

Sutra School continued:

Question from Audience:

Why are they called 'uninterrupted' paths?

Answer: Although there is an etymology of it this escapes me at the moment but the meaning is that it is a force/an antidote that its opponents can not undermine. It overpowers them. It puts an end to those opponents. For example, if you are doing something and receive a surprise visit from friend, it requires you to drop everything and attend to them and therefore there is interruption of your activity. When it's an uninterrupted path of meditation it means the meditation is not interfered with by objects the wisdom consciousness is trying to overcome. Rather these are actively overcome by the meditation.

The etymological explanations do not pervade – eg; omniscience of Buddha can not be overcome by any force, but he is not on uninterrupted path because Buddha is beyond a path.

Summary of the views of first two schools, Vaibashika and Sautantrika.

There are four schools of Buddhist thought. We've covered the tenets of the first two schools and the lama is now wrapping up so we can go on to the next two.

We need to know with regard to objects whether they are existent or non-existent. Things can be known by being critically examined or casually, that is; analytically or non-analytically.

In our case we are not able to determine existence of things in an analytical way, so can not probe into the reality deeply. We only take face value appearance of things. We take for granted that things are the way they appear to be and mix this with the idea that things actually exist like this, whereas they don't. This mistake leads to a lot of problems and confusion.

How things are known ultimately, by probing deep into the nature of their reality, or analytically, is presented clearly and unmistakably by the fourth school of Buddhist thought, Prasangika Madhyamika. That ultimate way of knowing things happens in a graduated, serial way. First we need to know how lower schools present their versions of ultimate analysis of how things exist. Of them, the first school is called Vaibashika. If we can present the two facets of reality of the same phenomena well, we will not be confused about what actually is real as opposed to what seems to be real, and as a result we will be able to make informed, good choices, wise choices, which will lead to the cessation of suffering.

How do we go through the schools to arrive at the final view? We look at the first school's views. That view is the one the proponents of that school feel comfortable with. Proponents of the second school, Sautantrika, find some errors within those views. They, while negating such wrong views, educate the proponents of the first school then present their own version of reality. However their version is challenged by the views and proponents of the third school who educate the proponents of the second school and then present their version of what is real. While they see their view as correct it is seen to be fallible by the next school. Again the fourth school educates the third school proponents while presenting their version of reality. In this way we arrive at the view of the final school which is error free and infallible. This is how we use the views of the previous schools as important stepping stones.

Two Truths

According to the first school, Vaibashika, (Vaibashikas are known in English as Particularists) an ultimate truth is a phenomenon that can not be subdivided into any further parts. It has reached an irreducible entity which cannot be mentally or physically dissected into further parts.

Examples they give are directionally partless particles or the smallest irreducible moment of consciousness. Such a phenomenon, whether a consciousness or matter, is called ultimate because no matter what kind of consciousness, even a super consciousness, examines it, it is seen as irreducible and remains so at all times.

What is relative or conventional truth for this school? It is a phenomenon which when deconstructed mentally or physically broken into parts results in the perceiving mind losing the original image. E.g. a pot/vase.

From this school viewpoint, all compounded phenomena have conventional and ultimate truths. The second school says compounded/impermanent phenomena are only ever ultimate truth. They are never conventional/relative truth.

What can we deduce by the way the two truths are defined by the first school?

2011/08/29 Tenets GJT Summary of first two schools continued:

We learn that for them ultimate truth can only be established by reductionist analysis. For Vaibasheka, a phenomena that is reified/exaggerated by a concept is necessarily non-existent.

From the point of view of this school only such things as the rabbit horns or skyflowers are mentally imagined/made up phenomena. All other phenomena, whether permanent or impermanent, are not imputed by concept.

For the Sutra school only permanent phenomena are constructs of mind. For the third school, Mind Only, existence of external phenomena/outside the mind is a construct/imagination of mind. For the first of the two highest schools, Autonomous Madyamika, that things/ form/ matter exit truly from their own side is a construct of the mind.

How does the second school, Sutra/Sautantrika school/followers of Buddha's discourses, define the two truths? For them an ultimate truth is that which can perform a function/yield an effect. They believe that all and only impermanent phenomena perform a function/ are ultimate truths.

Relative or conventional truths for them are 'universals'/ permanent phenomena. All permanent phenomena are relative truths.

Why, according to this school, are functional things called ultimate truth? It is because their self defining characteristics unmistakably appear to direct perceptions. They exist as they are perceived correctly to have their self-defining characteristics. According to this school, something becomes ultimate truth if it unmistakably appears, to a valid, direct awareness.

