
Study Group - "Buddhist Tenets"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual, please establish the motivation of bodhicitta for listening to the teachings, thinking that I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and that it is for that purpose that I am going to listen now to this profound teaching.

8.7. Principles of Grounds and Paths (cont)

Last time we started on the seventh point, the positing of grounds and paths, which has two subdivisions. They are the explanation of the objects of abandonment, and the actual explanation of grounds and paths.

We have finished with the first subdivision, the explanation of the objects of abandonment. Last time we explained how the objects of abandonment are actually eliminated from the mental continuum, and we went through the whole path until we reached Buddhahood.

8.7.2. Actual Explanation of Grounds and Paths

8.7.2.1. Object of Meditation

It says in the text that, "The practitioners of the three vehicles do not take as their main object of meditation various different higher and lower views of emptiness". In the lower tenets, the Svatantrika Madhyamika and so forth, the practitioners of the three vehicles had as their main object of meditation different levels of the view of emptiness. Some were higher, and some lower. Here that is not the case.

The text goes on to say, "The three types of practitioners take as their main object of meditation the subtle selflessness of person as well as the subtle selflessness of phenomena. So in that regard, the three types of practitioners are the same in taking as their main object of meditation the subtle selflessness of person as well as the subtle selflessness of phenomena. They do not have various high and low views of selflessness as their main object of meditation.

Because the Prasangika posit true grasping at phenomena as being afflicted obscurations or obscurations to liberation, one has to realise selflessness of phenomena as well as selflessness of person in order to just attain liberation. In the Svatantrika tenet it was enough for the Hinayana practitioner to take as the main object of meditation the selflessness of person, but here that does not work anymore. For the Prasangika, in order to purify obscurations to liberation, even a Hinayana practitioner has to meditate on the subtle selflessness of phenomena, as well as the selflessness of person.

The way to look at it is like this.

- Those practitioners for whom the main object of abandonment is the self-grasping at person, have to take the selflessness of person as their main object of meditation.
- Those practitioners for whom the main object of abandonment is the self-grasping at phenomena have to take the selflessness of phenomena as their main object

of meditation.

This is the way the main object of meditation is decided. The practitioner says that, in order to be free from samsara one has to abandon the root of cyclic existence, which is self-grasping. They then take that as the main object of abandonment and selflessness of person as the main object of meditation. If the practitioner sees that without abandoning self-grasping at phenomena then one will get nowhere, then they will take the selflessness of phenomena as their main object of meditation.

8.7.2.2. Object of Abandonment

So between the practitioners of the three vehicles there is no difference from the point of view of the main object of meditation. There is, however, a difference in regard to the main object of abandonment. As we learnt the other day, the practitioners of the Hearer and Solitary Realisers vehicles practise the abandonment of self-grasping, together with their seeds. The bodhisattvas take as their main object of abandonment the karmic latencies of self-grasping.

We explained the other day that there is a division into afflictive obscurations, and the obscurations to omniscience. Afflictive obscurations are those obscurations that primarily obscure, or prevent the attainment of liberation. The obscurations to omniscience are those obscurations that primarily obstruct the attainment of enlightenment.

The practitioner, who primarily wants to attain liberation from cyclic existence, takes the afflictive obscurations as the main object of abandonment. In order to eliminate them from the mindstream they take subtle selflessness of person and subtle selflessness of phenomena as the main object of meditation.

The practitioner who wants to attain complete enlightenment takes as the main object of abandonment the obscurations to omniscience. To purify those there is no difference with regard to the main object of meditation; one also meditates on the subtle selflessness of person and the subtle selflessness of phenomena.

This is a very important point, which you need to contemplate well. What does one have to abandon in order to attain one's aim? To attain liberation, what kinds of obscurations have to be abandoned from the mindstream? Contemplating and thinking about this, and making it clear to one's own mind is very beneficial.

8.7.2.3. Two Types of Nirvana

With regard to the two types of nirvana, nirvana with remainder and nirvana without remainder, the text says that, "The suchness that is characterised by having abandoned the two true-grasplings together with their seeds, in the continuum of a Hearer and Solitary Realiser arhat at the time of meditative equipoise, is nirvana without remainder. The suchness that is characterised by the abandonment of the two true-grasplings together with their seeds, in the continuum of Hearer and Solitary Realiser arhats during the post-meditational period, is nirvana with remainder".

Here, whether the nirvana is nirvana with remainder, or without remainder is defined by whether or not the arhat is in meditative equipoise. The reason is that it becomes a nirvana with remainder if, in the continuum of the person, there is manifest true appearance.

- If in the continuum of the person is manifest appearance of true existence then that nirvana becomes **nirvana with remainder**.
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- If in the continuum of the person is no manifest appearance of true existence then that nirvana becomes **nirvana without remainder**.

Therefore here, nirvana without remainder is attained first, and then nirvana with remainder is attained.

This is different from the lower schools like the Mind Only and so forth. There nirvana with remainder will be attained first, and later the nirvana without remainder will be attained. This is because their definition of nirvana with remainder, and without remainder, is different. The lower schools say that it is a nirvana with remainder if there are still some suffering aggregates left in the continuum of the arhat. Once the last suffering aggregates are abandoned then the nirvana becomes nirvana without remainder. So there is this difference between the Prasangika school and the lower schools.

8.7.2.4. Attainments

1. Then the text says that, "For the practitioner who abides from the beginning in the Mahayana lineage, the abandonment of the afflictive obscurations, and the attainment of the eighth bodhisattva ground are simultaneous".

This is as we explained the other day. Being a bodhisattva who abides in the Mahayana lineage from the beginning means the practitioner hasn't first practised the Hinayana path. Rather, from the very beginning upon entering the path, they have only practised the Mahayana path.

Somebody who first completed the Hinayana path will of course have abandoned the afflictive obscurations earlier. However for the person who hasn't first entered the Hearer or Solitary Realiser path, but practised the Mahayana path from the beginning, the attainment of the eighth bodhisattva ground and the abandonment of the afflictive obscurations are simultaneous.

2. The text says that, "For the same practitioner the abandonment of the obscurations to omniscience and the generation of the four buddha bodies is simultaneous." We explained this in the last session.

So now you know what the obscurations to omniscience are, and that their abandonment, and the attainment of the four Buddha bodies, when the four Buddha bodies become manifest, is simultaneous.

Please posit those four Buddha bodies, which will place very beneficial imprints on your mind.

Wisdom Truth Body

Nature Truth Body

Emanation Body

Enjoyment Body

The Sanskrit names for the four buddha bodies are:

- Nirmanakaya for emanation body
- Sambhogakaya for enjoyment body
- Svabhavakaya for the nature truth body
- Dharmakaya for the wisdom truth body

We went through the definitions and their meanings when we discussed the Mind Only School so you can look it up. The Sanskrit word *kaya* is translated as 'body'.

That completes the teaching on the tenets. It has gone very well.

As we are receiving an oral transmission, there will be no further study group transcripts for the remainder of the year.

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Edited Version

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