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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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5 March 2002

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This human rebirth with the eight freedoms and ten endowments is like a wish fulfilling jewel; it has a very great potential but it also disintegrates very quickly. As the precious human rebirth is over in an instant, just like the lightning in the sky one shouldn't let it go to waste. One should try to take the essence.

If we practise the various meditations gradually and sequentially then we will gain a very good understanding of the graduated path. So sequential and gradual practice of the various meditations is very important. In that way one's continuum will become purified and developed.

### **The Superiority of the Precious Human Rebirth**

Lama Tsong Khapa said, "This precious human rebirth is superior to the wish fulfilling gem". So when we meditate on it we also have to reflect on the great potential of that precious human rebirth.

Actually, the precious human body has greater potential than a wish-fulfilling jewel, which will only be able to give us what we wish in this lifetime. It will only be able to fulfil our very short transitory desires, giving us a very short happiness in this life. However on the basis of the precious human body, one can not only attain happiness in the next life, but one can also create the causes for happiness in the life after that, not to mention the happiness of future lives. By having the precious human body one can attain liberation from cyclic existence, and completely liberate oneself from taking rebirth again. One can even attain complete enlightenment.

So the potential of the precious human body is far superior to the potential of the wish-fulfilling gem. By reflecting on the great potential of the precious human body, our attachment to the meaningless activities of the small purpose of this life should lessen. We should become less and less attracted towards the activities of this life, which are quite purposeless and essenceless.

### **Our Potential to Attain Happiness**

By reflecting on the great potential of the precious human body one will come to understand that one has the potential to attain both happiness and enlightenment. This meditation should generate a very strong self-confidence in one's potential to be able to practise the Dharma. Having recognised that one has this potential, it becomes necessary that one actually does practise the Dharma.

Since everybody wants happiness and doesn't want suffering, then everybody has to create the causes for happiness, and has to stop creating the causes for suffering. One recognises one's potential to be able to do

so by recognising that one has a precious human body. Recognising that one has this potential, it then becomes necessary to practise the Dharma. Why must one practice the Dharma? Why is it imperative that one practices the Dharma? It is because one has the potential, and because one wants happiness, and doesn't want suffering.

### **Why We Must Practise Now**

Having reflected on, and understood the great potential of the precious human body, and also the difficulty of attaining such a precious body, it's still possible for a procrastinating and lazy attitude to arise within one's mind. One might still have the idea that it is possible to practise the Dharma a bit later. In order to overcome that, one reflects on the precious human body being just like a flash of lightning in the sky. It's over in a mere instant. By reflecting on the impermanence of the precious human body, then one overcomes the procrastinating thought of thinking, "It's good enough to practice the Dharma a bit later on".

### **Creating the Right Causes**

We have to relate this meditation on the precious human body to our own situation, and reflect upon whether at the present time we are creating the causes and conducive conditions to again attain a precious human body in a future life. So we analyse our present life, and check up on whether we are keeping our pure morality, which is one of the causes to attain a precious human body. Are we practicing generosity, which is another cause to attain a precious human body? Both of those practices need to be combined with prayers to attain a precious human body. In our present life how much do we practise those three conditions so as to attain a precious human body again? If we are honest, we will find it is probably quite difficult to say to oneself that one is practising all of these three conditions perfectly.

### **Developing the Motivation to Practise Now**

If we do this meditation, a great urgency should arise in our mind; there will be a very great wish of wanting to create those three conditions to attain another precious human life in the future. Even though one has a good situation now, we want to make sure that in future lives one again has a good situation. So by practising this meditation on the precious human rebirth and impermanence, then this type of motivation should arise within one's mind.

By reflecting on the difficulty of finding a precious human rebirth, and by reflecting on its impermanence, and how it disintegrates so very easily, then one first of all should generate the motivation wanting to practise the Dharma, and then secondly of wanting to practise the Dharma right now. So by reflecting on the impermanence of the precious human body, one will generate the motivation of wanting to practise the Dharma right now.

This basis with endowments is very easily destroyed and lost. As said before, it is as impermanent as a flash of lightning in the sky. By reflecting on this fact then one abandons attachment to the activities of this life. One shouldn't be overly engaged in the activities of this life. By reflecting on the impermanence of the precious human rebirth one will be able to lessen that attachment, and

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become less and less involved with the activities of this life. Right at that very moment one starts to practise the Dharma.

### **Realms of Rebirth**

This precious human body disintegrates very easily. By reflecting on the effect of one's approaching death we remember that when we die that we are not just becoming non-existent. Rather, after leaving this body our consciousness will go on to a future life. We will go on to a new body, and the only companion that goes with our consciousness is our karma. After death, the only two directions one can take is either upward into one of the three higher realms, or downward into any one of the three lower realms. The direction will be dependent upon one's karma.

### **Influencing the Realm of Rebirth**

By reflecting that because of one's karma it is so much more likely that one will take rebirth in one of the lower realms, and remembering the sufferings of the lower realms, we are looking for a method or refuge that might possibly prevent us from going to the lower realms after our death. Here there are the Three Jewels, and by going for refuge to the Three Jewels one can close the door to the lower realms. Remembering the fact of one's death, karma and the lower realms, and having faith into the Three Jewels one then goes for refuge to the Three Jewels.

One also practises those practices associated with going for refuge. These practices are, in particular, watching one's karma, the practice of abandoning non-virtuous karma, and practising the ten virtuous actions. By practising the ten virtuous actions one closes the door to the lower realms, and creates the causes for higher rebirth.

### **Escaping from Cyclic Existence**

Even if one again takes rebirth in a higher realm in the next life, there is no freedom there as one is still within cyclic existence. There's no guarantee as to how all of one's future lives will work out. In fact it is very unlikely that they will all be in the higher realms. Also, by reflecting on the general and particular sufferings of all the samsaric realms, one generates renunciation towards cyclic existence.

