

exist because its identification must depend on the appearance of other phenomena.³⁷ Therefore, the mental consciousness is not a substantially existent self. In the Svātantrika system, the mental consciousness is identified as the imputedly existent (*prajñaptisat, btags yod*) person, as will be explained below (pp. 109-114). All four tenet systems refute the existence of a substantially existent person.³⁸

Having thus explained the manner in which form is like a ball of foam, feeling is like a bubble, discrimination is like a mirage, compositional factors are like a banana tree, and consciousness is like an illusion, it remains to be seen how this stanza from a Hīnayāna sutra became a point of contention between the Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas.

In commenting on the thirty-fourth stanza of the seventh chapter of Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way* which says:

Production, abiding, and disintegration
Are said to be like
A dream, an illusion,
And a city of the *gandharvas*.

Buddhapālita writes:

In this way, the Supramundane Victor set forth the categories of an illusion, an echo, a reflection, a mirage, a dream, a ball of foam, a water bubble, and a banana tree as examples of the selflessness of conditioned phenomena. There is nothing whatsoever real or non-mistaken in these. It is said that these are elaborations, these are falsities. In the statement, "All phenomena are selfless," selfless means non-entityness because the term "self" is a word for entityness.³⁹

The Buddha used the examples of deceptive phenomena such as illusions, mirages, and dreams to indicate that phenomena do not exist in the way that they appear. All phenomena are selfless in the sense that they lack inherent existence and do not exist by way of their own entity. When the Buddha said in Hīnayāna sutras that form is like a ball of foam, feeling is like a water bubble, discrimination is like a mirage, compositional factors are like a banana tree, and consciousness is like an illusion, he was indicating that all conditioned phenomena are selfless, empty of inherent existence. This is Buddhapālita's position.

In commenting on the same verse from Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way* (VII. 34), Bhāvaviveka disagrees with Buddhapālita's assertion that the selflessness of phenomena is taught in Hīnayāna sutras:

Self and mine are without entityness, but they are perceived in that way. Therefore, as an antidote to the afflictive obstructions, the Supramundane Victor taught in the [scriptures of the] Hearer vehicle:

The Seer of Reality [Buddha] said that
Form is like a ball of foam,
Feeling is like a bubble,
Discrimination is like a mirage,
Compositional factors are like a banana tree,
Consciousness is like an illusion.

In the Mahāyāna [scriptural collection], conditioned phenomena are just without entityness, but they are perceived in that way and are [wrongly] taught to be that way [by others]. Therefore, as an antidote to the afflictive obstructions and the obstructions to omniscience, it is said [in the *Diamond Cutter (Vajracchedika)*]:

Products are to be viewed as like
Stars, cataracts, butter lamps,
Illusions, dew, bubbles,
Dreams, lightning, and clouds.

Therefore, this is not something to be feared: the intelligent, having analyzed, should become forbearant.

Another [Buddhapālita] says:

The Supramundane Victor set forth the categories of illusion, echo, reflection, mirage, dream, ball of foam, water bubble, and banana tree as examples of the selflessness of conditioned phenomena. There is nothing whatsoever real or non-mistaken in this. It is said that these are elaborations, these are falsities. In the statement, “All phenomena are selfless,” selfless means non-entityness because the term “self” is a word for entityness.

Regarding that, one who is not another [i.e., myself, Bhāvaviveka], says that here, since the appearance as self is a mistaken reality, and since the term “self” is a word for self [of persons and does not mean entityness], and since a self that is a separate entity does not exist in those [aggregates] and they themselves are not a self just as they are not Īśvara, that scripture, because of referring to the selflessness of persons which is to be specifically realized in the Hearer Vehicle, cannot indicate that phenomena are selfless. If it could, it would be meaningless [for the Buddha] to have taken up another vehicle [the Mahāyāna].⁴⁰

The Nine Examples

Before exploring Bhāvaviveka's argument in detail, the stanza he cites from the *Diamond Cutter Sutra* warrants explanation.

Products are to be viewed as like
Stars, cataracts, butter lamps,
Illusions, dew, bubbles,
Dreams, lightning, and clouds.

According to Jam-yang-shay-ba and the annotator of his *Great Exposition of Tenets*, Nga-wang-bel-den, this stanza sets forth nine examples that illustrate four characteristics of products.⁴¹ The characteristic of nature is indicated by the examples of stars, cataracts, and a butter lamp. The characteristic of experience is indicated by the example of a magician's illusion. The characteristic of fault is indicated by the examples of dew and bubbles, and the characteristic of renunciation, by the examples of dreams, lightning, and clouds.

