

DBC Geshe Jampa Tenzin Drupta/Tenets 18.4.2011

Please participate in this discourse with the right motivation, to achieve the state of a Buddha in order to help all sentient beings and to use the merit gained from hearing teachings towards this end.

Tonight we talk about drupta/tenets. Drup means established. Ta means limits; therefore established limits; in other words, established limits of Buddhist schools of thought.

For the last two weeks we have been discussing the first Buddhist school, Vaibashika, and their view on dak me/selflessness, what is selflessness of the person and of phenomena and also how this school posits relative truth and ultimate truth. As well as that I mentioned that this school believes in external entities. The reason for this is that this school contends that external objects that we see out there ultimately arise from the conglomeration of many directionally part-less particles. This school believes that when you break matter down you ultimately arrive at an indivisible entity called a directionally part-less particle which is the basis from which things exist. So they say there are external objects.

Tonight I will discuss more about how the Vaibashika School views time. What is time? What are the three times?

All of the Buddhist schools believe that all compounded phenomena are impermanent and all phenomena share four attributes which are integral and defining characteristics of being impermanent. They are:

1. They are produced
2. They abide
3. They disintegrate
4. They decompose/decay.

Broadly speaking, all impermanent things share these four characteristics. All Buddhist schools believe that, including Vaibashika School. However according to Vaibashika the first moment of a phenomenon is production, the second moment is abidance, the third is disintegration, and fourth is decay. This school gives a phase of abidance. It says it is only in the third moment that things begin to disintegrate. All other schools above Vaibashika contend that things begin to disintegrate right from the second moment of production/arising.

This principle of impermanence is extremely important for two reasons. Understanding impermanence is vital so we can gradually understand how we as a person and all other impermanent things are empty of self existence/selfhood in and of themselves. By understanding impermanence you correctly arrive at that conclusion. Such understanding shatters any idea of a permanent selfhood in things. When it is established that compounded things are not permanent, because of a momentary disintegration, it has far-reaching implications for our understanding of selflessness of things.

Secondly our understanding of momentary disintegration is also vital to help us develop aversion to and disenchantment with mundane existence, which will only let us down badly at the crucial time. We then begin to yearn for the durable experience of nirvana.

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In what way does understanding of impermanence help build aversion to mundane existence/samsara? It helps in that when a being dies a death and is reborn in a higher existence, in the human realm or realm of celestial beings, such a rebirth is brought about by karma. It is positive non-liberating karma that hurls a being into existence in such a place. As soon as someone is reborn in a human realm, what causes life to relentlessly move towards death, and in the process, to undergo momentary disintegration? There is no person/individual controlling this. It is something that is naturally built into such a karmically produced existence.

When we are carefree and casual about our existence, about being a product of our karma, it seems as if there are separate causes of production of our life and the ending of our life. In fact the cause and factors which are responsible for production of our life are the very factors responsible for disintegration of our body. There is no such thing as separate factors for the disintegration of things and that which produces them. So when we consider our body and our life now we now see that we are getting older and then later on a few years down the track some of us will become very old and decrepit. Why is it that we become like this? These phases were not produced overnight but are the effects of accumulated disintegration of the body moment by moment. Even when we were young we were getting old and imperceptibly gathering, accumulating the causes for the old, decrepit body we will have. The cause of this momentary disintegration of our body is caused by the very production of this body. What produced this body are factors like karma and negative thoughts. Karma, which is itself momentarily disintegrating, is responsible for the production of things and also the disintegration of things.

Both our body and the enlightened physical form of the Buddhas disintegrate or change from moment to moment. However, while our bodies disintegrate as the Buddha's body does they are very different. Even though the fully enlightened physical form of a Buddha is still subject to momentary change, it does not change for the worse. This is because a Buddha's body is produced by stainless, pristine virtue alone. These virtues have reached a state where their results will never change for the worse; therefore Buddha's body remains perfect and free of any suffering. Whereas our bodies, which are compounded phenomena, changing from moment to moment, undergo constant wear and tear. Therefore things can only turn towards the worse. Why? Our body is produced from ignorance and coarse delusions as well as negative karma. Due to these underlying causes being unwholesome, the effect is also and that means our body, when undergoing change, changes for the worse.

When we talk about Buddha's first teaching, the Four Truths, the first words of Buddha's discourse emphasised the Truth of Suffering, meaning this afflicted body/life is the Truth of Suffering because it has four attributes: it is impermanent, miserable, selfless and empty.

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The reason this body/life is impermanent is because it is under the governance/domination of karma and kleshas/delusions. That is a powerful statement.

Understanding impermanence helps generate a lasting sense of aversion to mundane existence. As I said before understanding impermanence is a great aid to understanding selflessness of a person. At the moment we have a very tight knot at our heart as it were. We cling to the idea that 'I am'. There is a very strong grasping at I. Why is that grasping so tight? This is because there is an underlying belief that self is permanent and enduring. That whole idea is so strong it makes ones belief that one exists in and of oneself very tight. Once you have a good understanding that person is momentary this lends itself well to understanding that one is merely labelled in dependence on the momentary aggregates or skandhas. If a person is believed to be permanent then it is really difficult to grasp that a permanent person could be labelled in dependence on ever changing, momentarily skandhas.

It is helpful to carefully consider the idea of momentary change. For an example, when there is a person who is standing, in the very first moment of the person sitting down that is also the time when the person in standing position disappears/disintegrates. In the second moment of sitting down the person who just sat down a moment ago also disintegrates/disappears. Another example there is a person holding a pen and then drops it. The moment the pen has dropped the person holding the pen has gone/disintegrates.

