

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
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Shāntideva's *Bodhicharyāvatāra*, The Way of the Bodhisattva
Chapter 9: "Wisdom" Parts 6.4 & 6.5: Emptiness and the Middle Way

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 Kunpel); *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; *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by Wulstan Fletcher and the Padmakara Translation Group; and teachings by Lama Tsongkhapa, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Geshe Drakpa Gelek, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Ven. Robina Courtin, Geshe Lhundup Sopa, Jeffrey Hopkins, Guy Newland, Alexander Berzin, and the guidance of Geshe Lobsang Nima.

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

The Five Paths

1. The first of the five paths of a Bodhisattva, called the *Path of Accumulation*, is actually three paths in one—a lesser, middle, and greater path—in which the aspiring Bodhisattva gradually develops the accumulation of *sonam*, or merit, which is the positive force and potential that builds up in someone who practices with a good heart imbued with wisdom. It is said that it can take a very long time to accumulate the enormous amount of *sonam* needed to complete this path, but His Holiness says that with a genuine attitude of bodhicitta, such vast amounts of *sonam* are quickly and easily achieved.

2. In the second path, called the *Path of Preparation*, the dualistic appearance of subject and object becomes increasingly subtle. Finally, at the initial moment of perceiving emptiness directly, the Bodhisattva enters the third path, called the *Path of Seeing*, in which all dualistic appearances, even the most subtle ones, are completely removed. Then, like water pouring into water, there occurs an experience with no sense of distinction between subject and object.

3. In the fourth path, called the *Path of Meditation*, the Bodhisattva becomes more and more familiar with their realization of emptiness and uses it to cleanse their mind. They are in the process of eliminating the obscurations to liberation from cyclic existence, called *afflictive obscurations*, which include afflictive emotions and negative karma, and the obscurations to omniscience, called *cognitive obscurations*, which involve the mistaken belief that the three spheres of subject, object, and action are inherently existent. When, during this fourth path, a non-conceptual realization of emptiness occurs to the Bodhisattva while in deep meditative absorption, all of their conceptual elaborations are subdued and pacified. But when the Bodhisattva arises from their meditative absorption, their dualistic appearances of subject and object return even though they have had a direct realization of emptiness. Finally there occurs what His Holiness calls 'diamond-like concentration'. Diamond-like concentration acts as the direct remedy to one's cognitive obscurations, and as a result, omniscient wisdom arises.

4. When omniscience occurs the Bodhisattva reaches the fifth and final path, called the *Path of No More Learning* and achieves the enlightened state of a Buddha. Once omniscient wisdom arises all conceptual elaboration and activity vanishes, and it never recurs. The mind has no other object to fix on, no ideas like “It is empty” or “It is not empty.” All conceptual thought and activity is brought to complete stillness. This is a state of equality, unceasing and unborn, which is the very character of space. There is no name for it; it is beyond thought and explanation. It is the unmanifested, inconceivable aspect of a Buddha known as the Dharmakaya, the ultimate essence of the enlightened mind, the fundamental ground of consciousness from which Buddhas arise and manifest for the benefit of others and to which they return after their manifestation dissolves.

Objections of the other schools

1. At this point in Shantideva’s discourse, the other schools of tenets put forth an objection. They argue that if a Buddha has no conceptual mind then how can a Buddha possibly teach the Dharma to sentient beings? It is contradictory to maintain that a Buddha has no conceptual thoughts and at the same time can teach the Dharma.

2. When Shantideva presents these objections of the other schools, we shouldn’t think that he is doing so only to refute the positions of strictly defined schools of philosophy such as the Vaibashikas, Sautrantikas, and Chittamatrins. His exchange of logical arguments are equally applicable to our own ways of thinking. As we each progress in our analysis and search for the ultimate nature of things, we may well arrive at our own conclusions that in some ways are similar to those of the earlier schools of Buddhist tenets. This is when the critical examination and consequentialist approach of the Prasangikas becomes particularly relevant in seeing whether our own internally formed views are justified or not. It becomes a means by which we can weigh our own insights against the light of further possibilities that we have not yet considered, and it enables us to gain even deeper and more far-reaching understanding.