Contrast that with the first schools ultimate truth which says you must reduce a phenomenon to its parts and arrive at the irreducible unit and when doing so, that awareness of the irreducible unit stays forever no matter what kind of consciousness examines it. For second school an ultimate truth must appear correctly with all its self-defining properties. Therefore the version of ultimate truth given by the second school is a step closer to the fourth school/Prasangika/Consequentialist/highest version. Prasangika says that an ultimate truth is an unmistakable object of the direct awareness analyzing the ultimate.

Examining the Sutra School's conventional truth, again it is a step closer to the highest school.

Last time I said there are three ways to define the relative/conventional; firstly, if it is dependent on parts, secondly, if it veils you from seeing the real/concrete, and ?

For the Particularist/Vaibashika school a vase is conventional truth because it is composed of/dependent on its parts. For them an ultimate truth of the vase would be when you break it down into irreducible units. That is when it is non-dependent on parts. For the second/Sutra school all permanent phenomena do not exist inherently. They are only imagined phenomena. Only a likeness of an imagined phenomenon appears to be it, when really it is not it. Therefore conventional truth for them is understood to be a veiling factor, which is the kind of definition of relative truth given by the highest school. So they share the same idea.

A meaning generic image of a pot is considered a conventional truth. What does such a truth do? The conceptual mind to which it appears, believes the likeness of a vase before the mind's eye. To that mind the image appears to be that vase. It is as if the likeness is akin to a curtain falling before the real vase, veiling it, preventing the mind from seeing the vase with all its concrete/defining properties. If the likeness of the vase before the mind's eye were the vase it would be strange, as if the vase were actually in the mind. For example here at our house we have prayer wheels at the door. If the likeness of the wheels were the real concrete one it would be as if we had a wheel spinning inside our head when we don't. Our conceptual mind makes an effort to know the things it perceives. But despite its attempt to know things well the image veils the conceptual mind from getting at the real thing itself. When an eye consciousness looks at its object, a vase, the visual consciousness is able to take in all the facets, all the self defining properties of it, the colour, and the shape. Nothing prevents the visual consciousness from getting at the real thing out there. Since a likeness of a phenomenon appears to be that phenomenon to the conceptual mind, yet it is not. The image is just a concept. It is the language this school uses when defining relative truth which is similar to the language if the highest school; that conventional truths are just constructs of the mind.

Summary of the first two schools continued:

Proponents of the first and second schools are called proponents of the Hinayana school of thought. This is not the same as being hinayanaists. Such a proponent of these schools, do not subscribe to selflessness of phenomena. How is a Hinayanist different from this? Hinayanists are a counterpart to Mahayanists. The difference is in willpower. Hinayanists are serious practitioners for their own liberation, whereas Mahayanists pursue Buddhist practice for the liberation of all living beings.

There are many instances of proponents of Hinayanist school of thought, who are Mahayanist in attitude. Atisha's teacher Dharmarakshita is by philosophy a proponent of Hinayana, but by empathetic attitude he was Mahayanist. There are many Hinayanists who subscribe to the Mahayana school of thought with regard to selflessness of phenomena – all arahats of the lower vehicle.

Next I want to move on to talking about directionally partless particles – is there such a thing or not. It is critical to understanding the Mind Only school of thought which we will begin to examine next week.

The first two schools believe in the existence of directionally partless particles. This means that they do not believe in selflessness of phenomena. Why? Because they believe in the existence of external phenomena; that it exists. Phenomena here refers to all phenomena other than sentient beings. They say things like form, table etc, exist by themselves and they have self sufficiency about their existence – they exist in and of themselves. We need to discuss directionally partless particles. Both the first two school believe there is such a particle but that it can't exist all by itself. It can only exist in association with 8 other particles. A single directional particle needs the communal support of eight substances. The 8 particles are earth, water, fire/heat, wind, then all the objects of the senses except sound; that is; form, smell, taste, and tactile quality particles. They surround the single irreducible particle in three ways;

1) Interrupted surrounding.

If challenged by the question, "How can the eight particles surround it when there must be gaps/interruptions, won't they fall away?" They say, "No there is a cohesion provided by the wind element which holds the particles together."

2) Without gaps or contiguous touching

3) They do meet/ touch but do not adhere. This idea is quite crucial to establishing whether an external thing/outer phenomenon exist or not. If it exists in and of itself it would do so from its own side.

This idea is quite crucial. All schools above these do believe in particles, but not in partless particles. They say however minute a particle may be it does have parts; the part of being met by another particle, one from the east side, another from the west side, and so on. Since there are two parts at least it shows that it does have parts and therefore it does not exist inherently and irreducibly in and of itself.

