

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

Shāntideva's *Bodhicharyāvatāra*, The Way of the Bodhisattva
Chapter 9: "Wisdom"
Part 9.3: The Nature of Existence—Interdependence & Karma

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; Debate in Tibetan Buddhism* by Daniel E. Perdue; 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 Session 31: Sunday, December 10, 2023

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

Review of Session 30

1. In the last session Shantideva began by establishing that subject and object are mutually dependent. This means that conscious awarenesses, which are subjective in nature, arise in dependence upon objective existence. Similarly, objective existence cannot be experienced, observed, or identified unless there are subjective consciousnesses to observe, experience, and identify it. The two rely upon one another for their existence as mutually dependent, fundamental components of the universe. In other words, the universe exists as a mutually dependent relationship between subjective consciousnesses and objective existence.

2. Shantideva then explored the concept of a Creator God. He first presented and refuted the atheist argument that all things have no cause but come into existence merely from their own nature. Obviously things arise due to multiple causes and conditions, both internally and externally. Next, he addressed the pantheistic argument that God is identical to all things in the universe and cosmos. If by that, the pantheists mean living beings and the environment arise from the elements that make up the universe, Shantideva finds no fault there. What the pantheists call "God" in this case, the Buddhists call the "elements of the universe". It's merely a difference in terminology.

3. Finally, he debated the theist view that God the Creator is eternal, one, immutable, and worthy of veneration. The God of the theists is involved in the world and human life, but as a Creator is quite distinct from creation. But if an immutable, permanent God is the creator of all possible effects, then God is responsible for the unsought suffering of creatures. If all effects—including the free will of sentient beings—are wished for by God, then in effect God wishes suffering for some and happiness for others. This would indicate that creation is not produced by a permanent, unchangeable God, but by impermanent wishes and desires. This makes the belief in an immutable, unchangeable God unfounded. In that case, how could one say that God

is the cause of everything that exists? Shantideva relies on logic and reason, as well as direct and inferential evidence when forming conclusions about the nature of existence.

The belief in a primal substance that is the origin of existence

1. Shantideva now returns to the Samkhya school of Hindu philosophy that we studied in part 7.2 of the Wisdom chapter where we discussed the selflessness of persons. The Samkhyas assert the existence of *atman*, a true, permanent, and eternal self-existent essence of each individual. *Atman* serves as an individualized example of the universal principal called *purusha*. *Purusha* refers to an observing awareness or witnessing consciousness that is permanent and uncaused, present everywhere, and which is independent, unattached, and unrelated to anything. All objects that are perceived by the permanent *purusha* arise from the primal substance of the first cause which forms all the impermanent aspects of reality. The Samkhyas call this primal substance and its effects *prakriti*. [126] *Those who hold the permanence of particles [Vaibashika school] were indeed refuted earlier. The Samkhyas are the ones who hold that permanent prakriti is the cause of the evolving world.*

2. This primal substance, or *prakriti*, which the Samkhyas say is the cause of the world, is asserted by them to be eternal, one, independent, devoid of consciousness, invisible to ordinary sight, and universally creative. The nature of this primal matter, or *prakriti*, is defined as the balance or equilibrium of three universal constituents called *sattva* (pleasure), *rajas* (pain), and *tamas* (neutrality). *Prakriti* is the cause of all manifestation, so it is called “primal”. The Samkhyas say that when the three constituent elements or qualities of *prakriti* fall into a state of imbalance, the appearance of the whole universe arises. [127] *“Pleasure”, “pain”, “neutrality”, so-called, are qualities which, when they rest in equilibrium are termed “prakriti”. The universe arises when this balance is disturbed.*

3. Shantideva goes on to point out the Samkhyas’ lack of logic when they say that the primal substance of the universe is one and independent and then say that it has three natures. There can be no such thing as an independent primal cause that is one if it has three constituent natures or qualities that can be either in balance or out of balance with one another. Likewise, the three universal constituents have no real existence in themselves either, because each of them can again be divided into three. For example, there is the pain of pleasure, the pain of pain, and the pain of neutrality, and so on. [128] *Three natures in a unity are disallowed, and thus prakriti is without existence. These [three] qualities likewise do not exist, for each of them indeed is three.*

4. [129] *If these qualities have no existence, a thing like sound is very far from plausible! And cloth and other mindless objects cannot be the seat of feelings such as pleasure.* If the three universal qualities cannot actually be established, their manifestation of things such as visual forms and sounds become extremely difficult to establish as well. It is also completely incongruous to say that cloth and other non-conscious material objects have in their nature the qualities of pleasure, pain, and neutrality because they are material objects and have no mental qualities. Pleasure, pain, and neutrality are qualities of mental consciousness, and whatever has those in its nature must also be a mental phenomenon.

