

# Vasubandhu 3: manas

Thursday, June 30, 2022

12:49 PM

Good evening, our Supreme Court has been busy taking away women's rights and undermining the government's ability to regulate industry and do something about climate change. And yes perhaps things will shift and congress will somehow act to pass new legislation that restore a woman's right to choice or specifically authorize the EPA to regulate climate gasses but things sure don't look good there either. It makes us see that quite a few of the good things that came from previous court rulings and interpretations of past law are not stable or solid. This Court seems to be doing it's best to knock a bunch of these down.

It's a frightening time. At Samish we found out about Roe v. Wade being overruled from Norma at the end of a Dharma Talk. He broke it to us as gently as he could but it was such a horrible thing to hear. Women's lives are already being disrupted in huge ways as abortion services are taken away. And women will definitely die. One article I read said that a black woman in Mississippi is 112 times more likely to die from carrying a pregnancy to term than having an abortion. 112 times more likely.

So I just want to take a minute to acknowledge these big changes and whatever you're feeling about it all. There's no one particular way I think, any of us think, you're supposed to feel and of course a topic like abortion is an ethically very complex question.

But it seems to me that what's missing from these restrictive laws, that are now allowed now that the protection of Roe is gone, is any respect for the uniqueness and individuality of each woman's situation and needs. In the Zen Centers we try to avoid being partisan.

I would love for Red Cedar to be completely welcoming of people who feel strongly that abortion is absolutely a form of killing and violates the precepts. And I would love for Red Cedar to be completely welcoming of people who keep guns at home. And for people who tend to vote Republican (not that these things always go together).

But this doesn't seem to me to be any kind of reasonable legal debate over how the law and constitution - the core bit is the 14th Amendment saying that one can be denied "life, liberty, or property, without due process of law" and debating the rights of the fetus as-a-person against the rights of the pregnant person should reasonably be interpreted. It sure seems like a minor

;

e

an

or

r

te

or

ty

view, put into play with sneaky anti-democratic power plays based on a narrow kind of biblical understanding, being used to subjugate women. Not partisan, not an ethical debate, but simply the state taking away women's rights. This is just wrong.

And it's all happening through people's minds isn't it. Their views, their thirst for power and control, the ways they (and we) look at the world, how it works, how it should work. While it is also good to take action now to protect the rights of women - and whichever groups this Court attacks next, we also can help by understanding minds and how they work. The minds that create this human world.

So tonight we are looking at verses 5-7 in Vasubandhu's 30 Verses on Consciousness:

#### 5 - *manas introduced*

Dependent on the store consciousness and taking it as its object,  
Manas, the consciousness of a self arises, which consists of thinking.

#### 6 - *qualities of manas*

It is always associated with the four afflictions:

self-view, self-delusion, self-pride, and self-love.

And is obstructed by karmically neutral.

Along with these four [afflictions]...

#### 7 - *effects of manas*

From where it [manas] is born come sense-contact, attention,  
sensation, perception, and volition.

It is not found in:

enlightenment, the meditation of cessation, or the supramundane path.

In the first verses Vasubandhu pointed out the deep understanding of this psychology that everything we perceive, experience, or think about runs through our minds. In this system they call the process of conceiving anything "transformation of consciousness."

A short little verse that is a radical and important notion for us.

#### 1 - *all is mind*

Everything conceived of as self or other

Occurs in the transformation of consciousness

That things aren't as solid and stable and "real" as we think they are.



And then he gives an initial road map to the model they use to understand how that works by saying there are three major aspects of this.

## 2 - *this system has three major parts*

This transformation has three aspects:

The ripening of karma,  
the consciousness of a self,  
and the imagery of sense objects.

In this verse "ripening of karma" points to the wonderful teaching that we all have within us the vast, dark storehouse consciousness containing karmic seeds of potential.

Although to say "within you" makes it sound like there is a real, solid you which something can be inside so we do have to watch how ordinary language makes us think about things in ways that aren't how they really are according to this system. And this makes sense as our language evolved out of a certain way of thinking about how we are and what the world is. This system, and Buddhism in general, is saying that it's not really that way and that our misunderstanding of the nature of things is the source of our suffering.

