



Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

Teacher:- Venerable Geshe Jampa Tenzin

Title:- Drub.Ta - Established Tenets

Venue: D.B.C. Dunedin

2011-03-28 DRUBTA – ESTABLISHED TENETS –

Please participate in these teachings with the goal of trying to make it to Buddhahood and so be of benefit to all beings. We have gathered here to talk about the Dharma, in particular to talk about Drubta – the Established Tenets, the Buddhist schools of thought.

So what is drubta? It is the position a person holds about issues which were critiqued and discussed by great established Indian Buddhist masters, so the position that we hold, the very subtle philosophical viewpoint. Drubta can be presented in terms of philosophy and lifestyle or conduct.

Who is a proponent of the Buddhist system? It is a person who does not take refuge or subscribe to any other refuge apart from the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. In terms of conduct, the Buddhist tenet-holder is a person who subscribes to the Four Seals based on their acceptance of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha as refuge objects.

The Four Seals are four aspects of the right view. What are the Four Seals? 1) all compounded phenomena are impermanent; 2) all afflicted phenomena are suffering and misery; 3) all phenomena are empty and self-less; 4) the state beyond suffering is peace or nirvana. These are the key aspects of the view.

What differentiates between a Buddhist and a non-Buddhist tenet system? The position about emptiness; a Buddhist system believes that all phenomena are empty and self-less.

Non-Buddhist schools believe in an outer being/creator which is believed to be permanent by nature and self-arisen. The theistic view about a creator God is that it is permanent in that it isn't changing moment to moment. The view believes that God is self-arisen in that it isn't dependent on a prior cause to produce it, and it is independent in that it doesn't depend on parts, it is partless.

Buddhists discuss the position held by non-Buddhists and critique their position, not in a negative way, but by analyzing in a philosophical way. They show how beliefs held by theistic believers are untenable philosophically. While Buddhist and non-Buddhist proponents have debated the issues we need to have a sense of reverence and we need to hold such a creator God in high esteem because there are a lot of people in the world who are following this system and who benefit spiritually from their faith. We say we need to hold all religious traditions who believe in an external God in high esteem because the believers follow the teaching of the traditions very genuinely and as a result they practice patience, love and compassion. And through the practice of patience, love and compassion in this life they receive tangible benefit and indirectly this is aligned with Buddhist values. This will really help them in future lifetimes. For example the people living in a certain country follow the rule of law, and when everybody acts within the law, no one acts above the law, and all of the major institutions operate within the framework of the constitution then social cohesion, social harmony are enhanced and everyone benefits. In the same way, believers in a creator God, by believing, adhering to and following the teachings believed to be given by God receive tangible benefits and so are worthy of our admiration and our respect.

If one's aim is to be free of the entirety of samsaric existence then there is no other way than to investigate the cause and effect aspects and functions of ones grasping at self, the self-existence of a person, as an entity. Unless you know how that operates at a causal level, then on a relative level even one's keenest wish to be free of samsara will remain unfulfilled.

The Buddhist critique of the position of believers in a creator God can begin with the non-Buddhist belief that their God is all there is. If this were so then there is then no need for the dichotomy of happiness and suffering. If everything is created by God then there needn't be the suffering aspect, neither is there a need to create negative emotions and disturbing thoughts which are thought to be the cause of suffering. There should only really be happiness and joy. If it is argued that an individual can attain happiness only by believing in God then the implication is that if you don't believe in God you will suffer. If that was the case then a creator God who is believed to be omniscient and all-compassionate ceases to be all-compassionate. A truly compassionate person does not distinguish whether you believe in someone or not they just reach out equally to all. So if non-believers do not get anything due to their disbelief in God then the compassion of the God remains questionable.

If a creator God, an external being, is permanent and self-arisen that position becomes untenable when you consider that God will only reach out to those that believe in him or her, while the non-believers receive nothing. It is then as though God has two parts, a part of giving joy and happiness to the believers and a part of leaving the non-believers in the lurch or even causing them suffering. How can that God be a permanent, self-arisen and unitary force if it has two parts? A part that brings joy and a part that doesn't help to bring joy.