### **Renunciation**

By remembering in this way the first noble truth of suffering, one then recognises that what binds oneself to this situation is the root of self-grasping. Because of self-grasping delusions and karma are created, and from them cyclic existence is generated, so one then generates renunciation to self-grasping. Once one understands self-grasping one understands that it can be opposed with the wisdom realising selflessness.

### **The Method to be Used**

When one looks for a way out of one's situation, one understands that not only is one able to free oneself from cyclic existence, but also that the method to do so is the wisdom realising selflessness. For this one has to train in the higher training of wisdom. However the higher training of wisdom depends upon the higher training of

concentration, which in turn depends upon the higher training of morality. The very basic thing one has to do in order to free oneself from cyclic existence is to practice the three higher trainings. By practicing the three higher trainings one is able to attain nirvana.

### **The Goal of Enlightenment**

Reflecting further, one realises that even though one might attain nirvana for oneself that is, in itself, quite unsatisfactory. All the sentient beings that have shown oneself great kindness over and over again over many lifetimes, and as well as in this life, would still be suffering. So remembering their kindness, and generating 'Pleasant Love' and great compassion for them, one determines to take upon oneself the responsibility to free from their suffering all the sentient beings who have been kind to oneself in the past, and to establish them in happiness.

Having made this determination, and also realising that at the present time even though one has a very good motivation, one's potential hasn't been yet developed, one realises that in order to be able to really fulfil what one has set out to do, and free other sentient beings from their suffering, one has to become an enlightened being. If we reflect again and again over the years in such a manner, using the various meditations in their correct sequence, then definitely some change will happen in our mind, and we will be able to generate the motivation of Bodhicitta. This is very beneficial for one's mind.

If we meditate according in the traditional way as has just been explained, then we will definitely generate some special qualities in our mind. First, reflect upon the precious human rebirth and then mentally go through all the different points up to enlightenment. Then having reached the point of enlightenment one can do the meditation in the reverse order, going back from enlightenment down through the various points to the beginning of the precious human rebirth. Meditating on these topics in both sequential and reverse order will definitely be extremely beneficial for our mind.

### **Integrating Dharma Practice into our Lives**

Tonight Study Group starts for the year.

The reason why we are so destitute of both realisations and the benefit of meditation is not because we don't know how to practise, but because we don't practise. The fault lies not in the lack of knowledge about the different meditations, but with the lack of practice.

In order to receive the benefit of the different meditations one has to practise those meditations and apply the Dharma to one's life. From our mouths the words "all sentient beings" are often uttered, but then in our day-to-day life we harbour various resentments and aversions to different people. That is a very sorry situation. The Buddha said, "Giving harm to others definitely doesn't become Dharma; Dharma practice is cherishing others".

So we have to integrate our Dharma practice into our daily life. Also, every day we have to meditate a little. By having a long-term view, by meditating just a little every day, then over a long time period something will definitely happen. We have to have a long-term aim, and

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take the long view. If we try to realise everything in a very short life span, then that might also create obstacles.

From my side, I will put lots of effort into the Study Group, and I ask you to please do the same from your side.

With regard to practising the Dharma, then many people say they don't have much time to practise the Dharma. There are always many so many reasons and situations, children, family situations and so forth, and people say, "I don't have time to practice the Dharma. I'm too busy". Although there is never any time for practising the Dharma there is always time in their life for many other things, for example, talking about one's own great qualities, and about all the faults of others. There are many hours of time for that!

### **Chenrezig Meditation**

So it's good to make some time for Dharma practice. For example one can recite the mantra of Chenrezig, OM MANI PADME HUM. Then one sits in the meditation posture, concentrates or focuses one's mind inwardly and visualises in the space above one's head Chenrezig, being indivisible with one's root guru. Then reflect on the qualities of Chenrezig and, as at that time Chenrezig is also one's teacher, reflect on the qualities of one's teacher, of the qualities of his body, speech and mind. Then, while reciting the mantra, do the meditation of nectars coming down and purifying us. If we do this simple visualisation in this way then definitely we will receive some blessing within our mind. It will definitely make a difference to one's mind.

### **How Practise Helps Us**

At those times when one feels unhappy it is good to practice this type of meditation, instead of going outside to the beach, or running around outside like a crazy person. It is much better if one practises a meditation that calms the mind, makes requests to the guru deities, recites mantras, or does the meditation of the nectars coming down and absorbing and purifying. Then definitely it will change one's mind, which will become subtler. One will experience inner bliss and peace, and some refinement within one's mind will happen. That's so much better than running around the streets like a crazy person. It is said that once attachment arises within the mind, then one becomes like a crazy person.

It can happen that a dog goes a bit crazy and runs away from its owner for a few days, but the dog will only be gone for a few days. In our case if we follow our crazy mind all the time then we can lose our whole life. So it becomes important to understand that our happiness and suffering depends upon ourselves. We are the creators of our own happiness and suffering. We generate the causes to experience happiness, or to experience suffering. It's up to us. In the case of the dog, one could say, "Oh dogs can't think very well. Nothing can be done", but in our case it should be a little bit different.

### **Study Group**

Pam and Anthony will explain the structure of the Study Group to you later, even though there's not too much to explain. There are some students who feel that they can't

study well enough, or that they can't do the homework. Then maybe they lose their enthusiasm or the self-confidence to come to the Study Group.

However even if you can't study, or if you can't do the homework, coming here and listening to the Dharma for two hours still makes a great difference to the mind. After two hours the mind feels more subdued, one has maybe received a few new ideas, and so in that way has benefited. It is better to come and listen to the Dharma than not to come at all. Also one receives the imprints of having listened to those teachings. There's no need to give up completely because we can't study as much as the other more studious students and so forth.