These examples highlight that we don't usually examine our true state of being and how we change from moment to moment. As a result we suffer from the concept of permanence. We continue to think that the person now is the same as the person last year and we don't take into account the countless momentary changes to the person that have occurred continually over time. That view really lets us down. In this way the position of the Vaibashika School, as has just been described, is beneficial in helping us to understand selflessness even though it may not be absolutely valid when seen by the view of other schools of thought.

Another point of difference between the other schools and Vaibashika is that, according to the Vaibashika School, the four defining attributes of compounded phenomena - production, abidance, disintegration, and decay are different from phenomena themselves. In other words they say an impermanent phenomenon under consideration is different from its attributes, production and so on. Whereas the Sutra School and above say that a compounded/impermanent phenomenon is not different from its defining characteristics which are production, abidance, disintegration etc.

When you look at a vase for example, from the Vaibashika point of view, they say that all the four attributes are not strongly manifest at any time. Only one of the four attributes is manifested obviously and they each appear one at a time. So when a vase is produced in the first moment its production is manifested. In the second moment the attribute of abidance becomes more prominent. The other attributes of disintegration and decaying are less apparent.

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The Vaibashika School says that a vase as a 'result' (a product) is simultaneous with its 'cause', production (a defining characteristic). In other words a vase is simultaneously produced by its defining characteristic of production. Therefore the cause and effect are simultaneous.

Whereas the Sutra system and the other schools say that a vase is not produced by its defining characteristics. A vase is impermanent and therefore produced they say, so a vase would possess the four attributes but it's not produced by them. It is produced by an action of being produced. Therefore while it has the attribute of production a vase is not caused by production. It is a phenomenon produced by the force of the action of production. One comes before the other and thus cause and effect are not simultaneous.

As I've mentioned before the Vaibashika School and all others above it contend there are the four attributes to an impermanent phenomenon. However the referents (what they each refer to when using the terms) are quite different.

The Sutra School says that production is production when a phenomenon that did not exist before comes into being. They say abidance refers to the continuity of a similar type of the vase but they say the nature of the vase cannot abide. The nature is constantly changing but there is a strand that continues, that is called abidance. So what do they say about decomposition/aging? They say that it is the discarding of the attributes a phenomenon has in its first moment which are no longer present in its second moment. And what, according to the Sutra School, is meant by perish/decay? An impermanent phenomenon, they say, does not remain the same in the second moment after its original production.

So although these reasonings may seem academic, they are important to understand. Its extremely important to understand the notion of selflessness, impermanence and momentary change. Understanding these really helps put into perspective what is meant by selflessness in the higher schools view.

So let this be a bird's eye view of the first school in terms of its view of base or ground reality.

Paths and Stages of Vaibashika

Now we will discuss the path and stages of the Vaibashika School.

According to this school, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni was not an enlightened being before he came to this world, but became a Buddha in that very lifetime. He evolved from an ordinary person into a Buddha in one lifetime. All Buddhist schools believe that the Buddha performed 12 salient deeds. All of the salient deeds up to vanquishing demons are the deeds of Buddha as an ordinary person – a non-enlightened person. Buddha then remained in equipoise on shunyata/emptiness and entered absorption into reality which has two parts; that of an ordinary person's role and that of a non ordinary person's role.

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According to the Vaibashika School, the Buddha attained enlightenment in one absorption. There are five paths to enlightenment: accumulation, preparation (4 stages – heat, peak, forbearance and supreme knowledge), meditation and no more learning). When the Buddha entered into absorption at the heat stage of the path of preparation, the Vaibashika say that Buddha arose from that as a Buddha.

The Vaibashika School believes in two obstructions called deluded and nondeluded obstructions. It does not believe in obstructions to knowledge.

This school believes that when Buddha died, he died a permanent death, never to come back, and that all of his aggregates came to an end. They say everything impermanent about him ended; physically he came to an end, mentally, although his mind was an all knowing consciousness, it also completely ended, and so he would never return to the world.

Buddha turned the wheel of dharma/taught the dharma. Another belief of the Vaibashika School is that turning the wheel of dharma only refers to the spiritual/transcendent realisation on the Path of Seeing that took root in the heart of the first five disciples of Buddha. They say scriptures are not the wheel of dharma. This is a very important point. In other Buddhist schools of thought turning the wheel of dharma refers to scriptures as well as spiritual realisation.

The Vaibashika School says even when he was teaching, even though his mind was enlightened, Shakyamuni Buddha was still in the afflicted skandha of past life. It was only when Buddha passed into Nirvana that his afflicted body passed beyond suffering. Nirvana means to go beyond suffering. What is this suffering? It is having this body. So because he died, Buddha's afflicted body, they say, went beyond suffering. Who and what then is the Buddha? Buddha is a state of non-learning, non-training, a state of consummation, a state of perfection where you do not need any more training. Such an entity is called a Buddha according to Vaibashika. This was even in the mind of the living Buddha when he was teaching. But although he was an entity of non-training, a being whose mind was perfection, his body was still afflicted.

You may ask; what about the relics of Buddha? They wouldn't be called the relics of the Buddha according to the Vaibashika because the relics would be part of his 'afflicted' body and therefore not considered to be an enlightened object. However, the relics could come from the body as objects of offering for the faithful.