Prasangika’s response

1. Prasangika: [35] *As the wishing jewel and tree of miracles fulfill and satisfy all hopes and wishes, likewise, through their prayers for those who might be trained, the physical appearance of the Conquerors occurs.* The Prasangikas respond to the realist schools’ objections by saying that just as wish-fulfilling trees and gems have no conceptual minds but can still fulfill and satisfy the hopes and wishes of those who pray to them, similarly, although Buddhas have no conceptions, through the force of their having made prayers when they were Bodhisattvas, and through the positive force and potential of sonam/merit accumulated by their disciples, Buddhas spontaneously manifest in forms that physically appear to sentient beings and they turn the wheel of Dharma for the benefit of sentient beings. In reality Buddhas have no conceptual minds although they manifest as if they did.

2. Again, the realist schools object and say that these prayers were made a long time ago when the Buddha was a Bodhisattva. How can such prayers have an effect on that Buddha now?

3. Prasangika: [36] *The healing shrine of the Garuda, even when its builder was long dead, continued even ages thence to remedy and soothe all plagues and venom.* The healing shrine

referred to in this stanza is the Heliodorus pillar, a stone column that was erected around 113 BCE in north-central India. It was given the name *Garuda* by Heliodorus, the ambassador who delivered the pillar as a gift from the ruler of an Indo-Greek city in Punjab to the Brahmin ruler of north-central India. The Garuda is a mythical bird-like creature that appears in both Hindu and Buddhist epics as the vehicle upon which the god Vishnu flies through the sky. The pillar itself bears religious inscriptions and relics, and is an example of what is called a *stambah* in Indian architecture. Shantideva is saying in this stanza that although the builder of the *stambah* pillar, who put special consecrated substances in the shrine of the Garuda around the 1st century BCE had long since passed away, the shrine was continuing to alleviate plagues and poisons for people during Shantideva's time nine centuries later.

4. [37] *Likewise having gained the "shrine of victory" in accordance with their deeds for sake of Buddhahood, though Bodhisattvas pass beyond all grief, they yet can satisfy all ends.* Likewise, in dependence upon the accumulations of *sonam*/merit and wisdom, Bodhisattvas create the 'reliquary' or 'shrine' of a victorious Buddha. Although Bodhisattvas eventually pass beyond all sorrow, as Buddhas they are able to benefit sentient beings both temporally and ultimately. The point is that although the Bodhisattva who made the prayers to become a Buddha and accumulated the merit and wisdom to do so has ceased to exist, the continuum of that consciousness continues to exist as the consciousness of a Buddha. In this way the effects of the Bodhisattva's deeds are able to manifest effortlessly at the time of Buddhahood.

5. Realist schools: [38] *"But how can offerings made to beings freed from all discursiveness give fruit?"* The realist schools say if Buddhas don't have conceptual minds, what is the point of making offerings to them? Since they couldn't have any conceptual conscious acceptance of gifts, how could any merit result from the act of making offerings?

6. Prasangika: [39] *Whether you assert them in the ultimate or relative, merit, so the scriptures say, arises, just as there will be results when Buddhas are considered truly real.* The Prasangikas say that although Buddhas have no conceptual minds, it is taught in the scriptures that whether we make offerings to incarnate Buddhas or to reliquary shrines that only contain their remains, the merit accrued is the same. Likewise, whether our offering is accompanied by our thinking of it as being truly existent or with the understanding that it is empty of inherent existence, we will receive merit according to our degree of faith. The Prasangikas say that dependently arising merit is obtained from making dependently arising offerings to dependently arising Buddhas, in the same way that the realist schools say that inherently existing merit is received from making inherently existing offerings to inherently existing Buddhas.

7. The realists look upon the cause and effect relationship between naturally occurring events as a compelling reason for believing they exist in their own right, independent of any kind of conceptual designation or label that we put upon them. They assert that if they did depend on conceptual designation, how could they ever interact among themselves? The Prasangikas reply that if events were indeed truly independent and self-existent, they would be utterly immutable and isolated from one another. Each entity would intrinsically have its own unchangeable attributes, and it would exist permanently for eternity. This would make any kind of cause and effect interactions among phenomena impossible. The Prasangikas conclude that cause and

effect relations are only possible because events are not independently self-existent. Cause and effect relationships are only able to occur because events and things exist as dependent arisings.