Sometimes one might feel a bit depressed, feeling that one can't keep up with the Study Group, or that one's study has degenerated and so forth. It is also good to remember that everyone is part of the Study Group, that everyone else in the Study Group is doing exactly the same as oneself. So maybe one can become a little inspired by one's study companions.

In this case it is also quite good if a certain mind of competition arises. Ordinarily having a competitive mind is not very useful, but sometimes a little delusion becomes a conducive condition for Dharma practice. So if we feel our Dharma practice is not going so well, and we see that the practice and study of the others is going better, a competitive mind can give us some energy to study and practise more. So here then, the competitive attitude can be useful.

The text, *Entering the Middle Way*, shows unmistakably the extensive and profound meanings. Madhyamika is studied for four years in the monastery. In the first two years one would mainly concentrate on the text *Entering the Middle Way* and the *General Commentary* by Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen. Then in the second two years one would concentrate more on the root wisdom, and the various commentaries by Lama Tsong Khapa and so forth.

I estimate that we can finish in two years time. It takes four years in a monastery and we will do it in two. If in two years you have entered the middle way then that is good.

*Entering the Middle Way* is a very special text on Madhyamika because it both explains the hidden meaning of the Prajnaparamita sutras, as well the explicit meaning. By explaining both the explicit and hidden meaning of the *Prajnaparamita* sutras, *Entering the Middle Way* becomes a very special text.

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*Edited Version*

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## Motivation

First generate a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I definitely have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings. Not to do so is unacceptable, and in order to become enlightened I am going to listen to this profound Dharma'. If, rather than just using mere words, we actually contemplate this motivation, then what we do afterwards will actually become Dharma.

The text we are studying, called *Entering the Middle Way*, is a commentary unmistakably conveying the extensive<sup>1</sup> as well as the profound<sup>2</sup>.

The divisions of *Entering the Middle Way* according to the *Clear Illumination of the Thought on Madhyamaka*, by Lama Tsong Khapa are four: 1) *Meaning of the title*, 2) *Translators prostration*, 3) *Meaning of the text*, 4) *Conclusion*

## 1. MEANING OF THE TITLE

*In Sanskrit means Madhyamaka-avatara-nama*  
*In English means Entering the Middle Way*

In English we call this text *Entering the Middle Way*. In Sanskrit it is called *Madhyamakavatanama*.

*Madhyamaka* means Middle Way<sup>3</sup>, *avatara* means entering and *nama* means 'being called'.

In general, Madhyamaka or Middle Way refers to either the object or the object possessor. The object is the sphere abiding in the middle, free from the two extremes of externalism and nihilism. The object possessor is the view realising that sphere, emptiness. The person propounding that view then becomes a propounder of the Madhyamaka tenet. We should try to be proponents of the Madhyamaka tenet as much as possible. This is the explanation of the term Madhyamaka in general.

The Madhyamaka mentioned in the title refers to neither of those. This Madhyamaka refers to Nagarjuna's *Root Wisdom*<sup>4</sup>. The title of the text is *Entering the Middle Way*, and the Middle Way that is being entered is the Madhyamaka commentary by Nagarjuna called *Root Wisdom*. It also doesn't refer to the *Collection Of Six Texts* by Nagarjuna<sup>4</sup>, but it relates particularly to the text of

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<sup>1</sup> Conventional aspects of the path

<sup>2</sup> Emptiness

<sup>3</sup> Tib: Uma

<sup>4</sup> From Jetsun Cho gi Gyaltzen's *The General Explanation on the first Chapter of the Abhisamayalamkara*. Four texts conveying the object: suchness of dependent arising; two texts showing the object possessor, the view realising emptiness, to be the root of the path leading to liberation.

The first set again has two: Two texts primarily eliminating the object of

Nagarjuna's called *Root Wisdom*. So the title of this text is basically saying, 'Entering the Madhyamaka commentary called *Root Wisdom*'.

How do we know that the Madhyamaka mentioned in the title of this text does actually refer to a commentary on the Middle Way? This was stated by Chandrakirti himself in his self-commentary on *Entering the Middle Way*, where he says,

*I intended to compose Entering the Middle Way in order to enter a Madhyamaka commentary.*

How do we know that that this Madhyamaka commentary is Nagarjuna's *Root Wisdom*? We know this because whenever Chandrakirti gives a quote from *Root Wisdom* he does not say, 'It says in *Root Wisdom*', and then give the quote. When Chandrakirti does give a quote from *Root Wisdom* then most of the time he says, 'from the Middle Way', and sometimes he also says, 'from the Commentary on the Middle Way'. If he refers to any other of Nagarjuna's *Six Commentaries* then he says, 'from the *Precious Garland*' etc.

How does this commentary we are studying now enter the other commentary? How does it convey or explain the meaning of this other commentary? As it is explaining the meaning of *Root Wisdom* by Nagarjuna in both a profound way as well as in an extensive way, then one says this commentary of Chandrakirti's is entering *Root Wisdom* in both a profound and an extensive manner.

If this is expressed with a proof statement from Jetsun Cho gi Gyaltzen's *General Meaning of Madhyamaka*:

Take the subject, this commentary

It follows there is a reason for it to be called *Entering the Middle Way*

It is called like that because it enters the Middle Way *Root Wisdom* by way of both the profound as well as the extensive.

Take the subject, this commentary

It enters the *Root Wisdom* by way of the profound Because it explains the meaning of the Root Wisdom, the lack of natural existence, by showing it to be uncommon both to the Mind Only and the Svatantrika Madhyamika.

Take the subject, this commentary

It follows that it enters the *Root Wisdom* by way of the extensive

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negation: true existence; two texts showing the validity of activity & action despite lacking true existence.

