

Shantideva's Close Placement of Mindfulness and Mehm Tim Mon's Three Characteristics

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Abstract

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Shantideva's practice of Close Placement of Mindfulness is incompatible with suffering. The phrase “better solution” means that the position is more rational. “The suffering” refers to any of the three kinds of sufferings: suffering of suffering, suffering of change, and pervasive suffering. Mehm Tim Mon's practice of three characteristics refer to impermanence, non-self, and suffering. Mehm Tim Mon's practice of the three characteristics is just compatible with suffering. The thesis of this paper is that Shantideva's practice of Close Placement of Mindfulness is a better solution for suffering rather than Mehm Tim Mon's practice of three characteristics.

Keywords: Close Placement of Mindfulness; Three Characteristics

Introduction

Shantideva's practice of Close Placement of Mindfulness refers to two kinds of emptiness (*Sunyata*) practices: the practices of emptiness of the person and Phenomena. (a) The practice of emptiness of person means observing the identity of person in five aggregates by chariot logic. Shantideva says; (Shantideva, 2009 : 139)

“Teeth, hair and nails are not the self, the self is not bone nor blood; it is neither mucus nor is it phlegm; nor is it lymph or pus. The self is not fat nor sweat; the lungs and liver also are not the self; neither are any of the other inner organs; nor is the self-excrement or urine. Flesh and skin are not the self; warmth and energy-winds are not the self; neither are bodily cavities the self; and at no time are the six types of consciousness the self. The reason for

this is because all six psycho-physical categories are impermanent, multiple and not autonomous.”

(b) emptiness practice of phenomena refers to four kinds of emptiness practices: the practice of emptiness of body, feeling, mind, and *dharma*. (1) The practice of emptiness of body means observing the identity of body in five aggregates, such as:

“The body is neither feet nor calves; thighs and the waist are not the body; the abdomen and back are not the body; and neither are the chest and shoulders the body. The ribs and the hands are not the body; armpits and the nape of the neck are not the body; all inner organs are not the body; neither the head nor neck are the body. Therefore, what truly existent body is there among these parts.” (Shantideva, 2009 : 142)

(2) The practice of emptiness of feelings means observing the identity of feelings in five aggregates like this:

“If feelings of pain truly existed, then since they would never end, why would they not affect feelings of great joy and happiness, making it impossible for them to ever arise? Conversely, if happiness had true existence, why do those suffering greatly from grief and sickness not find any joy in delicious foods and the like? They should, if happiness had true independent existence, but they clearly do not. Therefore no (truly existent) experiencer of feelings exists and thus no truly existent feelings exist either. So how can this identityless collection of aggregates be benefitted by pleasurable feelings and harmed by painful ones? It cannot because beneficial and harmful feelings do not truly exist.” (Shantideva, 2009 : 144)

(3) The practice of emptiness of mind/consciousness means observing the identity of mind/consciousness in five aggregates, such as:

“A (truly existent) mental consciousness does not abide in the sense faculties such as the eyes, it does not abide in the objects such as visual-forms, and it does not abide in between the two. Neither does a (truly existent) mind exist either inside or outside the body, and it is not to be found elsewhere. This (mind) is neither the body nor truly other than it; it is not mixed with it nor entirely separate from it; the mind is not in the slightest bit truly existent. Therefore, all sentient beings have from the very beginning been in the natural Nirvana (i.e., their minds have always been devoid of true existence).” (Shantideva, 2009 : 146)

(3) The practice of emptiness of *dharma* means that the practice which is observing the identity of *dharma* in things (conditional thing) and non-things (unconditional thing) like this:

