

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

Shāntideva's *Bodhicharyāvatāra*, The Way of the Bodhisattva
Chapter 9: "Wisdom"

Part 8.3: The Selflessness of Phenomena: The Body, Feelings, Mind & Other Phenomena

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; *Science and Philosophy in the Indian Buddhist Classics, Volume 2: The Mind*; 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.

TBCWP Sessions 26, 27, & 28: Sundays, October 22, 29, & November 5, 2023

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

Session 26, 10/22/2023, "The Body"

The purpose of the Bodhisattva path

1. Many of us come to Buddhism because we are attracted to the teachings on loving kindness and compassion. The serene, peaceful demeanor depicted in the images of the Buddha holds the promise that we too can experience this for ourselves. Many have faith that the Buddha or a spiritual master will have the power to transform their lives. All of that is true, but it won't occur without wisdom. Loving kindness and compassion can never be stable without wisdom, which in Buddhism refers to the understanding and personal realization of the ultimate nature of reality.

2. This is something we have to experience for ourselves. It's not enough to have faith in the Buddha or his words. The Buddha said we should not simply believe him, we should put his words to the test and find out for ourselves whether or not he spoke the truth. Otherwise, studying the Buddha's teachings becomes nothing more than an intellectual pursuit that provides interesting information but no real transformational power.

3. The purpose of the Bodhisattva path is to develop our loving kindness, compassion and wisdom to such levels that we may be of benefit to all living beings who want to be happy and don't want to suffer. These qualities of love, compassion, and wisdom are necessarily interconnected and interdependent. It's helpful to remember this, especially when the wisdom teachings are challenging and difficult for us to fully comprehend.

Understanding the selflessness of phenomena

1. In this section of the Wisdom chapter, Shantideva explains the selflessness of phenomena. Skillfully using meditations on the absence of any 'self' or self-existent entity within phenomena, he discusses four areas of our experience where we must apply this kind of mindfulness: (1) the

body, (2) feelings, (3) the mind, and (4) other phenomena. He starts with the body in general, and then specifically examines its physical parts. Through this process, Shantideva helps us understand why it is so important for those of us who are aspiring to walk the Bodhisattva path to let go of our strong attachment and personal identification in relation to the body.

We have a mistaken idea of how the body exists

1. Most of us think quite a lot about our body—it's appearance, it's health, etc. To us, it appears as a real, truly existing thing that we grasp at and hold onto. In reality, the 'body' has no true existence at all. We cling to it as if it did because instead of thinking of it as something that's merely imputed by our conceptual mind, we understand and perceive it to be something that really exists in and of itself, by its own nature and from its own side. According to the Buddha, this kind of confused awareness and mistaken reasoning that causes us to apprehend phenomena as if they were truly existent is at the very root of cyclic existence.

2. Because of this mistaken reasoning regarding phenomena, the self-grasping of persons arises. This is the grasping at the "I", or "me"—the ego that we so thoroughly and persistently identify with—which is at the root of suffering. Until now, many of us have not had the opportunity to meet a qualified spiritual guide and to fully examine these Buddhist hypotheses. We have continually experienced the body as something that actually exists according to the way in which we conceive it to be. Now, with the help of Shantideva's insights, we will try to clearly examine from a Buddhist perspective how we grasp at the body as if it truly existed.

3. When we think to ourselves, "My body is in good shape," or "My body is out of shape," or "My body is ugly," or "My body is good-looking," and so on, it's not as if we're thinking that our left elbow is ugly or our head is in good shape. Our instinctive impulse is to think of a body that appears as if it's separate and unrelated to its parts—as if it were a whole, complete, independently existing entity unto itself. This is the way we think of our body, and we cling to that vividly appearing, truly existing view of it. We're all very familiar with this.

4. In reality the body doesn't exist in the way we instinctively think it does, and in fact is entirely lacking in any kind of true, independent existence. If the body really was truly existent then it would have to be found in at least one of three possible places. Either the body would be (1) found to be a collection of its parts, (2) within one of its parts, or (3) someplace other than these two alternatives. Upon investigation, Shantideva doesn't find a truly existing body in any of these three possible places.

The body is neither its parts nor the possessor of its parts

1. [78] *What we call the body is not feet or shins; the body, likewise, is not thighs or loins. It's not the belly nor indeed the back, and from the chest and arms the body is not formed. [79] The body is not ribs or hands, armpits, shoulders, bowels, or entrails. Its is not the head, and it is not the throat. What is the "body", then, in all of this?* As we discussed in the previous sessions, the personal self—the "I", "me", or ego—is imputed in dependence upon the aggregates of form and consciousness. The "form" that's being referred to is the body. What then is the nature of the body? If we were asked to point to our body and describe what it was, we would say something like, "my body," or "a human body," and the terms we used would be based upon the collection of our head, feet, hands, legs, and so on.

2. If we were asked if any one of these individual components, such as the foot or the leg, was the body, we would have to answer, “no.” For if each individual part of the body was the body, that wouldn’t make any sense because it would mean we would have as many bodies as we had parts, and if only one individual part was the body—say the armpit, we all would agree that would just be plain silly and absurd. Therefore, according to Shantideva’s analysis so far, the feet and so on are the parts of the body, and a single human body is the thing which has those parts. The whole body is imputed in dependence upon its parts. None of those parts can be identified as being the body.

3. [80] *If the “body” spreads itself and with the members coincides, its parts indeed are present in those parts. But where does “body”, in itself, abide?* The hypothesis that Shantideva presents here is that the body, as a whole entity, occupies the same space with its individual parts, and it pervades all of them, part by part. But if the whole body exists in each of its parts, this would suggest that the body itself is not composed of parts. Where then does the body exist?

4. [81] *But if the “body”, single and entire is present in the hands and other members, however many parts there are, the hands and all the rest, you’ll find an equal quantity of “bodies”.* If the entire body itself were wholly and completely located in each of the parts, there would be as many whole bodies as there are parts of the body, including the hands and so on.

