

Study Group - "Buddhist Tenets"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

གྲུབ་མཐའི་རྣམ་གཞག་བཤམ་པ།

17 April 2001

Try to cultivate a proper motivation of purely seeking an ultimate spiritual goal unassociated with any goal of this life. Generate the thought of listening to this teaching to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

Review of Previous Teachings

Within Buddhism there are several Buddhist schools of tenets, and the main criteria distinguishing one school of tenets from another is their philosophical stance, [in particular their] view on the ultimate nature of reality.

Of the four main Buddhist schools of tenets the first two are the Vaibashika (the school of the Great Exposition) and Sautrantika (school of Sutra). The nature of ultimate reality, according to these two lower schools, is a philosophical view about the emptiness of, for instance, a person. This refers to a person's emptiness of being substantially existent in the sense of self-sufficiency. This selflessness of person is the main assertion of these two lower schools of tenets.

Of the two lower schools of tenets, the Great Exposition school assert only the selflessness of a person. They do not assert the selflessness of other phenomena. They say that all phenomena have the status of a self of phenomena, therefore they are not empty, or are not negating this self of phenomena.

Whereas with respect to the two higher Buddhist schools of tenets, the ultimate view of reality of the Cittamatin school is the emptiness of the separate entities of the object, and the mind which perceives the object. The view of the Madhyamika or Middle Way school is based on the emptiness or lack of true existence [of both self and phenomena].

3.6 The Method of Asserting Selflessness

We now return to the views of the lower school of Great Exposition. As said before, generally speaking the main view of emptiness of this school is the selflessness of persons. The general stance refers to the person's emptiness of being substantially existent in the sense of being self-sufficient.

The Vasiputriya Sub-school

Within the Great Exposition school there are many sub-schools. One of these, called in Tibetan *nes-ma bu-pa*, or Vasiputriya in Sanskrit, does not assert the selflessness of a person from the point of view of a person's emptiness of being substantially existent in the sense of self-sufficiency. Rather, to this sub-school the selflessness of a person means the person being empty of a self that is permanent, partless and independent.

Why the Vasiputriyas Are Regarded as Buddhist

The answer to the question of whether all the proponents of the Buddhist schools of tenets assert the view of the selflessness of a person depends upon the interpretation of the meaning of 'selflessness of a person'. If the interpretation is the person's emptiness of being substantially existent in the sense of self-sufficiency then the answer is no. That is because, as we said, the Vasiputriyas do not accept that view. However if your interpretation of the meaning of 'selflessness of a person' is the person's emptiness of a self or an entity which is permanent, partless or singular and independent self, then all the four schools of tenets [including the Vasiputriyas] accept that view.

Relationship to the Four Seals

One way of defining a proponent of a Buddhist school of tenets is that a proponent accepts the four seals of Buddhism. One of these four seals is that all phenomena are empty and selfless. That meaning of selfless [implies] all phenomena as selfless

from the point of view of the emptiness of a self that is permanent, singular and independent. Using that general Buddhist view of selflessness then all the proponents of the Buddhist schools of tenets are qualified by that definition.

Otherwise, as we said before, if we interpret the meaning of 'selflessness of the person' in the sense of a substantially existent self in the sense of self-sufficiency, then we would be excluding that one Great Exposition sub-school. As far as their philosophical view is concerned, they do not qualify as Buddhist. However they are included by virtue of their stance on practices, or deeds, or the conduct which we have to practise on the path.

The Vasiputriya Argument

The root text gives a reason why this particular Great Exposition sub-school does not accept the view of the person's emptiness of being substantially existent in the sense of self-sufficiency. It is because this sub-school asserts the view that a person is not same as, nor different from the aggregates of a person. It is also a self which is neither permanent nor impermanent, but which exists substantially. It is substantially existent in the sense of being self-sufficient. They cite the Buddha's teaching that all phenomena are empty of self as the reason for asserting this self-sufficient, existent self of a person.

One of the reasons why the other schools think that the person cannot be a separate entity from the aggregates is that if they are separate it is as if the person exists outside of, independently from, or unrelated to the self. Likewise to say that if a person exists as the same entity as the aggregates, this gives rise to the problem that just as there are many aggregates, so too there would be many persons or selves.

3.7 Explaining the Principles of the Grounds and Paths

The next heading is the presentation of the stages of grounds and paths. This heading is elaborated under the two main subheadings:

1. The objects to be abandoned by the path
2. The actual teaching on grounds and the paths.

3.7.1 Objects to be Abandoned by the Path

First of all, what are the objects abandoned by the path? This concerns the obstructions on the path. According to this school of Great Exposition obstructions are classified into:

1. Afflictive obstructions
2. Non-afflictive obstructions

Here obstructions refers to obstructions to achieving the state of liberation, or to achieving the all-knowing state of buddhahood, or complete enlightenment.

3.7.1.1 Afflictive Obstructions

According to the Great Exposition school afflictive obstructions are the main obstruction to achieving the state of liberation. They refer to all the afflictive states of mind or mental delusions. The main mental delusion or afflictive obstruction is the mind that apprehends a person as being substantially existent in the sense of being self-sufficient, as well as the seed of that mind.

If we elaborate, we can list all the afflictive obstructions in terms of the ten root afflictions or mental delusions and their seeds. The ten root mental delusions can be divided into two groups: the five view root delusions¹ and their seeds, and the five non-view root delusions² and their seeds.

The difference between 'seed' and 'latency' is that 'seed of the mind' means there is a potential in the mind which has the capacity to manifest the same type of mind in the future continuum of the mind.

