

2011-09-12

Drup.ta /Tenets

Geshe Jampa Tenzin

Hinayana Criticisms of Mahayana and Mahayana Arguments continued:

Last time I left you with a few things to think about. Have you been able to do so and come up with explanations?

Criticism one: Are Mahayana discourses within the three pitakas/baskets of Buddhist teachings?

Our response: Both Hinayana and Mahayana have the same three baskets and basically the same subject matter. Hinayana proponents do believe the three pitakas do have the bodhisattva concentration and bodhisattva wisdom teachings. The problem needs to be settled by saying to them that in the same way the Mahayana does have the practice of the Sutra basket dealing with concentration and it has the Abhidharma basket on metaphysics/wisdom and also the Vinaya basket on moral discipline/higher ethics.

Just as they say Hinayana has the Bodhisattva practice of concentration and wisdom, we believe Mahayana do also incorporate these subjects. In summary you could say just as the pitakas you believe in have the three we believe that the three are incorporated in the 3 baskets for bodhisattvas. Mahayana teachings on these are basically the same except they elaborate a bit more on these subjects.

Second criticism: Mahayana is not found in any of the 18 Vaibashika schools' tenets.

Our response: If you say teachings that are not found in the treatises of the 18 Vaibashika schools are therefore not Buddhist teachings, it would follow that any teachings said to be Mahayana written by scholars of the Vaibashika School but which do not fall into writings of the 18 schools would also not be Buddhist writings. You can't say (it doesn't follow that) not being in any of the 18 Vaibashika schools' tenets means the teaching is necessarily not Buddha's because you do accept the three pitakas which you believe contain the teachings of the Buddha but you also have examples of teachings taught by Buddha that do not neatly fit into the writings of any of the 18 schools. If you admit that you have such teachings surely Mahayana teachings could also be such examples.

Third criticism: Hinayana says; Mahayana talks about Sambogakaya enjoyment form of Buddha as permanent, yet it is a physical body of Buddha, a form, and this goes against the salient point that 'all compounded phenomena/forms are impermanent' and so it follows that Mahayana is not taught by the Buddha.

Our response: Sambogakaya is not permanent in the sense of being unchanging, but because of its cause being stainless virtue it lasts for ever. Geshela agrees with that. Compounded phenomena are impermanent in that they undergo imperceptible momentary changes. Sambogakaya lasts until space ceases/lasts forever, it doesn't mean it doesn't undergo momentary change, it does, but it has a perfectly seamless infinite continuum. In that sense it lasts forever.

Fourth criticism: Mahayana discourses are not among the teachings collected/recorded by the conveners of Buddha's teaching after his death/parinirvana.

Our response: This does not mean there is a fault. Hinayana teachings were compiled by the second custodians, Maha-Kashapa, Arahaptagupta and others, whereas Mahayana teachings were put together by Samantabhadra and Avalokiteshvara. There were different conveners.

Fifth criticism: Mahayana states that Buddha lived on after his parinirvana. Hinayanists say that when Buddha died at age 81, that was his nirvana/end.

Our response: When you become a Buddha, the term used is that you have passed beyond non-abiding nirvana/ beyond sorrow. The word *sorrow*; if we ask Hinayana Vaibashika what it means they would say *sorrow* is the physical aggregates/the body and the continuity of consciousness, continued existence in the body and mind. To go beyond sorrow is to sever these. For Mahayana *sorrow* means to go beyond dualistic concepts. We say to them, when Buddha achieved non-abiding nirvana, it is not that his consciousness has come to an end, it is the dualistic concepts which have been stopped but conscious itself moves on.

Sixth criticism: Mahayana says Shakyamuni is an emanation of a Buddha and that is wrong.

Our response: Mahayana says Shakyamuni was not an ordinary being who made it to Buddhahood in one lifetime but an emanation of a being already enlightened. Hinayana has difficulty with the issue of a being able to be in single pointed meditation on reality, and at the same time emanating in different forms to aid others. They say that is impossible. Mahayana's answer to that is that Shakyamuni Buddha had attained the state of Buddha hundreds of eons earlier, and remained physically in the Sambogakaya state.

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We say our contention is that Shakyamuni is an emanation in human form, from the Sambogakaya state. As a Buddha it is his unique feature to do the impossible – to remain in meditative absorption and yet to spontaneously emanate in various forms.

Seventh criticism: Mahayana says there are times when the ordained should prostrate to the lay when a lay person is a bodhisattva which is a superior being to an ordinary person even if they are ordained. For Hinayana an ordained prostrating to a lay would be really taboo, a real no no.

