

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
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Shāntideva's *Bodhicharyāvatāra*, The Way of the Bodhisattva
Chapter 9: "Wisdom", Parts 7.1–7.3: The Selflessness of Persons

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.

Session 23, Part 7.1

Two aspects of emptiness

1. In this section of the wisdom chapter, Shantideva begins an extensive explanation of both the Selflessness of Persons and the Selflessness of Phenomena, or what His Holiness the Dalai Lama calls in his commentary, "personal identitylessness" and "phenomenal identitylessness". All emptinesses are included in the categories of the Selflessness of Persons and the Selflessness of Phenomena. Of these two, Shantideva starts with the logical reasoning that supports the Selflessness of Persons, as this is the first of these two aspects of emptiness for us to understand and realize.

2. Up to this point Shantideva has presented emptiness as it is discussed from the viewpoint of the highest Prasāngika Madhyamaka (Middle Way) school of Buddhist tenets, and has shown that this is the most profound and far-reaching theory of emptiness. The Chittamatra (Mind Only) school of tenets affirms the Selflessness of Phenomena, or phenomenal identitylessness, but for the Chittamatrins it is merely the absence of external objects, meaning that nothing exists separate from, external to, or independent of consciousness. However, they assert what they term the "mind-basis-of-all" as being the actual person—the self that is found to exist when it is sought—because it is the entity that passes into another body from one lifetime to the next. His Holiness says this approach doesn't go far enough for us to be able to discover subtle emptiness or selflessness, which is the lack of inherent, independent self-existence. For this reason, the way the Chittamatrins' present emptiness is refuted by the Prasāngikas.

Intellectual delusion and innate delusion

1. There are two ways that a mind can be deluded: intellectually and innately. Intellectually formed delusions are present in the minds of those of us who have been influenced by views other than those that are instinctively our own. For instance, we may hear the Chittamatra argument that the mind-basis-of-all is the actual self and being convinced by this argument, we

consciously adopt the Chittamatra viewpoint. Or, we may hear some other authoritative source set forth their belief of the way things are and based on their arguments we adopt their view. This is quite common among humans. If we were to adopt these views of reality as true and they were in fact not true, these would be examples of intellectually formed delusions. Among the beings of this world, intellectually formed delusions are generally present only in the minds of human beings, whereas innate delusions are a feature of the minds of all sentient beings.

2. As far as innate delusions are concerned, all of us—human or otherwise—have a natural, instinctive tendency to view ourselves and the objects of our world exactly the way they appear to us: as truly existing entities—separate and independent of one another. This is something that we don't need to be persuaded into accepting; there is no evident indoctrination process that causes us to have this view. We accept it without criticism or question, as if this were the true nature of things. This kind of delusion is innate. But what if things don't actually exist that way? What would it mean for our personal happiness and that of others if the self, the "I", the "me"—the *ego* that we cling to so tenaciously, doesn't actually exist the way it appears to?

How the self appears to us

1. All the suffering and fearfulness of samsara—the recurring cycle of birth, aging, sickness and death—arises from the innate delusion of ego self-grasping. This grasping and clinging to a "me" is the result of our seemingly hardwired idea that the self exists as an inherent, independently existing entity, solitary and distinct from the world and other selves, centered in itself, seeking comfort and happiness but frequently experiencing neediness and dissatisfaction. This is how the self appears to us. This is the reason we develop grasping attachment toward some entities and strong aversion toward others. Our egos develop a craving desire for those entities or things we think we want and need. Therefore we are attracted to those things and attached to having them. Conversely, our egos have either a disinterest in or aversion toward those things we don't think we want or need, and therefore we are not attracted or attached to them. However, when something or someone stands in the way of our ego getting what it wants, we develop strong forms of aversion, such as jealousy, anger, hatred, and fear. Additionally, our own ego-driven actions of body, speech and mind often result in our own painful experiences of guilt and depression. So we can see, without exception, that all of the disturbing emotions we have and the negative actions we engage in as a result of those emotions are generated because of this idea of ego self-grasping. *This* is the delusional idea that obscures our happiness and keeps us trapped and bound to the suffering of cyclic existence. In order to be free of this innate delusion of self-grasping and discover what the self actually is, we must recognize the identity of this self-grasping—the nature of the ego that's in question here. If that self's appearance isn't clear to our mind we won't be able to realize the non-existence of it.

2. When we dream, all kinds of things may come to our mind, but we recognize these as being nothing more than appearances. Similarly, magicians' tricks or the wizardry of special effects may create different kinds of illusory appearances, but we understand that they do not exist objectively. Likewise, all entities—ourselves, others, cyclic existence, and liberation—exist merely by the power of our minds and conventional agreement. In no way do they exist by the power of the objects that we label and designate, such as "person", "house", "career", or "planet". Those objects actually exist through the power of our minds and conventional agreement, but the way they appear to us is otherwise. Because of our habituation to ignorance since time without

beginning, all the things that appear to our eye, ear, nose, tongue, tactile, and mental sense consciousnesses do not at all seem as if they exist by the power of conventional, conceptual designation. Everything *appears* as if it exists inherently and independently from the side of the labeled, designated objects that serve as the bases for imputation. In other words, the inherent existence of the object is subjectively conceived *by the consciousness* rather than existing that way independently of the consciousness. Objects and entities do undeniably exist. But because they do not exist independently or inherently, from their own side, they must exist by the power of subjective convention and conceptual designation. There is no alternative. All entities, whether they be persons or other types of phenomena, exist due to their being conceptually designated by the mind onto something that they are not.