The **first two**: 1) The *Root Wisdom* eliminating 'true phenomena', the thesis of the self of person and phenomena mentally constructed by those propounding 'real existence'. 2) The *Grounding Fine* refuting the 'Sixteen Subjects of Intellectuals' used to prove 'real existence'.

The **second two**: 1) The *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness* showing in general the validity of activity & action despite lack of true existence, elaborating on *Root Wisdom*'s seventh chapter 'Analysis of Generation, Abiding and Disintegration'. 2) The *Elimination of Dispute* showing the validity of refutation and establishment despite lack of true existence, elaborating on the first chapter of *Root Wisdom*, the 'Analysis of Conditions'.

The **remaining two** are: The *Precious Garland* and the *Sixty Reasons*. They explain the realisation of the two truths is indispensable for liberation from samsara. What need is there to talk about attaining Buddhahood? They also explain the need for a path abandoning the extreme views relating to the existence and non-existence of a path to liberation.

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Because it explains the meaning of the *Root Wisdom* by way of the following subjects taken from other essential advice by Nagarjuna, called the *Precious Garland*: the three dharmas of ordinary beings, the ten learner grounds of an Arya, the resultant ground, the way of meditating on superior insight discerning with discriminating wisdom the suchness of both selflessnesses, in dependence upon calm abiding by way of the sequence of the fifth and sixth ground.

Generally there are many debates on this topic, but one debate that arises is that if this commentary called *Entering the Middle Way* explains *Root Wisdom* by way of both the profound as well as the extensive, then does it follow that *Root Wisdom* itself actually explains the extensive also?

Here there are two views. Gyaltsab Je says that *Root Wisdom* does explain the extensive<sup>5</sup>.

Lama Tsong Khapa, in his commentary *Illumination of the Thought* says that *Root Wisdom* doesn't show the extensive. Khedrup Je also refutes the argument that *Root Wisdom* shows the extensive.

How can this commentary, *Entering the Middle Way*, explain the meaning of *Root Wisdom* in an extensive manner if *Root Wisdom* itself doesn't show the extensive? It takes the extensive subjects from another of Nagarjuna's commentaries, the *Precious Garland*, and then uses them to explain *Root Wisdom*. *Root Wisdom* itself doesn't necessarily have to show the extensive.

So why is *Root Wisdom* by Nagarjuna just called the *Madhyamaka* or the *Middle Way*? It is because *Root Wisdom* contains the body of all the commentaries on the subject of *Madhyamaka*. As all the commentaries on the subject of *Madhyamaka* are contained within *Root Wisdom*, therefore *Root Wisdom* can be referred to as just *Madhyamaka*.

That concludes the first division, meaning of the title.

## 2 TRANSLATOR'S PROSTRATION

*I prostrate to the youthful Manjushri*

Next we come to the prostration or the homage. This is the homage of the translator. This text was translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan, and at the beginning the translator paid homage to Manjushri. So in the original Sanskrit version we don't find that homage.

Here the prostration is a prostration to Manjushri, and this has very great significance, because through this the translators very clearly define the category of the Buddhist scriptures to which the text they are translating belongs. If the text they are translating belongs to the Abhidharma basket then they would prostrate to Manjushri. If the text they were translating belonged to the Sutra basket they would prostrate to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and if the text belonged to the Vinaya basket then the prostration would be to the Omniscient One.

So prostrating to Manjushri shows that the commentary

belongs to the Abhidharma basket. It explains the ultimate Abhidharma, which is the uncontaminated wisdom directly realising emptiness.

So now we have gone through the title of the text and the prostration, and now you know the meaning of the both of those divisions.

## 3. MEANING OF THE TEXT

Having completed the first two divisions, the third division is the meaning of the text.

The meaning of the text has four subdivisions: 1) Homage - method for starting to compose the commentary, 2) the actual body of the composed commentary, 3) the method of composing the commentary, 4) dedication of the virtues of composing the commentary.

### 1 Homage-Method for Starting to Compose the Commentary

The homage method for starting to compose the commentary has two subdivisions: praising great compassion without discerning individually, prostrating to great compassion discerning individually

#### 1.1 Praising Great Compassion Without Discerning Compassion Individually

With regard to praising great compassion without discerning compassion individually, the root text says:

*Powerful Able Ones generate Hearers, Middling Buddhas  
And Buddhas are born from Bodhisattvas  
Mind of compassion and non-dual awareness  
And Bodhicitta are causes of Conqueror's Children  
Only compassion Conqueror's perfect crop, its  
Seed and like water for increase,  
Likened to ripening of fact of long time use  
Therefore, I first Praise Compassion*

The object of the prostration, or the homage, is great compassion. Chandrakirti doesn't pay homage explicitly to the Hearers, and self liberators, not even to the buddhas and bodhisattvas as is done in other commentaries, but he explicitly praises great compassion. Great compassion is the first supreme cause of enlightenment. In order to show and emphasise that great compassion is the root of the path to enlightenment, here Chandrakirti explicitly praises great compassion and not, as is normally done in other texts, hearers, self liberators, buddhas, bodhisattvas and so forth.

By saying, 'I praise the Baghawati great compassion', Chandrakirti gives great compassion the name of the result, with a female connotation. *Bhagawan* is one of the titles of an enlightened being. Chandrakirti here describes great compassion as *bhagavati*, a female enlightened one. So he applies the name of the result to the cause in order to show the importance of great compassion.

The two lines,

*The mind of compassion and non-dual awareness  
and Bodhicitta are causes of conqueror's children.*

first of all show that the mind of compassion is a main cause of bodhisattvas. These two lines also show that not only is compassion the root of the bodhisattvas, but it is

<sup>5</sup> From Jetsun Cho gi Gyaltsen's *General Explanation of Madhyamaka*: Gyaltsab Je says *Root Wisdom* shows the extensive path, but not as its main subject.

also the cause for the other two causes of the bodhisattvas, which are the non-dual awareness, the correct view, and the mind of enlightenment, Bodhicitta. These lines show the three dharmas of the individual beings, which was mentioned before. So bodhisattvas are born from great compassion, which is shown in those two lines.

