

DBC Geshe Jampa Tenzin DRUPTA/TENETS 2.5.2011

As always it is important to set the highest motivation to dedicate your merit from hearing teachings to attaining complete enlightenment for the benefit to all sentient beings.

Tonight we are here to learn about Drupta/Tenets – the Buddhist schools of thought. There are four schools. Two believe in selflessness of person and not of phenomena whereas the other two schools not only believe in selflessness of the person but selflessness of phenomena also. Tonight we will be discussing the view of the Sautantrika, or the Sutra System School.

Sautantrika/Sutra School

The definition of a proponent of the Sautantrika is a person who subscribes to the Hinayana school of thought and believes that self-cognising phenomena/apperception and external phenomena both have true existence. The etymology of the Sautantrika School is that this school presents its philosophy following the Sutra teachings given by the Buddha, in particular the sutras called the Seven Steps of Abhidharma.

The other name of the Sautantrika School is Analogists because this school tries to establish all categories of phenomena by way of analogies or examples.

The Seven Abhidharma Sutras were compiled from memory (photographic) by Maudgalyana, Shariputra and so on. The Vaibashika School takes the Seven Abhidharma Sutras as actual teaching by the Buddha. However, the Sautantrika School are divided on this. One branch believes it is a teaching by the Buddha while others believe it is a teaching by the Buddha given by arahats and some even go to the extent of saying they were not even compiled by the arahats, but that they were put together by ordinary beings. So as to what the Seven Sutras are the school is divided amongst its members.

Broadly speaking there are 2 subschools of Sautantrika/Sutra; those who follow scripture and those who follow reasoning.

Obviously, the scripture following branch of the Sautantrika/Sutra School follow the Seven Steps of Abhidharma Sutra and accordingly present their views about ground reality, path progression and resultant state and so on based on what is in the seven metaphysical sutras. Whereas the reasoning following branch follow Seven Pramana Treatises/Seven Works of Valid Cognition written by Dharmakirti. This subschool presents its views based on reasons propounded in the Seven Pramana Treatises by Dharmakirti.

Both of these schools when presenting their views do so under three divisions; base/ground reality, path, and result. That is; when you follow a particular path based on the ground reality there is a particular result which you arrive at.

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Two truths according to Sautantrika/Sutra School

When you talk about ground reality, the Sutra school talks about the two truths –

1. convention/truth of concealer/truth of concealed mind/relative truth (kun tsob denba)
2. ultimate truth (dondam denba).

All four Buddhist schools subscribe to the two truths. The view of the ultimate truth in this Sutra/Sautantrika School is more subtle than the first, Vaibashika, but is surpassed by the Mind-Only School which is surpassed by the Middle Way School.

How does this Sutra/Sautantrika School define ultimate truth? They say it is a phenomenon that bears ultimate analysis because it exists inherently by the power of a moment of subsistence without being imputed by sound/language and concepts. It says that ultimate truth is a phenomenon that is not merely imputed by terms and concept.

This word ‘merely’ negates different things and what is negated differs from school to school. The criterion for being merely labelled by terms and concepts is; if an entity cannot perform the function of producing its effect despite its existing characteristically or inherently.

I will talk about what the Mind Only School and Madyamika School say about being merely labelled and not being merely labelled when we come to them.

How does an ultimate truth according to this Sutra School bear ultimate analysis? When an ultimate analysing reasoning consciousness investigates and tries to find where the phenomenon is among its basis, this school says it can be found somewhere and therefore it can withstand reasoning analysis applied by the ultimate investigating reasoning consciousness.

However, again here, the criterion for being able to bear ultimate analysis and the interpretation of that differs from school to school.

Ultimate truth

An example of ultimate truth according to Sautantrika School is, all compounded/impermanent phenomena are instances of ultimate truth.

That is, all impermanent things are called so because ultimate consciousness, referring to direct prime cognition, correctly gauges/understands them unmistakably. That is a brief explanation of the definition of the ultimate truth according to this school.

Conventional truth

The definition of a conventional truth/truth for a concealed mind according to Sutra/Sautantrika School is a phenomenon that is merely labelled, constructed by ideas or

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mind. The etymology is a phenomenon which offers a mere appearance to the conceptual mind.

Conventional truths are merely constructed by the conceptual mind which is called the concealed mind. It is called a concealed mind in the sense that it is concealed by a generic image, meaning that the conceptual mind cannot directly/starkly perceive specifically characterised phenomena/impermanence. The conceptual mind is a concealed mind in that it is not able to see nakedly impermanent things that are specifically characterised. They are blocked by the opaque nature of the generic image. The conceptual mind needs to eliminate something that presents as an impermanent phenomenon but is not an impermanent phenomenon, meaning the generic image. So the conceptual mind needs to get at an impermanent phenomenon by way of eliminating the semblance of an impermanent phenomenon, the generic image.

I'd like to again reiterate the difference between the two lower schools, Vaibashika and Sautantrika, with regard to ultimate and conventional truths.

For the Vaibashika, a phenomenon is said to be an ultimate truth when you do not lose the idea of the object even once it is destroyed. For example, a vase; once a vase is smashed with a hammer, if you don't lose the concept/image/idea of the vase even after the smashing, then that conception is an ultimate truth. A relative/conventional truth is an impermanent phenomenon which when it is destroyed or broken into parts, the image of the phenomenon is lost.

For the Sautantrika School an ultimate truth is an impermanent phenomenon that is able to ultimately produce its effect and a thing that is not able to produce its effect is an example of a relative/conventional truth.