5. [82] *If “body” is not outside or within its parts, how is it, then, residing in its members? And since it is not other than its parts, how can you say that it exists at all?* When we look for the object called “body” that is imputed onto its parts by our conceptual mind, the body itself is not found either inside or on the surface of the parts. Since no independent, truly existing body can be found, how can it exist among those parts? And as the body surely can’t be of a different nature than its parts, then the designation of “body” is merely a conceptual label given to the collection of parts and doesn’t truly exist as an entity in and of itself.

6. [83] *Thus there is no “body”. It is through illusion, with regard to hands and other parts, that “body” as a notion is conceived—just as on account of its specific shape a pile of stones is taken for a man.* Although the body doesn’t exist as such, it is through ignorance and confusion that the idea “body” occurs to the mind based on the assembly of physical parts. Aside from being a mere label, the body has in fact no existence. For example, at twilight when visibility is dim, we could easily mistake a pile of stones shaped like a man for a real man. In a similar way, on the basis of the hands and other physical parts there is no truly existing body, but because of our lack of sharp awareness and mistaken conclusions we apprehend those parts as being a truly existing body.

7. [84] *As long as the conditions are assembled, the body will appear to be a man. As long as all the parts are likewise present, a body will appear therein.* As long as the causes for mistaking a pile of stones for a man are present, for that long will the mistaken apprehension of a man take place. Similarly, on the basis of the assembly of the parts of the body we will say things such as “my body,” or “good-looking body,” or “bad-looking body.” In these cases the body clearly seems to exist from its own side, but in fact the body is no more than a label which is assigned or chosen for a particular basis, although it seems very different than that.

8. As long as the conditions are fulfilled with regard to a specific shape, the body will continue to appear as male or female. But when these conditions are not complete, it will not do so, as when a change of sex occurs or during the development of an unborn child or when the body is cremated and only ashes are left. In just the same way, as long as the interconnected physical parts for imputing a body are found, a body will appear. But in themselves these parts are not the body; they are just pieces of flesh and bone.

The parts of the body themselves have no truly independent self-existence

1. [85] *Likewise, since it is a group of fingers, the hand itself does not exist as such. And so it is with fingers, made of joints—and joints themselves consist of many parts.* Shantideva has just given an analysis of the body as a whole, and now he discusses its components (such as the hands), and parts of those components (such as the fingers), and so on. So even if the body does not exist, we still can't say that its limbs, the arms and so on, which we can see before our very eyes, really exist either.

2. "Hand" is imputed upon the configuration of the fingers, the palm and so on, but the hand does not exist among those individual parts. And there is no hand existing independently of those separate parts. Likewise a finger has no true, independent self-existence because it is also merely imputed upon its parts: the assembly and collection of joints, nails and so on. The joint too is only imputed upon the collection of its parts and therefore has no independent self-existence.

3. [86] *These parts themselves will break down into particles, and particles divide according to direction. These fragments, too, lack partless parts; they are like space. Thus even particles have no existence.* A joint of a finger can likewise be subdivided into its components, from the comparatively gross down to the most basic components, atoms; and it, too, is not found among them. Once again we see that the 'whole' is designated in dependence on its components, but it can't be found to exist independently.

4. An atom can be analytically subdivided into six basic directional segments—north, south, east, west, up and down. It also is not found among those subdivisions. If one tries to break down the directional segments into something else, nothing at all can be found. Ultimately, not one true, independently self-existing fragment can be found in any of these directional segments; even the fragments themselves disappear. In the same way, when any apparent form, for example the hand, is analytically dissected in this way, going from comparatively gross to more subtle fragments, down to the directional segments of the infinitesimal particle, they are seen to be empty, like space; they have no existence as physical forms. Even the infinitesimal particle does not exist.

5. This form of analysis is suitable to both quantum physics and classical concepts of the atom and subatomic particles. The atom or particle may or may not be conceived as having a particular size and location, but all theories about the types of particles that exist and how they relate to one another will attribute certain defining characteristics to those particles. Otherwise, they would be indistinguishable from other entities. As soon as the particle is conceived as having certain qualities, we can proceed with the same analysis, which is: What is the

relationship between the whole and its parts? The conclusion is that particles of matter are as empty of inherent, independent self-existence as space is.

The need to let go of our attachment to the body

1. [87] *All form, therefore, is like a dream, and who will be attached to it, who thus investigates? The body, in this way, has no existence; what, therefore, is male and what is female?* Having analyzed the body in this way, not even the slightest fragment of it can be found to have any true existence. Therefore, what intelligent and wise person would develop attachment to this illusory, dream-like body? It's completely inappropriate to become so attached.

2. Since a person's body has no true existence, it is impossible for the person to have any true existence. In this case how can there be such a thing as a truly existent male body and a truly existent female body? The terms "man" and "woman" are designated on the basis of the differences between male and female bodies. Since the bodies that are bases of those imputations are not to be found under analysis, how could a man or woman intrinsically exist?

3. In the same way, all forms of gender identity cannot truly or inherently exist. If we apply the same logical analysis and reasoning to such current terms as straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, nonbinary, plus all of the gender identities and sexual orientations that letters and words cannot yet fully describe, we will come to the same conclusion. All of these terms are merely conceptual labels given to a collection of parts that when analyzed are not found to intrinsically or inherently exist.

4. The problem we all have has nothing to do with the labels we use—it completely transcends labels. The problem lies in our confused awareness and mistaken reasoning that causes us to apprehend the persons and bodies these labels represent as if they were truly and independently self-existent. As was said at the beginning, this is at the very root of cyclic existence, ego self-grasping, and the suffering that follows as a consequence.

