

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES ON SHANTIDEVA'S NINTH CHAPTER
Sravasti Abbey Green Tara Retreat
July 3-10, 2020

A. SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF SHANTIDEVA

- lived in India in the late-7th to mid-8th centuries CE
- was a Buddhist monk, philosopher, and poet
- lived, studied, and taught at Nalanda Monastery
- considered to be a follower of the Madhyamaka school of tenets
- author of two texts: *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (*Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Deeds*/EBD) and *Śikṣā-samuccaya* (*Compendium of Trainings*)

B. OVERVIEW OF ENGAGING IN THE BODHISATTVA'S DEEDS

Chapter One: "Explanation of the Benefits of Bodhicitta/the Mind of Enlightenment" (36 verses)—also gives brief explanation of the two types of bodhicitta.

Chapter Two: "Confessing Negativities" (65 verses)—in addition to cultivating bodhicitta, we also need to purify negativities and accumulate merit.

Chapter Three: "Completely Upholding the Mind of Enlightenment" (34 verses)—more practices to accumulate merit, and making strong commitments to help all sentient being.

Chapter Four: "Teachings on Conscientiousness" (48 verses)—after committing oneself to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings, one needs to be aware of afflictive emotions that could interfere with this aspiration.

Chapter Five: "Guarding Introspection" (109 verses)—how to cultivate mindfulness and introspection to protect one's practice; the perfection of ethical conduct.

Chapter Six: "Relying on Patience" (134 verses)—how to overcome anger and cultivate patience/fortitude, the third perfection.

Chapter Seven: "Teachings on Joyous Effort" (76 verses)—the fourth perfection; how to overcome laziness and increase joyous effort by means of four powers.

Chapter Eight: "Teachings on Concentration" (187 verses)—the fifth perfection; how to overcome attachment (especially to the body), a major obstacle to the cultivation of concentration/serenity; how to overcome self-centeredness and increase altruism.

Chapter Nine: "The Perfection of Wisdom" (167 verses)—the sixth perfection; refutation of incorrect views of non-Buddhists and other Buddhist schools; how to realize the selflessness (emptiness of inherent existence) of persons and other phenomena.

Chapter Ten: “Dedication” (58 verses)—dedicating the merit of composing the text to all sentient beings, making beautiful wishes for their benefit.

C. THE TWO TRUTHS: ultimate and conventional (verse 9.2)

According to Madhyamika Prasangika, **ultimate truth** is emptiness, i.e. the emptiness of inherent existence. This is the actual, correct way in which everything exists. All other phenomena are **conventional truths**.

According to the Prasangikas, the following terms are synonymous

- * Inherent existence
- * True existence
- * Ultimate existence
- * Objective existence, etc. (see p. 36 of *Meditation on Emptiness* for more synonyms)

What is inherent existence, according to the Prasangikas, which everything is empty of? If a table, for example, were inherently existent, it would have its own way of existing, independent of everything else (causes and conditions, parts, and being labeled by the mind). Such a mode of existence is completely false: it is only fabricated by ignorance and projected onto things. The table does exist, but not inherently or independently. It exists conventionally, which means it depends on causes and conditions, on the parts that make it up, and on being conceptually labeled as “table.”

Thus the Prasangikas say that the table (and everything else), is merely labeled or imputed by the mind onto a basis of imputation—e.g. a collection of parts and particles. When we search among those parts and particles for a table, we cannot find even a tiny particle that we can point to and say, “that is the table.” “Table” is merely labeled/imputed by the mind onto those parts and particles.

1. The Two Truths according to Madhyamika Prasangika

ULTIMATE TRUTH	CONVENTIONAL TRUTH
<p>Definition: an object found by a valid cognizer distinguishing the final nature of phenomena. <i>(This is an arya’s wisdom of meditative equipoise realizing emptiness.)</i></p> <p>An ultimate truth is an emptiness; the lack of any phenomenon's inherent existence.</p> <p><i>Examples: the lack of inherent existence of a table, a body, a person, a car, etc.</i></p>	<p>Definition: an object found by a valid cognizer distinguishing a conventionality. <i>(This is a correct awareness, conceptual or non-conceptual, of an ordinary being.)</i></p> <p>A conventional truth is any phenomenon other than emptiness/ultimate truths.</p> <p><i>Examples: impermanent things such as tables, bodies, cars, etc., and permanent phenomena other than emptinesses (e.g. uncompounded space, mental images, etc.)</i></p>

2. The rope and the snake

The analogy used by the Prasangikas to explain how we misconceive things is that of a rope and a snake. If we see a striped rope in a dimly-lit place, we might think it is a snake and feel frightened. This is just a misconception: the mind labels “snake” onto something that is not a snake. If we investigate, we cannot find a snake anywhere on the rope—none of the individual parts is a snake, and the collection of parts is also not a snake. When we realize this, our fear goes away.