5. [130] Samkhyas: *“But these things possess the nature of their cause.”* Shantideva: *But have we not investigated “things” already? For you, the cause is “pleasure” and the like, and yet from pleasure, cloth has never sprung!* It is impossible for pleasure, and so on, to be located in inanimate things like clothing. Inanimate objects like clothing or sounds do in fact give rise to pleasure, pain, or neutral indifference, but Shantideva has already shown that things such as clothes have no inherent self-existence when he refuted the independent self-existence of bodies earlier in this chapter.

6. The Samkhyas also undermine their own position by saying that the cause of woolen cloth is pleasure and so forth, and then go on to say that the effect of woolen cloth is pleasure also. In other words, pleasure is said to be both the cause and result of cloth. This is like saying that a man is both the father and son of the same person. It’s not even worth serious consideration.

7. [131] Shantideva: *Pleasure, rather, is produced from cloth. If this [the cloth] is nonexistent, pleasure likewise [is nonexistent]. As for permanence of pleasure and the rest—well, there’s a thing that’s never been observed!* Woolen cloth has certainly never been seen to arise from pleasure and so forth, and it is true that things like clothes and blankets and garlands of flowers may give rise to pleasure. But since things like cloth have no real independent existence of their own even on the level of subatomic particles, the feelings of pleasure, pain, and neutrality that arise from them cannot exist separately on their own either.

8. But the Samkhyas say that pleasure, pain, and neutrality constitute the eternal nature of the primal substance, which does not depend upon things like cloth. If that is so, then it follows that pleasure, pain, and neutrality must constantly be perceived and cannot be avoided because of their eternal nature. However, we all know from experience that these things are not constantly perceived, and so the position of the Samkhyas is unfounded. But the Samkhyas insist that although the three universal natures have a permanent existence, they have a particular feature of being sometimes manifest and sometimes hidden. For this reason they say it is not inevitable that they would be constantly observed.

9. [132] Shantideva: *If pleasure and the rest are manifestly present, how comes it that they’re not perceived? And if you claim they take on subtle form, how is it that they are both gross and subtle?* If the three universal natures can manifest intermittently, the question then becomes: Why? Why are they not constantly perceived? The Samkhyas’ answer is: If pleasure, pain, and neutrality become more subtle, they exist in a state of non-manifest potentiality and cannot be perceived—yet they still pervade the object of perception and dwell constantly in it. But Shantideva asserts that it is a contradiction to say that the primal substance is one and eternal, yet has three different natures with opposing states of grossness and subtlety.

10. [133] Shantideva: *If coarseness is abandoned, subtlety assumed, subtlety and grossness both lack permanence. So why not grant that, in this way, all things possess the character of transience?* Shantideva says that if pleasure has the ability to change from gross to subtle forms this clearly shows that pleasure must be impermanent. In the same way, he says, the Samkhyas should assert that all things are impermanent because they too all have the nature of arising into existence and then changing.

11. [134, part 1] Shantideva: *If the coarser aspect is none other than the pleasure, it's clear that pleasure is itself impermanent.* The Samkhyas assert that whether gross or subtle, the actual nature of pleasure is never lost, and therefore its permanent character isn't diminished. But is gross pleasure of the same nature or a different nature as pleasure itself? If it is different, it would follow that when gross pleasure subsided, pleasure itself would *not* recede into a state of non-manifest potentiality, but would still be felt and perceived. On the other hand, if gross pleasure is of the same nature as pleasure, then it is simply a degree or aspect of pleasure, which points out that pleasure itself is impermanent.

The belief in self-production

1. The Samkhyas argue that when the causal constituent of pleasure ceases to manifest, it remains hidden, in a potential state, within the expanse of *prakriti*, the primal substance. When it later reappears, it's merely the manifestation of what was already there. The Samkhyas say that if the three constituents or qualities of the primal substance didn't already exist, they would not be able to come into being. They say that whatever becomes manifest must have existed until that moment, according to its own nature, within the sphere of the primal substance. This assertion by the Samkhyas amounts to saying that cause and effect coexist.

2. [134, part 2] Shantideva: *If you claim that what does not exist in any sense (because it has no being) cannot manifest, [135] although you have denied the birth of things that did not previously exist, it's this that you're now saying! But if results exist within their cause, those who eat their food consume their excrement.* Shantideva says if results coexist with their causes, why aren't they constantly perceived? The Samkhyas say it's because the results are not apparent to consciousness. Later on they are perceived, just like a pot in a dark room becomes visible when the lights are on.

3. When they say this, the Samkhyas weaken their main argument. Although they don't mean to say that the manifestation of an effect is absent at the time of its cause and that it arises anew, what they have just said in fact amounts to this. They may claim that nothing is born anew but in reality things are born anew. A manifest sprout does not exist at the time of its cause, it only exists as a potentiality within the seed; it is produced at a later time when it meets the additional causes and conditions that enable the sprout to form. On the subjective level of personal consciousness, our Buddha nature only exists as a potentiality; our full development of Buddhahood is produced at a later time when our consciousness meets the additional causes and conditions that enable our enlightenment to come into existence. Anything that does not exist at the time of its cause and then comes into existence later is a perfect example of a newly born phenomenon. The Samkhya's position is self-contradictory and lacks clear reasoning. If the Samkhyas believe that a sprout can exist at the time of the seed, do they also believe that excrement exists at the same time as *its* cause: food? If, as the Samkhyas say, the result coexists with its cause, it follows that when they eat their food, they're eating their own shit!