THE CHARACTERISTIC OF NATURE

The Nature of Products is Like Stars

Products' nature of being a composite of appearance and emptiness is illustrated by stars. All phenomena have two natures. Their emptiness of true existence is their final, ultimate mode of being that appears to a non-conceptual exalted wisdom (*nirvikalpakajñāna*, *rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes*). This ultimate mode of being, which is the mere elimination of true existence, is illustrated by the fact that during the day, only the clear sky appears and stars are not visible. In the same way, the exalted wisdom consciousness sees only the emptiness which is the negative of true existence and does not see any conventional elaborations whatsoever.

The other nature of products is their conventional mode of being that appears to a conventional conceptual

consciousness. This conventional mode of being is posited through appearing to a non-defective awareness. Just as when the night is covered by darkness, the constellations of stars appear clearly, so the varieties of conventional phenomena appear to a conventional thought consciousness. For those with the obstructive covering of ignorance (like darkness), various mistaken appearances (like stars) are perceived. Nevertheless, not all appearances to conventional thought consciousnesses are mistaken in the Svātantrika system. Products appear correctly to factually concordant consciousnesses—conventional valid cognizers. The appearance of objects as truly established from their own side, without being posited through appearing to a non-defective awareness, exists only for mistaken minds. Phenomena do not exist in that way and appear so only through the force of predispositions for ignorance.

The example of stars, which do not appear during the day but do appear at night, illustrates the mode of apprehension of a non-conceptual exalted wisdom and a conceptual conventional consciousness. For a non-conceptual exalted wisdom of those who have not achieved Buddhahood, only emptiness—the absence of true existence and the final mode of being of phenomena—appears. To a conceptual conventional consciousness the varieties of conventional truths appear. This appearance of conventional phenomena is not an object of abandonment of the path to Buddhahood, for conventionalities appear to a Buddha's exalted wisdom knowing the varieties (*yāvajjñāna, ji snyad gzigs pa'i ye shes*). Rather, it is the conception of these phenomena as truly existent, ultimately existent, without being posited through the force of appearing to a non-defective consciousness, which is abandoned on the path.

The Nature of Products is Like Cataracts

Due to ignorance, products appear to be truly established but, in fact, are empty of being established in the way that they appear. This nature of emptiness is exemplified by cataracts.

If a phenomenon were ultimately established, then the phenomenon itself would have to be its own final mode of being, its own essence. If this were the case, then a reasoning consciousness searching for the mode of being of that phenomenon would have to find the phenomenon itself at the conclusion of its analysis. However, a consciousness which analyzes with reasonings, such as the lack of being one or many, finds that the phenomenon under investigation is not ultimately one or many and, therefore, is not ultimately established. The reasoning consciousness finds that the mode of being of the phenomenon, rather than being the phenomenon itself, is its very lack of ultimate establishment, its emptiness of being established in the way in which it appears.

This is similar to the case of a person with cataracts who sees falling hairs. If the falling hairs actually existed, they would have to be seen even more clearly by a person with good vision. The fact that such a person does not see falling hairs indicates that they do not exist. Similarly, if phenomena were ultimately established, as they appear to be to an ignorant consciousness, that ultimate establishment would have to be ascertained by an analytical consciousness specifically investigating ultimate establishment. The fact that such a consciousness, after searching for ultimate establishment, does not find it indicates that phenomena are empty of ultimate establishment.

The Nature of Products is Like a Butter Lamp

Although phenomena do not ultimately exist, they do exist, and it is necessary to posit the factors of the category of appearance—conventional truths. This is illustrated by a

butter lamp. Although the flame of a butter lamp does not naturally abide in the lamp, it is undeniable that the flame arises when such things as butter and a wick are assembled. In the same way, although no phenomenon whatsoever ultimately exists, all of cyclic existence and nirvana arise in dependence on the phenomena of the impure class, such as contaminated actions and afflictions, and the phenomena of the pure class, such as the six perfections, the eighteen emptinesses, and the four noble truths.

In this way, the nature of products is illustrated by the examples of stars, cataracts, and a butter lamp. The nature of emptiness is exemplified by cataracts, the nature of appearance by a butter lamp, and the nature of a combination of emptiness and appearance is illustrated by stars.