The innate self-grasping of persons

1. Before being able realize the Selflessness of Persons, we first have to understand the innate self-grasping of persons, and recognize the nature of this grasping. The innate self-grasping of persons is the innate mind that conceives the individual to be inherently existent. When someone speaks to us we never think, “They are talking to my body,” or “They are talking to my mind,” or “They are talking to my ears.” Instead, we automatically think, “They are talking to *me*.” We think that they are speaking to a ‘me’ or ‘I’ that somehow exists inherently unto itself, almost as if it were some kind of independent owner of the body and mind. Such a vividly appearing and recognizable ‘I’ unrelated to the body and mind is called the ‘conceived object of the innate self-grasping of persons’. This is a subtle object that is refuted or negated by the view of emptiness. The purpose of all of Shantideva’s following lines of reasoning that establish the Selflessness of Persons is to uproot this vividly appearing ‘I’.

Finding the ‘I’

1. As was said before, everything that appears to the minds of ordinary people is grasped as being truly self-existent. In reality, however, true self-existence is utterly non-existent. If the I truly exists in the way it appears, then we should be able to find it when we look for it. And if we were to find it, it would have to exist in one of three places: in one of the aggregates of form and consciousness that constitute an individual, in the collection of these aggregates, or somewhere other than these two places. But what we discover is that the ‘I’ cannot be found in any one of them.

2. Why can’t it be found in one particular aggregate? [57] *The teeth, the hair, the nails are not the “I”, and “I” is not the bones or blood, the mucus from the nose and phlegm are not the “I”, and neither is it made of lymph or pus. [58] The “I” is not the body’s grease or sweat, the lungs and liver likewise do not constitute it. Neither are the inner organs “I”, Nor yet the body’s excrement and waste. [59] The flesh and skin are not the “I”, and neither are the body’s warmth and breath. The cavities within the frame are not the “I”, and “I” is not accounted for in sixfold consciousness [eye, ear, nose, tongue, tactile, and mental consciousnesses].* Individually each of these parts cannot be the ‘I’ because in that case it would follow that the person would have as many ‘I’s as they have parts. The brain can’t be the ‘I’ because from our own experience we know this isn’t the case. When we refer to the brain we say, “my brain.” We think of it as belonging to the ‘I’ so it obviously isn’t the ‘I’.

3. Many of us think that the collection of all the parts together is the 'I'. But since it has already been shown that there is no 'I' to be found among any of the parts that form this collection, how can the collection itself be the 'I'? It is also clear that the 'I' cannot be found anywhere other than among the five aggregates of (1) form, (2) sensory feeling (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, tactile, and mental sense consciousnesses), (3) discrimination, (4) habitual mental formations, and (5) conscious awareness. These five aggregates comprise our entire experience of existence. When we investigate in this way we realize that the 'I' can't be found in them. Since it exists merely as an imputation that depends upon the collection of mental and physical aggregates, the 'I' as such has no real existence of its own. And yet, when it appears to our mind, it does not seem to be a mere conceptual designation upon the aggregates; instead it appears to exist objectively.

The rope and the snake

1. The situation we find ourselves in with the 'I' is comparable to what might happen to us in the gathering twilight when we can't see very clearly. We see a striped rope and think that it's a snake—a conviction that will remain unshakeable in us for as long as there is not enough light for us to see what's actually there. At that time there is no perception of a striped rope at all. In a similar way to which we grasp this rope as a snake, we grasp the person as being inherently existent. Both the snake and the inherently existent 'I' are the objects of their respective misconceptions. The striped rope and our aggregates are similar in that they act as the bases for such misconceptions. If we reach out in the gloom trying to locate the snake, even if our hand doesn't encounter anything, it will still be difficult for us to shake off the feeling that the snake is there, and we'll be filled with fear. In a similar way, if in our ignorance we grasp at an inherently existing 'I', we subject ourselves to the fears of cyclic existence. Now if a bright lamp were to shine light into the darkness where we find ourselves, illuminating everything, no snake would be seen, but only a rope, and we would realize our mistake. We would realize that a snake never actually was there, and we would immediately be released from the grip of fear. In a similar way, by realizing the complete and utter absence of an inherently existing 'I' we cease to grasp at it as well and are liberated from the fears and suffering of cyclic existence.

2. The mistaken mind does not perceive a striped rope but only a snake which has been imputed onto the rope; likewise our innate self-grasping of persons does not apprehend our aggregates of body and mind but only an inherently existent, vividly appearing 'I' imputed onto those aggregates. Both of these false conceptions in turn give rise to fear. In order to uproot these misconceptions it is necessary first to recognize their respective conceived objects—the snake and the inherently existing 'I'—and then realize that they are utterly non-existent. Once we understand that the inherently existent 'I' is non-existent, then by continually meditating and becoming familiar with its non-existence, all grasping at an inherently existent 'I' can be completely eradicated. Since this grasping is the root of all suffering in cyclic existence, through uprooting it we also come to uproot all suffering.

3. This is something we need to reflect upon carefully. If we examine these examples and understand the implications they have in relation to how we exist, this will eventually lead us to a recognition of the subtle object that is negated through a realization of emptiness. The snake we apprehend on the basis of the rope and the inherently existing 'I' that we apprehend on the basis of the aggregates are very similar; both are merely apprehended by the mind and have no existence at all. Once we recognize the inherently existent 'I', we recognize the subtle object to be

negated. From there we will be able to realize emptiness. First we must recognize exactly what has to be negated, and only then can its emptiness be determined. Initially we may have some difficulty with this investigation and see many contradictions in what is being taught. But if we reflect seriously for a long time our minds will eventually become like clear space, free from the clouds of confusion.