Our response: If someone has attained a certain high level then they should be shown that respect.

Mahayana says there is a bodhisattva vehicle/bodhisattva path. They say that Shakyamuni Buddha was on that path throughout the time of his austere practices when he ate almost nothing but a grain a day and into his meditative absorption until the night of his conquering the demons, death and delusions. Then just before the dawn he became a Buddha. So our answer is when Mahayana says the ordained should prostrate to the lay it does not refer to all lay people; it refers to lay people with bodhicitta.

Criticism eight: Mahayana praises the bodhisattva, more than Buddhahood.

Our response: Mahayanists consider Buddhas to be higher than bodhisattvas. Some Mahayana teachings praise bodhisattvas more than Buddhas. Chandrakirti, for example, praises compassion above anything and anyone. Just as we consider Buddha, holy, sacred and precious it is logical to consider the cause that gave rise to the effect of Buddhahood, equally if not more important. The cause of Buddha is bodhicitta. It produces the rising moon-like bodhisattva. If you want to consider the fully expanded result precious, you need to consider the cause behind that as equally important. Mahayanists seek to highlight the great importance of causes needed to produce effects.

Criticism nine: Mahayana teaches that karma, even with definite consequences, can be rendered null and void. Hinayana says if you have karma with definite inescapable result, you can't mitigate it. Whereas Mahayana says any kind of karma no matter how grave can be resolved.

Our response: The two systems have different explanations about that. This is around a difference in their definition of karma the result of which must be experienced. Mahayana explains that this is a karma where both strong motive and actual performance are present and a karma which is not addressed in terms of purification. So firstly, there is motive and actual performance and secondly, it is left to itself without being challenged by purification. The Hinayana example of karma with inescapable result is without qualification. It must be born by the performer whatever the effect may be.

Criticism ten: That dharmata taught in the teachings on the 16 attributes of the four truths is not real truth nature and if so what could be truer than that.

Our response: There is another dharmata/ real truth, which is: a person, or outer/external and inner phenomena, do not have any intrinsic independent existence, because they do not have existence from their own side. There is another mode of reality / dharmata which is different from that which is taught in the 16 attributes of the four truths.

Mind Only School

No more questions. I would like to give an historical account of the Mind Only school.

The Mahayana system has two schools; the Mind Only and the Middle Way. Whilst they were existent during Buddha's own lifetime, after Buddha passed into nirvana the Mahayana experienced some decline. Up to the appearance of Nagarjuna, the most prevalent school was Hinayana, although there were Mahayanist practitioners who discretely carried out Mahayana practice by themselves. 400 years after Buddha the great Indian master Nagarjuna appeared and he propagated the Middle Way Mahayana School. 900 years after Buddha, the Indian master Asanga appeared and he propagated and disseminated the Mind Only Mahayana School. Nagarjuna and Asanga both commented on the teaching of the Buddha saying some teachings are literally acceptable on their face value while some are not and require interpretation. That point had already been made by Buddha himself. Although there had been quite a few Buddhist masters who commented on the Middle Way and Mind Only systems, they are not considered trail blazers/ charioteers, showing the way. What need was there for Nagarjuna and Asanga to delineate the teaching of the Buddha as definitive and not literally acceptable?

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That was because Buddha himself taught the two processes; what is definitive and what is interpretive in two separate Buddhist discourses. Nagarjuna said the teachings of Buddha are to be categorized like this because Buddha himself said so in Akshyamadhi Sutra. Asanga said Buddha talks of need for delineation based on Buddha's discourse Thought Unraveling Sutra. If they did not do this a lot of inconsistencies would have remained in the Buddha's teaching.

In the Thought Unraveling Sutra, Buddha said, "Of the three natures; dependent phenomena, imaginary and thoroughly established phenomena, dependent/other powered phenomena has two parts, interpretive and definitive." Whereas in the Inexhaustible Intellect Sutra he says, "All relative phenomena are interpretive, not definitive". So there is a contradiction.

We can't delineate what is what (relative and interpretive) by simply relying on the words of Buddha or lines of reasonings which are not fullproof. For someone to delineate the teaching of Buddha as definitive or interpretive they must meet these criteria: - must be prophesied by Buddha to come to the world and do so. Then they must decide about these teachings following the four reliances (on teaching not person, etc) and four forms of reason and the four intended views (reading between the lines).

Next week we'll talk about how to delineate based on these three sets of four.