5. In order for us to develop our love and compassion to the degree that it becomes stable, powerful, and truly beneficial, we have to let go of our inappropriate attachment and aversion to these dream-like, non-truly existing bodies, whether they're ours or others'. It simply doesn't make sense to cling to them or be repelled by them. When we can cultivate the mindfulness and insight to accomplish this, we will move beyond the limitations that keep us from realizing our interconnectedness with all living beings. We'll be able to achieve a state of equanimity. Equanimity is an essential quality of a Bodhisattva. It is the psychological stability and composure which is undisturbed by afflictive emotions, pain, or any other phenomena that would otherwise cause us to lose our mental balance. By training ourselves in equanimity, loving kindness, compassion and wisdom, we train ourselves to become agents of peace in this world.

Session 27, 10/29/2023, "Feelings"

What is the nature of feelings?

1. According to B. Alan Wallace, in his annotation to His Holiness the Dalai Lama's commentary on this text, the term "feeling" as it is used here by Shantideva refers to physical and mental experiences of pleasure, pain and indifference. It does not include the tactile

sensations that arise when one touches objects. The question then becomes: in what way do the physical and mental feelings of pleasure, pain and indifference actually exist? What is their nature? Our feelings seem to arise spontaneously without any conscious effort. When they occur we naturally think of them as being ‘true’ and ‘real’. As long as our feelings cause us to act in ways that increase happiness, everything seems okay.

2. However, our feelings of desire, attachment, aversion and hatred cause us to act in unwholesome and deluded ways which only increase pain and distress for ourselves and others. At present all the feelings we have that are contaminated by afflictive emotions act as causes for our suffering in cyclic existence. This is because when such feelings occur we instinctively regard them as truly existent. In this section of Shantideva’s presentation of the Selflessness of Phenomena, he explains that until we eliminate clinging to our feelings as truly existent we will be unable to abandon suffering.

3. First of all, it’s important that we clearly understand what is meant by ‘truly existent’ or ‘truly real’ in this discussion. Both of these terms refer to any entity that is independently self-existent. But in fact, an ‘independently self-existent’ entity is actually nothing more than a conceptual abstraction. An independent state of being cannot be verified or proved by means of observation or experimentation. The fact and condition of existence as it is observed and actually experienced is that all phenomena—whether they be consciousnesses, matter, or the manner in which those two are related and combined—are in a continual and ever-changing state of moment-to-moment interdependence and interconnectedness.

4. To consider that any entity could truly be either independent or self-existent would be equivalent to considering an abstract concept to be a real thing. Yet this is precisely what we do when we reify or concretize things and cling to them as if they existed independently within their own distinct identity or ‘selfness’. We fail to take into account the undeniable spectrum of interdependent factors that every moment continuously influence all consciousness and matter, whether by having an effect on their mode of being, circumstances, structure, growth and development, or their mental and emotional conditions. This includes the mental and physical experiences of pleasure, pain and indifference that we call ‘feelings’. We cling to them and concretize them as if they existed independently within their own distinct identities we conventionally call ‘joy’, ‘sorrow’, ‘guilt’, ‘happiness’, ‘depression’, ‘comfort’, and so on.

5. [88] *If suffering itself is truly real, why is joy not altogether quenched thereby? If pleasure’s real, then why will pleasant tastes not comfort and amuse a man in agony?* If the feelings that we experience existed independently (i.e. truly existed), they would not depend on other circumstances. If that were the case, why would suffering not completely suppress and extinguish joy? A person who experienced suffering could never feel happy. On the other hand, if pleasure was a truly real, self-defining and self-existent entity, then when one was experiencing suffering, why would sensual sources of pleasure such as delicious food and drink not bring comfort?

Feelings have no truly independent self-existence

1. [89] *If the feeling fails to be experienced, through being overwhelmed by something stronger, how can “feeling” rightly be ascribed to that which lacks the character of being felt?* If pleasurable feelings were truly, independently self-existent, then the pleasurable feeling that

arises from eating delicious food would be unable to change. The person who was eating the food would necessarily experience the pleasure of it continuously. Therefore, for example, upon the unexpected death of that person's child it would be impossible for her or him to experience the agony of grief because at that time the pleasurable feeling of eating delicious food would be giving that person truly existent, unchangeable pleasure.

2. *Other schools*: At times of grief there can be pleasure as well, but the pleasure is not felt because of the more intense misery. *Prasangika response*: Feeling is of the nature of experience, so if something is not being experienced, the term "feeling" cannot be applied to it.

3. [90] *Perhaps you say that only subtle pain remains* [when there is great delight], *its grosser form has now been overmastered—or rather it is felt as "mere pleasure."* But what is subtle still remains itself.

4. *Other schools*: When intense joy arises, even while there is subtle dissatisfaction remaining, the intense joy displaces the former gross unhappiness that was being experienced. It removes gross unhappiness, but subtle dissatisfaction remains. Therefore, the gross unhappiness is not unexperienced; it's just experienced as subtle dissatisfaction. *Prasangika response*: At such a time of intense joy, can you really say there is an unenjoyable feeling? If there is a subtle feeling of dissatisfaction in what way does the intense joy overcome it? If there is the presence of dissatisfaction, it's absurd to say there is an intense feeling of joy taking place. As long as there is any dissatisfaction there can be no real happiness. *Other schools*: The strong feeling of pleasure dispels the gross feeling of pain and the subtle pain that remains becomes a subtle feeling of pleasure. *Prasangika response*: So now you're saying that subtle pain is actually in the nature of pleasure? How then can you say it is still painful? *Other schools*: Alright, we concede your point: When there is the experience of intense joy, which is incompatible with suffering, suffering is not produced.