So how do the other beings such as hearers, self-liberators and so forth, come about? To answer that question one goes to the first and second lines where it says,

*Powerful Able Ones generate Hearers, middling  
Buddhas,  
And Buddhas are born from bodhisattvas.*

### Hearers

So hearers, as well as middling buddhas are both generated, or born, from the powerful able ones, while the Buddhas themselves, the powerful able ones, are born from bodhisattvas.

In the Tibetan version, the very first word in the first line is 'Hearers'<sup>6</sup>. Why are those practitioners referred to as 'Hearers-Listeners'? It is because after those practitioners have listened to, and practised, the perfect advice from the mouth of a Buddha, and attained the small enlightenment of a hearer, they try to induce and encourage others to also listen to those teachings, which they have realised. Because of the way they practise, those practitioners are referred to as hearers or listeners.

They are also called *toe-drok*, which translates as 'Listeners-Expounders'. They are called that because, having listened to teachings on the supreme result and the path leading to Buddhahood from the Buddhas, they expound these subjects to those belonging to the Mahayana lineage aspiring towards those attainments.

### Middling Buddhas<sup>7</sup>

The first line of verse one first mentions Hearers, and then it mentions Middling Buddhas. Middling Buddhas are beings with medium attainment. Why are those practitioners referred to as beings with medium attainment? The reason is they attain their enlightenment after having practised the path and built up the accumulation of merits and wisdom for one hundred eons.

Therefore their attainment is greater than the attainment of the hearers, which takes a maximum of three lifetimes to attain. However, they are separate from great compassion, haven't built up the accumulation of merits and wisdom for three countless great eons and haven't attained omniscient consciousness. Therefore their attainment is less than the attainment of a complete Buddha and is referred to as a medium attainment.

The root text says, 'Powerful Able Ones generate Hearers, Middling Buddhas'. How does that come about? The Buddhas expound the profound meaning of dependent arising to those practitioners, and then those practitioners practise the profound meaning of dependent arising in

accordance to their own lineage and path. They then attain their own enlightenment in dependence upon that practice of dependent arising. Therefore they are born, or generated, from the Powerful Able Ones.

We will stop here. I think it's good if at the beginning we go slowly, and then once we get into the swing of things we will go more quickly. At the beginning, however, we can take our time.

### Review

It's good to reflect a bit on the following points.

#### Meaning of the Title

- ∞ The name of the text we are studying is called *Entering the Middle Way*.
- ∞ The middle way that is referred to here is the *Madhyamaka* or commentary by Nagarjuna called *Root Wisdom*.
- ∞ Why is this commentary we are studying called *Entering the Middle Way*, or *Entering 'Root Wisdom'*? It is because it explains, or enters so to speak, *Root Wisdom* by way of both the profound as well as the extensive.
- ∞ The commentary explains *Root Wisdom* in that it explains the profound, the lack of natural existence, to be an uncommon subject not shared with the Mind Only or the Svatantrika Madhyamika.
- ∞ The commentary explains or enters *Root Wisdom* by way of the extensive, by explaining the meaning of *Root Wisdom* in relation to such topics as the three dharmas of ordinary beings, which are mentioned in verse one, the mind of compassion, non-dual awareness and Bodhicitta, the ten grounds, which are the first, second, third bhumi etc, the resultant ground of the buddha, by explaining calm abiding in relation to the fifth ground, by explaining superior insight in relation to the sixth ground, and how the unification of superior insight is generated in dependence upon calm abiding. All those subjects are the subjects of the conventional or extensive, and they are all taken from *Precious Garland* on Madhyamaka. By explaining the meaning of *Root Wisdom* in relation to those extensive topics, which are not taken from *Root Wisdom* but from *Precious Garland* by Nagarjuna, it explains the meaning of *Root Wisdom*, or it enters *Root Wisdom* in an extensive manner.

#### Prostration to the Translator

- ∞ Homage is paid to Manjushri.
- ∞ The significance of paying homage to Manjushri is to show that, of the three baskets, this is a text belonging to the Abhidharma basket. The Abhidharma being explained is the ultimate Abhidharma, which is the uncontaminated wisdom realising emptiness.

It's good to meditate on these things a little bit. So for a few minutes we can reflect on as much as we can remember of what we have heard today.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson*

*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*

*Edited Version*

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<sup>6</sup> The Sanskrit *Sravaka* is *Nyen-Toe* or *Toe-Drok* in Tibetan. The first means literally a 'Hearer-Listener' and the second a 'Listener-Expounder'.

<sup>7</sup> Middling Buddhas = Self-liberated Buddhas

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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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19 March 2002

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Please generate the bodhicitta motivation thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and for that purpose I'm now going to listen to this teaching on the profound'. When we generate this motivation then we should also generate joy and enthusiasm within our mind, and sit there with a big eager smile on our faces. Lama Tsong Khapa has many things to say with regard to that.

Last week we completed the etymology of Middle Way and we also explained the homage of the translator. We didn't explain the two-fold purpose for the translator's prostration. The translator pays homage in order to accumulate merits and wisdom, so that he may be able to complete the translation. Prostrating to Manjushri will also increase one's merit and wisdom.

The second purpose of doing prostrations to Manjushri is that Manjushri is the buddha of wisdom, and prostrating to him is to signify that the text that is being translated falls into the category of Abhidharma.

What we can learn here is that first of all, merits are accumulated from prostrations, which help us to achieve our aims; and that secondly, by relying on Manjushri we can increase our wisdom.