If it is the case that by believing in God now you receive the benefits and by not believing in God you don't receive them, while later on if you come to believe in God you supposedly then receive reward for believing in God, again there are two parts. If God has omnipresent power to give joy to all its creatures, then God would have been believed to have existed from beginning-less time. If that is the case then why haven't we experienced happiness and joy from beginning-less time?

If God is unitary and therefore independent would you consider the head of the god 'God' or the arm of the god as 'God'? If you say 'yes that is our god' then you are saying God is not unitary but has many parts.

I have just discussed the critique offered by ancient Buddhist masters to the position which believes in an external god and my description is in no way a blatant put down of God and the faith system. Here I am only discussing the critiques presented in the past for you to sort out yourselves.

In Buddhism, we don't believe in an external god, in a creator. Buddhists believe in spiritual evolution, just as in science, we believe in evolution. Take Shakyamuni Buddha for example. Is he a God? No, he is a guide. Shakyamuni Buddha was an ordinary being just like us, deluded and karma-bound, having to face the consequences of his actions, but he evolved through practice.

So how do the Buddhist Three Jewels; Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, help? The Buddha helps by sharing knowledge and the techniques which the Buddhas themselves have found helpful in doing away with suffering, causes of suffering and gathering causes of happiness. The three jewels help by way of sharing the path. It is up to the individual to do the work. What path has the Buddha shared? He shared his knowledge by saying, "All our sufferings ensue by believing that self is a truly existent phenomenon". The Buddha has said that that is a basic, fundamental misconception and that the way out of suffering is to free the mind of that misconception by developing the knowledge that the person is empty of self-existence.

The issue of selflessness of the person is essential to Buddhist philosophy and, being a central issue, the four Buddhist schools have come up with their interpretations of what selflessness of person is. When we take a holistic view, the view of selflessness of the lower schools is helpful in the beginning but only to be used as a stepping stone and then to be discarded as one moves to the higher levels of thought. The view of selflessness of the person held by Prasangika Madhyamika is said to be the highest view.

© Dhargyey Buddhist Centre Inc. 22 Royal Terrace, Dunedin 9016, NZ

0064-3-477-8374 , www.dhargyey.org.nz

In order to finally establish the subtle position of selflessness, the Buddha taught the notion of selflessness held by various Buddhist tenet systems. Buddha had to teach grosser levels of selflessness to people when they were exposed to emptiness for the first time then refine it and keep refining it before finally revealing the ultimate view of selflessness. That is why the four schools exist; there is no difference in the view held by the four schools about love, compassion, patience and so on. The difference is in the different views of selflessness. When people are not ready and yet are taught the final view of selflessness it is inconceivable for them and they are at risk of falling into the extreme of nihilism, the belief that nothing at all exists and therefore why should they care. That carelessness then guides their actions. To avoid that Buddha had to teach the grosser levels of selflessness first.

Buddha presented the first notion of selflessness to people on the initial stage by saying that a person is not permanent, unitary or partless. Therefore he ruled out the position of the non-buddhists. He said that a person is impermanent, a person has parts, a person is produced and a person disintegrates. This is the view of the first proponent of the lowest school of thought, the Vaibhashika.

After having revealed what person is like, it can be understood that a person is disintegrating moment by moment, is impermanent, and comprised of parts. Then the Buddha revealed the second level of selflessness of a person; that the person is empty of being a self-sufficient substantially established entity. This led to a school of belief which sees the relationship between a person and their aggregates as one where the aggregates are the load and the person is someone who carries it. When you consider this the idea the conclusion is that the person is apart from the aggregates.

Therefore the Buddha taught emptiness of self-sufficient substantially existing person to the second Buddhist tenet holders, whose system came to be called the Sutra System, the Sautantrika School.

Following the Buddha revealing that the person is empty of self-sufficient substantial existence there was a raft of discussion about what a person is. If a person does not exist in a substantial self-existent way, where is a person? Indian Buddhist scholars discussed a great deal about this. However, such a thing as a person has to be established for everyone. If you don't establish what a person is, then who experiences joy and happiness? Who experiences suffering and karma? Who gathers karma? Somebody has to do this and that is the person. Now what is the person like? If this person is not established to be self-sufficiently existent, substantially established, then what is the person like? These questions led to a lot of discussion.