5. [91] *If, because its opposite [comfort] is present, discomfort fails to manifest, is not the claim that it's [an inherent] "feeling" no more than a mental imputation?*

6. *Other schools*: When delicious food is eaten and a pleasurable feeling occurs, at that time there is no feeling of pain at all because the delicious food is acting as a condition from which pleasure dependently arises. Therefore delicious food is a cause that inherently produces the feeling of pleasure. *Prasangika response*: Depending on the person, the same food can act as the condition for feelings of both pleasure and aversion. Therefore, in the example you give, the food is a cause of pleasure merely through conceptual imputation. You're making the mistake of conceiving feelings as if they were self-defining and self-existent. The feelings of joy and sorrow don't exist independently within their own identity, from their own side. In the same way as the cause (the 'delicious' food) is merely a conceptual imputation, it follows that the resultant feelings (pleasure or aversion) themselves are also merely conceptual imputations. In this way feelings are established as having no inherent existence.

The remedy for clinging to feelings

1. [92] *Since so it is, the antidote is meditation and analysis. Absorption grown in fields of their investigation is indeed the food and sustenance of yogis.* There is a remedy for clinging to

pleasure and other feelings as if they were real; a remedy that will break the chain of delusions that arise from that clinging—such as wanting this and not wanting that. That remedy is the meditation which examines and shows that feelings have no inherent existence in and of themselves. Apart from this meditation, there is no other antidote for grasping at the supposed reality of feelings—something that grips and convulses our world with a kind of collective insanity.

2. The contemplation and meditation on the unreality of feelings, which arises from such a rich field of analysis, is the food and sustenance of yogis. Just as food nourishes and sustains the body, in a similar way, this extraordinary yogic insight, which combines the analysis of emptiness with calm abiding, enables one to experience pleasure free from desire. It nourishes and sustains the qualities of one's realizations, and also sustains and nourishes the gross physical body of the meditator.

3. Since feelings are the root of craving and the main grounds for all disagreements and quarrels, it is said that it is of vital importance to come to a clear-cut conviction that they are without any inherent existence. We can, and need, to gradually become accustomed to this. Whether we engage in analytical or calm abiding meditation, the most important thing in the beginning is to acquire wisdom by listening to the teachings. It has been said that among the disciples of Buddha Shakyamuni, those who realized the truth were the ones who had received and absorbed into their minds the teachings of the previous Buddha Kashyapa, the third Buddha of the present eon. In the future, therefore, when Buddha Maitreya, the fifth and final Buddha of the present eon appears, those who listen to the teachings now will be born as the first of that Buddha's followers and will see the truth.

Examining the cause of feelings

1. Now Shantideva presents arguments that refute the true existence of feelings. We speak of feelings, such as pleasure or pain, being caused by contact with an object. An object is experienced through the combined interaction of the object, the sense organs and consciousness. Through that process feelings arise. Shantideva now analyzes contact to see if it is truly existent or not.

2. [93] *If between the sense power and a thing there is a space, how will the two terms meet? And if there is no space, they form a unity, and therefore what is it that meets with what?* According to Buddhism there are five internal sense faculties, also known as sense powers, which are based on the five physical sense organs. These are inner subtle forms which generate sensory consciousnesses. If there is a space between the material particles that make up a sense faculty and the material particles of the object being sensed, where would the contact between the two occur? If there is no space between the elementary particles of the sense faculty and the elementary particles of the object being sensed, those particles would inseparably occupy the same space. In that case they would become one. If particles had exactly the same location, they wouldn't be distinct from one another, so one really couldn't say where the sense faculty left off and the object began.

3. According to B. Alan Wallace, in modern quantum field theory the concept of individual elementary particles remains problematic. In addition, there is considerable disagreement

among well-known physicists concerning the actual nature of atoms. Physicist Bernard d'Espagnat (1921–2015) claimed that atoms are mere properties of space; Henry Stapp (born 1928) argues that atoms are a set of relationships; and Werner Heisenberg (1901–1976) denied that atoms are things. The Prasangikas don't deny the existence of atoms, but they do refute the assumption that atoms exist as real entities that are independent of conceptual designation.

4. [94] *No penetration can there be of particle by particle, for they are both the same in lacking volume. But if they do not penetrate, they do not merge; and if they do not merge, there's no encounter.* From the Buddhist perspective two atoms can never possibly become one, because in order to do so one would have to dissolve into the other. This is impossible because they are equal in size and neither of them contains any empty space inside. Without any dissolution into one another there can be no mixing of the two atoms and therefore no possibility of their meeting on all sides.

5. This particular Buddhist view would be contested by most contemporary physicists, citing the work of Australian physicist Ernest Rutherford (1871–1937) in 1911, who experimentally demonstrated that most of the interior of an atom is composed of empty space. This idea is closely related to the old quantum theory of the “planetary model” of the atom, in which the electrons orbit about the nucleus. B. Alan Wallace says that modern quantum theory, with its wave/particle duality and uncertainty principle, now states that this model cannot be regarded as a representation of the atom as an objective reality. The planetary model is useful (and is still in broad use) as a device that, while not accurate or optimal, enables a general understanding of the atom which serves as a guide in further investigating it.

6. Also according to modern quantum field theory, “empty space” seems to be far from empty. However, in the context of this Buddhist text, it is more important to recognize that the Buddhist concept of atoms differs radically from that of modern Western science. Buddhist yogis have used their own heightened powers of awareness, developed through rigorous training in meditation, as their means of exploring the smallest components of the physical world. Modern physicists use mechanical instruments and mathematics in formulating their atomic theories. In this situation much insight can be gleaned from Heisenberg's comment: “What we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning.” Given these two radically different methods of questioning, it is not surprising that the resultant theories differ as much as they do.

7. Given the major differences between Buddhist contemplative views concerning the basic constituents of the natural world and the views of modern physical science, Alan Wallace puts forth the question: which of these views is more useful? But he says this question needs to be refined to: useful for what purpose? In terms of advancing technology, the theories and models of physics and chemistry are incomparably more useful; but in terms of transforming one's body and mind through contemplative practice, the views of Buddhist contemplatives are far more appropriate.