3.7.1.2 Non Afflictive Obscurations

¹ Editor: View of the transitory collections, Extreme view, Holding the aggregates to be supreme, Holding an inferior morality to be superior, Wrong view.

² Editor: Desire, Anger, Pride, Ignorance, Doubt

Latency is the appropriate term when you talk of the main example for non-afflictive obstructions. The main non-afflictive obstruction is the latency left in the mind by the mind that apprehends the person as being substantially existent in the sense of self-sufficient. Each of the other delusions also has a latency.

The root text refers to non-afflictive obstructions as a kind of weakness [or mental decline] in the mind. In Tibetan this weakness is called *ne nya-len*³. In addition to a mental *ne nya-len* there is also a physical *ne nya-len*. Those of you who studied the topic of the calm abiding meditation may recall that we described at length these physical and mental *ne nya-len* or disadvantages, which cause some unsuitability in the functioning of our body and the mind. The remedy to purify that disadvantage is developing the so-called mental and physical state of pliancy.⁴

What we are saying here is that the mental *ne nya-lens* are non-afflictive obstructions. Even a being who has achieved the state of liberation, (called a foe destroyer or *arhat* in Sanskrit), has this latency. Even though they are free and have completely uprooted the mind that apprehends the self of the person, they still possess the latency of that misconception with respect to the ultimate nature of the person.

Even though they have overcome all the mental delusions and so forth, they still possess the latency of those delusions. They are certain that their actions and conduct cannot be called negative or non-virtuous actions but something in their conduct is inappropriate or unsuitable. They might physically move in a manner that resembles a hopping monkey, or their speech may contain some very inappropriate word. However it is not a negative or non-virtuous action such as harsh speech.

A being who, as a foe destroyer, has achieved the state of liberation still possesses some form of mental dullness or darkness. Just as darkness can hinder our visual eye from perceiving things, so dullness in the mind of a foe destroyer obstructs them from seeing all things.

3.7.1.2.1 Causes of Not Knowing

Generally speaking there are four causes of not knowing.

1. The first cause of not knowing things is **profundity and the vastness of the Buddha's teachings**. In one of the sutras the Buddha asked his disciple Shariputra, "Have you understood all the teachings that I have given, such as the teaching on the heap of morality and so on?" Shariputra replied that he had not understood [them all]. That was because the Buddha's teaching on morality and so on is too profound and vast.

2. The next cause of not knowing is **distance of the object of knowledge**. One of the classic examples of someone not knowing because of this cause concerns another of the Buddha's disciples, Maudgalyanaputra, who was generally renowned for his power of miracles and so on. He could not see that his mother had been reborn in the northern realm called the land of Radiant Light, [and had to ask the Buddha].

3. The third cause of not knowing is **length of time**. The example of not being able to see an object because of the length of time is another story concerning the disciple Shariputra.

A very old (over a hundred years) lay person who had spent his life with his family as a householder, [developed] a sense of detachment from his family. He decided to renounce the world and to take novice vows. Shariputra said to him that he was not eligible because he did not have the so-called root virtue to receive the novice vow.

However later on the Buddha said that he did have the necessary root virtue enabling him to take the novice vow. As

the story of this lay person (whose name in Tibetan is *Khyim bdag dpal skyes*)⁵ goes, the root virtue that the Buddha saw that would make him fit to take the novice vow, was that aeons and aeons ago, in one of his past lives, he was born as a fly, and circumambulated a stupa or relic.

This is a story about the benefits of circumambulating a holy stupa or reliquary. In the case of this old man in one of his past lives he was born as a fly that lived in dry cow dung. He made a ball of the dung and by coincidence the ball of the dung went around the stupa. So that was the root virtue that he created. Another story concerns a pig that went around a stupa because it was being chased by a dog. As a result of that, the pig accumulated enough merit to take rebirth in the godly realm called the land of Thirty-Three Gods. So every time we walk into this centre, if we circumambulate the stupa in the entrance hall we also are accumulating such virtues.

One simple meditation you can do while circumambulating a stupa is to imagine that there is a buddha in the stupa. You imagine the rays of light from that buddha radiating to all directions, bringing back and absorbing the qualities and blessings of all the buddhas residing in the ten directions. Then as you circumambulate the stupa you imagine the light shining forth from the buddha in the stupa. As it strikes you it purifies all the negativities of your three doors. At the same time you receive the blessings of the buddhas' body, speech and mind.

The fourth cause for not knowing is **the multitudinous numbers of objects**. First of all, how do you know that your perceptions of the glass that I am holding are not the perceptions of an omniscient mind? There is a difference between the way we perceive this glass and the way the omniscient mind of a buddha perceives it.

As far as we are concerned, we see it very clearly with our visual consciousness and so does a buddha. By closing our eyes we do not use our visual consciousness, and we do not see the glass very clearly unless we have clairvoyant powers. One distinction in regard to this fourth cause of not knowing is the multiple aspects of the glass. What would a Buddha see that we do not see?

Answer [from a student]: The living beings in the water.

Of course what you said is correct. We can guess or assume but do not actually directly see any animals or germs in the glass. The Buddha, however, can directly see any bacteria. Also we can ask questions like "Who is the person who manufactured this glass?" to which we do not know the answer. If however you ask, "In which shop did you buy this glass?" some people might know. Then again, although we see this glass as a solid thing, which can hold water, it is in fact made up of a collection of atoms and so on. When a buddha mind looks at it he can see every single atom which comprises this glass, as well as all previous causes, and causes of causes and so on. All we see is the whole shape of the glass and none of its atoms.