THE CHARACTERISTIC OF EXPERIENCE

The Experience of Products is Like that of a Magician's Illusion

A magician is able to take pebbles or sticks and, by rubbing them with a salve and casting a mantra, cause them to appear as various pleasant or unpleasant things. The audience, viewing these false appearances, reacts to them with attachment or fear even though, in fact, there is nothing there to bring benefit or harm. In the same way, sentient beings are tortured by the sufferings of cyclic existence due to misconceiving the nature of phenomena. They generate various attachments and hatreds through the force of being affected by the ignorance that conceives of true existence, whereas, in fact, phenomena are not truly existent, and they experience suffering as the result of desire and hatred. Being led like a dog who chases a stone thinking that it is food or tempting a child with an empty fist that it thinks holds candy, sentient beings manufacture various hopes and fears about things that do not truly exist.

This suggests that one must reverse attachment and not follow after those objects, attempting to experience their taste.

THE CHARACTERISTIC OF FAULT

Products are viewed as faulty from the viewpoint of their nature of impermanence and from the viewpoint of their nature of suffering.

Products' Fault of Impermanence is Like Dew

A tiny dewdrop on the tip of a blade of grass immediately dries up at the slightest cause, such as being touched by sunlight. It has a nature of utter instability. In the same way, all conditioned phenomena, as soon as they are established, have an inner nature of disintegration, without depending on a later cause for them to fall apart. For this reason, the *Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Stanzas* (*Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*) and Maitreya's *Ornament for Clear Realization* (*Abhisamayālaṅkāra*) refer to impermanence as the aspect of non-being and the aspect of non-existence (because of being the aspect of the non-existence of permanence).⁴²

Products' Fault of Suffering is Like a Water Bubble

When water bubbles appear, they have a nature of water, when they disappear, they return to the nature of water. With regard to contaminated feelings, sutra says, "Whatsoever feeling here is a suffering." Feelings of suffering arise in the aspect of suffering as soon as they are produced. When contaminated pleasures cease, they become entities of suffering and are, therefore, called sufferings of change. Because feelings of equanimity are the basis of ail suffering, they are explained to be pervasive sufferings of conditioning.

Thus, the three types of contaminated feelings—those of pain, pleasure, and equanimity are all identified as being

types of suffering: the suffering of pain, the suffering of change, and the pervasive sufferings of conditioning respectively. Common beings (*prthagjana, so so skye bo*) (etymologically, those who take birth (*jana*) by the power of individual (*prthak*) contaminated actions and afflictions)⁴³ do not perceive the three types of feelings as having a nature of suffering. Rather, such beings, often derogatorily referred to as children (*balaka, byis pa*) by the Buddha, attribute qualities of pleasure and pain, pleasantness and unpleasantness to contaminated feelings. To the sight of Superiors, those who have achieved the path of seeing or above, it is said that “Pleasure never exists on the point of the needle of cyclic existence.” That is, all experience in the cycle of existence has a nature only of suffering. This is something that can only be understood fully by Superiors; it cannot be understood by common beings. Therefore, the suffering nature of all contaminated feelings is called a truth for Superiors (*āryasatya, 'phags pa'i bden pa*).

CHARACTERISTIC OF RENUNCIATION

The characteristic of renunciation is the lack of true existence of products—that quality of products which, when realized, causes them to be renounced. This characteristic of non-true existence of past, present, and future products is illustrated by a dream, lightning, and clouds, respectively.

Past Products' Characteristics of Renunciation are Like a Dream

When remembering a dream, one may feel desire or hatred for objects that appeared in the dream. Even though the dream objects are not real, they are nonetheless capable of serving as the basis of desire and hatred. In the same way, although the effects of past actions are experienced, it is not necessary that the actions that cause those effects be truly established. The mere fact that an effect is

experienced does not entail that its cause must truly exist. Past products, such as actions in former lifetimes, produce effects yet are empty of true establishment, much as past dream objects can cause desire and hatred.

Present Products' Characteristics of Renunciation are Like Lightning

Lightning appears with radiant whiteness just for an instant and then immediately becomes non-existent without one being able to say, "It first appeared there, then it remained here, and finally disappeared there." In the same way, when one searches for present things, whether it be from the viewpoint of object, agent, and action or cause, effect, and entity, one can find no nature that is more than an appearance to a non-defective awareness. Through merely seeking for a truly existent thing with a reasoning consciousness, this object sought is broken down and disappears; it cannot be found anywhere.