“What would be the need of a cause for a thing that (truly) existed? (If it truly existed), it would already exist. And what would be the need of a cause for it, if it didn’t exist at all? (If it didn’t exist), it would not be the effect of anything. Although a cause cannot make a non-existent arise into a non-thing, it can change it into a thing. Even by means of a hundred million causes a non-thing cannot be transformed into anything else because it is permanent. If it were able to change, it would have to do so either while retaining its non-thingness or through discarding it. In the former instance how could it become a thing as long as its condition remained unseparated, from being a non-thing? And in the second instance what is there that could (first) separate itself from the state of a non-thing and then (proceed) to become a thing? This is an impossibility. Furthermore, if the condition of a non-thing is not discarded, it will be impossible for a thing to exist at the same time. In which case when could a thing ever come to exist? Also (a further consideration should be made) in the case of a non-thing becoming a thing upon having first discarded the condition of a non-thing. Without actually becoming a thing, a non-thing cannot be separated from the state of a non thing, and if it has not become separate from this state, it is impossible for the state of an existent thing to arise. Similarly, a (truly existent) thing does not become a non-thing upon cessation because it would absurdly follow that something with one nature would become twofold, i.e., both a thing and a non-thing. In this way there is no cessation or production of (truly existent) things.” (Shantideva, 2009 : 153-154)

Through those observations of emptiness of person and phenomena, all things and non-things are never having a (truly existent) birth nor a (truly existent) cessation. They are pacified (of true existence) from the very beginning, and by nature in the state beyond sorrow. Although sentient beings and feelings of sufferings appear, they are not truly existent, just like a dream. And since they are found to have no essence upon analysis, they are also like a plantain tree. Therefore, Shantideva’s practice of Close Placement of Mindfulness incompatible with suffering.

2. The phrase “better solution” means that the position is more rational

The phrase “better solution” means that the position of emptiness is more rational than the practice of three characteristics. Because the practice of emptiness can avoid suffering in a direct way rather than the practice of three characteristics.

Let us see the practice of three characteristics of Mehm Tim Mon. (Mehm Tin Mon, 2015 : 292-295) The methods of practice of these characteristics are just concentrating on the impermanent, suffering, and not-self nature of the ultimate mentality and materiality, reflecting repeatedly *anicca, anicca, anicca, dukkha, dukkha, dukkha, and antta, antta, antta*. As a result, the practice of three characteristics cannot renounce suffering as an emptiness practice. For example, one cannot avoid suffering from a headache by repeating “headache,” “headache,” and “headache.” As well, one cannot escape from suffering by reflecting repeatedly *anicca, anicca, anicca, dukkha, dukkha, dukkha, and antta, antta, antta*. Because everyone knows *anicca, dukkha, and antta* but still they are suffering from *anicca, dukkha, and antta*. It seems medicine does not become medicine.

Thus, if one wants to recover from a headache, one must find out the cause of the disease and take medicine. As well, if one does not like the sufferings, one must observe the nature of sufferings rather than suffering itself by chariot logic and so on as above. If one can see the nature (*sunyata*) of suffering, at the same time, the sufferings also disappear. For instance, the suffering of a dream disappears while one knows that it is a suffering of dream. As well, The Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas, says; (Ngulchu Thokme, 2006 : 9)

“All forms of suffering are like a child’s death in a dream. Holding illusory appearances to be truly makes you weary. Therefore, when you meet with disagreeable circumstances, See them as illusory. This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.”

From the point of view of the emptiness, there is no such things as suffering because that is stultified by delusion. Therefore, Shantideva says; (Shantideva, 2009 : 138)

“Those who wish to put an end to all suffering should meditate on emptiness. When one understands emptiness, compassion should arise for those who experience suffering as a result of being confused about emptiness. Then, while remaining in cyclic existence, to accomplish inconceivable benefit for others by means of liberating them from the two extremes of desiring the happiness of cyclic existence and fearing suffering, is the fruit of meditating on emptiness.”

On the other hand, Mehm Tim Mon believes that there is consciousness, mental factors, materiality, and *nibbana* in the ultimate state, (Mehm Tin Mon, 2015 : 21-25) because of this concept no one can renounce the suffering completely. Because Nagarjuna says; (Nagarjuna, 2005 : 5)

“As long as aggregates are conceived, so long thereby does not the conception of I exist. Further, when the conception of I exists, there are action, and from it there also is birth.”