The self exists as a mere conceptual designation

1. There are some great thinkers, such as the sixth century Madhyamaka Buddhist philosopher Bhavaviveka, who identify mental consciousness as the ‘I’. But His Holiness the Dalai Lama says if we logically analyze this and equate the ‘I’ with mental consciousness, we would wind up having to express it in some way equivalent to “the mental consciousness’s mental consciousness” or “the mind’s mind” instead of the way we naturally will say, “my consciousness,” or “my mind.” To do this would mistakenly equate the actor and the action. Therefore, His Holiness says consciousness cannot be identified as the self. In short, nothing whatsoever among the four physical elements, space, or consciousness is found to be the self. Nothing is identified that way by the Enlightened Beings, nor is it identified that way by us, nor will the self be found to exist that way in the future.

2. As it says in Nagarjuna’s *Jewel Garland*, there is a person, a self, who undeniably exists—a person who engages in actions, experiences their results, who is the agent or actor in the cycle of existence and in liberation. There is an ‘I’ that exists in dependence upon the body and mind. The self does exist, and its location can be nowhere but the mental and physical aggregates of consciousness and form that constitute the entire experience of the person. It cannot possibly exist apart from them. However, not any one of those aggregates, nor the assembly of all of them, nor the continuum of any one of them can be identified as being the self. For those reasons, the self can only exist as a mere conceptual designation—a label—upon the mental and physical aggregates.

Session 24, Part 7.2

The Buddha’s teachings are to be taken as personal advice

1. In the second part of this section of the wisdom chapter that expressly addresses the Selflessness of Persons, Shantideva presents a refutation of the Samkhya Hindu theory of the self. It’s important to remember that Shantideva’s purpose for these arguments and debates is not merely to engage in some kind of intellectual exercise to prove who’s correct and who’s incorrect. These debates go to the very heart of what suffering is and the ignorance that causes it. Shantideva is not simply talking about suffering and ignorance in general, he’s specifically talking about *our* suffering—yours and mine—and the ignorance that is at its root. All of the Buddha’s teachings are to be taken as personal instruction and advice. They are as relevant to us in the world today as they were to those in Shantideva’s world of eighth-century India.

2. In the last session we discussed two ways that a mind can be deluded: intellectually and innately. As was said previously, all the suffering and fear we experience in cyclic existence arises from our innate delusion of ego self-grasping. We have a hardwired idea that our self exists as an independent entity, solitary and distinct from the world and other selves, centered in itself, seeking comfort and happiness but frequently experiencing dissatisfaction and neediness. This is why we develop craving desire for those entities or things we think we want

and need, and have either a disinterest or aversion for those things we don't think we want or need. When something or someone stands in the way of us getting what we want, we develop strong forms of aversion such as jealousy, anger, hatred, and fear. To make matters worse, our own ego-driven actions of body, speech and mind frequently result in our own painful experiences of guilt, shame, and depression.

3. This innate delusional idea of ego self-grasping obscures our happiness and keeps us trapped and bound to the fear and suffering of cyclic existence. In order to be free of this self-grasping we must identify the nature of this innate delusion—the ego self-grasping that's in question. If the appearance of the ego-self isn't clear in our minds we won't be able to realize the non-existence of it.

4. But there are also intellectually formed delusions that arise in those of us who have been influenced by views of the self that are not instinctively our own. These layers of intellectually formed delusions obscure our cognitive awareness of how we actually *do* exist and prevent us from realizing the omniscience of enlightenment. There are many authoritative views in the world concerning how the self exists—religious, non-religious, psychological, and materialistic. According to the Buddha, any kind of self that appears to the mind as if it exists independently does not exist at all. This applies to *any* self—whether we identify it as our own, or identify it as the reified self of another entity. In the following debates and arguments, Shantideva shows us how to engage in irrefutable logical analysis to get to the facts concerning intellectually formed speculative views of how the self exists.

The Samkhya school of Hindu philosophy

1. Shantideva begins with a refutation of the Samkhya theory of self. Samkhya is one of the oldest orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy that evolved from its earliest forms in the 8th or 7th century BCE to its development as a classical school of Indian philosophy during the 1st—10th centuries CE. Being a philosophy that was contemporary to Shantideva's time and location, he would have been well acquainted with it. *Samkhya* is a Sanskrit word that means to systematically enumerate, calculate, deliberate, and reason by means of rational examination. These particular qualities had an influence on the technical and scientific aspects of Buddhism.

Atman and Purusha

2. The Samkhyas assert the existence of *Atman*, a Sanskrit word for the true or eternal self; the self-existent essence of each individual. The orthodox schools of Hinduism believe that Atman exists in every living being, and that this true, eternal self is distinct and separate from the ever-evolving body-mind complex of the individual who is embedded in material reality. This is a major point of difference with the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness, which holds that there is no self-existent essence or true self to be found anywhere in the collection of aggregates that make up the entirety of how a conscious being experiences and observes their existence.

3. According to the Samkhya Hindus, Atman serves as an individualized aspect or example of a principal universal consciousness, which they call *Purusha*. Purusha is an abstract essence of the self which is permanent and unchanging, uncaused but is present everywhere. It refers to an observing awareness or witnessing consciousness which is described as unattached and unrelated to anything. The Samkhyas assert that it is permanent, independent, eternal and pure.