8. [95] *For how could anyone accept that what is partless could be said to meet? And you must show me, if you ever saw, a contact taking place between two partless things.* If at the subtlest level there is no space between subatomic particles, they would be identical. If there is

actual contact between subatomic particles and if that contact is made without those particles having any parts or attributes, this is something that needs to be proven and demonstrated.

9. [96] *Consciousness is immaterial, and so one cannot speak of contact with it. A combination, too, has no reality, just as we have previously shown.* There can be no truly existent meeting of consciousness with matter because consciousness has no material quality whatsoever; consciousness is merely clear, luminous, and aware.

10. Buddhism makes a definite distinction between consciousness and matter, or between cognitive and physical events. Cognitions, such as sensory awareness, memory and imagination, *experience* their respective objects of awareness. Physical entities certainly can contribute to the production of various types of cognition; but physical entities themselves experience nothing. Materialists may suppose that perception is nothing more than a physical process, but who has ever experientially verified this theory? The Prasangikas acknowledge the role various conditions play in the interaction between consciousness and matter, but they deny that any of these interactions have real, intrinsic existence.

11. Similarly, as we discussed previously in the discussion of the the body, where the body is nothing more than a label for the collection of its parts, and its parts, such as the hands and so forth, are nothing more than labels for the collection of their parts, and so on down to the microcosmic level of subatomic particles, the conclusion one comes to is: collections of material particles can have no true existence aside from the conventionally agreed upon labels that we give to them. And since these collections of material particles have no true existence, there can be no true contact with them.

10. [97] *If therefore there's no touch or contact, whence is it that feeling takes its rise? What purpose is there, then, in all our toil, for what is it, indeed, that torments what?* Therefore, if there is no contact which acts as a cause, where do feelings come from? Feelings themselves have no existence on the ultimate level. Ultimately, like everything else, they are empty of inherent existence. If that is so, what sense is there in exhausting ourselves chasing after pleasure and running away from pain? The pleasures that we desire and work for have no inherent existence of their own. It is the same with suffering. So, what suffering is tormenting what entity? It is just the delusion of the mind—the delusion of the consciousness. And consciousness itself is like an illusion in that it has no independent, unchangeable, inherent self-existence.

Examining the result of feelings

1. If craving arises constantly in all sentient beings, how could feeling, which is the cause of craving, not be truly existent? [98] *Since there is no subject for sensation, and sensation, too, lacks all existence, how is craving not arrested when all this is clearly understood?* That which feels, namely, the mind and the self, and that which the mind and self experience, namely, feelings, each have no inherent, independent self-existence at all. When we realize that the sentient being who feels, and the feelings which are felt by that sentient being, are both dependent arisings that are continually subject to change and therefore without any truly inherent existence, how could the result of feeling, namely craving, *not* be turned away from, since the cause of craving lacks all true existence?

Examining the subject who experiences feelings

1. [99] *What we see and what we touch is stuff of dreams and mirages. If feeling is coincident with consciousness, it follows that it is not seen thereby.* There is nothing at all that has a true mode of existing. However, this doesn't mean that the person who experiences feelings and the feelings themselves do not exist at all. They do exist, but in an untrue way. The things that we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch have a dream-like and illusion-like quality.

2. In the second line of this stanza Shantideva says that if the consciousness which experiences a feeling and the feeling itself were to occur simultaneously, it would be impossible for the mind to observe the feeling. If distinct entities occur at exactly the same time, without one preceding the other, there could not be a causal relationship between the experienced object and the experiencing subject. Two mental events that arise simultaneously with each other are not able to apprehend one another. This is true for all states of awareness. Thus, feelings are not observed by the awareness that arises in conjunction with them and that exists simultaneously with them.

3. [100] *If the one arises first, the other after, memory occurs and not direct sensation. Sensation is without perception of itself and likewise, by another it is not perceived.* A feeling is not observed by an awareness that exists prior to it, nor is it directly observed by a later cognition that exists after the feeling has ceased. Neither is it correct to say that a feeling can feel itself. It can't be a "self-feeling" feeling since it is contradictory to say that a sensation can sense itself. This argument is similar to Shantideva's previous refutation of a self-cognizing consciousness earlier in the Wisdom chapter in his critique of the Chittamattra school. Thus, His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, in terms of truly inherent existence, a subjective experience of feelings cannot be posited at all.

4. [101] *The agent of sensation has no real existence, thus sensation, likewise, has no being. What damage, therefore, can sensation do to it—this aggregate deprived of self?* In his commentary on this stanza, His Holiness says that since the experiencer of feelings does not truly, inherently exist, feelings don't inherently exist in reality either. So what harm can be inflicted upon this aggregate that is empty of an inherently existing self?

5. Even though a person's physical and mental aggregates lack any intrinsic identity or self, we fail to recognize this and mistakenly become attached to those aggregates. But when we analytically look for the self that is imputed onto the aggregates we can't find it. How then could that non-inherently-existing self be harmed? The self that we mistakenly cling to exists as nothing more than a mere conceptual label that is applied to a dependently arising collection of ever-changing consciousness and form.

6. Grasping onto true existence is what makes us vulnerable to harm. Since there is no basis for such grasping, how can actual harm be inflicted upon that non-existent basis?

Session 28, 11/5/2023, “Mind & Phenomena”

What is meant by “selflessness” in Buddhism?

1. We began our discussions on selflessness—or identitylessness—with the selflessness of *persons*. As Nagarjuna states in his *Jewel Garland*, there is a person who undeniably exists, who engages in actions, experiences their results, and who is the actor in cyclic existence and liberation. The “self” of a person cannot exist apart from the aggregates of consciousness and form that make up the person. However, not one of those aggregates, the assembly of all of them, or the continuum of any one of them can be identified as being the “person”. The self of a person can only exist as a conceptual label or name imputed onto our experience of the combined aggregates of consciousness and form.