Similarly, we label “car” onto something that is not a car, but is just a collection of parts such as hood, engine, doors, etc. If we search and try to find the car among its parts, we cannot. There is no car to be found—none of the individual parts is a car, and the collection of parts is also not a car. When we realize this, any disturbing emotions we might have about the car disappear.

3. The relationship between the two truths

- The two truths are a dichotomy, meaning that whatever exists is either one or the other. There is nothing that is both, and nothing that is neither.
- Nevertheless, the two truths are compatible, not contradictory like heat and cold. Ultimate truth/emptiness is the actual, final mode of existence of conventionally existing things. E.g. a cup is a conventional truth; its emptiness of inherent existence is an ultimate truth.
- The two truths with respect to a single object, like a cup, are one entity, although they are different, i.e. they are not the same thing. For example, the Heart Sutra says, “Form is empty; emptiness is form; form is not other than emptiness; emptiness is not other than form.”
- The term “truth” means something that exists the way it appears, and appears the way it exists. From this point of view, only emptiness is a truth. Conventional truths are not really truths, but are falsities. They are called “truths” because they are true for ignorance (like “fool’s gold”).
- Some translators use the term “concealer truths” for conventional truths: they are true only for a concealer, i.e. ignorance, which is a concealer because it conceals the reality of things. (This is actually a more accurate translation of the Sanskrit and Tibetan terms: *samvrti-satya* & *kun.dzob.den.pa*).

4. Three criteria for conventional existence

How do Prasangikas reply to the doubt: “if things have no inherent existence and are merely labeled by mind, we should be able to call a rock “gold” and it would be gold”? This is incorrect. For something to “exist conventionally/in conventional terms” it must satisfy three criteria:

- 1) It is known to the world, i.e. to conventional consciousness
- 2) It is not discredited by a conventional valid cognizer
- 3) It is not discredited by an ultimate valid cognizer—i.e. it’s found by a valid cognizer.

An object that has legs and a flat surface on top (1) is known as a “table” in the world, (2) calling it a table is not discredited by any conventional valid cognizer, and (3) calling it a table is not discredited by any ultimate valid cognizer. On the other hand, calling this object a “car” would not fulfill these criteria.

5. Two types of selflessness/emptiness

1. Selflessness of persons—asserted by all four Buddhist systems
2. Selflessness of phenomena—asserted only by the two Mahayana systems

6. Three levels of selflessness of persons

- 1) The emptiness of a permanent, unitary, and independent self** (asserted by some non-Buddhist schools, but rejected by all Buddhists. This type of selflessness is considered coarse by non-Prasangikas.)
 - permanent = unchanging
 - unitary = one whole thing, not made of parts
 - independent = not dependent on causes and conditions
- 2) The emptiness of a self-supporting, substantially existent self** (asserted by all Buddhists. This type of selflessness is considered subtle by non-Prasangikas, but coarse by Prasangikas.)
 - self-supporting = being somewhat independent of the aggregates
 - substantially existent = able to appear to the mind without other things having to appear, e.g. a tree (as opposed to a *forest*, which can only appear in dependence on the appearance of many trees)

There are two forms of this conception of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self:

- innate—everyone has it, even babies and animals
- acquired—acquired by studying tenets that teach the existence of such a self

- 3) The emptiness of an inherently existing self** (Prasangikas only)
 - “inherently-existent” means existing from its own side, independent of anything else; existing objectively, etc.
 - this conception is innate—everyone has it—but can also be acquired
 - we have such a conception not only with respect to the self/person, but also with respect to all phenomena, e.g. tables, cars, etc.

5. Selflessness according to Madhyamika Prasangika

According to Prasangika, what the other schools posit as the *subtle* selflessness of persons—the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent person—is the *coarse* selflessness of persons. Their subtle selflessness of persons is the emptiness of inherent existence. And the subtle selflessness of phenomena is also the emptiness of inherent existence. There is no coarse selflessness of phenomena.

Selflessness of persons (coarse)	Selflessness of persons (subtle)	Selflessness of phenomena (coarse)	Selflessness of phenomena (subtle)
Lack/absence of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self	Emptiness of an inherently existent self/person	n/a	Emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena other than persons

6. Dependent Arising: the “monarch” of reasons for realizing emptiness

There are three ways in which things are dependent:

1. Causes and conditions (impermanent things)
2. Parts (all things, impermanent and permanent)
3. Mental labeling (all things)

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Translations of Shantideva’s *Engaging in a Bodhisattva’s Deeds*

Batchelor, Stephen, transl. *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*. Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1979. A pdf can be downloaded at: https://www.tibethouse.jp/about/buddhism/text/pdfs/Bodhisattvas_way_English.pdf

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Tobden, Geshe Yeshe. *The Way of Awakening*. Wisdom, 2005

Wallace, Vesna A. and Wallace, B. Alan, transl. *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*. Snow Lion, 1997.

Translations of Chapter Nine only, with commentary

Dalai Lama, His Holiness; translated and edited by Thubten Jinpa. *Practicing Wisdom*. Wisdom Publications, 2005.

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