All objects that are observed or witnessed by the permanent Purusha consciousness arise from the primal energetic substance of the first cause. The Samkhyas call this primal substance and its effects *Prakriti*.

Prakriti and the three gunas

4. According to the Samkhyas, Prakriti is seen as the original cause or ground of everything. It is the primordial substrate from which arise all the cognitive, moral, psychological, emotional, sensorial, physical and material aspects of reality that are impermanent. Prakriti has three primary qualities of energy, called *gunas*. These three qualities are: *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*, which in their most neutral sense refer to inactive energy, active energy, and balanced energy, respectively. Unmanifested Prakriti is infinite, inactive, and unconscious, with the three gunas in a state of equilibrium that is stable, balanced, and unchanging. The energetic equilibrium of the three gunas is disturbed when the Prakriti primordial substance comes into contact with the observing consciousness of Purusha, causing unrest and imbalance in the three gunas, giving rise to the manifestation of the world of experience. [ed. note: This is reminiscent of the “observer effect” in quantum physics, in which an ‘observer’ of quantum phenomena changes or disturbs the pattern of the phenomena being observed. This has been interpreted by some to suggest that a conscious observer can affect reality.]

5. The Samkhyas postulate an evolutionary theory in which the Prakriti primal substrate or energetic substance is transformed and differentiated into a multiplicity of impermanent objects related to mind, perception, and matter. Evolution is followed by dissolution. In dissolution the existent worldly objects mingle back into Prakriti, which returns to its undifferentiated primordial substance. In this way cycles of evolution and dissolution follow each other. [ed. note: In the video counterpart to this study guide, I mistakenly characterized Prakriti as being permanent because it is a first cause. According to the Samkhyas, the ‘first cause’ aspect of Prakriti refers to a time period of equilibrium that is part of a repeating cycle of evolution and dissolution and is therefore impermanent because it changes. However, this does not in any way affect Shantideva’s refutation of the Samkhya assertion that consciousness is permanent.]

Moksha or liberation according to the Samkhyas

1. The Samkhyas say Purusha and its individuated aspect Atman is the true, eternal self which consciously witnesses manifest reality, but is independent of it. It is not the creator of it. It is independent of the Prakriti primal substance and all the impermanent objects which arise from it. The Samkhya school considers liberation or *moksha* to be the natural pursuit of every living being. The Samkhyas say that ignorance is the root cause of suffering and bondage in *samsara* (cyclic existence). They state that the way out of this suffering is through knowledge. Liberation, according to the Samkhya school, results from knowing the difference between Prakriti and Purusha. Purusha, the eternal pure consciousness, due to ignorance identifies itself with the manifestations of Prakriti such as intellect and ego. This results in endless transmigration and suffering in *samsara*. However, once the realization arises that Purusha is distinct from Prakriti, that Purusha is more than the experience of the ego, and that Purusha is the deepest conscious self within, the self achieves isolation and freedom.

2. It can be understood from the above explanation that the Samkhyas postulate and accept an inherently existent self that is conscious, knowing, permanent, self-existent, and independent. For Shantideva, it is an example of a view of the self that is speculatively conceived by the intellect. The refutation by Shantideva of this conceived self—his proof that such a supposedly permanent entity is a totally fictitious creation of the mind—is presented in the following debate.

Shantideva shows us a methodology to use when we engage in an examination of our own intellectually conceived views of reality, consciousness, and self that may be obscuring our cognitive awareness of how we actually *do* exist. Such cognitive obscurations keep us from realizing complete enlightenment.

Clarification of terms

1. It's impossible to engage in any kind of meaningful debate, discussion, or inquiry without clearly defining the terminology we're using. If we don't define our particular vocabulary precisely, we won't be able to think precisely, and therefore we won't be able to come to a definite conclusion. The following terms are used by the Samkhyas in their explanation of the self: (1) *consciousness* is conventionally defined in Buddhism as "awareness", the subject/object-based awareness of external and internal existence, which refers to the six awarenesses of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching and mental activity; (2) *permanent* is defined as "being without any change"; (3) *impermanent* is defined in as "changing from moment to moment"; (4) *independent* is defined as "not depending on anything", implying that a truly independent entity does not depend on parts, is self-existent and solitary; (5) *eternal* is defined as "continuing perpetually"; (6) *pure* is defined as "free of being mixed with something else"; (7) *Purusha* is defined by the Samkhyas as "the true or eternal self; the principal universal witnessing consciousness that is permanent, independent, eternal and pure"; (8) *Atman* is defined by the Samkhyas as "the individuated aspect of Purusha; the true or eternal self; the self-existent essence of each individual that is distinct from the body-mind complex"; (9) *the objects of the self's awareness* are defined by the Samkhyas as "the activities of mind, perception and matter". These activities are said to be impermanent and arise from (10) *Prakriti*, which is defined by the Samkhyas as "the primal substance of the first cause, and its effects". Shantideva uses these terms to form the basis of his reasoning in debating the Samkhya view of the self.

Refutation by Shantideva of the permanent self set forth by the Samkhyas

2. [60] Shantideva: *If the hearing consciousness is permanent, it follows that it's hearing all the time. And if there is no object, what does it cognize? On what grounds do you call it consciousness?* If the conscious self that hears and cognizes sound is permanent, and therefore unchangeable, then whether or not there is any sound present, the unchangeable conscious self that hears will always be hearing sound. But how is it possible for such a consciousness to do so when no sound is present? On what grounds can this be called a consciousness?

