

### 11.4.11 DBC TENETS/DRUPTA Geshe Jampa Tenzin

Generate a sound motivation to listen to help all sentient beings.

There are four tenets/schools of thought in Buddhism.

The first two schools assert the selflessness of person only and the second two not only do this but also assert selflessness of phenomena.

Of the two types of selflessness, that of person is relatively easier to understand than selflessness of phenomena. Between person and phenomena we have a stronger idea of the self existence of the aggregates and a relatively weaker grasping at person. That is because it's easier to understand person lacks selfhood. When pointed out to us it is easy to see that person is a label affixed to the aggregates. Whereas we tend to think deep down that aggregates are different and that they have an aspect which makes them exist by themselves.

Although selflessness of person is easier to come to terms with, selflessness of person asserted by the highest school, Prasangika-Madhyamika, was not taught straight away because that was too subtle for everyone to grasp. If it was taught from the outset Buddha knew that people would get the wrong end of the stick and if people thought there was no person at all they may fall into the extreme of nihilism, thinking nothing at all exists. This would lead people to cast aspersion on the law of karma and cause and effect. This is a very dangerous thing as it becomes a guiding principle of them to do whatever they like and would then lead them down to the three lower realms by their negative actions. Therefore Buddha was very cautious in his teaching of selflessness of person, so much so that he even taught sometimes that person did have some kind of selfhood, saying that the five aggregates are like a load and person is like the carrier. Buddha implied person was separate from the aggregates, therefore having some kind of existence of their own, implying a form of selfhood of person.

What form of selflessness of person did Buddha teach at the outset so that people would not misunderstand him?

**The first was the coarsest view; that person is empty of being a permanent, unitary/singular, independent entity. This is the Vaibashika/lowest school view.**

After teaching this selflessness, when Buddha thought people had a good grasp of the roughest degree of selflessness he taught the **second shade of emptiness of person; that person is empty of having a self sufficient substantially existent entity**. Person is believed to have a self-sufficient substantially existent entity when person is seen to be not dependent on skandas much like the relationship between the ruler and the subjects. To understand emptiness of self sufficiently existing substantial entity we need to understand how a person is empty of permanence because person is momentarily disintegrating, person is empty of being unitary because it is dependent on parts, and person is empty of independence because it is dependent on production and cessation.

We need to understand how a person is empty of having a self sufficient substantially existent entity. We can do this by knowing how a person is empty of permanence. How

do we think of a person as permanent? Deep down we think that one's person has come from throughout beginningless time up to this point. When we think that person has such a deep history we cannot help but think person is permanent. At the same time the aggregates on which person is labeled are seen as temporary. That causes us to see person and aggregates as different. Overcoming the thought that person is permanent helps us to see that person is empty of having self-sufficient substantial entity.

When we understand that person is not unitary but dependent on parts/ components of person/ the mental and physical aggregates, that helps us to see an important concept, that the person is a designated, labeled phenomenon.

Among all but one Buddhist school person is believed to be *tagyu*/an imputed, designated labeled entity. One school believes person has *dzeyu*/substantial/nondependent/independent selfhood. An imputed phenomenon is a phenomenon which is labeled onto something that is not itself. Whereas a substantially existent phenomenon has an assertive existence from within itself, not needing anything else for its existence. It doesn't need to rely on another phenomenon for its existence.

All schools agree person is labeled dependent on its aggregates. The question is whether the aggregates themselves are seen to be person or not.

All school except the highest/Prasangika believe that person can be found when look for it. Where do we look for person? We look among the aggregates of body and mind. There is the underlying belief that things can be found and if not person would not exist at all. According to these schools different aspects of the aggregates end up being the person.

**According to the first school, Vaibashika, person is what is labeled on to the collection of aggregates of body and mind. According to the Sutra/Sautantrika school person is the mental consciousness. According to Mind Only/Cittamatra school person is the foundation consciousness which is apart from the normal 6 consciousnesses. For Savatantrika Madhyamika person is the mental consciousness. In this way while all of these schools believe person is labeled in relation to its aggregates each of these schools has a different way of defining aggregates of person. This difference is explained by the schools different ways of seeing an important concept called dependent arising.**

**All four schools except a branch of the highest, Prasangika, believe that for things to exist they must be found. If you search for a thing and can't find it you can't say it exists. The underlying principle is things are findable upon analysis. Aggregates are called the basis of designation. Person is, like the stamp on an envelope, the imputed phenomenon. These schools say when you look for the person you have to look among its basis. When they do that they say they come up with these different aspects as being person.**

These four schools believe in the dependent arising of person. How? Person is dependent on the persons parts/aggregates and therefore dependent arising.