### 1.1.1 *Compassion as the Main Cause of a Bodhisattva*

Last time we talked about the very first line of the text, which says,

*Powerful Able Ones generate Hearers, Middling Buddhas*

#### **Etymology of Terms (cont.)**

In Tibetan, Hearers is the first word, so we started out by explaining what being a hearer means. We also explained that middling buddhas are referred to as those with medium attainment.

Middling buddhas, or those with medium achievement, are also referred to as 'self-liberators' or self-buddhas<sup>1</sup>. Why are those practitioners referred to as self-liberators? The reason for it is that when they have reached their final life they have the ability to attain arhatship through the self-arising transcendental wisdom realising the profound nature of dependent arising, without necessarily having the teachings of the Buddha being present in their country. The realisation they manifest is the realisation of arhatship - for their own purpose alone. For those two reasons they are called self-liberators.

#### **Powerful Able Ones**

With regard to the etymology of 'powerful able one', the Tibetan word *tub-pa*, translated as 'able', comes from the Sanskrit word *muni*. We know muni from the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha, which is OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA. The name muni or 'able one' is also applied to hearers and arhats, because they're able to overcome the enemy of the delusions. So the common term 'able one' can be applied to both arhats as well as to buddhas. However arhats are not referred to as powerful able ones, or great able ones, because even though they have overcome the enemy of the delusions, they have not overcome the enemy of the obscurations to omniscience.

We can also see this when we look at the meaning of the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha. First we have the OM which signifies the enlightened body, speech and mind, then we have the word MUNI twice. This is twice times the able one, which refers to being able to overcome the suffering of the lower realms, as well as the enemy of the delusions. To this point it applies to hearer arhats as well.

The third repetition MAHAMUNI, the great able one, applies only to an enlightened being. The reason is that only an enlightened being has overcome the two obscurations. Therefore 'powerful able one' applies only to a buddha.

#### **Powerful**

With regard to the etymology of 'powerful', a buddha is referred to as powerful because he has power over, or he reigns over, the three types of practitioners, which are the hearer arhats, the self-liberated arhats and the bodhisattvas. The Buddha's realisation of the Dharma has nothing above that. So therefore he reigns over all other types of practitioners, who haven't yet become enlightened.

#### **Generate**

Here the word 'generate' in the first line has the connotation of 'giving birth to'. Of course this does not mean physically giving birth to, but helping practitioners to become hearers and middling buddhas, by building them up through giving teachings with the help of supernatural powers etc.

#### **111.a The Way Hearers and Self-Liberators are born from Buddhas**

When we read this line, then of course the question arises, 'Well how do the powerful able ones give birth to hearers and middling buddhas?' The Buddha descended to Earth, and the reason he did so was in order to show unmistakably profound dependent arising and set them on the path of profound dependent arising.

#### **The Three Steps**

By practicing the meaning of profound dependent arising, by way of the three steps of listening, contemplation and meditation, the disciples attained the individual results for which they aimed. The disciples of the Buddha first listened to the teachings, and so they completed the step of listening. Then, having listened to the teachings, they reflected and contemplated the

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<sup>1</sup> Skt.: *Tatva-Buddha* - lit: self-buddha. Other terms to describe those beings are Middling Buddha, Solitary Realiser, and Self-liberator.

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meaning of what they had heard. Having done the second step of contemplation they then meditated on the meaning of what they had reflected and contemplated. In that way they attained the individual results for which they aimed, such as becoming hearer arhats or self-liberated arhats and so forth.

This is a very important point. The lesson we can take is how to practise in order to attain our aim. One should practise in the same way as those disciples of the Buddha practised, which is by completing the three steps of listening, contemplation and meditation.

1. First one generates the wisdom arising from hearing. In order to generate this wisdom arising from hearing, the very first thing that one has to do is to listen to teachings. Without actually listening to teachings the wisdom of hearing won't arise within one's mind.

2. Through contemplating the meaning of what one has heard, then the wisdom of contemplation is generated.

3. Only after that can one meditate on the meaning of what one has understood from contemplation and generate the wisdom arising from meditation. Only then can the wisdom of meditation arise.

The wisdom of meditation depends upon the wisdom of contemplation, which in turn depends upon the wisdom arising from hearing, which in turn depends upon first actually listening to teachings. Without listening to the teachings no understanding arising from listening can be generated. If we didn't have the understanding that arises from having listened to teachings, then what would we contemplate? If we haven't understood anything through contemplation then there will be nothing upon which we can meditate. So those three steps are very important, and it is very good for one's own practice to remember them.

As the Buddha said to his disciples, 'You should reflect upon the meaning of what I have said, and not just accept it just because I have said so'. Even though we generate wisdom from listening to teachings, that wisdom has been generated through the means of outer conditions, and it is not a very stable type of discriminating awareness. One listens to something that appears pleasant to and agreeable to one's mind, and generates a liking for it, without necessarily having actually thought about and investigated the meaning of what one has actually heard.

In order to make the understanding, which has been generated through listening to the teachings, more stable, one needs to complete the second step of contemplation. This means thinking about the meaning of what one has heard. The discriminative awareness that will be most stable is that which comes from arriving at an understanding of what one has heard, or what has been said, through one's own investigation and thinking.

### **Eliminating Doubts Regarding the Birth of Self-Buddhas from the Powerful Able Ones**

From the *Self-Commentary*:

In case someone says, 'Even though having become proficient in realising the ultimate merely through listening to the clear explanation on dependent arising they don't go

beyond sorrow during the observable lifetime'. Even though it is like that, the practitioners who received clear explanation will without doubt achieve the complete ripening of the intensely desired result, like the result of definitely ripening karma.

From Aryadeva's *400 Stanzas*:

In case, by knowing suchness, They don't go beyond sorrow here, Will attain effortlessly in another life, Like karma.