Let's bring home this position of emptiness of the self-sufficient, substantially existent person. Although we don't actually believe this person is permanent, we do believe that we as a person have come along through beginningless time. That we have had some type of seamless existence in the past tends to the suggestion that we are somewhat permanent. We have this idea of person as the driver and our body and mind, the aggregates, as the vehicle and that there is a concrete demarcation between the aggregates and the person. Although we have this idea that the aggregates are not the person, that the person is established as existing self-sufficiently, Buddha said that there is no such thing, there is no such person. This hits us hard. Therefore we have the difficulty of positing what a person is.

Among the proponents of the Sutra System, the Sautantrikas, a position developed which says the person is the mere collection, or assemblage of the aggregates. Another sub-school of Sautantrika says the person is not that, but the continuum of the aggregates is what a person is. So what is a person? According to proponents of some Buddhist tenet systems, a person is the mind itself, *kun zhi nam pa she pa*, which means foundation consciousness, and that this foundation consciousness continues to exist across lifetimes. It exists when you are fast asleep. It exists after you die. Therefore, they say, the person is not just the mere collection of the aggregates; a person is this foundation consciousness. They came up with this idea of foundation consciousness. Apart from the usual six types of consciousness they believe in two more types of consciousness, making eight.

This leads to the next step about what a person is. A person is not the appearance of person to the conceptual mind. This is quite subtle and I will try my best to explain it.

© Dhargyey Buddhist Centre Inc. 22 Royal Terrace, Dunedin 9016, NZ

0064-3-477-8374 , www.dhargyey.org.nz

According to the Mind Only school, the third school, they say, in the case of a person called Tashi, that there is no Tashi apart from what is conceived of or constructed by the conceptual mind. If Tashi existed by way of his or her natural characteristics, then Tashi would not have to depend on conceptual mind to perceive Tashi.

The Tibetan is rang zhin tok pay she shi. She shi means the conceived object, the conceived object of the conceptual mind. This conceived object of the conceptual mind lacks the characteristic of existence. Why? Because the object needs naming by the mind, to be constructed by the mind. This is approaching the highest school of thought, which says that everything exists by being named

All these three lower schools believe the person is truly existent from its own side.

The next school, the Madhyamika school makes a blanket statement that ‘the person does not **truly** exist and that all phenomena do not **truly** exist’. I am really placing a lot of stress on the word ‘truly’ here. But within this, an interpretation is developed as to what this means.

There are two Madhyamika schools. The first is called Savatantrika Madhyamika, or Autonomous Madhyamika and they say things exist due to twin factors. Partly they exist from their own side, and partly they are labelled. If a phenomenon existed purely from its own side it would be truly existent. If a phenomenon is purely a construct of mind, then you cannot posit what a person is. You can’t posit anything. So you need these two factors.

The next school, the Prasangika Madhyamika, or Consequentialist Madhyamika, says no phenomena exist objectively. Everything is purely a concept of the mind. Nothing has any objective reality. This position which says that nothing exists objectively, from the object’s side, that everything is a concept of the mind, does not mean that everything is mind like the Mind Only school says, but, that an object is a concept of the mind. This has now become extremely difficult to conceive of. So much so that great Buddhist logicians like Dignaga and Dharmakirti and even the Madhyamika philosopher Bhavaviveka could not accept such a thing. Here we are saying these great Indian masters had difficulty negotiating and embracing these ideas. So they didn’t believe in that. Yet we say we believe in this.

We are able to talk about the highest school’s position, not because of our own skills, but because of the hard work done by such great masters like Jamgon Lama Tsongkhapa and by being exposed to these explanations of the teachings by our own root gurus. That is why we have something to talk about, and apart from talking about it, it is really hard to get a clear picture of the highest school of thought which is that nothing exists inherently; everything is purely a construct of mind. In our case, we might even have difficulty understanding the notion of person held by the second tenet (Sutra System), yet we try to make the leap reaching out to the position expressed by the highest school of thought. However this is not wrong as prior exposure will leave indelible imprints on our minds.

If we mean business in trying to eradicate all kinds of suffering that recur throughout so many lifetimes we need an understanding of selflessness, the emptiness of self existence of person, propounded by the Prasangika Madhyamika.