4. [136] Shantideva: *And likewise with the the money they would spend on clothing, let them rather buy the cotton grains to wear!* Samkhyas: *"But the world is ignorant and blind. For this is taught by 'those who know the truth'."* Shantideva says that with the money the Samkhyas use to buy their fine cotton clothing, why don't they just buy the cotton seeds which the fabric comes from and cover their bodies with those instead. At least that might be a way to prove their

beliefs to themselves! The Samkhyas insist, however, that the effect coexists in the cause, but ordinary worldly people don't see it because their eyes are blinded by the darkness of ignorance.

5. [137] Shantideva: *This knowledge must be present in the worldly too! And if they have it, why do they not see? If now you say that what the worldly see has no validity, this means that what they clearly see is false.* Shantideva replies that ordinary worldly people *do* have this knowledge because the Samkhyas teach this view of theirs to them. Why don't the worldly people they teach come to understand and see that the effect already exists in its cause? If the Samkhyas say that the perceptions of these worldly people have no validity, this means that what these people can clearly see with their own eyes is false. But in fact, what they see with their own eyes is correct and unmistakable in regard to their object. For the Samkhyas to say that effects are present in their causes because they manifest at a later time is meaningless.

The actual refutation of self-production

1. [138] Samkhya: *"If there's no validity in valid knowledge, is not all that it assesses false? And therefore it becomes untenable to meditate on voidness, ultimate reality."* The Samkhyas now test the Madhyamikas with the following question: Since, according to you Prasangika Madhyamikas, valid cognition is not truly existent, must it not then be false? Therefore isn't any object that is ascertained by such a cognition also false? If this is the case, isn't the emptiness you speak of in fact false because the valid cognition that realizes it is false? If such false emptiness is meditated upon, doesn't it become incapable of being maintained?

2. [139] Shantideva: *If there is no object for analysis, there can be no grasping of its nonexistence. And so deceptive objects of whatever kind will also have a nonexistence equally deceptive.* Shantideva responds by saying that although the valid cognition that realizes emptiness and emptiness itself are both non-truly existent, to realize what the Prasangikas mean by non-true existence depends upon the correct identification of the true existence that is to be negated.

3. In relation to the realization of emptiness, unless the object that is to be negated is identified there can be no apprehension by a valid mind of its nonexistence. The object that is to be negated is true existence, which means *inherently independent existence*. The apprehension by a valid mind of that object's nonexistence is the apprehension of emptiness, which means *the emptiness of inherently independent existence*. Similarly, there is no inherently independent negation; therefore the emptiness of inherently independent existence is itself empty. When the Prasangikas say that all phenomena are not truly existent and are falsely existent they are not saying that they are utterly untrue and false but rather that they are empty or devoid of a deceptive and falsely imagined true existence that we have mistakenly attributed to them.

4. It is our clinging to the deceptive and falsely imagined independent existence of phenomena, a habit acquired from beginningless time, that is, at the moment, binding us to samsara and its suffering. The antidote to this is quite simply to develop the habit of considering all phenomena to be without any inherently independent existence. This includes emptiness, which clearly has no inherently independent existence itself.

1. [140] *When therefore in one's dream a child has died, the state of mind that thinks it is no more supplants the thought that it is living still. And yet both thoughts are equally deceptive.* People suffer when they have a dream in which their child dies. In the dream, the thought that the child has died replaces the thought that the child was alive. Both thoughts are equally deceptive because they occur in a dream, yet the thought that the child has died has the ability to overcome the thought that the child was alive. In a similar way, both the realization of emptiness and the conception that grasps at inherently independent existence are equally deceptive in that they each have no inherent existence, but the realization of emptiness is still able to overcome the grasping at inherent existence. Therefore, even though the grasping at inherent existence and the realization of emptiness are both equally deceptive and illusion-like, one can inflict harm and the other can give benefit.

2. It is important to recognize the distinction between phenomena being *false* and phenomena being *falsely existent*. All phenomena are *falsely existent* because they are empty of inherently independent existence. Even the ultimate truth of emptiness is empty of inherently independent existence and is therefore said to be *falsely existent*. Only conventional truths are said to be *false* phenomena. Here the term *false* should be understood as meaning that the phenomenon's mode of appearance and the phenomenon's mode of existence are not the same. Any conventional phenomenon that appears to any ordinary sense consciousness—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mental—is *false* because although it appears as if it is inherently independent, in fact it is a *false* mode of appearance. An ultimate truth, i.e. an emptiness, is not a *false* phenomenon because when it appears to perception, its mode of appearance corresponds to its mode of existence, yet it is still *falsely existent* because it is a dependent arising that does not inherently exist.

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