2. Shantideva then explains the selflessness of *phenomena*. There are four areas of our experience where this applies: (1) the body, (2) feelings, (3) the mind, and (4) other phenomena. Shantideva shows that the body itself cannot be found among any of its individual parts, from the limbs, joints and muscles, all the way down to the subatomic particles that form those parts. Neither can the collection of parts that form the body be the body because the collection of parts themselves can’t be found in the collection of pieces and segments that form all of the parts. The conclusion is that the body exists merely as a conceptual label and name imputed onto the parts that form it, and the parts themselves exist as mere conceptual labels imputed onto those segments that form each part, and so on. It is through illusion then, with regard to conceptually named parts, that we conceive the notion of a “body”, in the same way that in the dimness of twilight, a pile of stones in the shape of a person can be mistaken for an actual person.

3. Feelings as well—such as pleasure, pain, aversion, fear, and depression—do not exist inherently. Depending on the person, the same object or experience can act as the condition for both good and bad feelings. We can easily see this from our own experience, for instance when the taste of a particular kind of food is completely delicious for one person and completely disgusting for someone else. Or when we go to the gym to exercise because we’re trying to build up our strength and muscle tone, we’ll feel a sense of accomplishment afterwards if our muscles are painfully sore because we feel that we’re doing something good for ourselves. But if that same soreness and discomfort was experienced because someone *else* caused it and *we* didn’t ask for it, we’d be very upset and angry. We cling to our feelings and concretize them as if they existed independently within their own distinct identities we conventionally call ‘joy’, ‘sorrow’, ‘guilt’, ‘happiness’, ‘depression’, ‘comfort’, and so on. And yet, when we analyze these feelings, they have no inherent existence of their own.

What is meant by “mind” in Buddhism?

1. Shantideva next explains the selflessness of the mind, or consciousness, and other phenomena. Here in the Western world, many of us tend to equate the mind with the main organ of our nervous system, the brain. This view leads one to think of the mind as if it were generated from matter. According to Buddhism, the mind is equated with consciousness, or awareness, rather than matter. This conscious awareness is by nature subjective—its function is to be aware or cognizant of an object. In addition to being aware, the mind is also clear and luminous.

2. The mind is luminous in the sense that it “illuminates” by presenting contents to our awareness, but the mind doesn’t depend on the physical proximity of that content. For example, a concept of the moon can “illuminate” our consciousness without any need for us to be on the moon.

3. The mind is also clear in that it’s transparent. The term *clear* points to a fundamental property of the mind. Water, for example, is by nature clear, so that even when it is clouded and dirty, those impurities can be removed, and the water’s natural clarity or transparency will return. In the same way, the mind is clear in that no particular object (such as the moon), or emotional state (such as anger), is essential to a moment of consciousness. This is a crucial point for personal transformation and behavioral change, since it means that the dysfunctional habits that produce suffering and dissatisfaction can be transformed, precisely because they are not essential to the conscious mind itself.

4. In particular, this means the ignorance and ego self-grasping that is at the root of our suffering is not an essential property of the mind. Therefore it’s possible to remove that ignorance and ego self-grasping without putting an end to consciousness itself.

Sense consciousness versus mental consciousness

1. In Buddhism, a distinction is made in the mind between the categories of sense consciousness and mental consciousness. There are six categories of consciousness: eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body consciousness, plus mental consciousness. The first five are the sense consciousnesses, each arising in dependence on a physical sense faculty that has its own unique mode of being. The last is the mental consciousness, which arises in dependence on the mental sense faculty that has its own unique mode of being.

2. Form is perceived by the eye consciousness, sound by the ear consciousness, smell by the nose consciousness, taste by the tongue consciousness, and touch by the body consciousness. The five sense consciousnesses arise through the functioning of their respective sense faculties and their respective objects of the senses, such as form, sound, and so on. The mental consciousness arises in dependence on the mental sense faculty, but it is not a physical sense faculty. Therefore a distinction is made between the sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness from the point of view of their physical or non-physical sense faculties.

3. The sense consciousnesses totally depend on an external object of focus, and they can arise only through the observation of that external object. But the mental consciousness doesn’t need to depend on the presence of an externally observed object. So, although an ear consciousness hearing music will not arise if there is no externally audible music as its observed object, a mental consciousness perceiving the sound of music can still arise through remembering or conceiving it, even when no music can be heard externally. Our own experience verifies this.

Where is awareness located?

1. [102] *The mind within the senses does not dwell, it has no place in outer things like form. And in between, the mind does not abide: not out, not in, not elsewhere, can the mind be found.* The mind, also known as awareness or consciousness, is not located among the sense organs; it

can't be found among the outer sensory objects such as visual form; neither can it be located somewhere between them. No matter where we look for the mind, we can't find it.

2. Some non-Buddhists believe that awareness exists in the interior of a person, while others think it may exist in the extremities of the body such as the head or hands. There is a common belief in the West that visual perceptions, thoughts, and mental images are located in the brain. Although it's undeniable that the brain is involved in the arising of these cognitive events, where is the evidence that these subjectively experienced events occur in the head or anywhere in physical space?

3. Edwin Arthur Burtt, a 20th century American philosopher wrote a critique of the Western assumption that the mind is located in the brain in his work, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*. In Chapter 8, part B: "Examination of the Doctrine that Mind is Located in the Brain", he argues with those who presume that the awareness or consciousness of sensation is located in the brain. He says if we adopt the premise that our sensations are all located where the nerve fibers leading from the various parts of the body terminate in the brain, then physical sensations must be felt in the brain, sounds must be heard in the brain; sights, tastes, and smells likewise must be experienced in the brain. The objects and contents of the senses would all be concentrated at their proper nerve endings in the brain.

