers to six types of root delusions such as anger, attachment, doubt, ignorance and so forth, as well as the twenty secondary delusions. So ‘attachment and so forth’ refers to the six root delusions and twenty secondary delusions, and also the seeds of those various delusions.

The seeds of those various delusions and the delusions themselves are classified as afflictive obscurations. This is an important point that should be clearly understood. First one has self-grasping, and then because of self-grasping one generates attachment towards oneself and aversion towards others. From that all the various other delusions arise.

When the text talks about the seed of attachment it is referring to the karmic latency that has the potential to generate attachment again in the future. The seed of anger is the karmic latency that has the potential to arouse anger again in the future. If one has abandoned manifest attachment, but then attachment arises again, that is the sign that the seeds of attachment in one’s mental continuum have not been

abandoned. If one abandons the seeds of the delusions, then the delusions are not able to arise again.

The text continues with, ‘Those various delusions [that we just described], and their seeds are obscurations that primarily obstruct the attainment of liberation’. The significance of saying ‘primarily’ is that of course those obscurations also obstruct the attainment of omniscience, but primarily they obstruct the attainment of liberation. It doesn’t mean that they don’t obstruct the attainment of omniscience, because they do. However they do not do so primarily.

8.7.1.2. Obscurations to Omniscience

Then the text goes on to explain the obscurations to knowledge. Here it cites the karmic latencies of true grasping and the part that is mistaken with regard to the dualistic appearance arising through the force of those karmic latencies, as obscurations to knowledge.

Here, as the obscurations to knowledge, the text mentions the karmic latencies of true-grasping, and the part that is mistaken with regard to the dualistic appearance arising through the force of those karmic latencies. It explains the two types of obscurations to knowledge. There is one part that is referred to as the latent part and there is another part, which is referred to as the manifest part.

- Karmic latencies are the latent part.
- The mistaken part with regard to dualistic appearance is the manifest part of the obscurations to knowledge.

If we have abandoned true grasping and the seeds of true grasping, then our perceptions can still have a mistaken part with regards to dualistic appearance. This is what it is referring to when it says ‘the part which is mistaken with regard to dualistic appearance’.

This mistaken part arises through the force of the karmic latencies of true grasping. As long as one has this mistaken part within one’s perception one cannot realise all phenomena simultaneously, and thus is not able to attain omniscient mind. Therefore this mistaken part in our perception, which one can still have even after having abandoned true grasping and its seeds, is called obscuration to knowledge. That is because as long as one has this mistaken part within one’s perception, one cannot talk about having attained omniscience. So therefore they are called obscurations to knowledge.

How does this mistaken part arise? The mistaken part within the perceptions arises from the karmic latencies of true grasping. Even after having abandoned the seeds of true-grasping and true-grasping itself, there are still karmic latencies in the mental continuum, and these cause the mistaken part within the perception.

So the obscurations that primarily obstruct the attainment of the all-knowing transcendental wisdom, or omniscience, are called obscurations to knowledge.

To repeat this, there are two types of obscurations - afflictive obscurations and obscurations to knowledge.

- The coarse and subtle self-graspings together with their seeds, and the delusions such as attachment and so forth together with their seeds, which arose through the force of those self-graspings, are classified as afflictive obscurations.
- The karmic latencies of true grasping, and the mistaken part with regard to the dualistic appearance, which arises through the force of those karmic latencies, are classified as obscurations to knowledge.

This is very important to keep in mind.

We have now concluded the objects of abandonment.

8.7.2. Actual Explanation of Grounds and Paths

Now I am going to talk about how the ways those objects of abandonment are actually abandoned by the three vehicles, the Hearer, the Solitary Realiser and Mahayana. This is not

mentioned in the tenet text itself, but I am going to explain it from the commentary on the Madhyamika. Even though, of course, this is going to be discussed again next year, it's good to go through it now.

Path of Accumulation

We begin with the practitioner who abides from the beginning in the Hinayana lineage. From the point when he or she generates spontaneous renunciation, they enter the Hinayana path of accumulation. They are then called a Hinayana practitioner on the path of accumulation. The etymology or the meaning of why they called practitioners on the path of accumulation has been explained previously.

Path of Preparation

Once the practitioner on the path of accumulation attains the unification of calm-abiding and special insight focusing on emptiness, they proceed from the path of accumulation to the path of preparation. One proceeds from one path to the next in meditative equipoise.

The practitioner at the time of accumulation meditates on calm abiding focused on emptiness by way of the unification of the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. While in this meditation the practitioner attains superior insight focused on emptiness, and then proceeds to the path of preparation. This happens in the meditative equipoise.

Path of Seeing

The meditator has attained the unification of calm-abiding and special insight. Once this unification of calm-abiding and special insight becomes the meditative equipoise realising emptiness directly, then the practitioner has proceeded from the path of preparation to the path of seeing, in this case to the Hinayana path of seeing.