3. [61] Shantideva: *If something that's unconscious knows, it follows that a stick has knowledge also. Therefore in the absence of a thing to know it's clear that consciousness will not arise.* If a subjective consciousness could actually exist without having an object of consciousness, then the absurd conclusion would be that a piece of wood could also be a subjective consciousness since it exists without perceiving objects. Consciousness is subjective, and being subjective it depends upon whatever objects it is conscious of. Without there being an object to be conscious of, it's impossible for something to be a consciousness.

4. The Samkhya response to this is: the consciousness that apprehends sound is permanent and does not change; when there is no sound present, it then apprehends visual forms and other such objects. Although there is no sound, it still has an object of consciousness, in this case visual forms.

5. [62] Shantideva: *If the selfsame consciousness detects a form, at that time, why does it not hear? Perhaps you say the sound's no longer there. Then neither is there consciousness of sound.* The Samkhyas don't consider this to be a problem. They say that the permanent consciousness which perceived sound earlier on can perfectly well perceive something else like a shape at a later time. The Samkhyas say consciousness is permanent, it doesn't change; there is simply a difference of focus on the individual objects of awareness. But, Shantideva says, if the permanent, unchanging consciousness that was perceiving sound before doesn't change, how could it be that when it later perceives a form or something else, it doesn't still perceive sound? When the Samkhyas reply that it's because the sound is no longer there, Shantideva responds as before: If the object is absent, the permanent consciousness of the object is absent as well.

6. [63] Shantideva: *How could that which has the nature of a sound-perceiver ever be transformed into a form-perceiver?* Samkhya: *"A single man can be both son and father."* Shantideva: *But these are merely names; his nature is not so.* If a consciousness was really permanent it could never be subject to any change. It would never be possible for an unchanging consciousness that perceives sound to change into an unchanging consciousness that perceives form. The two are essentially different. This goes against the Samkhya idea that consciousness is both permanent (unchanging) and independent. (Though from the Prasangika point of view, it shouldn't be thought that the perception of sound in an *impermanent* single continuum of consciousness precludes the perception of form. The simultaneous perception of several different non-conceptual perceptions such as sight, sound, taste, smell and touch is perfectly possible and readily verifiable by our own experience of consciousness.)

7. The Samkhyas say, however, that just as one particular man can be both a father and a son at the same time, objects of a permanent consciousness such as sound and form do not exclude each other. Since all objects of a permanent consciousness arise from the primal substance of Prakriti, they are considered to be aspects of Prakriti's nature. Therefore form *by nature* is the same as sound for their nature is derived from the same primal substance. Thus, when form is perceived, even though there is no perception of sound, nevertheless there is a perception of the nature of sound. According to the Samkhyas this avoids the unwanted consequence that consciousness perceiving sound is impermanent.

8. Shantideva says the example the Samkhyas give is invalid. When one says that a man can be both father and son, one is merely attaching labels to him on the basis of two distinct relationships. He cannot, in any absolute sense, and *by nature*, be both father and son. If by nature he is truly existent as a father, it is impossible for him to ever assume the position of being a son, since in that particular case, fatherhood precedes sonship. On the other hand, if *by nature* he is truly existent as a son, it is impossible for him to become a father, because it is impossible for the truly existent state of sonship to precede a later state of fatherhood. This whole matter is simply one of labeling. As such, Shantideva certainly has no intention of refuting it, and in any case it doesn't prove what the Samkhyas want it to prove.

9. [64] Shantideva: *And likewise "pain", "neutrality", and "pleasure" are neither fatherhood nor sonship; and we indeed have never yet observed a consciousness of form perceiving sound.* If the man is simultaneously both father and son in an absolute sense, then these attributes must exist in Prakriti, the primal substance of the first cause. This primal substance has three

energetic attributes: action, inaction, and balance, or rajas, tamas, and sattva (translated above by the Padmakara Translation Group as “pain”, “neutrality”, and “pleasure”). The Samkhyas do not accept any attribute other than these three primary qualities of energy. These form the nature of all manifest phenomena such as sounds, visual forms, and so forth. All these manifestations are said to be of one nature since they are all of the nature of Prakriti, the primal substance from which they have originated. Thus, for the Samkhyas, father and son, fire and water, a pillar and a pig, a napkin and a raincloud all become of one nature. In this way they can say that two unrelated and distinct entities can be of one nature. If this is so, then the six sense consciousnesses are all of the same nature. But who has ever experienced this? Who has ever smelled their thoughts, or kissed a sound, or heard a flavor? When has the consciousness that perceives form ever perceived sound? Who has ever seen an oink? If the Samkhya assertion was true then these things should be evident, but they have never been witnessed by a valid mind.

10. [65] Samkhya: *“But like an actor it takes a different role and sees.”* Shantideva: *If so, this consciousness is not a constant thing. And if its later mode is still the first, that’s identity indeed and never seen before!* The Samkhyas reply that even though no one has ever had the experience of their eye consciousness seeing sound or their ear consciousness hearing form, the nature of both consciousnesses is nevertheless one and the same. They say it is just like an actor who dresses in the costume of a god in the morning and as a demon in the afternoon. Similarly, the earlier consciousness of sound appears later in the aspect of a consciousness of form, and then it can see. But this would mean that the previous consciousness of sound, which according to the Samkhyas is permanent and unchanging, is impermanent because the earlier aspect is gone and another one is assumed. If consciousness assumes a new aspect, which is different from the first but is still considered to be one with it and not different (even though it appears to be quite different), then, as Shantideva says, this is a kind of entity unknown anywhere in the world and is something that has never been seen before! Saying something is one and identical when it can clearly be seen as belonging to two different categories is contradictory and doesn’t make sense.