4. But given this, Burtt then postulates, what becomes of the universe we know and live in? It would all come down to a series of minute, mathematical points in the brain. Even more than that, what in the world can we mean when use the term "brain" or talk about the nerve fibers that supposedly lead into it? They also are only known to us by our various senses; and so they too must be nothing but minute points—not in the brain, for that now would be unintelligible nonsense—not anywhere! The whole universe, including the body itself, would disappear from space.

5. [103] *It is not in the body, yet is nowhere else. It does not merge with it nor stand apart—something such as this does not exist, not even slightly. Beings by their nature are beyond the reach of suffering.* A true, independently existing consciousness cannot be located somewhere inside the torso, nor within the body's outer limbs; and it cannot be found elsewhere. The mind does not intrinsically exist in the nature of the body. Neither does it exist independently apart from the body. If the mind is sought, one discovers that it does not exist independently. But since it can have no independent existence—not even slightly—apart from the body, the root verse says, "Beings by their nature are beyond the reach of suffering." In other words, conscious beings (sentient beings) are, by the nature of their consciousness, liberated from suffering.

6. As it is said in an ancient collection of Mahayana Buddhist sutras known as the *Ratnakuta Sutra*, literally *The Sutra of the Heap of Jewels*, "The mind is not within; the mind is not without; neither is it both. You cannot point to it." And later, "The mind, O Kashyapa—even all the Buddhas have never seen it! They do not see it and they never shall!" The *Prajnaparamita-sutra* in eight thousand verses, which is among the oldest of the Mahayana sutras and is part of the foundation of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, states: "The mind indeed is not a 'mind'; the nature of the mind is lucent clarity."

Awareness is unborn

1. [104] *If consciousness precedes the cognized object, with regard to what does it arise? If consciousness arises at the same time as its object, again, regarding what does it arise?* The five sense consciousnesses, i.e. eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body consciousnesses are found to have no true existence. If a sense consciousness had truly inherent, independent existence, it would have to exist independently before, during, and after any object that appears to it. If an independently existing sensory perception existed before the appearance of its respective object, then what object would it be conscious of? For example, visual awareness has to arise in dependence upon the shape, structure, and color of an object in order for it to occur. So if an independent visual awareness exists prior to that object, in dependence on what does it occur?

2. This verse is making it quite clear that the Prasangika Madhyamika view avoids not only the extreme of materialism set forth by the Vaibashika and Sautrantika schools of Buddhist philosophy, but also the view that asserts reality is entirely a mental construct, as set forth by the Chittamatra “Mind Only” school. Material phenomena do indeed depend for their existence upon mental labeling and naming, but perceptions of the physical world of matter, such as the visual cognition of shape, structure, and color, require for their production objects that can be cognized. The Prasangika view does acknowledge a dualism between mind and matter, but the two are seen as mutually interdependent. Moreover, the dualism itself has a purely relative, conventional status—it also exists in dependence upon conceptual labeling and imputation.

3. If an independently existing sense awareness and its object arise simultaneously, the same problem occurs: an object that serves as the cause for the production of a sense consciousness must precede that cognition. A causal relationship is necessarily sequential. However, cause and effect are not separated by absolute, objective time. According to the Prasangika view, not only are effects dependent upon their causes, but causes depend upon their effects. For example, not only is the existence of a child dependent upon its mother, but being a mother is dependent upon having a child.

4. So prior to the arising of a sense consciousness, the object of that sense consciousness must first be established. Otherwise no causal relationship would be able to exist between an object and the mind. But if the mind, the conscious awareness, is truly and *independently* existent, how could it possibly arise subsequently *in dependence upon* an object or anything else?

5. [105a] *If consciousness comes later than its object, once again, from what does it arise?* If an awareness arises after its object has ceased, in dependence upon what would that awareness occur? For example, if an ear consciousness hears a sound after that sound has completely ceased, in dependence on what does the ear consciousness hearing that sound arise?

Phenomena are without origin

1. [105b] *Thus the origin of all phenomena exceeds the reach of understanding.* Thus, when we seek the inherently existing entity that is imputed onto anything, we will discover that all phenomena lack independent self-existence. Everything exists in a relational way, purely by the power of conventional agreement. The way in which phenomena arise is beyond our conceptual grasp. Phenomena do not come into being before, after, or simultaneously with their cause; they do not arise from themselves, nor from something else, nor from both, nor from neither. They are without origin. They neither last nor cease, as it has been said: “They do not cease to be and

do not come to be. They have no ending and they are not permanent. They do not come; they do not go. They are not different; they are not the same.”

Shantideva refutes the objections of other schools

1. [106] Objection: *“If this is so there is no relative, and the the two truths—what becomes of them? Moreover, if the relative derives from beings’ minds, how can they pass beyond their sorrow?”* The objection here is that the Prasangikas seemingly claim that no existing entity is found under analysis, and that emptiness itself does not exist. When looking for an existing entity, they conclude that there is no form, sound, smell, taste, tactile object nor mental awareness, and that there is no truth of suffering, truth of the cause of suffering, truth of the origin of suffering, or truth of the path to the cessation of suffering. It’s as if they’re saying that everything does not exist.

2. It sounds as if the Prasangikas are saying that all relative (conventional) truths are mere illusions appearing to deluded minds, since they have no intrinsic existence. But if they are not intrinsically existent, they do not exist at all. In that case, how can there be two truths? If relative truths don’t exist, then ultimate truths cannot be established either.

3. Apparently the Prasangikas are concluding that everything that is posited consists purely of imagined appearances to deluded minds. If something exists simply because it seems to be real to a deluded mind, then nothing could be denied existence. In that case “true” and “untrue”, “good” and “evil”, “relative truth” and “ultimate truth” all lose their meaning. By eroding the distinction between “good” and “evil”, there can be no liberation from suffering by means of correctly avoiding evil and adopting virtue. Liberation from suffering itself would be nothing more than the illusion of a deluded mind.