Uninterrupted Path of Seeing

This first concentration realising emptiness directly is called the uninterrupted Hinayana path of seeing. It is the direct antidote to the intellectually acquired afflictive obscurations, but it is not the direct antidote to innate afflictive obscurations. It has put a stop to the intellectually acquired afflictive obscurations, but it hasn't yet completely removed them from the mental continuum. So it has completely stopped them, and that is the meaning of being the direct antidote.

Liberated Path of Seeing

Once the intellectually acquired afflictive obscurations are eliminated from the mental continuum, the practitioner attains the liberated Hinayana path of seeing.

Attaining the truth of cessation, and attaining the liberated Hinayana path of seeing are simultaneous. Here you can see that first the uninterrupted path of seeing was attained, and at that time the truth of cessation had not yet been attained. The truth of cessation is attained with the liberated path of seeing.

Although this is not an actual cause-and-effect relationship, we still say that the truth of the path is the cause, and that the truth of cessation is the result. While not an actual result, the truth of cessation is still referred to as such. We can relate that understanding to the sequence of the different paths and how the truth of cessation is attained. First one attains the uninterrupted path of seeing, and only after having attained the uninterrupted path of seeing does one attain the truth of cessation.

The reason why the truth of cessation is referred to as the result of the truth of the path is because the truth of cessation is induced through the force of meditating on the truth of the path. Then having abandoned the intellectually acquired afflictive obscurations on the path of seeing, the practitioner has to then abandon the innate afflictive obscurations on the path of meditation.

The Nine Levels

As you know, here we talk about the nine-fold division of the innate true-grasping. There are nine levels of obscurations, and also the nine paths that are their antidotes. Basically it is very easy. There are three coarse divisions into subtle or small true-grasping, medium true-grasping and great true-grasping. Each of those three divisions again has three subdivisions. So you have:

1. Great great true grasping; middling great true grasping, and small great true grasping.
2. Great middling true grasping, middling middling true-grasping and small middling true-grasping.
3. Great small true grasping, middling small true grasping and small small true grasping.

Having an understanding of those various levels of true grasping is very important. Even though one can have abandoned the more coarse true-grasping (that is, one can have abandoned great great true-grasping, or middling great true-grasping, or small great true-grasping), there are still more subtle levels of true grasping left in the mind to be purified and abandoned. We might say "I have eliminated anger from my mind, however, in fact we don't even yet know about small small true-grasping, as that is something we cannot even see yet. So it is very important to know that there are these various levels of true-grasping.

We have these nine types of true grasping, which can actually be categorised into three groups. In the same way we also have nine paths of meditation, which are similarly categorised into three groups. The way they oppose the various true-grasping is exactly opposite. So great great true grasping will be opposed by the small small path of meditation; middling great true grasping will be opposed by the middling small path of meditation. The nine true-grasping and meditation paths are exactly opposite to each other. It is said that the small paths act as the antidote to the great delusions.

It is very important to think about the significance of a small path acting as an antidote to a great delusion. At the beginning one is not able to oppose the delusions with the very great paths. Rather one starts out with small paths, which act as the antidote towards the greater delusions. The significance of this is very important to keep in mind, because sometimes we have the feeling "Oh, my mind is completely overwhelmed with so many great delusions". It seems like a huge effort is required to overcome those delusions, and so one feels incapable of generating those great paths. So it is important to keep this psychological significance in mind, and remember that in the beginning the antidote will always be the small path.

So the practitioner meditates on the small path of meditation and opposes through that concentration great great true grasping. Then, when the practitioner further develops in their practice, he or she generates the medium small path of meditation, which is slightly more effective and stronger than the preceding one. Then he or she can oppose a slightly subtler true grasping. In this way the practitioner proceeds along those nine paths of meditation, gradually abandoning the nine more subtle levels of innate true grasping.

Path of No-More-Learning

All of this has been in the context of a Hinayana practitioner, so this is the Hinayana path of meditation. When the practitioner, having proceeded in such a manner along the path of meditation, has finally abandoned the afflicted obscurations, and has abandoned the small small innate true-grasping with the great great path of meditation, then they proceed to the Hinayana path of no-more-learning. They have become an Arhat.

If you look at those nine paths of meditation, in particular how one proceeds along those nine paths of meditation, then first one will attain the uninterrupted path of meditation. From that uninterrupted path of meditation one will proceed to the

liberated path of meditation. Both the uninterrupted path and the liberated path are states of meditative equipoise. Having attained the liberated path of meditation then the practitioner will arise from their meditative equipoise, and will attain what is called the post-meditational path or the post-meditational transcendental wisdom. This refers to the various paths that exist in the continuum of the practitioner while not in meditative equipoise.

Having arisen out of the meditative equipoise of the liberated path of seeing, the practitioner goes into the post-meditational state, similar to in-between sessions. During that time the practitioner accumulates merits. Then having accumulated merits, when the practitioner feels able to again oppose another level of delusion, they again enter into meditation.

There are three types of paths of meditation. There is:

- The path of meditation that is classified as transcendental wisdom of meditative equipoise
- The path of meditation that is classified as a post-meditational transcendental wisdom
- The path of meditation which is classified as being neither

First a practitioner attains the path of meditation that is meditative equipoise, which are the uninterrupted path and the liberated path.