11. [66] Samkhya: *“But its different modes are quite unreal.”* Shantideva: *Its essence therefore you must now describe. You say that this is simply knowing. It follows that all beings are a single thing.* The Samkhyas say that the particular aspects of an eye consciousness perceiving form and an ear consciousness perceiving sound are in fact just modes of consciousness that are not actually real or true. Their nature is one, true, and permanent. But Shantideva responds that if their particular aspects are untrue, then what reason is there for saying that their nature is true? The Samkhyas say that their nature is true and the same in the sense that the eye consciousness and the ear consciousness are both merely conscious perceivers. Shantideva then responds by saying in that case it would follow that all sentient beings are one and the same because they are all the same in being merely conscious perceivers.

12. [67] Shantideva: *What has mind and what does not have mind are thus identical, for both are equal in existing. If the different kinds of mind are all unreal, what common basis can there be for them?* Shantideva goes on to say that if one continues to follow this same line of reasoning being used by the Samkhyas in their arguments, not only would all sentient beings be one and the same because they are all the same in being merely conscious perceivers, but the entirety of animate and inanimate phenomena would be one and the same because they are

equal in that they all merely exist. If one takes that line of reasoning to its ultimate level, one would be forced to come to the conclusion that there are no differences among all existing phenomena. The activities of mind, perception, and matter, as well as the primal substance from which they arise, and the true, eternal self would all be one and the same. Once one has totally discounted all the specifics of experience, what then remains of this mere consciousness, which is supposedly real, solitary, universal, and permanent? There is nothing left of it.

Session 25, Part 7.3

The importance of precise logical analysis

1. Shantideva continues with the second part of this section of the wisdom chapter which addresses the Selflessness of Persons. He refutes the Nyāya-Vaisheshika theory of the self, as well as other non-Buddhist schools who present arguments supporting their own views. Again, it's important to remember that Shantideva's purpose in presenting these arguments is not merely to show he can win a debate with 8th century Indian philosophers. These debates are allowing us to see the way in which precise logical analysis plays a crucial role in understanding what causes *us* to suffer and why. Shantideva uses logical arguments to point out the ignorance that is at the root *our* suffering—yours and mine. This is the kind of logical analysis we must cultivate and develop for ourselves if we want to be happy and help others to be happy as well.

The Nyāya-Vaisheshika school of Hindu philosophy

1. The Nyāya and the Vaisheshika systems are two orthodox systems of Indian philosophy that predate the Common Era. In their early histories, the Nyāya and the Vaisheshika were independent systems with their own respective theories of the nature of reality, cognition and knowledge, logic, ethics, and the means of liberation from suffering. Over time, the Vaisheshika system became blended with the Nyāya.

2. The Nyāya-Vaisheshika philosophy begins with a view of physics in which the universe is in an endless cycle of existence. This existence is marked by all sorts of motion—from the microscopic motion and vibrations of atoms and sub-atomic particles to the macroscopic motion of the planets and stars. The motion ceases only during the rest period when the universe is preparing for the next cycle, wherein all the atomic laws collapse. The universe can be understood as guided by the will of a personified creator, or at an abstract level, the laws of nature. The knowledge of the universe, its creation, dissolution and life is comprehended by consciousness which is an active element in all the actions and motion of the universe. The self, in its nature, exists as an entity that is distinct from consciousness. When the self is liberated from the suffering of cyclic existence it is unconscious.

Shantideva debates the Nyāya-Vaisheshika view of the self

1. The Nyāya-Vaisheshika schools assert that the self—the personal “I” or “me”—is unconscious by nature and can become conscious only when it is joined to consciousness. When the conscious self achieves liberation from cyclic existence it reverts to the passive state of its original unconscious nature. With the cessation of its bondage within the cycle of samsaric suffering comes emancipation of the self in which it is freed of all the qualities of consciousness. It abides in its naturally passive and pure state—without pleasure, pain, feeling, knowledge, will, thought, or awareness of any kind. The Nyāya-Vaisheshikas believe that the self—the personal “I” or “me”—is like space, all-pervading and permanent. Therefore, it is unconscious, for if it was

conscious it would be impermanent and nonpervasive. For them therefore, the self is unconscious and inanimate. When it is joined with consciousness however, this self supposedly identifies experiences as its own and clings to them. Shantideva refutes this assertion that the self is unconscious by nature.

2. [68] Shantideva: *Something destitute of mind, we hold, is not a self. For mindlessness means matter, like a vase.* Nyāya-Vaisheshika: *“But the self has consciousness when joined to mind.”* Shantideva: *Then this refutes its nature of unconsciousness.* Shantideva says that anything which is mindless or unconscious cannot, for that very reason, be the self. Even if the Nyāya-Vaisheshikas were to claim that a self which is similar to an unconscious vase or piece of cloth could somehow perform an action of its own volition and therefore be the basis of happiness or suffering, an entity that is unconscious could never actually experience happiness.

3. The Nyāya-Vaisheshikas respond, however, that although the self is not of the same nature as the consciousness, it is joined together with it; and due to the power of the consciousness—which isn’t the self—the self can then cognize objects. Shantideva says this completely undermines the assertion that the self is unconscious and unaware of objects, for it would mean the self comes to acquire awareness, and in doing so it would also become impermanent.