As ordinary beings, if we had a look at the cockpit of an aeroplane we would not have a clue about what each [button, lever or gauge] does. This shows us that there are a lot of things we might know, but that other people do not. Generally we can see how gaining knowledge of things is limitless. A fully enlightened is a being who has a mind that possesses the fully developed knowledge of all the things that exist!

I first went to see the cockpit of an aeroplane when I travelled to New Zealand with Alan Molloy. I thought that it was amazing to see all the things there. I was just amazed that what people can achieve in terms of gaining knowledge of how things work, if they make an effort.

In a spiritual path we talk about the knowledge of the mind, or inner knowledge. When you talk of outer knowledge, or knowledge of the outer world, it can quite amaze us when we

³ Ed: The Tibetan term *ne nya-len* has no direct translation. It refers to those obstacles acquired with one's rebirth. Tsepa Rigzin's *Tibetan - English Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology* defines *gnas-ngan-len* as taking unfortunate rebirth.

⁴ Study Group, 18 April 2000

⁵ Also known in Sanskrit as the Shrijata. See pp 440, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Wisdom Publications for further detail.

see the knowledge some people possess.

© *Tara Institute*

Study Group - "Buddhist Tenets"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

གྲུབ་མཐུན་རྒྱུ་མ་གཞག་བཤམ་པ།

24 April 2001

Generate the motivation of listening to this teaching in order to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Also generate the motivation to put these teachings into practice.

3.7 Explaining the Principles of Grounds and Paths (cont)

3.7.2 The Actual Teaching on the Principles of Grounds and Paths

Under the heading of the presentation of the grounds and paths we learn about the different paths according to the three vehicles [of practice].

Generally the terms 'path', 'ground' and 'exalted knowledge' are synonymous as they all denote the same meaning. In Tibetan the term for path is *lam*. It refers to the exalted knowledge of inner realisations, which are conjoined, with a genuine sense of renunciation, or seeking liberation.

One characteristic of the definition of path is that it should be qualified with a genuine unfabricated renunciation. We have already studied the meaning of renunciation in detail; it is one of the three principle aspects of the path. Renunciation is a genuine thought to seek liberation from samsara (or worldly cyclic existence), and for all the objects of desire or attachment, as a result of feeling a sense of disgust or distaste from the depth of one's heart.

The Term 'Vehicle'

Before we go any further it is also important to explain the meaning of the term 'vehicle' in terms of lesser vehicle and greater vehicle. In Tibetan the term for vehicle is *theg pa*. It technically refers to the inner knowledge or realisations, which literally takes the responsibility for the well being of oneself or for all others¹. Based on this meaning of the term vehicle, the meaning of 'lesser vehicle' is the inner knowledge or realisation which takes the responsibility or burden merely for oneself, whereas the greater vehicle [is the inner knowledge or realisation which takes the responsibility or] burden of all other beings.

The lesser and the greater vehicles are sometimes called the small and the great vehicles. It might occur to ask why one path in Buddhism is called a small or lesser path? It sounds like an inferior path and the other path sounds like a greater superior path. When we say the path of the lesser vehicle is a small or lesser path we are not saying that it is an inferior path of less value or meaning. The main implication, however, is that it is a lesser, smaller or inferior path compared to the path of the greater vehicle. The reason there are two vehicles is also because there are two types of spiritual practitioners. The difference between the lesser and greater vehicles is the difference between the ultimate spiritual goal of these two types of followers.

The ultimate spiritual goal for a person of lesser vehicle is the state of nirvana, or peace, which is a state of the mere cessation of the sufferings of cyclic existence. The purpose for which the person of lesser vehicle is pursuing that goal is merely for one's own sake.

The path that a person of the great vehicle follows is said to be the supreme one, because of the superiority of that person's

motivation. Their motivation is not just for themselves, but principally for the sake of all other beings. Therefore their motivation is much broader and greater compared to the motivation of the person of the lesser vehicle. Furthermore the ultimate spiritual goal for a person of the great vehicle is the state of buddhahood, or complete enlightenment, which is also greater than, and superior to, the ultimate goal of a person of the lesser vehicle.

Just as there are two types of beings who follow the spiritual path, so there are also two types of teachings that are given. In other words there are two baskets of the Buddha's teachings in terms of the teaching of the two vehicles. There is the basket of teachings of the lesser vehicle, which give all the guidelines needed for the person of the lesser vehicle to achieve on his or her respective goal. There is also the basket of the teachings of the great vehicle for the person following the greater vehicle.

Stages on the Spiritual Path

In explaining this teaching in terms of the path there are five [stages on the] spiritual path which show the progression towards the final spiritual goal. They are:

1. Path of Accumulation
2. Path of Preparation
3. Path of Seeing
4. Path of Meditation
5. Path of No-More-Learning

1. The Path of the Accumulation is the stage in one's spiritual journey when one first enters onto the path, and while on the actual path begins to amass merit for the first time.
2. The Path of Preparation is the stage where one is, literally speaking, preparing oneself to directly realise the truth.
3. The Path of Seeing is the stage of gaining direct realisation of the truth.
4. The Path of Meditation is the stage of achieving further familiarisation with the direct realisation of the truth.
5. The Path of No-More-Learning is the stage of achieving the final goal. It is the completion of one's effort on the path to liberation.

According to the Great Exposition School, the main object of observation for the person of lesser vehicle, in particular the lesser vehicle of Hearer, is the Four Noble Truths. This is their main meditative contemplation. The main spiritual qualities or inner realisations to be achieved along the path are called the 37 Qualities or Harmonies of the state of enlightenment. The list of 37 qualities can be broken down into: four types of mindfulness; four pure states of abandonment; four types or legs of miracles; five powers; another list of five forces; seven branches of enlightenment, and, finally, the eight-fold path of superior beings.