Mahayana debates Hinayana

1. At this point in the text, Shantideva sets up a debate between the Mahayana and Hinayana traditions in Buddhism. Hinayana, which means “small vehicle” in Sanskrit, is a name that was given to the orthodox, conservative schools of Buddhism around the 1st or 2nd century CE by the followers of the Mahayana, or the “great vehicle” tradition in ancient India. The name reflects the Mahayanists’ appraisal of their own tradition as being a complete means for attaining enlightenment, utilizing great compassion combined with wisdom realizing emptiness, based upon their view of what they considered to be the Buddha’s entire teachings. Hinayana is not inferior to Mahayana, but Hinayana does not accept the view of emptiness as being a part of the Buddha’s teaching. The Mahayana-given name of ‘Hinayana’ was not accepted by the conservative schools as referring to a tradition that was common amongst them.

2. The Mahayanists applied the term Hinayana collectively to what are called the Shravaka and Pratyekabuddha paths of Buddhism. Shravakas, or ‘Hearers’, first hear instructions from the Buddha on teachings such as the Four Noble Truths and then by reflecting and meditating on these instructions they attain the state of an Arhat—a being who is liberated from cyclic existence and has achieved nirvana, the cessation of delusions and afflictive emotions. Pratyekabuddhas, or ‘Solitary Realizers’, are said to achieve enlightenment on their own without the help of teachers and guides. Literally “lone Buddhas”, they are not omniscient and are unable to completely teach the Dharma for the benefit of others. Pratyekabuddhas do not bring others to enlightenment and leave no Sangha as a legacy to carry on the Dharma. They are sometimes referred to as “intermediate Buddhas” and as such have not attained the omniscient state of full enlightenment, but rather, from a Mahayana viewpoint, have attained a level of Arhatship that is more broad in scope than the Shravakas’.

3. Hinayanists: [40] *“We’re free through seeing the (Four) Truths—what use is it to us, this view of emptiness?”* Prasangika Mahayanist: *But as the scriptures have themselves proclaimed, without this path there can be no enlightenment.* The Hinayanists claim that since they can achieve liberation from the suffering of cyclic existence by gaining a direct realization of the Four Noble Truths, what is the point of striving to realize the emptiness of inherent existence as it is set forth in Shantideva’s preceding verses? Of course, it is in the Mahayana that the emptiness of all phenomena is explained, and Shantideva refutes the Hinayanists by pointing out that in many of the discourses given by the Buddha, it is clearly stated that if one grasps onto reality, lacking the view of emptiness, there is no liberation from the suffering of cyclic existence. Those sutras state that beings who wish to follow the spiritual paths of Shravakas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Bodhisattvas should all train in wisdom realizing emptiness. Therefore, all three levels of awakening are impossible without such a realization.

4. Prasangika Mahayanist: [41] *You say the Mahayana has no certainty. But how do you substantiate your own tradition?* Hinayanists: *“Because it is accepted by both parties.”* Mahayanists: *But at the outset, you yourself lacked proof!* The Hinayanists do not accept the Mahayana scriptures as the pure word of the Buddha, but consider them to be writings composed after the Buddha had passed into nirvana by those who were merely intellectuals and

therefore those scriptures should not be relied upon. They say the Mahayanists cannot prove their point by citing sutras whose authenticity is in question.

5. Since the Hinayanists do not accept the Mahayana as the genuine teaching of the Buddha, the question of how they prove the authenticity of their own scriptures is now asked by the Mahayanists. The Hinayanists say that the authenticity of their scriptures is demonstrated by the fact that they are accepted by both Hinayanists and Mahayanists. Therefore they say that their scriptures are firmly established beyond question. But the Mahayanists respond by saying that those scriptures were not established as the word of the Buddha for the Hinayana followers at the time they were born—when they didn't even believe in the Hinayana tradition yet and hadn't accepted its validity. It was only accepted by them on the basis of certain reasons.

6. Prasangika Mahayanist: [42] *The reasons why you trust in your tradition may likewise be applied to Mahayana. Moreover, if accord between two parties shows the truth, the Vedas and the rest are also true.* The reasons for trusting in the Hinayana scriptures as being the word of the Buddha can equally be applied to the Mahayana scriptures. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says the three criteria or reasons for establishing certain teachings as being the Buddha's words are (1) the guidance contained in them is permitted in the Vinaya, the rules and precepts for fully ordained monks and nuns of Buddhist Sanghas, (2) they relate to the Buddhist canonical scriptures known as Sutras, many of which are regarded as records of the oral teachings of Gautama Buddha, and (3) they relate to and are not incompatible with the system of Buddhist philosophy, psychology, and ethics known as the Abhidharma that emerged after the time of the Buddha, around the 3rd century BCE. Those criteria are satisfied for the Mahayana canon. Furthermore, if one assumes the authenticity and truth of the Hinayana canon simply on the grounds that two parties—in this case, the Hinayanists and the Mahayanists—agree on it, then any religious tradition that two parties agree upon, such as the large body of Hindu religious texts originating in ancient India called the Vedas, as well as all other religious texts in the world, would have to be considered authentic and true as well.