4. [69] Shantideva: *If the self, moreover, is immutable, what change in it could mingling with the mind produce? And selfhood we might equally affirm of empty space, inert and destitute of mind.* In any case, Shantideva says, if the self is immutable and permanent as the Nyāya-Vaisheshikas claim it is, what effect could consciousness have on it? Obviously none. Consciousness cannot cause a permanent, immutable self to pass from one state to another, any more than one can make the sky blue by using paint or make a mountain move by clapping one’s hands. If the self really was permanent it would be impossible for it to change in any way. And if it never changes it cannot form a relationship with a conscious mind and become something that apprehends and knows objects. A self such as this would be unable to do anything. In which case one could equally assert that empty space is the self. It’s pointless to talk about a self that would be incapable of causing any benefit or harm.

Shantideva answers objections by non-Buddhists to the selflessness of persons

1. Shantideva has previously argued that the self doesn’t exist the way we think it does when we innately grasp onto it as a truly existing, independent identity, like an ego. Then he rejects the intellectual speculations of non-Buddhists as being unfounded and untrue when they assert that the self is permanent, unitary (meaning ‘having no parts’) and independent. For example, the Samkhyas identify the self as Atman or Purusha, a permanent, unitary, eternal entity that consciously witnesses reality but is independent of it; and the Nyāya-Vaisheshikas identify the self as all-pervasive, permanent, and partless—like uncompounded space. The Nyāyayikas assert an entity that is permanent, unitary, independent *and* unconscious. Now Shantideva presents objections to the Prasangika theory of selflessness that are made by other non-Buddhist philosophies. These philosophies also assert a permanent, unitary and independent self.

2. [70] Non-Buddhist: *“If self does not exist there is no link connecting action with results. If when the deed is done, the doer is no more, who is there to reap the karmic fruit?”* The non-Buddhists say if the self is not permanent, then in the following moment it must disappear. In

that case, how can there be anything that links an action with its result? The time that an action occurs is different than the time an experience resulting from that action occurs. For instance, when one commits an action as a human being, it is said that it's possible to experience its results later in a non-human existence. If there isn't a permanent self that exists as the same entity for these two beings, how could there be any relation between a karmic action and its fruition? When the fruition of an act is experienced, whose fruition is it?

3. [71] Shantideva: *The bases of the act and fruit are not the same, in both a self is without scope for action. This is valid both for you and us; what point is there, therefore, in our debate?* Shantideva responds with saying that the person who exists at the time of performing an action and the person who exists at the time of experiencing its result exist at different times, and are of different natures. Both the non-Buddhists and the Prasangikas agree on this point. Neither of them believe that the self that experiences the effect is the self that engaged in the actions. So there is no point in debating this issue. But as soon as the non-Buddhists claim that the self being discussed is a permanent, unchangeable self, the issue is immediately at odds with the non-Buddhists' own position, not the Prasangikas'.

4. [72] Shantideva: *"A cause coterminous [simultaneous] with its result" is something quite impossible to see. And only in the context of a single mental stream can it be said that one who acts will later reap the fruit.* Effects must manifest from causes. It is not possible at the very moment a cause is created for there to be an experience of the effect of that cause. At the moment the effect occurs, the cause of that effect has necessarily ceased. However, through the definite force of the interdependent relationship between cause and effect, it is certain the effect will happen. Moreover, the effect will grow wherever the causal conditions for it to do so are all complete. In the case of the self's karma, effects ripen in the mind stream of a particular person and nowhere else. The "self" is merely designated upon a mental continuum, that is, a continuum of consciousness. In this way, one can say, "In a previous life 'I' committed an action, and now 'I' am experiencing its result."

5. The self that existed yesterday and the self that exists today are different. Yesterday's self has passed, and today's self has newly arisen, but they are of the same continuum. Therefore it is correct to say, "Today I'm experiencing the results of what I did yesterday." But the Prasangikas will never say that the person who committed an action yesterday can exist as the same person who is experiencing the results of the action today. That person changes moment to moment.

6. [73] *The thoughts now passed, and those to come, are not the self; they are no more, or are not yet. Is then the self the thought which now is born? If so, it sinks to nothing when the latter fades.* If the self is designated upon the continuum of moments of consciousness, one could well ask if consciousness itself is the self. The answer is no. The past and future consciousness is not the self because it doesn't exist. In terms of the past, future and present, the past has ceased and the future is yet to come. Conventionally speaking it is possible to talk of the three times—past, present and future. But when we get more precise, if we distinguish the past and future in relation to earlier and later individual moments of consciousness, the earlier moments belong to the past and the later moments to the future. The present moment can't actually be found. Like a point on a line, it disappears when it's precisely looked for. For that reason, the present

consciousness is not the self, because if it was, as soon as it had passed, the self would become non-existent.

7. [74] *For instance, we may take banana trees—cutting through the fibers, finding nothing. Likewise analytical investigation will find no “I”, no underlying self.* It is similar to cutting open a banana tree, which is full of sap but is hollow and without any firmness or body to it. Gradually cutting through the fibers, one finds nothing substantial, and eventually the tree disintegrates. In a similar way, if one searches analytically, one will find that the self has no reality, no ultimate existence or substance.

If no self exists, who are the Bodhisattvas developing compassion for?