Future Products' Characteristic of Renunciation are Like Clouds

A pure empty sky does not have the capacity to produce rain, but rain falls from clouds gathered in the sky, and those clouds can continuously yield such effects as a ripened harvest. In the same way, contaminated actions, afflictions, and predispositions for assuming bad states gather in the natural clear light of the mind. These defilements are merely adventitious and are not the final nature of the mind; otherwise, liberation would be impossible because the mind could not be purified of defilement. The mind is naturally pure and empty of true existence. As the clouds are capable of producing harvests, contaminated actions, afflictions, and predispositions for assuming bad states are capable of producing a variety of fruitional effects in the future, such as rebirth as an animal. These future fruits are empty of true existence. If future

things were ultimately established, they would have to exist at all times whereby all effects would have to abide in their causes, in which case it would absurdly follow that all the effects which arise in dependence on a cloud, such as a harvest, would have to exist in the cloud. Because future effects do not exist in their causes but rather arise gradually through a process of maturation, it can be inferred that future products lack ultimate establishment; they are empty of true existence.

Having examined the meaning of the stanza from the *Diamond Cutter*, it is now necessary to explore Bhāvaviveka's argument that this stanza in particular and the Mahāyāna scriptures in general teach the selflessness of phenomena, whereas the stanza from the Hīnayāna sutra which says, "form is like a ball of foam ..." and all other Hīnayāna sutras teach only the selflessness of persons.

The Buddha is ostensibly saying very nearly the same thing in the two stanzas, even repeating the two metaphors of bubbles and a mirage. On face value, there is nothing to point to that indicates that the passage from the Hīnayāna sutra merely teaches the selflessness of persons while the Mahāyāna passage teaches the more subtle selflessness of phenomena. Bhāvaviveka's assertion that the selflessness of phenomena is not taught in the Hīnayāna scriptural collection (*piṭaka, sde snod*) revolves around two essential points of disagreement between the Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas: the meaning of the term self (*ātman, bdag*) and what constitutes the two obstructions—the afflictive obstructions (*kleśāvaraṇa, nyon sgrib*) and the obstructions to omniscience (*jñeyāvaraṇa, shres sgrib*). This becomes clear through reexamining his commentary to the thirty-fourth stanza of the seventh chapter of Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way*:

Self and mine are without entityness, but they are perceived in that way. Therefore, as an antidote to

the afflictive obstructions, the Supramundane Victor taught in the [scriptures of the] Hearer Vehicle:

The Seer of Reality, [the Buddha] said that
Form is like a ball of foam,
Feeling is like a bubble,
Discrimination is like a mirage,
Compositional factors are like a banana tree,
Consciousness is like an illusion.

In the Mahāyāna [scriptural collection], conditioned phenomena are just without entityness, but they are perceived in that way and are [wrongly] taught to be that way [by others]. Therefore, as an antidote to the afflictive obstructions and the obstructions to omniscience, it is said [in the *Diamond Cutter*]:

Products are to be viewed as like
Stars, cataracts, a butter lamp,
An illusion, dew, a bubble,
A dream, lightning, and clouds.

Therefore, this is not something to be feared; the intelligent, having analyzed, should become forbearant.

Another [i.e., Buddhapālita] says:

The Supramundane Victor set forth the categories of illusions, echoes, reflections, mirages, dreams, balls of foam, water bubbles, and banana trees as examples of the selflessness of conditioned phenomena. There is nothing whatsoever real or non-mistaken in them. It is said that these are elaborations, these are falsities. In the statement, “All phenomena are selfless,” selfless means non-

entityness because the term “self” is a word for entityness.