But Shantideva never believe like that in ultimate state and he asserted such as, (Shantideva, 2009 : 134-135) once neither a thing nor a no-thing (its emptiness) remains before the mind then as there is no other alternative, such as something being both a thing and a no-thing, or being neither a thing nor a no-thing, finally the mind that apprehends (truly existent) objects will cease and be totally pacified.

Therefore, the phrase “better solution” means that the position is more rational.

3. “The suffering” refers to any of the three kinds of sufferings: suffering of suffering, suffering of change, and pervasive suffering

The suffering ‘*Dukkha*’ refers to any of the three kinds of sufferings: suffering of suffering (*Dukkha-dukkha*), suffering of change, (*Viparinama-dukkha*), and suffering of pervasive (*Sankhara-dukkha*).

The suffering of suffering refers to feeling of suffering. Which means that we can experience suffering of suffering when, before one suffering is over, we are subjected to another. We get leprosy, and then we break out in boils, too; and then as well as breaking out in boils we get injured. Our father dies and then our mother dies soon afterwards. We are pursued by enemies and, on top of that, a loved one dies; and so forth. No matter where we are reborn in *samsara*, all our time is spent in one suffering on top of another, without any chance of a moment’s happiness.as well. The Letter to a Friend says:

“*Samsara* is like this: there are no good rebirths among the gods, Humans, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. Understand that birth is the vessel of many sufferings.” (Nagarjuna, 2006 : 14)

The suffering of change refers to the feeling of pleasure. That we feel when a state of happiness suddenly changes into suffering. One moment we feel fine, satisfied and full after a good meal, and then suddenly we are wracked by violent spasms because of parasites in our stomach. One moment we are happy, and the next moment an enemy plunder our wealth

or our livestock; or a fire burns down our home; or we are suddenly stricken by sickness or evil influences; or we receive some terrible news and immediately we are plunged into suffering. For indeed, whatever apparent comfort, happiness or prestige is to be found here in *samsara*, it lacks the tiniest scrap of constancy or stability, and in the long run can never resist the round of suffering. The Letter to a Friend says;

“One who achieves the pleasure and happiness of Brahmahood, free from the desire world, will again become the fuel of *Avici* and suffer continuously.”

(Nagarjuna, 13)

The **pervasive suffering** refers to neutral feeling. In this case, the ordinary people will not feel the all-pervasive suffering as, for example, when one is stricken with a serious plague and a small pain in the ears and so forth is not noticeable. But the saintly beings the noble ones beyond *samsara* such as the stream enterers, and so forth will see the all-pervasive suffering as suffering, as, for example, when one is nearly recovered from a plague and the small pain of an ear infection is experienced as suffering. Treasury of *Abhidharma* says;

“When one hair from the palm of the hand goes to the eye, there will be discomfort and suffering. The childish, like the palm of the hand, are not aware of the hair of all-pervasive suffering. The saintly are like the eye, and will feel the all-pervasive suffering”. (Vasubandhu, 2005 : 163)

Therefore, the suffering ‘*Dukkha*’ refers to any of the three kinds of sufferings: suffering of suffering (*Dukkha-dukkha*), suffering of change, (*Viparinama-dukkha*), and suffering of pervasive (*Sankhara-dukkha*).

4. Mehm Tim Mon’s Practice of Three Characteristics refer to Impermanence, Suffering, and Not-self

The *Buddhad Abhidhamma* says, (Mehm Tin Mon, 2015 : 292) there are three characteristic marks of mental and corporeal phenomena, i.e., of the five aggregates of existence. They form the objects of insight-meditation. These are: *Anicca-lakkhana* – the characteristic mark of impermanence, *Dukkha-lakkhana* – the characteristic mark of suffering, and *Anatta-lakkhana* – the characteristic marks of not-self. These three characteristics are distinctive specialty thus no one can change it, even buddha himself states like this in *Anguttara Nikaya*;

“Whether Perfect Ones (Buddhas) appear in the world or whether Perfect Ones do not appear in the world, it still remains a firm condition, and

immutable fact and fixed law, that all formations are impermanent, that all formations are subject to suffering, that everything is without a self”.