From Nagajuna's *Middle Way*:

Complete Buddhas don't arise and; Also Hearers have disappeared, the transcendental wisdom of Self-Buddhas; arises intensely without depending.

A debate arises in relation to the point of the powerful able ones generating middling buddhas, or self-liberated buddhas. How does the debate arise? It is quite clear how hearer arhats are born from the buddhas. The buddhas give birth to the hearer arhats by showing them the profound meaning of dependent arising, and then those practitioners attain the arhatship of a hearer in that very lifetime. Most hearer arhats become arhats during the lifetime in which they actually listened to the Buddha's teaching.

However self-liberated arhats don't become arhats during that very lifetime. They pass away, and then attain arhatship in some future lifetime<sup>1</sup>. Here then, some doubt

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<sup>1</sup> From Jetsun-Cho-gi Gyaltzen's *General Explanation of Madyamaka*: There is a reason why those belonging to the family of self-liberator can't attain the result of a self-liberated arhat during the lifetime they are shown the profound dharma of dependent arising by the 'Powerful Able Ones - because through the power of prayer self-liberated arhats are born in a realm without buddhas or hearers.

From *The Middle Way*: Complete Buddhas don't arise and; etc.

In case someone says: No self-liberator becomes the direct disciple of a supreme emanation body.

If follows there are such self-liberators - because there are self-liberator trainees that become direct disciples of a supreme emanation body because - there are people with the training of a self-liberator in their continuum that become direct disciples of a supreme emanation body because - it says in *the 'Self-Commentary*: The practitioners who received clear explanation will without doubt achieve the complete ripening of the intensely desired result' and in 'Tik-chen: *The self-liberator practitioners*'.

Further: If follows there are self-liberators that become direct disciples of a supreme emanation body - because there were self-liberators in the audience when the supreme emanation body praised bodhisattvas because - in that audience were beings belonging to all three families.

In case someone says: To say 'Complete Buddhas don't arise and; Also Hearers have disappeared, the transcendental wisdom of Self-Buddhas; arises intensely without depending' is incorrect - because there are self-liberators that become direct disciples of a supreme emanation body.

There is no pervasion because - the meaning of that quote is that self-liberators at the end of their existence and self-liberated arhats are born in a realm without buddhas or hearers.

Then: Even though there are self-liberators that become direct disciples of a supreme emanation body there aren't any self-liberators at the end of their existence or self-liberated arhats that become the direct disciples of a supreme emanation body. In the same way there are self-liberators that become tenet proponents but there aren't any self-liberator at the end of their existence or self-liberated arhats that become tenet proponents because - from the 'great tantric stages': 'Self-

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arises as to how those practitioners completely achieve their aim in dependence upon the teaching of profound dependent arising by the Buddha.

The answer lies with the type of karma that is called the karma definitely to be experienced. Of the various karmas that one can generate, there is one called the karma definitely to be experienced. There's no pervasion that that karma is experienced during the lifetime in which it is created. If it isn't experienced during that lifetime then definitely it will ripen in a future lifetime when it meets with the causes and conditions that cause it to ripen.

Karma that is definitely to be experienced can be both non-virtuous and virtuous. If non-virtuous karma is not purified, then it will definitely ripen in some lifetime when it meets with the causes and conditions that cause it to ripen.

Self-liberated practitioners will definitely experience the fruit of their practice in a future life. They don't experience the completion of their aims within the lifetime in which they actually listened to the teaching of a buddha. But just like the results of definitive karma will definitely be experienced they also will definitely experience the complete ripening of they strongly desired result of a Self-Buddha in a future life.

So hearers, as well as self-liberated arhats, achieve the completion of their aims by listening to the teachings on profound dependent arising from the Buddha. Hearers do so in that very lifetime and Self-Buddhas in a future life.

It is like Aryadeva and Nagajuna explain it in the quotes: Self-buddhas attain the completion of their result during a time where no complete buddhas or even hearers exist. After having realised suchness here in this life they go effortlessly beyond sorrow in a future life without dependence upon those outer conditions. They become arhats through the intense spontaneously arising transcendental wisdom realising the profound meaning of dependent arising.

That completes the explanation of how the powerful able ones give birth to hearers and middling buddhas.

### **111b. The Way Buddhas are born from Bodhisattvas**

If the powerful able ones give birth to hearers and middling buddhas, then from whom are the powerful able ones themselves born? The answer to that question lies within the second line where it says:

*And buddhas are born from bodhisattvas.*

Here again a doubt arises. Bodhisattvas are already referred to as children of the conquerors, and now here it states that the buddhas themselves are born from bodhisattvas. So the doubt arises, 'Aren't those two statements contradictory'? Since the bodhisattvas are referred to as children of the conquerors, then how can it be that the conquerors are actually born from bodhisattvas?

Even though the buddhas are born from bodhisattvas, it is still not contradictory to call the bodhisattvas children

of the conquerors. In the same way, even though the son is born from father it is not contradictory to talk about the son's father. It is not contradictory to talk about the son's father, even though the son is born from the father, so it is also not contradictory to talk about the children of the conquerors, while still asserting that the conquerors are actually born from the bodhisattvas.

The reason for this is that the bodhisattvas are referred to as the children of conquerors, because they are the children of the buddha who becomes their teacher. So they're not seen as the children of the buddhas in general, but they are the children of that buddha who becomes their teacher. They are the children of that buddha who becomes their father and therefore they are referred to as children of the buddha, of the conquerors. But they are not the children of buddhas in general. So therefore it is correct to refer to bodhisattvas as children of the conquerors.

There are two reasons why it is said that the buddhas are born from bodhisattvas. One reason relates to 'occasion' and the other reason relates to 'different continuum'.