7. Hinayanists: [43] *"Mahayana is at fault because it is contested."* Prasangika Mahayanist: *But Buddhist texts are questioned by extremists, while Buddhists also vie among themselves; and so your own tradition you must now abandon.* The Hinayanists say there is much dispute surrounding the Mahayana scriptures; therefore their credibility should be questioned. The Mahayanists respond by saying that is a poor reason. The validity of the Hinayana canon as a whole is accepted by some Hinayana schools and rejected by others. In fact, there were at least 18 different Hinayana schools of ancient Buddhism that were not in full agreement with one another. In addition, one would have to say that non-Buddhists don't believe in Buddhist scriptures, so the validity of the Hinayana canon is contested by non-Buddhists as well.

Are the Mahayana scriptures authentic?

1. Arguments for the authenticity of the Mahayana scriptures are found in the writings of Shantideva, Nagarjuna, and Maitreya. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says the fact that its authenticity has been questioned is quite understandable. In the Mahayana sutras many extraordinary mysteries are discussed which the minds of ordinary beings like ourselves cannot comprehend. When we fail to understand something, we have a tendency to doubt its validity.

2. His Holiness says if only the Hinayana and not the Mahayana sutras were the Buddha's teachings, then Buddhist spirituality would be limited and deprived of its richness and strength. If the Mahayana canon were not the Buddha's teachings, then one could ask whether it would be possible to attain the omniscience of Buddhahood by means of the Hinayana path alone. Even the Hinayana scriptures acknowledge the different spiritual paths of Hearers/Shravakas, Solitary Realizers/Pratyekabuddhas, and Bodhisattvas. But without the Mahayana, how could one even proceed on the Bodhisattva path? How is the awakening of a Buddha experienced? It would be extremely difficult to set out on that path solely on the basis of the Hinayana scriptures.

3. One cannot realize emptiness or attain the Nirvana of Buddhahood on the basis of the Hinayana scriptures and treatises alone. Without a realization of emptiness, Nirvana cannot be attained, and the "Truth of Cessation (of suffering)" would be nothing more than words. Therefore, if the authenticity of the Mahayana is not established, it is virtually impossible for the Hinayana's authenticity to be established.

4. The widely celebrated teachings that the historical Buddha gave in India are the Hinayana discourses. But apart from those, His Holiness the Dalai Lama believes the Buddha gave Mahayana teachings to a small number of beings who were pure in action, or karma. For example, the teachings on emptiness found in the Heart Sutra that took place on Vultures Peak in India are recorded as having been given in the midst of thousands of Arhats and hundreds of thousands of Bodhisattvas. Vultures Peak is quite small today and it probably was quite small at the time of the Buddha. There is not enough room on the little hill at Vultures Peak for that many beings, whether they were humans or beings with more subtle kinds of bodies. So they probably were not all assembled on that hill as we perceive it.

5. When the Buddha gave Mahayana teachings there, they were heard by disciples who were pure in action; and to them that site appeared broad and vast. The Buddha did not offer Mahayana teachings to the public; they would not have been of benefit. His most public, or celebrated, discourses were given in the presence of such Shravakas as Shariputra and Maudgalyayana. In the circle of his disciples who were pure in action were Maitreya and Manjushri—bodhisattvas who appeared in the form of gods. To such disciples the Buddha appeared to teach in the presence of these beings as well as Shravaka disciples.

6. According to His Holiness, to the smallest number of disciples of extraordinarily pure action the Buddha gave tantric teachings. To some of those disciples he generated a mandala with himself as the deity within it, engaging in meditative concentration on non-duality; but the chief deity in the mandala appeared in the form of the Buddha as a monk. Then the even subtler mysteries were taught to disciples of even greater purity who, by practicing higher forms of method and wisdom, gained realization of non-dual ultimate and phenomenal reality. For such disciples there were no obstructions to the Buddha casting off the form of a monk and appearing as a richly adorned deity or as a World Monarch. For them it was very meaningful for the Buddha to appear in such guises.