The Mind Only and higher schools say even the last unbreakable particle, one which can not be broken down further, cannot be called partless. However it may be not able to be reduced, but still has direction aspects. Mind only and other schools do not subscribe to directionally partless particles. However minute the particle it does have parts. The same applies to last irreducible moment of consciousness. Even if it can't be broken down further, it is impermanent and it is a product.

The two lower schools say there are directionally partless particles. They say when many particles conglomerate they form an externally existent true reality. Mind Only school goes out of its way to refute existence of such things as external phenomena formed in gross form by directionally partless particles.

Permanence and impermanence

Both the first two schools believe that anything that is impermanent has four defining characteristics: being produced, disintegration, abidance and decomposition/changing from one state to another.

All impermanent phenomena are characterized by these four things.

The Sutra School says the moment an impermanent phenomenon comes into existence, all four characteristics are present. Its production, abiding, disintegration and decay are happening in a single moment. To explain let us think of a ten year old child. It has changed since birth. Now it looks vastly different. Is it overnight or cumulative change? Obviously it has been a result of cumulative changes over the years. All the aspects of ten year old child are not there beforehand. The difference would be smaller if we discuss changes noticed at five years old, compared to the time of its birth. How about la newly born baby? Are there changes later in the day on the day it was born? Have there been any changes in that baby within one day?

Summary of the first two schools continued:

Yes there have. Let us say the baby was born two minutes ago. Have there been any changes? Yes there have been. If not, then one hours change could not take place. So we can see it is changing in four ways from the very first moment it was born. In the first second it was born it was changing; being produced, abiding, disintegrating and decaying. This is why we say; All impermanent phenomena are impermanent because they undergo momentary changes.

The first school, Vaibashika, says impermanent phenomena have these four aspects, but that they say these four defining characteristics are sequential. First they are produced, then they abide, and disintegrate then they decay. Since the Sutra School believes a phenomenon has ceased in the second moment after it was produced, they believe that all 4 characteristics are simultaneous. This second school says that when a vase is produced, it is also disintegrating. The moment of disintegration is the moment of abidance too. On the way to abiding it was disintegrating, changing from one state to another. All the four things are present within the one vase.

What can we learn from this?

People usually celebrate birthdays, but actually a degree of sobriety is called for. From the moment of birth we are disintegrating, changing. For a phenomenon to change it doesn't need an external force to crush it. Production has disintegration built into it. Because of birth we will die. However in our casual view we think we'll be around a considerable time. That is an illusion – you are compounded and so you are an impermanent phenomenon. These four characteristics are incessantly operating each and every second. In view of this, Buddha taught the four seals. The first seal is; all compounded phenomena are impermanent. It says a lot about our state of being.

What I have tried to do tonight was wrap up views of the first two schools, drawing some contrasts, and then I said how they are stepping stones to higher schools. I was trying to present a transition to the Mind Only school of thought which we'll begin next week. There is a lot more we can say about the first two schools, but I thought it is time to make a change or it might drag on interminably. I won't load you with more; you can read about it and bring questions to the class if you have any issues.

We're eager to hear about highest school, but it's hard to understand even the first two schools let alone realizing their views.

Question about the 8 Substances-

Answer: Yes, the 8 are used to create a single directionally partless particle. They are all minute. We can not see/ perceive them. One particle with its 8 needs to come into contact with another one with its 8, and so on until there are millions together which may then become something visible to us.

Question re density of particles.

Answer: The highest school sees no directionally partless particle, so these ideas about the 8 particles surrounding a directionally partless particle are just conceptual imagination. If things were actually as the lower schools posit, then the superior school of thought would find not be able to find logical fallacies in the views of the lower schools. At the particle level whether they are dense or loose is hard to see. They were just defending their position. That the highest school of thought finds inconsistencies doesn't matter to them. The lower schools still posit their views as if they are final. They couldn't care less so to speak what the other schools think of it. They will still insist on their views being right.

Question: Do the first two schools believe the directionally partless particle is inherently existent?

Answer: They say external phenomena exist inherently, truly. Why? If you break it down you arrive at something. They say if you look for things, if they exist, they should be findable. So where does matter exist truly? They break it down into parts. They say the basic unit of its composition, the directionally partless particle, exists in and of itself. It can't be reduced any further. Whoever sees it sees it this way. Therefore it is inherently existent and exists truly as well.

Question: re ?

Answer: A good question. They make a distinction. They say for a directionally partless particle to exist it doesn't need to meet with anything. It *exists* in and of itself in an irreducible manner but to *abide* it needs the 8. From the highest school view there is a contradiction.