1. [75] Non-Buddhist: *If beings have no existence, who will be the object of compassion?* Shantideva: *Those whom ignorance imputes, for whose sake we have pledged ourselves.* The non-Buddhists ask: If living beings have no inherently existing selves, then who are the Bodhisattvas developing compassion for? Compassion without an object of compassion doesn't have any meaning. Shantideva replies that, on the ultimate level of emptiness, there is neither an inherently existing being who is the object of compassion nor an inherently existing being who is engaging in compassionate action on their behalf. Bodhisattvas have taken a pledge to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings who, through their ignorance have imputed an inherently existing self upon the aggregates of form and consciousness. They have become fixated on this imputed self and it is undeniable that on the level of appearances, in every case, grasping attachment and suffering always arises.

2. This is why there is a need to liberate beings from samsara. Samsara is not a place. Samsara is the ongoing cycling of the deluded view of an inherently existing self and the dream-like appearances of suffering that result because of that deluded view. This is why Bodhisattvas take the vow to liberate them. These seemingly solitary, independent, permanent selves, whose existential burden of suffering Bodhisattvas assume, have no real inherent existence in an ultimate sense. They exist only to the extent that they are falsely imputed as selves, through the force of ignorance. So, although the Bodhisattvas have realized the Selflessness of Persons, they take as the object of their compassion all beings who do not have this realization and who over and over, incessantly and pointlessly experience the many appearances of suffering because of their mistaken belief in inherent selfhood.

3. In the same way, Bodhisattvas have no concern for their own welfare. They see that others suffer meaninglessly, and the attitude of cherishing them more than themselves naturally arises in their minds. They see that the suffering of beings is like a deep sleep and that they are able to wake them from it.

The self exists as a mere label

1. [76] Non-Buddhist: *“If there are no beings, who will gain the fruit?”* Shantideva: *It's true! It is through ignorance that they are said to be! But for the total vanquishing of sorrow, the goal, which ignorance conceives, should not be spurned.* The non-Buddhists ask: If there are no truly self-existent sentient beings, who is it that attains the fruition of the spiritual path—liberation from samsara and the cessation of suffering? Shantideva, in the first part of his response, says: It's absolutely true, there is no such thing as an inherently existing sentient being. It's only

through ignorance that a sentient being is said to be self-existent. Let's examine this first part of Shantideva's response in a more personal way.

2. Imagine a person call Suzi. First of all, at her birth what exists is an impermanent collection of aggregates that comprise form and consciousness. Based upon this collection of impermanent aggregates her parents designate the name "Suzi". Because of this everyone, including Suzi herself, comes to have the conceptual thought, "She is Suzi," or "I am Suzi." These conceptions of Suzi that arise in dependence upon the impermanent aggregates of form and consciousness are acceptable, valid cognitions in relation to those particular kinds of aggregates, and therefore Suzi is established as existing. However, she exists merely through conceptual imputation, and not in a truly self-existent way; in other words, a truly self-existing "Suzi" can't be found among her impermanent aggregates, either individually or as a collection. The self of Suzi exists merely as a label. All sentient beings exist in the same way.

3. Shantideva, in the second part of his response, says that in order to completely subdue suffering and sorrow for such a Suzi, the ignorantly conceived goal of liberation from samsara and attainment of nirvana should not be shunned. This means that until the enlightenment of Buddhahood, when ultimate reality appears to us directly, we should not reject the thought that on the relative level, samsara is something we can be liberated from and nirvana is something we can attain. For it is on these bases that suffering will be removed. In the end, when we are free from every kind of dualistic concept—subject and object, good and evil, relative and ultimate, even the subtlest cognitive obscurations arising from the firm belief in samsara and nirvana will be removed.

4. This occurs at the omniscient level of Buddhahood. But at present this is not possible for us. For us, the two truths—relative and ultimate—are not in union, which is why the way things appear to us never corresponds to their true mode of existence. When this discrepancy between appearance and truth is completely eliminated, ultimate reality—where there is nothing to be obtained and nothing to be abandoned—will manifest. But until that happens it's impossible to rid ourselves of the expectation and wish for the goal of liberation and nirvana.

5. [77] *The source of sorrow is the pride of saying "I." It's fostered and increased by false belief in self. To this you may believe that there is no redress, but meditation on no-self will be the supreme way.* The cause of all suffering in the cyclic existence of samsara is ego self-grasping—the pride of thinking "I." It is a singular, separated view of being which is fed and increased by the ignorance of actively believing in the existence of a personal self. The ignorance that falsely and mistakenly imputes existence onto the nonexistent self is what we have to overcome. Once this ignorance is cleared away, there will be no more clinging to the ego-self, and once that ego-clinging vanishes, there will be no more compulsive rebirth in the cycle of birth, aging, sickness, suffering and death.

6. The view of the self as a merely designated label is not the same as the view of an inherently existing self. The sense of self that is just a label occurs through the power of interdependence, and it is impossible for reasoning to prove that it does not exist in the experience of ordinary people, plus there is no need to do so because it does not cause suffering. On the other hand, belief in the inherently existing self can be eliminated by a mind that meditates on selflessness,

familiarizes itself with it, and realizes the nature of phenomena. This will dispel ignorance in the same way that darkness is dispelled by the presence of light.

7. As long as the belief in an inherently existing self is not eliminated, no matter what practices we engage in, whether austere ones or meditative ones, we will not be able to get beyond samsara. For that reason, it is said that those of us with a fortunate human life and the wish for liberation from suffering should constantly make our practice a remedy to ego self-grasping.

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