Criterion of Entering the Path

As to the followers of this lesser vehicle, there are those who have the lineage or the nature of the lesser vehicle, like for instance a Hearer nature or lineage. For a person who has the nature of the Hearer vehicle, the moment that person generates true renunciation is when they enter the actual path of the Hearer vehicle. Whereas for someone with a lineage or nature of the greater vehicle, the moment they first enter the path is the moment they generate the bodhicitta mind for the first time.

Here we are learning a little bit about the criteria of entering into the path of Hearer vehicle and the greater vehicle. This is quite different from the criteria of being a proponent of a school of tenet of the lesser vehicle or the greater vehicle. Let us consider the difference between a person who has entered into the path of, say, the lesser vehicle, and a person who is a proponent of a tenet of the lesser vehicle. Recall from our study of the tenets that only two of the four schools of tenets are schools of lesser vehicle, the Great Exposition school, and the Sutra school. Therefore to be a proponent of a tenet of the lesser vehicle, you have to be a proponent of either of the Great Exposition school or the Sutra school.

¹ Tsepa Rigzin, *Tibetan-English Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology*, Spiritual path or means along which a practitioner is led to liberation according to his particular disposition; a path or means to lead sentient beings to higher states depending upon their capabilities., p 177

Is it necessary for someone who has entered the path of the lesser vehicle to also be a proponent of the tenet of a lesser vehicle? Of course the answer is that it is not necessary. This is because with respect to the path you have entered, you can be someone who has entered the path of lesser vehicle, but with respect to the tenet that you hold in your mind, you can be a proponent of even a tenet of the greater vehicle. In other words you can be someone who has entered the path of the lesser vehicle, but at the same time you can be a proponent of a school of the greater vehicle, such as the Mind Only² school or even the Autonomous³ or the Consequence⁴ school.

The Three Vehicles of the Great Exposition School

There is a question as to whether the Great Exposition school even accepts the term 'greater vehicle' or Mahayana, because of the way this school names three types of vehicles: Hearer, Solitary Realiser and Bodhisattvas. Furthermore this school says that each of these three vehicles is an ultimate vehicle in itself. In other words it says that each vehicle offers an ultimate goal beyond which no further goal can be achieved. So according to this school each vehicle can be treated as an ultimate vehicle. Therefore there are three ultimate vehicles.

The root text describes the length of time and the level of determination a person of each of these three vehicles needs to achieve their spiritual goal.

A person with a lineage of **Hearer** of the lesser vehicle meditates on their view of emptiness - a person's emptiness of being substantially existent in the sense of being self-sufficient. At the same time they accumulate a small amount of merit over three lifetimes, as that is how long they want to take to achieve their goal. The text says that the level of merit they accumulate is a small level and they amass this accumulation in three lifetimes and meditate on the view of the selflessness of person. They want to achieve their goal in three lifetimes.

Hearers have generated a very strong sense of renunciation, and are impatient to achieve liberation from cyclic existence. So with this thought they decide that they wish to achieve their goal within three lifetimes. Within those three lifetimes the main meditation they do is on the selflessness of the person, and also the sixteen attributes of the Four Noble Truths. Meditating on that they acquire the merit for achieving their goal. This is described as a small accumulation of merit.

A person who has the lineage of **Solitary Realiser** of the lesser vehicle has, it says, more patience and determination compared to a person with the Hearer's lineage. The Solitary Realiser has more spirit in the sense that he or she is prepared to meditate to achieve their goal even if it takes hundreds of aeons. What they meditate upon is the same - the view of the selflessness of a person. As a supporting cause to that meditation the amount of merit they need to accumulate is a middling accumulation of merit.

The person with the lineage of a **Bodhisattva** meditates in order to achieve their goal of great enlightenment. They meditate on the [same] view [of selflessness of person] in conjunction with the accumulation of the great amount of merit over the period of three countless great aeons. Compared to the previous two, the spirit and the determination of the Bodhisattvas is much higher, in the sense that to achieve their goal the Bodhisattva is ready to sacrifice and accumulate merit over three countless great aeons.

We have just discussed the differences in the way beings of each of these three vehicles follow the path to achieve liberation. The text, which we shall discuss next week, also shows the differences between beings of these three vehicles in terms of the way each accumulates the required amount of merit.

Student: Why are Hearers called Hearers, and why are Solitary

Realisers called Solitary Realisers?

To explain the literal meaning of hearer, the term in Tibetan is *nyan thos*. The term *nyan* means to hear from others and the term *thos* means to expose to others, or to make others hear about. Literally it means a person of the lower vehicle.

Another explanation is that a person who is a Hearer has complete knowledge not only of their own vehicle, but also the greater vehicle. However they do not apply the greater vehicle to their own practice, even though they teach it to others. Their main basis of progression on the path is by listening to, and depending upon others.

The Tibetan term for Solitary Realiser is *rang gyal*, which means awaken self-victorious. Solitary Realisers have a very strong determination to achieve their goal independently. They wish to achieve that goal in a place where there is no Buddha, where there are no Hearers, and no practitioners of Hearers. They just want to work by themselves to achieve their goal. Solitary Realisers are likened to the Rhinoceros. Both have the nature of not mixing with the others, and of being alone. Solitary Realisers hate socialising with other beings.

In the past I gave a teaching on Chandrakirti's text *Supplement to the Middle Way*. That teaching gave a detailed explanation of the answer to your question.