Regarding that, one who is not another [i.e., myself, Bhāvaviveka], says that here, since the appearance as self is a mistaken reality, and since the term “self” is a word for self [of persons and does not mean entityness], and since a self that is a separate entity does not exist in those [aggregates] and they themselves are not a self just as they are not Īśvara, that scripture, because of referring to the selflessness of persons which is to be specifically realized in the Hearer vehicle, cannot indicate that phenomena are selfless. If it could, it would have been meaningless [for the Buddha] to have taken up another vehicle [namely, the Mahāyāna].⁴⁴

Bhāvaviveka states that the self of persons lacks entityness but is falsely perceived to exist truly. This misconception of the nature of the person constitutes the chief of the afflictive obstructions, which prevent liberation from cyclic existence. Since Hīnayānists seek to be liberated from cyclic existence, they must overcome the afflictive obstructions, and, therefore, the Buddha taught the selflessness of persons—the thorough knowledge of which is the antidote to the afflictive obstructions—in the Hearer or Hīnayāna scriptural collection. For Bhāvaviveka, the stanzas, “Form is like a ball of foam ...” are an instance of a Hīnayāna scripture that teaches the selflessness of persons.

Bhāvaviveka goes on to say that all conditioned phenomena, persons and other things, lack entityness but are falsely perceived to exist truly. The conception of phenomena as truly existing by way of their own entity is the chief of the obstructions to omniscience preventing the achievement of the omniscient consciousness of a Buddha, which is able to perceive directly all objects of knowledge

(*jñeya, shes bya*) simultaneously. This conception of phenomena as truly existent is more subtle than the conception of a self of persons, and therefore the wisdom realizing that phenomena do not truly exist serves as an antidote to the more coarse afflictive obstructions as well as to the obstructions to omniscience. It is Bhāvaviveka's view that the Buddha taught that conditioned phenomena are without entityness in the Mahāyāna scriptural collections so that those with the Mahāyāna aspiration to achieve Buddhahood for the welfare of all sentient beings could realize the non-true existence of phenomena and overcome both obstructions. Bhāvaviveka cites the passage from the *Diamond Cutter* as an instance of a Mahāyāna sutra that teaches that conditioned phenomena are without entityness.

He then goes on to quote Buddhapālita's commentary to the *Treatise on the Middle Way* (VII.34) in which Buddhapālita states that the similes of illusions, balls of foam, banana trees, and so forth that the Buddha employs in the Hīnayāna sutras denote the selflessness of phenomena, not merely that of persons. This is due to the fact that, according to Buddhapālita, when the Buddha says that all phenomena are selfless, the word selfless (*anātman, bdag med pa*) means non-entityness (*niḥsvabhāva, ngo bo nyid med pa*), that is, not being established by way of its own entity, because self (*ātman, bdag*) is another word for entityness (*svabhāva, ngo bo nyid*).

Bhāvaviveka disagrees, saying that the term self in this context refers only to a misconceived nature of the person. The Hīnayāna scriptures, by saying that form is like a ball of foam, feeling is like a bubble, discrimination is like a mirage, compositional factors are like a banana tree, and consciousness is like an illusion, are indicating that a self that is a different entity from the aggregates does not exist anywhere among the aggregates, nor are the aggregates

individually or collectively the self. The passage discusses only the nature of the person in terms of the five aggregates and in no way refers to the lack of entityness of phenomena, as Buddhapālita contends. Hearer scriptures teach only the object of a Hearer's wisdom, namely, the selflessness of persons. If the object of a Bodhisattva's wisdom, the non-entityness of phenomena, were taught in the Hīnayāna scriptures, then the complete antidote for the removal of both obstructions would be available in the Hīnayāna canon and the Buddha's teaching of the Mahāyāna scriptures would be totally redundant.

This controversy between Bhāvaviveka and Buddhapālita rests on the disagreement between the Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas on three fundamental issues: the meaning of self and selflessness, the nature of the two obstructions, and the distinguishing feature of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna.

According to the Svātantrikas, Yogācārins, Sautrāntikas, and Vaibhāṣikas, the term "self" (*ātman, bdag*) in isolation, and not in phrases such as "selflessness of phenomena" (*dharmanairātmya, chos kyi bdag med*), refers only to an attribute falsely ascribed to the person (*pudgala, gang zag*); it does not refer to other phenomena. It should be noted that self, in this context, is not a synonym for person as it usually is; when these tenet systems refute the existence of self, they are not refuting the existence of persons. Rather, they are negating a special type of person, a person which can appear to the mind independent of the appearance of other phenomena.⁴⁵

The Prāsaṅgikas apply the bare term "self" to a wider context than merely the false nature of the person.⁴⁶ Buddhapālita says that self is a word for entityness,⁴⁷ the inherent existence which is falsely ascribed to all phenomena, including persons. Candrakīrti says in his *Commentary to Āryadeva's "Four Hundred"* (*Catuḥśatakaṭikā*):