7. It is not possible for gross consciousness to transform into omniscient wisdom; only a subtle mind can be so transformed. To facilitate this the Buddha revealed practices to focus the mind

on the channels, wind energies, and drops of the subtle human anatomy. These were given only to those disciples of the utmost purity. The channels, winds, and drops are explained in **Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth** by Lati Rinpoche and Jeffrey Hopkins.

8. So, to disciples of increasing purity, ability and rarity the Buddha gave more private guidance in the subtle mysteries. It appears that such teachings are included in the Mahayana sutras. There is no certainty, though, that all of the tantras were taught while the historical Buddha was alive. To an extremely small number of pure disciples the Buddha could appear today. They could encounter Vajradhara, the King of the Tantras, and could have tantras and pure guidance revealed to them. This is possible even though more than twenty-five hundred years have gone by since the historical Buddha passed away. There is no possibility, after the Buddha's death, of additions being made to his public discourses. But His Holiness is of the opinion that teachings to disciples of pure action do not necessarily have to be given during the historical Buddha's lifetime.

9. According to His Holiness, the distinction of "Great Vehicle" and "Small Vehicle" was not made to demonstrate contempt for the Hinayana. Followers of the Mahayana should study and practice the Hinayana teachings. The distinction between the two Vehicles is made in terms of their differing presentations of (1) the basis of spiritual practice, (2) the extent of the motivation and practice along the spiritual path and (3) the degrees of awakening due to differing levels of purity and realization. The terms "Hinayana" and "Mahayana" were not created out of disrespect or sectarianism. Basically there is nothing wrong with these labels, though they have become somewhat uncomfortable to use. For this reason there are people who think the two terms should be dispensed with.

10. Some people suggest that the terms "Shravaka Vehicle", "Pratyekabuddha Vehicle", and "Bodhisattva Vehicle" should be used. Those terms are found in the Hinayana scriptures and they are in accord with the Mahayana. One could simply use these three terms instead, without condemning either Hinayana or Mahayana.

A logical argument for the authenticity of the Mahayana

1. [44] *The true monk is the root of Dharma, and to be a monk is difficult indeed. It's hard for minds enmeshed in thoughts to pass beyond the bonds of suffering.* Now begins a logical argument for the authenticity of the Mahayana. Without the view of emptiness as it is revealed in the Mahayana sutras, it is impossible to attain any state of awakening. The root of the Dharma, the perfect doctrine, is the true monk—the perfect monk, but to be a perfect monk is not an easy matter. A perfect monk is one who has abandoned negative emotion. It is difficult for a monk to achieve that because it is impossible to eliminate negative emotions without a realization of emptiness. If the afflictive, negative emotions are not eliminated, one cannot become an Arhat and achieve Nirvana. Even if one has a realization of impermanence and the other aspects of the Four Noble Truths, that is not enough. What is crucial is the wisdom realizing emptiness that completely eradicates afflictive emotion. That alone is the perfect remedy. For this reason, those who reject the doctrine of emptiness and whose minds are still engrossed in concepts will not be able to attain Nirvana and the release from the suffering of cyclic existence.

2. Without the complete destruction of clinging to an independently existing self, there is no way to overcome afflictive emotion; and it is only through the realization of emptiness that clinging to the self is uprooted. No other way is possible. Even if the habitual tendency to assume that phenomena have an inherent, independent self-existence has been temporarily suppressed by certain kinds of meditative concentration, it will later reassert itself in much the same way as when one emerges from a meditative absorption of non-perception. Consequently, there is no other way of overcoming afflictive emotion than the realization that the self, the conceived object of the innate process of ego-clinging, does not exist inherently.

The Selflessness of Persons and the Selflessness of Phenomena

1. The Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas are in complete agreement about the need to realize selflessness, but they do not consider selflessness and emptiness to be the same thing. For them, emptiness means the denial of the existence of phenomena such as material form—and it can be a frightening, nihilistic notion. However, the recognition of the nonexistence of a personal self which has never at any time existed, for them is the perfect view in accordance with the true nature of things.