Secondly the practitioner attains the path of meditation that is classified as being post-meditational, during which time, having arisen out of meditative equipoise they accumulate merits and wisdom.

Having accumulated merits and wisdom the practitioner again goes into meditation, but this meditational state is not classified as meditative equipoise. Rather it is classified as a path of meditation that is neither meditative equipoise nor post-meditational. This path of meditation becomes the next uninterrupted path of meditation.

So the meditation at the beginning is not meditative equipoise. Later it becomes meditative equipoise when it becomes an uninterrupted path. So that's completely clear? That's the way the Hinayana abandon the obscurations.

The Mahayana Practitioner's Progress on the Path

In the case of the Mahayana practitioner who is abiding in the Mahayana lineage from the start, before entering any path trains in, and meditates on Bodhicitta.

Once that Bodhicitta becomes spontaneous Bodhicitta that practitioner enters the Mahayana path of accumulation, and becomes a bodhisattva. They are a bodhisattva on the **path of accumulation**.

When that practitioner attains the unification of calm-abiding and special insight on emptiness, then they progress from the path of accumulation to the **path of preparation**.

When that practitioner has proceeded along the four paths of preparation, heat and so forth and finally realised emptiness directly, then he has attained the Mahayana **path of seeing**. That Mahayana path of seeing acts as the antidote towards the intellectually acquired afflictive obscurations. Abandoning the intellectually acquired afflictive obscurations, and attaining the liberated path of seeing occurs simultaneously.

After having attained the liberated path of seeing, which is simultaneous with abandoning the intellectually acquired afflictive obscurations, (also called the abandonments of the path of seeing), then the meditator again arises out of meditation in the post-meditational state. He or she attains the path of seeing, which is the post-meditational path of seeing during which the practitioner will engage in the unified two accumulations. After that again they will go into meditation. So this meditation after the post-meditational state, during which merits were accumulated, is referred to as the path of seeing that is neither meditational equipoise nor post-meditational.

Three Mahayana Paths of Seeing

1) At first the uninterrupted path of seeing is attained, which acts as the direct antidote to the intellectually acquired afflictive obscurations. Then when the intellectually acquired afflictive obscurations are abandoned, the liberated path of seeing is attained. Those two are called path of seeing that is transcendental wisdom of meditative equipoise.

2) The post-meditational path of seeing is attained, during which the bodhisattva, engages in the unified two accumulations in the post-meditational period. This is called the path of seeing that is the post-meditational transcendental wisdom.

3) Then the bodhisattva then goes into meditation, and this meditation is the path of seeing which is neither meditative equipoise nor post-meditational. During that path of seeing which is neither of the two, the practitioner progresses to the first uninterrupted path of meditation.

So when the practitioner attains the path of seeing, they are referred to as a bodhisattva on the path of seeing, and have attained the first of the ten bodhisattva grounds. To proceed from the path of seeing to the path of meditation, the nine levels of true grasping (which were explained before) have to be abandoned while on the path of meditation.

There is one further tiny subdivision of those nine levels of true grasping. The great Jetsun Chokyi Gyalsten divided great great true-grasping into coarse and a subtle forms. There is a coarse great great true grasping and a subtle great great true grasping.

The very first innate true grasping that is going to be abandoned is the coarse great great true grasping. That happens after having proceeded through the various stages of the paths of seeing as we have described. At the time of the post-meditational path of seeing, the bodhisattva engages in the two accumulations of merit and wisdom unified.

Then the bodhisattva understands that through having engaged in the two accumulations, they have attained the power to abandon the first level of innate true grasping, because until now no innate true grasping has been abandoned. When the bodhisattva understands that they have attained the power to overcome the first level of innate true grasping, which is the coarse great great true grasping, they again go into meditation.

This meditation was classified as the path of seeing that is neither meditative equipoise nor post-meditational. That meditation is still the path of seeing. So when that transforms in meditation on emptiness into the first uninterrupted **path of meditation**, then the practitioner has proceeded from the path of seeing to the path of meditation. He or she has attained the direct antidote to coarse great great innate true grasping; this is still on the first bodhisattva ground.

The attainment of the first bodhisattva ground is simultaneous with the attainment of the path of seeing. However the attainment of the first instance of the path of meditation still happens on the first bodhisattva ground. So the first instance of the path of meditation, the first uninterrupted path of meditation, is at the very end of the first bodhisattva ground. That happens when the bodhisattva attains the direct antidote to coarse great great innate true grasping.

From the point of view of bodhisattva grounds, it is still the first bodhisattva ground. From the point of view of the path, it is the first of the three groups of paths of meditation.

When this first uninterrupted path of meditation attains the power to abandon its appropriate level of obscurity, then the bodhisattva attains the first liberated path of meditation. That is simultaneous with attaining the second bodhisattva ground. So the attainment of the second bodhisattva ground is simultaneous with attaining the first instance of the liberated path of meditation, which happens when the preceding

uninterrupted path of meditation attains the power to abandon
its level of obscuration.

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