

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

Shāntideva’s *Bodhicharyāvātāra*, The Way of the Bodhisattva
Chapter 9: “Wisdom” Part 2: Dependent Arising

The following is based on *The Nectar of Manjushri’s Speech: A Detailed Commentary on Shantideva’s Way of the Bodhisattva* by Khenpo Kunzang Pelden (Khenpo Kunkpel); *Transcendent Wisdom, A Teaching on the Wisdom Section of Shāntideva’s Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life* by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, translated, edited and annotated by B. Alan Wallace; and teachings by Lama Tsongkhapa, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Geshe Drakpa Gelek, Geshe Lundup Sopa, Jeffrey Hopkins, Guy Newland, Andy Wistreich, and the guidance of Geshe Lobsang Nima.

TBCWP Session 11: Sunday, May 28, 2023

Geshe Nima requested we study Shāntideva’s text following his two month teaching residency at the TBCWP between November 2022 and January 2023.

Introduction to session 11

1. Geshe Nima has asked us to begin each session of our study of Shāntideva’s ninth chapter, “Wisdom”, by reciting the “Pratītya-samutpāda-gāthā”, or the “Essence of Causation” mantra, and by contemplating the fifth stanza from the eighteenth chapter of Nāgārjuna’s *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, or *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*. His Holiness the Dalai Lama considers these to be very important and frequently quotes them in his teachings on emptiness.

The “Pratītya-samutpāda-gāthā” (“Essence of Causation” mantra)

1. One of the most ancient Buddhist Sanskrit mantras is the “Pratītya-samutpāda-gāthā” which means “dependent arising mantra” or “essence of causation mantra”. The mantra is also referred to as *Ye dharma hetu*, which are three of the words that begin the first line. It is actually a summary of the teachings of the Buddha. *Pratitya samutpada* is the name for the Buddha’s teaching on cause and effect, in which he demonstrates how all situations arise through the coming together of various factors.

2. The most common translations of the term *Pratītya-samutpāda* are “dependent origination” or “dependent arising”. But the term is also translated as “interdependent co-arising” and “conditioned arising”. His Holiness the Dalai Lama explains, “In Sanskrit the word for dependent-arising is *Pratītya-samutpāda*. The word *pratītya* has three different meanings—meeting [or coming together], relying, and depending—but all three, in terms of the basic idea they convey, mean ‘dependence’. The word *samutpāda* means ‘arising’. Hence, the meaning of *Pratītya-samutpāda* is that which arises in dependence upon conditions, in reliance upon conditions, and through the force of conditions [meeting and coming together].”

3. *Pratītya-samutpāda* is closely related to the very first teaching of the Buddha, the Four Noble Truths, where the first line of the mantra points to suffering, the second to its cause, and the third to its cessation. The mantra is also closely related to the concepts of karma, selflessness, and emptiness. Nāgārjuna, in his explanation of the Madhyamaka or Middle Way

position, states that everything that exists does so dependently and everything that is dependently existent necessarily lacks any independent objective existence.

4. Sanskrit, the language of the “Pratītya-samutpāda-gāthā” mantra, is considered a sacred language. It is said that when one vocalizes the vowels and consonants of a Sanskrit mantra with spiritual intention, they become a sacred utterance that connects the one who is saying the mantra to the spiritual power of the lineage of that mantra, especially if it has been transmitted to them from a guru of that lineage.

5. The first word of the mantra, “om”, is believed to be the first sound that was originated on earth. The om/aum sound when produced creates a reverberation in the body which helps the body and mind to be calm.

Om ye dharma hetu-prabhava

Those dharmas¹ which arise from a cause,

Hetu tesham tathagato hyavadat

The Tathagata² has declared their cause,

Tesham cha yo nirodha

And that which is the cessation of them.

Evam vadi mahashramananah

Thus the Great Renunciant³ has taught.

Svaha

May a blessing rest on it!

Nāgārjuna’s *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, stanza five

1. The ***Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*** (*Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*), is the foundational text of the Mādhyamaka school of Mahāyāna philosophical tenets, particularly its highest sub-school, Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika. It was written by the Indian Buddhist monk and philosopher Nāgārjuna circa 150 CE. The text makes use of arguments to show how all phenomena, both form and consciousness, are empty of having any kind of inherent or independent self-existence of their own-being. It is regarded as one of the most influential and widely studied texts in the history of Buddhist philosophy, and has had a major impact on the development of Buddhist thought, especially in Tibetan Buddhism.