Student: In relation to the school of Great Exposition, they gave a gross definition of a person as being empty of being permanent, partless and independent. Do they take that to be ... an artificial or innate view? And if it is regarded as an innate view, how do you explain that? [Many parts of the tape were unclear]

Reply: With regard to the gross form of the self of the person, we can have both artificial and innate views. Generally the innate view comes from beginningless time. We have always had it. Whereas the artificial view is one that we have acquired. We have constructed it in our mind, through the influence of our study of a school of tenets.

One of the sub-schools of the Great Exposition school is the Vasiputriyas, who assert that the person has a substantial existence. So a person who follows that sub-school of the Great Exposition school has this artificial view of the self of the person in terms of the person having a substantial existence. This is as a result of having asserted this philosophical view. So as a matter of principle, the view that they hold and believe in, is an artificial one. Whereas if we have not adopted this view that the person has a substantial existence, we have the assumption that it does not exist that way. If in fact we do not have [such an] artificial view of the self of the person, and someone asks or posits that the person has such a substantial existence then we would reply 'no'. However we still have the misconception of the self of the person, and we still generate the consciousness which conceives the person as being substantially existent [so we still have the innate view].

Student: Does the Vasiputriya school actually assert that someone can have the innate perception of the self being permanent ... argument that suggested that they accept ... innate levels ... That would mean that a self would ... without any doctrine or learning ... [Many parts of the tape were unclear]

Sandup: Your question is that if everyone already has an innate view in their mind, how can you have that innate view at the same time as an artificial one?

Answer: If you take this glass as an example, then we may not have the belief that it is permanent. We would not say that the glass is permanent, rather we would say, assert or propose that the glass is impermanent. This means that we do not have the artificial view of this glass being permanent. However we do have what we call the innate conception of this glass being permanent, because there is still a part of [our] mind which holds this glass as being a permanent object.

² Cittamantrin

³ Svantrika Madhyamika

⁴ Prasangika Madhyamika

Study Group - "Buddhist Tenets"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

གྲུབ་མཐའི་རྣམ་གཞག་བཤམ་པ།

1st May 2001

Begin by generating a strong wish to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Think that it is for this reason that you are receiving these teachings, and also strongly think of putting them into practice.

3.7.2 Actual Teaching on Grounds and Paths

Manner of Accumulating Merit

Last week we learned about the differences between followers of the three vehicles in terms of the manner in which each of them proceeds on their path. Another difference between beings of the three vehicles is the manner in which each accumulates merit.

Bodhisattva Vehicle

We start with beings of the bodhisattva lineage or vehicle. The first path which the being of the bodhisattva lineage follows is called the path of accumulation. The path of accumulation can be divided into three levels - the great path of accumulation, the medium path of accumulation, and the small path of accumulation. A being of the bodhisattva lineage accumulates limitless merit of three great aeons before they enter the great path of accumulation.¹

During that path of accumulation such a being will mainly devote their effort to listening to, and contemplating the meaning of selflessness of person. That is their main object of meditation.

When they reach the stage of the calm-abiding realisation of the selflessness of persons, he or she moves to the next path, which is the path of preparation. There are four stages of this path of preparation:

1. Heat-like path of preparation
2. The level of peak of path of preparation
3. Patience-like path of preparation
4. Supreme dharma path of preparation.

Technically the beginning of the path of preparation (the heat-like path of preparation) is when the meditator gains the union of calm-abiding and special insight on the realisation of the selflessness of person.

In the same meditation sitting they proceed from the first level of the path of preparation (heat-like path of preparation) to the path of seeing, then to the path of meditation, and finally actualise the path of no-more-learning. So in other words, from the heat-like path of preparation the bodhisattva achieves complete enlightenment in one continuous state of meditative equipoise.

Recall the deeds in the life of the historical Shakyamuni Buddha. After he entered the celibate life he engaged in the deeds of ascetic practice. Then, under the bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, it is said that the actual time when he reached complete enlightenment is at dawn of the 15th day of the lunar month, which is the full moon. On the previous night, at around dusk, he performed the deeds of conquering the evil forces. Then, in the one meditation sitting lasting

throughout the night, he achieved complete enlightenment on the next morning.

Solitary Realiser Vehicle

The being of the solitary realiser lineage finishes accumulating merit over 100 aeons before entering the great path of accumulation. They enter the first path of preparation, which is the heat-like preparation, and then in the one meditation sitting they achieve the path of no-more-learning through actualising the paths of seeing and meditation.

Hearer's Vehicle

A being of the hearer lineage, it says, accumulates merit while on the four paths of learning (the paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing and meditation). So during each of those stages the being would be accumulating merit. Having achieved the status of superior being through gaining the path of superior beings, it still takes fourteen rounds of birth before actualising the path of no-more-learning. When it says fourteen lifetimes (or rounds of birth), it includes seven lifetimes of the bardo state of being and seven of the stage of the birth. For such a being, the path of no-more-learning begins after the last moment of the path of meditation, which is, called vajra-like meditative concentration. It is after that moment that the being of the hearer lineage enters the path of no-more-learning.

3.8 Fruit of the Path: Nature of a Form Body

According to the root text the Great Exposition school hold that the form body of a buddha is not a state of full enlightenment or state of perfection. This, it says, is because the form body of a buddha is the same body that you had while you were on the path of preparation. Therefore the form body is an object of abandonment, and something to be discarded.

The fact is that the form body, which was possessed by the bodhisattva who was on the path of preparation, is the body that was propelled [into existence] as a result of karma and delusion. When the bodhisattva achieves full enlightenment they still have the same body. Therefore the [form] body is an object of abandonment and not a state of a buddha.