To elaborate, for the Vaibashika School, the difference between relative and ultimate truth is whether a person loses an awareness of a thing that is destroyed or not; when the awareness is lost that is relative truth, when we don't lose awareness that is ultimate truth.

For the Sautantrika School the difference between the two truths is; whether a phenomenon can bear ultimate analysis or not. If it can bear analysis it is ultimate truth. If it cannot bear analysis it is conventional truth.

For the Mind Only School the difference between the two truths is whether the object serves to be one of observation or not. This means whether or not it is an ultimate object of meditation of a pure path. If it is an ultimate object of a consciousness which has become a pure path it is an ultimate truth. If not it is a conventional truth.

From the Madyamika School point of view an ultimate truth is one that is directly perceived non dualistically by a direct cognizer apprehending it; shunyata, for example. If it is not perceived directly, empirically in a non dualistic fashion it is a conventional truth.

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According to Vaibashika School if something exists it has to be a functional entity. With regard to this there are permanent and impermanent functional entities.

Impermanent functional entities have two parts; that which is ultimate truth and that which is conventional truth.

For the Sutra/Sautantrika System, the second school of thought, all compounded/impermanent phenomena are necessarily ultimate truths while all non compounded phenomena are examples of relative truth.

For Mind Only School and Madyamika School ultimate truth is necessarily permanent. For example shunyata/emptiness is permanent by nature, not made but existent, and therefore an ultimate truth.

This has been a brief explanation of ultimate and conventional truths.

The Objects of the Sutra School

Between Vaibashika and Sutra schools knowables/ sheja/ things that can be known by a consciousness, are of two kinds; permanent and impermanent knowables. But their interpretation of what is permanent and what is impermanent differs.

For Vaibashika a permanent knowable is that which exists permanently, perennially. For the Sutra School it is that which does not have the cause of its disintegration built into it by nature. For this school the opposite is an impermanent phenomenon.

Let me give you an example of a permanent knowable from the Sautantrika point of view. Something that is permanent is something that needn't exist for all time. The truth of cessation, the fourth of the four noble truths, is something you will achieve in the future. You don't have it now but when you become an Arahat, the truth of cessation, the permanent cessation of all delusions, will crop up, take root, in your consciousness and it will abide there forever. The truth of cessation by nature abides forever in the consciousness. Disintegration is not built into it. It will not become non true cessation once it has taken root in the consciousness. However it doesn't exist permanently, at all times, because right now we don't have it. But when we do have it, it will abide forever.

The second knowable is an impermanent knowable. The two schools both say it is a momentary phenomenon but what constitutes a momentary phenomenon differs between the schools.

For the Sutra School momentary means that the phenomenon does not remain in the second moment of its existence. That is very subtle. For the Vaibashika, momentary means, whatever completes the cycle of production, abidance, and cessation. That constitutes momentary.

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For example, this pen; the first moment that it comes into being the process of disintegration/wear and tear, its perishable nature, comes into existence as well but it has not disintegrated yet. The first moment that the pen comes into being, that it will not exist the same way in the second moment, is built into that very first moment. It has this perishable nature through subatomic change moment to moment right from the beginning.

What is this word zhigpa. It's really difficult to describe. Zhigpa means (*English please.....(what does it mean?)*) According to Sutra School zhigpa is permanent.

What is this word jigpa? It means perishable.

According to the Sutra School an object which is jigpa is impermanent.

Whereas the highest school/ Prasangika Madyamika says that zhigpa is not permanent but impermanent. According to the highest school both of these, zhigpa and jigpa, are impermanent.

According to the Sutra school jigpa is impermanent and zhigpa is permanent.

The lower schools cannot establish zhigpa (*English please.....*) to be functional. That is why they have to come up with all sorts of examples for the storage of predispositions. They talk about foundation consciousness for example.

An example of a zhigpa (*English word please.....*) would be; the cessation in the second moment of the first moment of the pen. That is permanent the Vaibashika say. This school considers zhigpa as permanent because when the first moment of the pen collapses in the second moment we cannot find the collapse. We cannot find where the second moment of disintegration took place. Therefore, they say, the first moment of the pen is not findable in the second moment. When you look for it you cannot pinpoint it. So that means that it is permanent according to Vaibashika. For the first moment which has collapsed into the second moment to be impermanent it should be findable, they say, because all impermanent phenomena are ultimate truth. Vaibashika says as ultimate truth you can touch it, find it.

The highest school says; although you cannot find such a moment you can call it, label it, because everything is merely labelled by concepts. The disintegration of the first moment into the second is a process which is just labelled. That is enough, according to the highest school.

When the Sutra School says, this, zhigpa, is permanent and this, jigpa, is impermanent, apart from semantics they have the same meaning. There is a contradiction in the assertion of this school.

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The Sutra School says, the ability not to stay in the second moment is impermanence; whereas the school also says, when a phenomenon doesn't stay in the second moment it is permanent. The school says that the first moment not abiding in the second moment is impermanence because disintegration is built into the first moment. That part they say is impermanent. But when the first moment has actually disappeared it is gone, you can't find it, because it has collapsed, and we can't pinpoint it, they say, that is permanent. All impermanent phenomena, this school says, can be found by consciousnesses.

Answers to Questions

For Vaibashika School if it is an existent it has to be ngopo, a functional thing/reality/entity. As for these there are permanent and impermanent functional things. Impermanent functional things and compounded phenomena/substantial substance are synonyms. But for Vaibashika School a permanent functional thing is ngopo. For them all functional things, like space, would be an example of a permanent functional thing. But space is not compounded/impermanent phenomena. It is permanent.