(Anguttara Nikāya, Book IV, Sutta 134.)

Impermanence means incessant arising and dissolving of ultimate mind and matter is impermanence, i.e., human life embodies this flux in the aging process and the cycle of repeated birth and death so nothing lasts, and everything decays.

Suffering refers to incessant arising and dissolving of ultimate mind and matter itself is suffering, that follows each rebirth, aging, illness, dying, dissatisfaction from getting what a being wishes to avoid or not getting the desired, and so on.

Not-self means since the mind and body are made up of five aggregates and all these aggregates are incessantly forming and perishing, leaving no single entity itself, i.e., there is no unchanging, permanent self or soul in *nama-rupa* or living beings and no abiding essence in anything or phenomena. In sum, not self means not permanent entity. Therefore, Mehm Tim Mon’s Practice of Three Characteristics refer to Impermanence, Suffering, and Not-self.

5. Mehm Tim Mon’s practice of the three characteristics is just compatible with suffering

Mehm Tim Mon’s practice of the three characteristics refer to practice on three characteristic marks of mental and material phenomena: impermanence practice, suffering practice, and not-self practice. (a) In impermanence practice, while one is practicing impermanence, that one is observing the incessant arising and dissolving of *nama* and *rupa* in the five aggregates through reflects repeatedly ‘*anicca, anicca, anicca...*’ all the time. While deeply observing the incessant arising and dissolving of *nama* and *rupa*, one can see that mentality and materiality are rapidly fading and have no form or sign at all. At the same time, he has the concept of the impermanent nature of *nama* and *rupa* in the five aggregates of existence.

(b) In **suffering practice**, while practicing with suffering, one observes the unsatisfactory or suffering nature of *nama* and *rupa* in the five aggregates and concentrates on that by reflecting repeatedly ‘*dukkha, dukkha, dukkha...*’ all the time. He gradually loses desire for and attachment to the *nama* and *rupa*. In other words, he has the concept of the suffering nature of *nama* and *rupa* in the five aggregates.

(b) In **not-self practice**, while one is seeking the unchanging or permanent self in ultimate *nama* and *rupa*, one cannot see the self because, in the ultimate state, mind and

matter are incessantly arising and dissolving. So, while the one is observing and concentrating on the incessant arising and dissolving of *nama* and *rupa* through reflecting repeatedly ‘*anatta, anatta, anatta...*’, he can see the mentality and materiality are void of self. At that time, one has the concept of the not-self nature of *nama* and *rupa* in the five aggregates of existence.

The phrase “*just compatible with suffering*” means impermanence practice, suffering practice, and not-self practice are just focusing on impermanence, suffering and not-self rather than themselves, thus these are just compatible with suffering. Let us see. If one does not know the nature of impermanence, impermanence itself also becomes a cause and condition of suffering, as most people suffer from aging and death. Like that, suffering becomes suffering if one does not know the nature of suffering. In the same way, not-self also becomes a cause and condition of suffering, because, according to Mehm Tim Mon’s point of view, not-self also refers to a not permanent entity. Therefore, Mehm Tim Mon’s practice of the three characteristics is just compatible with suffering.

Conclusion

In sum, I have shown that Shantideva’s practice of Close Placement of Mindfulness is a better solution for suffering rather than Mehm Tim Mon’s practice of three characteristics. My argument for this conclusion is:

- (1) Shantideva’s practice of Close Placement of Mindfulness is incompatible with suffering.
- (2) The phrase “better solution” means that the position is more rational.
- (3) “The suffering” refers to any of the three kinds of sufferings: suffering of suffering, suffering of change, and pervasive suffering.
- (4) Mehm Tim Mon’s practice of three characteristics refer to impermanence, non-self, and suffering.
- (5) Mehm Tim Mon’s practice of the three characteristics is just compatible with suffering.

Therefore, Shantideva’s practice of Close Placement of Mindfulness is a better solution for suffering rather than Mehm Tim Mon’s practice of three characteristics.

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