The other thing that the Great Exposition school asserts is that you can abandon something but still possess it. To clarify this assertion, the term in Tibetan is *pang den*. *Pang* means abandonment and *den* means possessing. The assertion is that it is possible that you can still possess something, even though you have abandoned it.

[This assertion results from] this school distinguishing between contaminated and non-contaminated objects. Any object that we call a contaminated object is an object of abandonment; we need to abandon it in order to achieve enlightenment. According to this school this table is a contaminated object. Therefore when you achieve the state of buddhahood it is said you have abandoned the table. What does this mean? Usually to abandon a table you just throw it away, or break it up into pieces. [In the spiritual context it usually means uprooting something as a result of applying a remedy.]

In this case [abandonment] is not a question of applying a particular remedy or antidote to the table. Rather, part of this school's definition of a contaminated object is that it is an object which serves as a suitable [basis for delusions] to arise and which increases mental delusions².

¹ Editor: Note an error was made in the translation at this point and was subsequently corrected. The corrections have been incorporated into this final text.

² Editor: A definition of contaminated according to the Vaibhasika school is : A phenomenon that is amenable to the increase of contamination from the point of view of being either an object of observation or an [afflicted] concomitant.

When you achieve enlightenment you abandon all delusions, including desire or attachment for a particular object like this table. Since you have abandoned subjective desire for the table, [according to this school you have] you have abandoned even the object itself.

Here we are particularly concerned with the form body of a buddha, which we said is a contaminated object. In fact the form body is the truth of suffering. Yet the buddha has by definition abandoned the truth of suffering. So abandoning and yet possessing suffering so is not mutually exclusive [according to this school].

Types of Bodies

The root text next discusses the Great Exposition school's position on the various types of bodies of a buddha. One type of body of a buddha is called the enjoyment body or the fully endowment body. This school does not assert this type of body. They do however assert the supreme body of the buddha. The reason they do not assert the enjoyment or endowment body is because you achieve the supreme body of buddhahood in the same body in which you achieve complete enlightenment. It says that when you leave your last body you go into the state called nirvana without remainder. In that state, it is said that even your continuum, your mind, your consciousness also ceases to exist. Therefore this school does not assert the enjoyment body.

It is not mentioned in any text, but it appears that according to this Great Exposition school taking a rebirth or new life can be only possible due to the force of karma and delusions. So it does not look logical for this school to accept the case of a bodhisattva taking rebirth due to the force of their aspirational prayer of benefiting other beings.

One other uncommon assertion that this school makes is with respect to the primary consciousness, or primary mind, and the mental factor that associates with that primary mind. This school says that the primary mind and the mental factor that accompanies this primary mind are cause and effect, but they also exist at the same moment.

With regard to the twelve deeds of a buddha, the Great Exposition school maintains that the first nine deeds are the deeds of an ordinary or common being, and the last three deeds that are the deeds of a fully enlightened being or buddha.

Types of Nirvana

There are two types of nirvana achieved by foe-destroyers - nirvana or liberation with remainder, and nirvana without remainder. A Hearer who has achieved the state of foe-destroyer, or state of liberation attains the state of liberation with remainder. This lasts for as long as that being still possesses a form body, which is associated with the truth of suffering. After you leave this truth-of-suffering body then you achieve the state of liberation without remainder.

For this school the state of liberation can be the means to the state of abandonment where you completely overcome the two types of obstructions, that is, afflictive obstructions and non-afflictive obstructions. The hearer or foe-destroyer who has achieved nirvana or liberation with remainder still possesses the form body of suffering, because he or she has not abandoned non-afflictive obstructions, even though afflictive obstructions have been abandoned.

However this school says that when these same beings leave their bodies and enter into nirvana without remainder they abandon all obstructions, even non-afflictive obstructions. Of course they are not abandoned as a result of applying a remedy. They just become non-existent because of losing their base. This is because after you enter into nirvana without remainder there is no life base.

Therefore there is no base for the obstructions, and so in that sense you abandon non-afflictive obstructions upon achieving nirvana without remainder.

Acceptance of Scriptures

Finally the root text mentions this school's position on defining particular scriptures as the word of a buddha. According to this school there are two types of scripture - definitive sutra and interpretive sutra. From the point of view of this school, the distinction between definitive and interpretive literally determines whether the scripture is acceptable or not.

The text says that both the school of the Great Exposition and also the school of Sutra do not accept of the sutras of the Mahayana, or the Great Vehicle, as the authentic word of the Buddha. Both of them only accept the texts we call sutras as being literally acceptable as the word of the Buddha. If it is literally acceptable to them then they accept it as a sutra. In other words they only accept the definitive type of sutra.

However in some other commentaries on the schools of tenets, there is mention of some proponents of the Great Exposition school who lived after the great master Nagarjuna who in fact accept [Nagarjuna's work] and some parts of the Mahayana sutras as the word of the Buddha.

Before the arrival of the great Mahayana scholars like Nagarjuna and Asanga the Mahayana teaching was almost unknown. It flourished in other worlds like the realm of the godly beings and the land of the Nagas, but in the human world it existed in a very concealed way. Vasubandhu was the great pioneer of the lower school of tenets, and in particular he was a proponent of the Great Exposition school. However in the latter part of his life there are indications that he became a proponent of the Mind-Only school.