Then verses 3 and 4 describe the storehouse consciousness - I'm fond of the Sanskrit name of Alaya Vijñana - just has a lovely and deep ring to it:

## 3 - intro to alaya vijñana

The first of these is also called alaya,  
the store consciousness, which contains all karmic seeds  
What it holds and its perception of location are unknown.

## 4 - qualities of alaya vijñana

It [alaya] is always associated with  
sense-contact, attention, sensation, perception and volition [the 5 omnipresent dharmas]  
Neither pleasant nor unpleasant,  
It is unobstructed and karmically neutral - like a river flowing.  
In enlightenment it is overturned at its root.

And now tonight's verses introduce us to the second of the three major aspects of this system. The consciousness of a self.

e

of

## 5 - *manas introduced*

Dependent on the store consciousness and taking it as its object,  
Manas, the consciousness of a self arises, which consists of thinking.

This level of consciousness is called manas, manas vijñana - the word manas usually just means thinking which explains the end of this verse - "which consists of thinking" but the way it's used in Yogacara manas has to do with the sticky karmic, volitional, qualities of mind: the aspect of mind that wants to do something and be something, define itself. And in doing so manas consciousness creates the powerful belief in a separate self who *is* the experiences that are happening.

Manas is the self-centered distortion of the karmic seeds that sprout in the storehouse. It's because of manas that we think "I am angry" or "I am jealous" when a seed of anger arises from the storehouse in response to what's happening or a seed of jealousy arises.

Manas is one of the big innovations of this system of Buddhist psychology. Early Buddhism pointed out very strongly that there's no inherent self in us and that everything we experience is just a moment of experience passing through the mind. In Early Buddhism the encouragement was to look closely at each arising experience and see how it fits into the various categories of mental phenomena but there's nothing inherently "me" or "you" about any of it. And remember that in Early Buddhism everything we experience happens through the six senses: the usual five senses and they described a 6th sense consciousness that perceives mental objects. The eyes see sights and this mind consciousness sees thoughts, ideas, feelings.

But although early Buddhism had a way of explaining thinking it just denied the reality of the experience of the thinker - of the me - and didn't provide an explanation for how that sense of self arises.

Yogacara does.

The confusing bit here is this differentiation between manas and mind consciousness (which confusingly is called *manovijñāna* so in our texts and discussions we'll use the term manas for this new idea of how to explain the sense of self and mind consciousness for the mind that perceives thinking.

Try this. Hold up your hand and look at it carefully.

What do you see? Feel free to call out your observations.

s  
in  
nd

m

is  
is

er  
e



So

- 1) the eye consciousness sees these shapes and colors and
- 2) the mind consciousness turns that in to description word-thoughts: wrinkles, fingers, hairs, a hand,
- 3) And manas comes up with *my* hand.

So our me-ness is a product of manas and it's almost always functioning and perpetuating the idea of a separate self.

And while we know that the belief in a separate self is BAD from a Buddhist point of view the next verse tells us just how bad:

It is always associated with the four afflictions:  
self-view, self-delusion, self-pride, and self-love.  
And is obstructed by karmically neutral.  
Along with these four [afflictions]...

Manas is the root of our feeling of dis-ease and separation from others and from our world and generates a sense of separation and self cherishing in an unhealthy way.

Wait a minute, you might ask, what about our ideas about self-care and making sure we have what we need. Even if Buddhism denies the reality of the self we all experience ourselves as a self and we do better when we take care of ourselves right? Self-delusion and self-pride don't sound so great but what's wrong with self-view even if we know it's not quite right and especially what's wrong with self-love?

Ben Connelly explains it this way: [p64-67]

And Thich Nhat Hanh talks about manas this way: [p.91 intro page]

Again, the basic idea here is that manas is the distorted process in which we personalize the arising of the karmic seeds. We make them are own. And then if they are bad - afflictive is the term used here - we feel terrible. I feel this way. I am this way. Horrible. Not just the arising of anger according to conditions but I am angry or even worse we think "you are making me angry" and water some blame seeds while we're at it.

And even if they are good experiences the way we make them "mine" can make them too precious, too loaded and how easily when we think it's this "me" that's happy or satisfied

d

y''

precious, too loaded and now easily when we think it's this me that's happy or satisfied because "I" got what I want. And then this is so sticky, egotistical we would say, that it inspires us to plant seeds of desire and possessiveness and even fear. Somehow I managed to feel good how do I keep that going? How do I get that back? How do I protect this happy feeling?