2. But in fact, there is no difference between these two assertions of emptiness: that of the Selflessness of Persons, and that of the the Selflessness of Phenomena. Selflessness of Persons means that the person—the “I”—is merely a conceptual imputation or label made on the basis of the five aggregates (skt. *skandhas*) that produce one’s experience of existence. These are, (1) *form*: the matter, body, or material form of any being or other object of awareness, (2) *feeling*: the pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensory experiences triggered by any object of the six sense consciousnesses (eye, ear, nose, taste, touch, and mental), (3) *discrimination*: the sensory and mental process that distinguishes, recognizes, and labels things, (4) *mental formations*: the habitual mental activities, propensities, decisions, and subtle karmic imprints occurring on a mental continuum, and (5) *consciousness*: the awareness of existence, internally and externally. The person—the label “me” or “I”—has no objective existence of its own at all. Similarly, the Selflessness of Phenomena means that even aggregations or collections of parts, like a body, for example, or a pot, are imputed and labeled on the basis of their assembled parts. They are empty of any kind of objective existence in and of themselves. The only difference between these two emptinesses lies in the thing considered to be empty—i.e. the type of self that’s being negated by realizing its utter lack of inherent existence. Realizing the Selflessness of Phenomena undermines clinging to phenomena in general, while a realization of the Selflessness of Persons acts against the root of cyclic existence. Aside from this, there is no difference between these two modes of emptiness.

3. The Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas, however, claim that there is a big difference between the Selflessness of Persons and the Selflessness of Phenomena. They also say that the realization of the Selflessness of Phenomena is unnecessary: liberation from cyclic existence and its suffering is attained merely through the realization of the Selflessness of Persons. This means that, for them, existent phenomena are not empty, i.e. they do inherently exist, whereas the personal self, which has never at any time existed, is as unreal as a rabbit’s horns. Therefore, they have no use for the belief in the Selflessness of Phenomena. And so they debate, without realizing that a personal self, which is imputed in dependence on the five aggregates, is in fact the very same thing as the phenomenal self.

4. If we consider this carefully, we'll see that the absence of a personal self and the absence of a phenomenal self are of the same taste. We'll say things like "my arms, my legs, my mind," or "your hair, your smile, your personality," when referring to a person, whether it's ourself or someone else, in the same way that we'll say, "the chair's arms, the table's legs, the iPhone's design," or "the planet's atmosphere, the moon's light, the ocean's floor," and so on when referring to any other kind of phenomena that are not persons. We impute the notion of a 'self' onto everything, when in fact, the self—whether of the person or phenomena—is merely a particular label—a conceptual idea—we assign to a particular collection of parts that are interdependently connected to each other and everything else ad infinitum. So there is actually no difference between the Selflessness of Persons and the Selflessness of Phenomena in terms of emptiness.

5. It is necessary for us to understand that the Selflessness of Persons is just an instance or category of the Selflessness of Phenomena. The primordial wisdom which realizes the Selflessness of Phenomena can be regarded as the general term, while the wisdom that realizes the Selflessness of Persons can be taken as a specific instance, a lesser category. It's like the relationship between the genus *tree* and the species *juniper*. Conversely, the belief that phenomena have an inherent, independent self-existence corresponds to the ignorance of the nature of reality in general, whereas the belief that a person has an inherent, independent self-existence is a particular case of this.

6. From the specific belief in an independently existing personal self, afflictive obscurations like greed, anger, fear, craving, shame, and so on arise. From the general belief in independently self-existing phenomena, cognitive obscurations arise, namely the concepts of the three spheres. The three spheres refers to the mistaken idea that, in any given action, the subject, object, and the action occurring between them each are real, independently existing entities. It should be understood that a Bodhisattva who realizes both the Selflessness of Persons and the Selflessness of Phenomena has the wisdom that overcomes both afflictive and cognitive obscurations, while those on the Shravaka and Pratyekabuddha paths are only able to eradicate afflictive emotions.

7. The Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas say that afflictive emotions are eliminated through having a realization of the Four Noble Truths and that is how the cessation of Nirvana is attained, in the same way as a fire goes out when its fuel has all been consumed. However, it has been shown by the Prasangika Mahayanists that it is impossible to know ultimate truth—which is emptiness itself—without the realization of emptiness. There is a further drawback to the position of the Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas in that the realization of the Selflessness of Persons leads only to the elimination of the afflictive emotions and therefore not to ultimate liberation.