As a strong proponent of the lower school Vasubandhu directly challenged and criticised Asanga and other great Mahayana masters. The great renaissance of the Mahayana teachings brought about by Nagarjuna and Asanga not only proved the authenticity of the Mahayana teaching using the Buddha's work, but also through a great length of logic and reason they established the Mahayana teachings. So later on, influenced by the work of Asanga and Nagarjuna, even some of the proponents of the lower school were convinced that the Mahayana teachings were sutras, the word of the Buddha. That is why it is said that there are some proponents of this lower school who accept the Mahayana teachings as sutras.

In fact the main scriptural source for the two lower schools of tenets is Vasubandhu's text *Treasury of Knowledge*. What is interesting however is that there are many indications in Vasubandhu's text that even while he was composing the *Treasury of Knowledge* he was already a proponent of the Mind-Only school of Cittamatin.

So with this we have roughly completed our discussion on the Great Exposition school. Next week we begin with the school of Sutra.

© Tara Institute

Note on authentication

Transcribed from the tape by Kathi Melnic
Edited by Adair Bunnett and Alan Molloy
Checked by Alan Molloy

Study Group - “Buddhist Tenets”

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

གྲུབ་མཐུན་རྣམ་གཞག་བཤམ་པུ་ལཱ་པུ་

8th May 2001

Generate the mind of bodhicitta, the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, as your motivation. Then think that in order to fulfil this bodhicitta aspiration one is listening to these teachings and will put them into practice.

4. Explaining the System of the School of Sutra

Tonight we begin the teaching on the lower school of tenets called the School of Sutra. This school is also known as the Sautrantika School.

4.1 Definition

First we define a person who is a proponent of tenets of the school of Sutra.

A proponent of the Sutra school of tenets is defined here as a proponent of the Lesser Vehicle tenets who asserts the existence of both self knowing consciousness and external objects.

As we recall, the definition of a proponent of the lesser school of Great Exposition does not assert a self-knowing consciousness. So we need to know the school of Sutrist definition of **self-knowing consciousness** and of external objects. In our discussion on 20 March 2001 we covered the idea of self-knowing consciousness. This school of Sutra accepts the definition given there.

External objects are defined as the formation of gross objects as a result of the collection of many partless particles, or atoms. According to this school the mind and these external objects are separate substantial entities. When we talk in terms of a mind that apprehends the form of an external object, the mind that apprehends the form and the form that is its object, are two separate substantial entities. This is not accepted by the Mind Only School¹.

The school of Sutra accepts the separate substantial entities of subject and object. For example, the eye sense consciousness that perceives a visual form and the object of that perception are two entities because they are like cause and effect. The visual form is the condition or cause for the eye sense consciousness to arise. This finishes the definition of a proponent of the school of Sutra.

The next thing said in the root text is that a proponent of the Sutra school of tenets and an Exemplifier, (who uses examples to explain things), are synonymous terms.

4.2 Classification

There are two types proponents of the school of Sutra: Followers of Scriptures and Followers of Reason.

4.2.1 Followers of Scripture

It is said that most of the assertions made by proponents of the school of Sutra following the Scriptures are the same as those of a proponent of the Great Exposition school. However there are some clear differences between the two.

Firstly they differ in terms of the scripture which is used as the main authoritative source. The proponents of the school Sutra following the scriptures rely upon Vasubandu's

*Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*². The proponent of tenet of Sutra following the scripture do not accept the seven compendiums of knowledge, a collection of texts regarded as a main scriptural source of the Great Exposition school. They do not accept them as authentic scriptures. They regard them as a collected work by various Arhats.

Secondly there is a difference between the assertions made by proponents of the school of Sutra and those made by proponents of the Great Exposition. For example, proponents of the Great Exposition school assert the idea of simultaneous cause and effect. They say, for example, that the primary mind and all the mental factors that accompany it are concomitant. That is, the mental factors coexisting with the primary mind are cause and effect.

The Proponents of the tenets of this school of Sutra refute this idea of the coexistence of cause and effect. They do not regard primary consciousness and the concomitant mental factor as a case of cause and effect, because the two share the same entity or nature.

Other than this, the assertions of proponents of the school of Sutra about the two types of truth, conventional and ultimate truth, accord with those of the Great Exposition school.

Regarding the definition of the two types of truth, proponents of both the Great Exposition school and the school of Sutra use quotations from the *Abhidharmakosa* (or the *Treasury of the Manifest Knowledge*).

4.2.2 Followers of Reason

The proponents of tenets of the school of Sutra following Reason mainly use Dharmakirti's *Seven Treatises of Valid Cognition* as their scriptural source. These seven treatises are commentaries on Dignaga's text, *Compendium of Valid Cognition*³.

Definition of Valid Cognition

The title of Dignaga's text uses the term 'valid cognition' which indicates the main theme or subject matter of the text. What is valid cognition? It is a mind or an awareness which is new and incontrovertible with respect to its object.

The *Seven Treatises of Valid Cognition* can be listed in two groups. The first group of three is called the main body, and the other group of four is called the branch of scripture.

The main body of three are ordered according to the degree of detail of their explanation of valid cognition. The first one Dharmakirti's commentary on Dignaga's *Compendium of Valid Cognition*. This is the extensive exposition. The medium explanation on valid cognition is called *Ascertainment of Valid Cognition*, and the brief explanation is called *Drop of Reasoning*.

The group of four, the branches of text, includes *Drop of Logic*, *Analysis of Relations*, rules or reasoning *Principles of Debate* and *Proving the Continuum of Others*.

Together these comprise the *Seven Treatises of Valid Cognition*. The term valid cognition in the title in fact refers to Chandrakirti's text, *Compendium on Valid Cognition*, where the reference is to the actual valid cognition, which is an awareness that is new and incontrovertible with respect to its object.