And the last verse for tonight mostly just points out how the influence of manas is happening pretty much all the time as we have experiences and perceive things.

The first couplet says:

From where it [manas] is born come sense-contact, attention, sensation, perception, and volition.

That little list of sense-contact, attention, sensation, perception, and volition are called the omnipresent mental objects. Whenever we're aware of anything they are present. Some sense of sensory awareness with the attention on something, with the pleasant/unpleasant leanings vedana (sensation here is vedana, same as feelings in the 5 Skandha) and I think an important observation is that volition - the urge to do something - is ever present in the conditioned mind.

And then the second couplet of this verse on the functioning of manas say:

It is not found in:  
enlightenment, the meditation of cessation, or the supramundane path.

With awakening we are freed from manas. As we'll learn later the nature of the storehouse consciousness changes radically too.

The other thing I think that's important about working with these systems is there is the possibility of both gradual and radical change.

Gradual change: slowing down to watch our minds, meditating regularly, and planting the seed of wonder from a system like this can help it all ease and shift. Manas is still there but it's less intense, less gripping, less intensive about how it's all me-mine, less blame, less fear, less being stuck. And this is a good thing.

I asked you two weeks ago to try to pay attention to the mind when something intense occurs and be curious about what seeds you're planting. I'm looking forward to hearing about that in a minute.

d,

of

d.

s

;

a

And another aspect of this is to be curious about the nature of the seeds that arise. And with that curiosity we can invite a softening of manas' power.

Here's an example I noticed during Samish. In addition to Norman giving dokusan we usually have several other senior priests giving dokusan. Me. Kate & Michael from Vancouver. Chris. This time Norman asked that we facilitate Kathie - his wife who is also a dharma teacher - to give dokusan with a sign up sheet and a jisha and everything. Fully support from the retreat. In past years she's just offered dokusan on the quiet to a few people who know her.

Well I noticed her sheet filled up FAST and then I notice my sheet filled up slowly.

And what came bubbling up in my feelings and awareness but....jealousy.

And the interesting thing was I was able to see it and feel it, but it really felt like I didn't take it personally or particularly believe that it described anything. That the feeling of jealousy that was arising had zero to do with whether people prefer one teacher over the other or, even stickier, whether people don't want to talk to me. Naw I just felt a feeling arising.

It didn't really feel like "I am feel jealous" either. It was more just like a mental-emotional event. Like a light that flashed on and off for a second that's the feeling of jealousy.

And one notable thing about this for me was that I felt it at all. I'm very good at simply not feeling difficult emotions. I repress them. So I - if the word "I" is even right here - I did feel it and I didn't identify with it particularly.

This is different, also, from rationalizing and explaining. Different from: "Oh it's okay Tim, people still want to talk to you too and relate to you as a teacher, it's just Kathie is new - Norman always used to say a teacher from out of town is always more exciting - and also a woman teacher, it makes sense she got more sign ups, and it makes sense you might feel a little jealous - understandable!" But that narrative is still calling the jealousy real and the jealousy mine, it's solidifying it even as it tries to explain it and reduce its impact. It's saying "yeah, you're jealous but don't feel badly that's understandable."

This wasn't like a felt jealous it was just that I noticed the feeling of jealousy arising after my visual consciousness took in the two dokusan lists.

And I guess that also means I didn't plant a bunch of new afflictive seeds either. Like an intention to get more attention for myself: I should have the jisha announce that I have more

ve

as

t.

d

le

room on my list! I need to get Norman to let me do more dharma talks so people can see what good teacher I am! Or trying to defend the onslaught: hey, this is a Red Cedar event and Kathie not a Red Cedar teacher why did I go along with this? And on and on. It can get pretty toxic pretty fast and we're both planting new bad seeds and strengthening the power of manas to interpret whatever arises from the storehouse consciousness as me and mine and a big problem to deal with.

Let's do a little reflection practice and then break into groups of three and see what you've noticed around seed planting in response to difficulties. Just in case you don't remember about this or weren't here last time, let's reflect on a challenge you had in the last few days. [pause] What kind of seeds germinated from your storehouse and what new seeds do you feel you planted?

Triads to discuss.

a

's

m

t