4. [107] Shantideva: *But that is just the thought of others; it is not what I mean by the relative. If subsequently there are thoughts, the relative’s still there; if not, the relative has ceased indeed.* The objection by the other schools is that if something is said to exist merely because a deluded mind grasping onto true existence believes it exists, it would simply be an illusion—it would neither be able render help nor inflict harm. But one cannot claim that something exists simply because a deluded mind thinks it does. Although entities exist in dependence upon conceptual labeling, it is not true that one person’s concepts are necessarily as valid as another’s; nor is it true that each person lives in his or her own reality determined solely by their beliefs.

5. We may deny things that actually *do* exist; and although we are influenced by our false beliefs, we can’t escape being influenced by the existing things that we’re denying. Similarly, we may believe in things that do *not* exist. We are then influenced by those false beliefs, but we’re not influenced by the non-existent entities we believe in. The main purpose of Buddhist mind training is to recognize and reject those two types of false views: denying things that do exist, and believing in things that don’t exist. This is done by means of cultivating accurate perceptual and inferential awareness, reasoning, and judgement. This is called ‘verifying cognition’.

6. When the Prasangikas speak of relative or “conventional” truth, its truth is not determined by objective reality but by the mind. Objective reality cannot be the criterion for truth, because

truth is of the mind. According to the Prasangika view, truth cannot be determined on the basis of some reality existing independently of the mind, for such a reality doesn't exist. However, this is *not* to say there is no reality existing independently of the *human* mind. The human mind can neither perceive nor conceive a reality independent of itself. Truth is determined on the basis of its being known by a verifying cognition that is non-deceptive and accurate in its perceptual and inferential awareness, reasoning, and judgement. A truth may not be known by a given individual or society, but this does not mean it doesn't exist. If something is apprehended by *any* verifying cognition, it exists.

7. When we talk of conventional or relative truth, we're referring to something that is true for a mind that grasps onto the inherent existence of things. However, the mind that establishes conventional, relative reality must not be *deluded* in terms of mistakenly apprehending what is called its 'chief object'. For example, a mind that believes in rabbit's horns is *deluded* with respect to its chief object, namely rabbit's horns. But a mind that establishes conventional reality is said to be *confused* only, because it grasps onto true existence. It correctly identifies its chief object, but it mistakenly regards that object as truly existent.

8. A conventionally existing entity such as a rabbit, and a non-existing entity such as rabbit horns *both* are merely conceptual labels and neither exists independently in and of itself. In that sense they are alike; but there is a distinction as to whether they are conventionally (or relatively) able to render help or inflict harm and whether or not they are established by a verifying cognition. The cognition of a rabbit is not mistaken with respect to its chief object, namely the rabbit, but the cognition of rabbit horns is mistaken. There is a distinction between a cognition being mistaken or unmistaken with respect to its chief object; and that is what determines whether it is a verifying cognition or a delusion.

9. The criterion for conventional or relative existence is the presence of a mind that is unmistaken with respect to its chief object. If the validity of its conventional existence is not rejected by any other conventional knowledge; if it is able to yield benefit or harm; and if it is established by verifying cognition—then it exists. If not, it does not exist even conventionally. There are generally two kinds of verifying cognition: perceptual and inferential. Perceptual verifying cognitions include valid sensory cognitions as well as certain kinds of mental awarenesses in which objects are ascertained directly without the appearance of the *ideas* of those objects occurring in the mind. Inferential verifying cognition apprehends its object in dependence upon conclusive reasoning; and that kind of cognition is always mixed with the appearance of the idea of its object. For example, upon observing smoke rising from a hill in the distance, one will reasonably conclude that there is a fire on the hill. That would be a verifying inferential cognition that is mixed with the *idea* of fire burning on the hill, because fire itself has not actually been seen.

10. Because of these two kinds of verifying cognition—perceptual and inferential—Tibetan Buddhist mental discipline involves training both in meditation and logic. Meditation is aimed at cultivating subtle forms of perceptual, mental verifying cognition. Logic is aimed at cultivating inferential verifying cognition. The emphasis of this discipline is to learn to distinguish between verifying cognition and the fantasizing mind that conjures all sorts of fictitious imaginings.

11. [108] *The analyzing mind and what is analyzed are linked together, mutually dependent. It is on the basis of conventional consensus that all investigation is expressed.* According to the Prasangikas, subjective conceptual cognition and conceived objects are mutually interdependent. Action depends on an agent of action, and the agent depends on the action. For example, a sculptor is identified on the basis of his or her activity of making sculptures; and since there are sculptors, the activity of sculpting occurs. Neither the sculptor nor the sculpture has any true, independent existence—they are established conventionally in mutual dependence upon one another. In terms of the analyzing mind and the entity being analyzed, one first has to determine that the entity in question exists conventionally. On that basis one can then establish the ultimate mode of existence of that entity.

12. [109] Objection: *“But when the process of analysis is made, in turn the object of our scrutiny, this investigation likewise may be analyzed, and thus we find infinite regress.”* In order to understand that *all* phenomena are without true existence, the process of analysis that is used to show that all objects are by their nature unreal must itself be investigated. But if that happens, the original process of analysis will necessarily become the object of its own investigation. The first analysis must be investigated by a second analysis and so on; and in this way, the analysis must lead to an infinite series of recurring analyses.

13. [110] Shantideva: *If phenomena are truly analyzed, no basis for analysis remains. And when the object is removed, the subject too subsides. That indeed is said to be nirvana.* Upon establishing the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena, if one proceeds to further analyze the ultimate reality of the lack of inherent existence, one discovers the lack of inherent existence of ultimate reality. In this case the subject of analysis is emptiness, and one discovers the ultimate reality of ultimate reality. Thus, one discovers of the emptiness of emptiness itself.

Compiled and edited by Tenzin Dhondup Sherab/Christopher Moroney