4.3 Etymology

Why are the proponents of this school called proponents of the school of Sutra? It is because they advocate tenets that are based on the sutras of the Bhagavan Buddha. They are also called Exemplifiers because they are particularly good

¹ The Mind Only School is the third school of tenets

² This text is also known as Abhidharmakosa.

³ In some texts Dignaga's text is called Sutra of Valid Cognition.

at explaining all things by means of examples. A proponent of the tenets of the school of Sutra is a master of using examples to reveal and explain all phenomena.

4.4 Method of Asserting Objects/Assertions of this School of Tenets

We now turn to the main assertions of the proponents of tenets of the school of Sutra. This will be discussed mainly from the point of view of proponents of the tenets of Sutra Following Reason.

4.4.1 Assertions on the Basis

4.4.1.1 Assertions regarding the object

Existent things and non-existent things

We begin by defining what is existent and what is non-existent. An existent thing is defined as something that is observed by a valid or prime cogniser. Therefore the question of whether or not a particular thing or object is existent or non-existent depends on whether or not there is a valid cogniser for that particular object.

It is particularly important to know the precise meaning of 'valid cogniser'. Unless we know we know that, the definition of whether or not something is existent for a valid cogniser would not make any sense. A valid cogniser is a valid mind that is new and incontrovertible with respect to its objects.

If we relate the idea of valid cogniser to our own mind, we have realised a valid cognition in respect to any object when we have gained a definitive knowledge of the object. In terms of Dharma knowledge, if we gained valid cognition of that knowledge, we develop a final and very certain knowledge. Based on such a valid cognition of Dharma we have an unwavering faith that is absolutely stable.

4.4.1.2 Classifications of Existent Things

The Two Truths

After defining them, the text goes on to classify existent things. The one classification is into the two truths, conventional and ultimate.

Ultimate truth

Here the definition of ultimate truth is a phenomena which is ultimately able to perform a function. This is not the same as the definition used by a proponent of the Great Exposition school. Yet from our discussions earlier it was very clear that the definitions used by proponents of the school of Sutra following Scripture are the same as those used by the Great Exposition School. [As this definition of ultimate truth is different from that used by the Great Exposition School,] it must be according to proponents of the tenets of the school of Sutra following Reason.

The root text says that ultimate truth is synonymous with something ultimately established, a functioning thing, a product, impermanent, compounded phenomena, substance, and specifically characterised phenomena. These specifically characterised phenomena are not just mentally imputed, but they actually exist from their own side. All these terms are synonymous with ultimate truth. Whatever is one is also the other. Therefore we see very clearly, that according to this school of Sutra ultimate truth is synonymous with impermanent, product, and functioning things. This is a quite different definition of ultimate truth from that of the Great Exposition school.

Here the definition of ultimate truth is that it is something that is able to ultimately perform a function. The indication of the words 'ultimately perform' is something that has the capacity to produce a result. So in this instance ultimate truth is concerned with things which are cause and effect.

Whereas all those things which are classified as permanent phenomena are conventional truths.

Implications for our Practice

As we study the various schools of tenets it is important not just to know the definitions by heart, and to familiarise ourselves with the classifications. We should also try to understand the implications for our spiritual practice. If we talk in terms of practice, then creating a positive action is, according to this school, an ultimate truth.

The word 'ultimate' implies that it definitely has the capacity to produce a result. However it cannot be a result cannot be a random result. Rather it must accord with the cause. Therefore if it produces a result and the action is positive, the result that accords with this cause is happiness. Likewise if the action is negative, then the action ultimately performing the function will produce the result of suffering.

We are going through the text very quickly. In your own time, if you like, you can study the meaning of all the different terms that we find here, such as 'things', 'functioning things', 'impermanent', and 'compound phenomena'. Try to see what each of these definitions adds to a description of the nature of things.

We discussed valid cognition before in terms of our practice. Whether or not the conviction and faith that we gain in our spiritual practice is strong and stable has a lot to do with the level of our knowledge, or realisation, of Dharma. If we gain faith in our Dharma or spiritual practice through gaining valid cognitions about our practice, then the faith we gain is everlasting.

The fact is that for many of us our faith in Dharma as a very beneficial practice is fleeting. Sometimes we find our practice to be very beneficial; on other occasions we do not see it that way and we become distant from our practice. This fluctuation happens because we have not gained a faith that is based on valid cognition of the Dharma.

What follows next is another tabulation of conventional truths, and a few other terms that are synonymous with conventional truth. After that there is the classification of existence in terms of two types of phenomena, negative and positive phenomena.

Regarding the division of existence into positive and negative phenomena, Geshe-la remembers that when he taught the topic of logic at Kopan monastery in 1982, everybody found it very difficult to review and discuss. At the time the translator was Thubten Sherab who is a student at Lama Tsong Khapa Institute. At the teaching Thubten Sherab could not find the right word and he asked the students to help him, but nobody did. Geshe-la still remembers, that he said to Geshe-la, "I had a bit of an argument with the students before the teachings, so now they are not helping me".

This topic is an essential one. If you understand this topic of negative and positive phenomena, it will help you to understand the idea of emptiness and selflessness.

We end the session here. Next week we have discussion night, with the written test in the following week. We shall do the same as last month, which is to say, the questions for the test, including the compulsory question, will be selected from the list of discussion questions.

© *Tara Institute*

Note on authentication

Transcribed from the tape by Majola Oosthuizen
Edited by Adair Bunnnett and Alan Molloy
Checked by Alan Molloy