**What about the view of Prasangika Madhyamika? Its non-negotiable position is that nothing can be found to exist. When you look for a phenomenon among its basis of designation none of the parts nor the collection of parts are the imputed phenomenon. What is a person? It is a subtle dependent arising mainly labeled on its basis of designation. A key feature of this is that a person labeled in this way cannot be found among its basis. Nothing will end up being the imputed phenomenon.**

**While the first rung of Vaibashika and the Prasangika-Madhyamika both say that the person is empty of being a self sufficient substantial entity what they understand by that is very different.**

What is meant by substantial self sufficient entity according to the first school? A person would be believed to have this existence if the relationship between the person and aggregates were like that of the king and subjects or like that of the load and the porter. If they are seen as so distinct that amounts to the belief in a self sufficiently existent substantial entity according to the Vaibashika school. The distinction here is sharp. Kings cannot be subjects, subjects cannot become king.

What is the notion of self sufficiently existing substantial entity according to Prasangika? If the relationship between the person and aggregates is seen as like that of an owner of the business/manager and the workers, ie: engaged in the same business, then the person would have self sufficient substantial entity. Here the difference is subtle. The chief and the workers are both engaged in same business therefore difference is very fine, subtle.

When Vaibashika considers person to have self sufficiently existent substantial entity there are two ways they see it. Firstly if the defining characteristics of person and the aggregates are different then person would have such an existence. Secondly, if the person is seen to have a completely different entity, that is also a way of seeing the person as having this existence.

The first notion of seeing person as having different defining characteristics, as opposed to aggregates (????), is only a learned, acquired, schooled notion. That is, only if you are immersed in a certain philosophical school of thought would you acquire such a notion. When person is seen as the porter who carries the load of the aggregates, then one has a second notion of substantially existent person, that is, you actually see the person as a different entity than the aggregates. This is a universal notion held by all sentient beings. You don't have to be taught this, as a sentient being you instinctively hold this view. It is called innate grasping at person as having such an existence.

How do we know that we suffer from this view that person is different from the aggregates? If we were given the choice of being able to discard ones present body and be given the desirable beautiful body of a divine being one would do so in an instant. This shows that we don't implicitly consider our person to be the same as our aggregates, but separate.

Grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantial entity is easy to talk about but its very hard to get rid of such a notion. We need to see how we relate to our aggregates and then gain experience that there is a relationship between aggregates and person but they are not inherently one and nor are they different.

### **Arguments against Vaibashika view of person**

As said before Vaibashika would say that person is a dependent arising labeled on the aggregates and yet a person can be found among the aggregates. They say the aggregates can be person. If aggregates and person were the same some logical fallacies would occur. Firstly since there are five aggregates there would be five persons. Then person is appropriator of the aggregates in different lifetimes. We die here and then take on five new aggregates in next lifetime. However, if a person can be found among the aggregates, the distinct role of appropriator and appropriated falls away. If you say only one of the aggregates is person it means that just as there is only one person there is only one aggregate to apply a label to.

If we want to understand that a person is empty of self sufficient substantial entity we need to understand it in relation to the many explanations given by the Prasangika School. This is hard to understand. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that from the age of 37 onwards he has spent considerable time meditating on how a person is empty of inherent existence. He says it is really hard to arrive at that understanding. Yet it is highly beneficial. It is said to be profound. According to Aryadeva it is very worthwhile even to have a suspicion that person may not have such an existence. It has a powerful effect on cutting the root of our ignorance. Let alone understanding it directly, even beating about the bush of the concept has the effect of smashing to pieces the rigid notion of true existence of person.

On top of concerted reflection on the lines of reasoning we also need to gather merits and engage in purification activities to purify the mind of the veils of obscurities. Then we need to frequently turn to gurus and personal transcendent deities seeing them as indivisible and nondual pleading with them to give us the wisdom to understand emptiness. Then we need to study the major Buddhist treatises. This was the advice given to lama Tsong Khapa from Manjushri. When he asked for help to understand emptiness Manjushri told him to do these three things. We can certainly follow the same advice.

For Tibetan Buddhists who practice tantra, at the beginning of any practice, recitation of a verse on emptiness is done. Om svabava shuddho savadharma svabava shuddho hum. This mantra is repeated time and again to drive home how important it is to see that everything is empty at all stages of practice. Some practitioners spent 12 years just thinking about the meaning of the mantra.

I am not as conversant about this teaching as His Holiness. His teachings are available so immerse yourselves in his teachings.

What follows is questions from the audience.