8. Prasangika Mahayanist: [45] *You say there's liberation in the instant that defilements are entirely forsaken. Yet those who from defilements are set free continue to display the influence of karma.* Hinayanist: [46] *"Only for a while, for it is certain that the causes of rebirth, their cravings, are no more."* The Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas maintain that by simply overcoming afflictive emotion, they will be liberated from all suffering. They say that as soon as all of their negative emotions are uprooted, they will become Arhats and liberation from cyclic

existence and its suffering will occur. Even though the effects of their karma may continue during the remainder of their physical existence, due to their past karmas and emotions, nevertheless, since all craving, which is the cause for taking future rebirth in cyclic existence, has been extinguished, they are certain that they will never take another rebirth.

9. Prasangika Mahayanist: [46] *They have no craving, granted, through defilement, but like their ignorance, why should they not have craving undefiled?* The Mahayanists agree that the Shravaka and Pratyekabuddha Arhats are no longer subject to rebirth resulting from karma and afflictive emotions. They deny however that they remain in the solitary “lights out” peace of nirvana, like a blown-out candle or extinguished flame as they believe they do. On the contrary, nothing is holding back all the causes for the appearance of what is called a subtle “mental” body. A mental body is similar to a body made of subtle particles—not the subtlest, like the body of a Buddha, but a little bit like a dream body that is produced by mental consciousness. Additionally, although Arhats do not have afflictive craving due to clinging at an inherently existing self from having meditated on and realized the Selflessness of Persons, they do have a non-afflictive craving because they have not meditated on and perfectly realized the Selflessness of Phenomena. Since they have not completely overcome the cause of ignorance, they are not in any way immune to its effect.

10. Prasangika Mahayanist: [47] *This craving is produced by virtue of sensation, and sensation, this they surely have. Concepts linger still within their minds; and it is to these concepts that they cling.* Craving arises from feelings, or sensations, and even Arhats experience sensations. On account of their propensity toward ignorance because they have not realized the Selflessness of Phenomena, Arhats are not completely liberated. The continuum of their subtle aggregates is not severed and it remains for them to enter the Mahayana path. The Prasangikas assert that such Arhats don’t take rebirth in the world since the causes for reappearing in samsara, namely, negative emotions, are no longer present. Nevertheless, since they do not have a perfect realization of emptiness—the lack of inherent existence of phenomena—their minds are still oriented toward conceptuality and they have a feeling of avoidance or aversion toward the idea of ‘samsara’, and a feeling of craving or clinging to the idea of ‘nirvana’. They are not in a state of perfect peace that is free from conceptuality.

11. [48] *The mind that has not realized voidness, may be halted, but will once again arise, just as from a non-perceptual absorption. Therefore one must train in emptiness.* The minds of such Shravaka and Pratyekabuddha Arhats do not have a realization of emptiness that is free from all extremes, and they still conceive of existence and nonexistence. As a result, their minds come to a halt and rest for a time in the expanse of cessation/nirvana—only to manifest and take rebirth later on. Their minds’ latent propensity for ignorance, as well as their lack of afflictive emotions, act as the continual causes for the generation of their mental bodies. Because they have not gained a perfect realization of emptiness (the antidote through which all concepts vanish), they either remain in a condition similar to the absorption of non-perception that occurs in the fourth Bodhisattva Path of Meditation, or else they achieve an unconscious state of mind that is lacking in sensation or awareness. Therefore, if one wishes to go totally beyond sorrow one should meditate on emptiness, for without it, it is impossible to transcend suffering either temporarily or ultimately.

12. The *Saddharmapundarika-sutra* (known as the *Lotus Sutra*) has this to say: *Thus you say that you have passed beyond all pain, but from the sorrows of samsara only are you free. You have not yet transcended every misery; the Buddha's highest vehicle [Mahayana] you should now pursue.* And Nagarjuna says in the *Bodhichittavivarana* (Exposition of Bodhicitta): *The Arhat Shravakas, till the Buddhas call them, rest in wisdom bodies, drunk on concentration. Roused [by the Buddhas], they take on various forms, and work with love for beings' sake. Merit and wisdom gathered in, they reach the awakening of Buddhahood.*

Other objections concerning the authenticity of the Mahayana scriptures

1. [49] *If all the words recorded in the sutras you admit to be the Buddha's perfect speech, why don't you now accept the greater part of Mahayana, with which your sutras are in perfect harmony?* [Note: according to some commentaries, stanzas 49 to 51 have either been misplaced and are not in their correct position, or they were not composed by Shantideva. If they did belong in the text, some commentaries say they should be inserted between verses 43 and 44. The Padmakara Translation Group, whose translation we are using, has here followed the positioning of Khenpo Kunzang Pelden and Mipham Rinpoche.] The point of this verse is that since most of the Mahayana sutras are similar to the Hinayana sutras, they should also be acknowledged as the Buddha's teachings by the Hinayanists.