¹ phenomena

² one gone beyond suffering, i.e. the Buddha

³ the Buddha

2. The text is a series of stanzas or verses organized into 27 chapters, written as a *kārikā*-style work. Sanskrit *kārikā* texts are meant to be memorized as an aid to learning by students, and therefore make use of aphorisms or sayings that are often enigmatic and extremely short and concise (eg. “form is emptiness, emptiness is form”). The meaning of these aphorisms is then filled out through the oral commentary of a teacher. As such, the *kārikā* texts are like an outline in verse of the major philosophical arguments of an oral tradition. Shāntideva’s *Bodhicharyāvātāra* could be considered a *kārikā*-style work.

3. Stanza five of Nāgārjuna’s *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, or *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, outlines the cause-and-effect process of achieving liberation from cyclic existence that is complementary to the “Essence of Causation” mantra. The verse states:

*By extinguishing actions and afflictions, there is liberation.
Actions and afflictions arise from misconceptions
And misconceptions arise from elaborations.
Elaborations will cease through cultivating emptiness.*

As was said before, the wisdom that realizes emptiness directly is the main and indispensable aspect of the Bodhisattva path. According to this stanza by Nāgārjuna, the process of achieving liberation from cyclic existence starts with cultivating the correct view of emptiness. If we’re able to do this, then what Nāgārjuna calls “elaborations” will cease.

4. When any phenomenon appears to a human physical sense consciousness—sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch—if that sense consciousness is unimpaired and properly functioning, it perceives what most other properly functioning human physical sense consciousnesses perceive, as opposed to, say, what an ant, or a bat, or whale, or fly perceives with their physical sense consciousnesses. For example, what appears to a properly functioning human eye sense consciousness and a properly functioning fly eye sense consciousness is not the same. In other words, a phenomenon’s appearance *itself* is not an absolute because its appearance does not arise separately from the particular sense consciousness that’s perceiving it. The appearance itself is a dependent arising which relies on the force of conditions relating to both the perceiving sense consciousness and the object being perceived meeting and coming together.

5. The word “elaboration” that Nāgārjuna uses has two general meanings, one as in ‘exaggeration’ and one as in ‘evolution’. Our *mental* sense consciousness conceptually exaggerates, or embellishes, or magnifies, or misrepresents, or even fabricates characteristics and qualities beyond those which exist in a phenomenon as it appears to our *physical* sense consciousnesses. Over time we evolve these exaggerated qualities and characteristics, we develop them, expand them, enhance them, and even transform them, until our elaborations cause us to believe that any given phenomenon absolutely appears the way we conceive it to be— independently self-existent with independently self-existent qualities.

6. This is why two different people can conceive the same phenomenon in two different ways, whether in relation to food, music, movies, religion, race and gender issues, or whatever it might be. Take, for instance, the widespread and divisive phenomenon of the nexus between the public, the media, and political leaders. One group of people perceives a particular political

leader as the savior of civilization and a portion of the media supports that group and fuels their opinion. At the same time, another group of people perceives that same political leader as the destroyer of civilization, and another portion of the media supports *that* group and fuels *their* opinion. So, what's going on here? Both sides can't be correct, because they are diametrically opposed to each another.

7. What's happening in this particular situation is that the mental consciousness of the public, fueled by a confirming media on both sides, exaggerates, embellishes, magnifies, misrepresents, and even fabricates characteristics and qualities onto that political leader beyond those which exist in that person as they appear to the public's sense consciousnesses. Both sides then conceptually evolve these qualities and characteristics, develop them, enhance them, and even transform them, until their elaborations cause them to believe that the political leader absolutely appears the way he or she is conceived by them to be—either as an independently self-existent hero, or an independently self-existent villain. Both of these are misconceptions that arise from elaborations. The disturbing result is a divided public that is locked into their positions. Strong afflictive emotions arise causing the public to engage in divisive and harmful negative actions of body, speech, and mind. This is a very vulnerable and dangerous position for the public to be in.

8. Because we believe in our elaborated misconceptions in general, they become habitual and firmly entrenched in our minds. Afflictive emotions arise in relation to them, such as desire, anger, and every other expression of attachment and aversion. These afflictive emotions consequently manifest in the form of harmful and divisive negative actions or behaviors of body, speech, and mind. In turn, these negative actions—negative karmas—leave imprints and propensities on our mindstreams that continuously entrap us in the pervasive suffering of cyclic existence.