2. [50] *If due to just a single jarring element, the whole is held to be at fault, why should a single sutra in agreement with your texts not vindicate the rest as Buddha's teaching?* If one concludes that all the Mahayana sutras are corrupt on the grounds that one of them doesn't meet the criteria for being the Buddha's words, then, conversely, one could equally make the claim that all Mahayana sutras are authentic on the grounds that one of them *does* meet the criteria for being the Buddha's words.

3. [51] *Mahakashyapa himself and others could not sound the depths of such a teaching. Who will therefore say that they're to be rejected just because they are not grasped by you?* In terms of common appearances, Mahakashyapa and others did not fathom the Mahayana sutras. So who would say that they are not to be accepted simply because you do not understand them? [Note: Mahakashyapa was one of the principal disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha]

Emptiness is the real solution

4. [52] *To linger and abide within samsara, freed from every craving and from every fear, in order to achieve the good of those who ignorantly suffer: such is the fruit that emptiness will bear.* Someone who has realized emptiness doesn't remain in samsara due to attachment, or the power of their emotional and mental afflictions and negative karma. Nor do they fall to the extreme of nihilism due to the fear that arises because of the many kinds of suffering that occur within the realms of samsara. The result of realizing emptiness is a person who can eternally benefit sentient beings with enthusiasm, great compassion, and joy. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that we need to integrate our awakened heart and mind of bodhicitta with the realization of emptiness. In this way, due to wisdom we do not remain trapped in the cycle of existence, and due to compassion we do not remain in the solitary tranquility of Nirvana. For the sake of sentient beings those of us who realize emptiness and the mirage-like appearance of phenomena will continue to dwell in the world, not out of craving or fear, for we'll be freed from those two extremes. Though we dwell in the world, we'll be free of its defects, like lotuses that

grow in the mud. The ability to live in the world in such a way is the fruit of realizing emptiness. His Holiness says this implies that great compassion is also the fruit of realizing emptiness. It is said that with those two qualities of great compassion and the wisdom realizing emptiness it is possible for us to serve the needs of sentient beings forever. On the other hand, it is precisely through not understanding the equality of samsara and nirvana that a mind sees faults in samsara and advantages in nirvana and leans exclusively toward nirvana.

5. [53] *Therefore it is incorrect to find fault with this view of emptiness. And so, with every doubt abandoned, we should meditate on it!* Therefore it's a mistake to find fault with the view of emptiness. Rather than being troubled by doubts, we should meditate upon it correctly.

6. [54] *Afflictive passion and the veil upon cognition—the cure for their obscurity is emptiness. How then shall they not meditate on this who wish for swift attainment of omniscience?* Emptiness is the only cure for the darkness of our afflictive emotional obscurations (the principal obstacle to liberation from samsara) and of our cognitive obscurations (which obstruct omniscience). If we wish to swiftly rid ourselves of these two obscuring veils and attain enlightenment we should, by all means, meditate on emptiness.

7. [55] *Whatever is the source of suffering, let that be the object of our fear. But voidness will allay our every grief, how could it be for us a thing of dread?* It's right to fear something that causes suffering in this or future lives, but since a realization of emptiness completely uproots all suffering, how can it be a cause for fear? There is nothing about a realization of emptiness to be afraid of.

8. [56] *If such a thing as “I” exists indeed, then terrors, granted, will torment it. But since no self or “I” exists at all, what is there left for fears to terrify?* If there truly exists an inherent, separate “I” that is not actually interconnected with anything, alone and completely susceptible to fear, then of course anything frightening can and will upset it. But since there is no “I” that exists in that way, who is there to experience fear? No one at all. Fearfulness should therefore be thrown aside. Instead, we should be quick to meditate on emptiness.

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