9. If we can stop the elaborations, we'll stop the misconceptions. If we stop the misconceptions, we can stop the afflictive emotions and negative actions. If we stop the afflictive emotions and actions, and attain the wisdom that directly realizes emptiness, we will liberate ourselves from the suffering of cyclic existence. Those of us who are on the Bodhisattva path will be able to help others do the same. This is all possible through cultivating the correct view of emptiness, a view that will bring transformative spiritual power to our Bodhisattva practices of ethics, generosity, patience, courageous effort, and meditative concentration. This is what Shāntideva's ninth chapter is about.

Review of the last session

1. In the last session we discussed how the sixth perfection of wisdom—the wisdom that directly realizes emptiness—is the main aspect of the Bodhisattva path to enlightenment. To sever the root of all suffering it is necessary that wisdom guides and takes hold of our practice of bodhicitta and the other five perfections of generosity, ethical discipline, patience, enthusiastic effort, and meditative concentration. To do that, we first need to understand relative truth and ultimate truth, and to realize that they are not contradictory but mutually supportive. Relative truth refers to the mere appearance of everything, and ultimate truth refers to the abiding nature of everything as it really is—completely empty of any kind of independent self-existence.

2. His Holiness says when we directly realize the emptiness of independent self-existence, the misconception that generates our afflictive emotions will be removed. It is this misconception—this idea that phenomena actually have an independent self-existence that is *not* merely being superimposed or projected onto them by our conceptual consciousness—that is the very object that is negated and proven to be false when we have a direct realization of emptiness. That misconception is responsible for all the suffering in the world. So it is Shantideva’s purpose going forward in this chapter to refute any person or school (Buddhist or non-Buddhist) holding on to such a wrong view.

The Buddhist schools of tenets

1. It’s important to have a brief overview and understanding of the Buddhist schools of tenets and how they each posit their view of the two truths, because they represent the evolution of philosophical thought that leads to the correct view of reality—an evolutionary process that many of us with philosophical leanings have been going through for much of our lives.

2. Buddhist yogis who have not yet had a direct realization of emptiness (“worldly” yogis) are of two types. The first type are yogis who recognize all phenomena as being empty of inherent existence. Those are the yogis who hold the views of the supreme Prasangika Madhyamika school of tenets. The second type are the yogis who share the common view that phenomena *do* have inherent existence. These are yogis who ascribe to the views of the schools of tenets known as Svatantrika Madhyamika, Chittamatra, Sautrantika and Vaibhashika. The views of those yogis, who assert that all things have inherent existence, are refuted by the logical reasonings presented by the yogis who hold the Prasangika Madhyamika viewpoint, such as Shantideva.

2. Shantideva mentions the different levels of understanding of yogis to point out that the Prasangika system that he represents is superior to any of the other philosophical schools and cannot be contradicted by them. There are two Theravada systems of tenets, Vaibashika and Sautrantika, and two Mahayana systems, Chittamatra and Madhyamaka. These systems present emptiness in different ways, but the final view of the Buddha is the view presented by the Prasangika school, which is a division of the Madhyamaka school.

Vaibhashika school

1. Followers of the Vaibhashika school accept the existence of external objects but reject the idea that consciousness can know itself. Their system also has many other distinctive features which we won’t go into for the purposes of this study. The way the Vaibashikas posit the two truths is as follows. Something is a relative truth if it can be physically destroyed or mentally dissected, so that there is nothing left of that object for the mind to recognize. This means that phenomena that are made up of parts, such as a rock that can be crushed and destroyed into bits and pieces, or consciousness that can be dissected by mental analysis into smaller and smaller moments of itself, have a relative existence. By contrast, something is an ultimate truth if it cannot be physically destroyed or mentally dissected, so that there is something left of that object for the mind to recognize. This means that the smallest partless particle of material form and the shortest indivisible moment of consciousness—neither of which can be destroyed or split—are said to have ultimate existence. These ideas are held in common by both the Vaibhashikas and the Sautrantikas. According to Geshe Drakpa Gelek, the Vaibashikas say that

the self is the collection of aggregates that make up the body—when you see the body, you see the person.

Compiled and edited by Tenzin Sherab/Christopher Moroney