#### **1. Occasion**

The reason relating to occasion means that during the time, or occasion, of practising the learner's path, every buddha was a bodhisattva. Therefore every buddha is generated from a bodhisattva. When we talk about the bodhisattva from whom the buddhas are born, relating to occasion, it is a bodhisattva of the same preceding continuum.

#### **2. Different Continuum**

Buddhas are also born from bodhisattvas of a different continuum. This refers to the situation where, again at the time of the learner's path, the bodhisattva relied on another bodhisattva as a teacher. By relying upon another bodhisattva as one's teacher at the time of the learner's path, and then becoming enlightened, that buddha is also born from a bodhisattva.

That's why one says the buddhas are born from bodhisattvas, both in relation to occasion, and also from the point of view of different continuum.

The lesson one can take from this is that to do one's practice, to traverse the path to buddhahood, one needs to rely on the outer condition of a spiritual teacher for one's progress. That is something that everybody needs. This is one point that is shown here.

If we relate this to the two types of causes, substantial causes and concurrent causes, the bodhisattva of preceding same continuum is the substantial cause for that buddha. The other bodhisattvas, who the practitioner relied upon as spiritual guides during the time of practising the path, become the concurrent cause. As concurrent causes we not only have bodhisattvas, but we also have, of course, those other buddhas who don't form the attainment of that particular practitioner. That particular practitioner aims for the buddha he or she will become in a future lifetime. Those other buddhas are also concurrent causes because they act as a spiritual guide for the practitioner during the learner's path.

#### **Why are Bodhisattvas Praised by Buddhas?**

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buddhas aren't classified as any of the four tenet proponents'.

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There are four reasons why the buddhas particularly praise the bodhisattvas.

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1. The first reason is that the bodhisattvas will definitely become buddhas. They are a very stable, very promising, and very sure cause of buddhas. Bodhisattvas are a very sure-fire cause to become a buddha, therefore bodhisattvas are very close to the heart of the buddhas. That's why buddhas cherish bodhisattvas so much.

2. The second reason is that by explicitly praising the bodhisattvas, one is implicitly praising the definite result, which is complete enlightenment or buddhahood. That's the second reason.

3. The third reason why buddhas praise bodhisattvas is explained in an example. After having planted the seed of a medicinal tree, in order to get the full result of that medicinal tree, that tree must really grow and give all the fruit that can be used. So from the very beginning, after planting the seed one takes very great care of the growing tree. The buddhas praise the bodhisattvas for the same reason.

4. The fourth reason is in order to encourage the three types of practitioners to enter the bodhisattva path.

There is a quote from a sutra that says,

As I prostrate to the half moon, and not to the full moon

In the same way I don't prostrate to the buddhas, but I prostrate to the bodhisattvas.

Here the idea is that by prostrating to the half moon, one is automatically prostrating to the full moon, but not the other way round. In the same way, by prostrating to bodhisattvas one is also automatically prostrating to the buddhas. Whereas by prostrating to buddhas one does not automatically prostrate to the bodhisattvas. So in order to draw attention to the significance of the bodhisattvas, and the fact that the buddhas are generated from the bodhisattvas and not vice versa, here one prostrates to the bodhisattvas. Buddhas are generated from the bodhisattva, that's why by prostrating to the bodhisattvas one is automatically prostrating to the result, which are the buddhas. Then from the buddhas hearers and solitary realisers are generated, or born.

### **The Three Main Causes of Bodhisattvas**

Now we have gone through the hearers and middling buddhas being born from the powerful able ones, and the powerful able ones being born from bodhisattvas, so the next question is, 'What is the cause of the bodhisattvas? Where do the bodhisattvas come from?'

I think it is very good for you to memorise the homage of this text, that is, the first eight lines up to, 'Therefore I praise compassion'. Memorising those two verses, and then meditating on their meaning while reciting it, will help us greatly in our meditation, and in our understanding.

*Edited Version*

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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga  
Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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26 March 2002

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Generate bodhicitta as your motivation for listening to the teachings thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, and in order to be able to do so I'm now going to listen to this profound teaching'. Then listen to the teaching with your whole mind, focusing it on the teaching. Don't be present with just one part of the mind, while being somewhere else with the rest! Otherwise it doesn't become what is called correct listening.

We come to the third outline, which is called 'showing the three main causes of a bodhisattva'.

### 1.1.1.c Showing the Three Main Causes of Bodhisattvas

To give you a very brief overview of how we arrived at the third part, we started at the homage - method for starting to compose the commentary, which has two parts, praising great compassion without discerning individually, and prostrating to great compassion discerning individually. Praising great compassion without discerning individually had two subdivisions, showing compassion to be the main cause of a bodhisattva, and showing it to be also the root of the other two causes of a bodhisattva. Showing compassion to be the main cause of a bodhisattva had three subdivisions. We have completed first two, the way hearers and self-liberators are born from the powerful able ones, and the way buddhas are born from bodhisattvas. We are now at the third, which is showing the three main causes of bodhisattvas.

The root text says,

*Mind of compassion and non-dual awareness;  
And bodhicitta are causes of conquerors children*

Lama Tsong Khapa's *Illumination of the Thought* says,

*In case it is asked, 'If both hearers and self liberators are born from the powerful able ones and the powerful able ones are born from bodhisattvas, then what is the cause of the bodhisattvas?' The three - the mind of compassion to be explained; the wisdom awareness realizing the meaning free from the two dualities, the two extremes of existence and non-existence and so forth; and bodhicitta<sup>1</sup> are the main causes of the bodhisattva children of the conquerors.*

The three dharmas shown at this occasion are the three main causes of bodhisattvas. They are the mind of compassion, non-dual awareness, which is the wisdom that is free from the two extremes of existence and non-existence, and bodhicitta, which is the mind of

enlightenment. On one side we have the three causes, which are great compassion, non-dual awareness and bodhicitta. Non-dual awareness refers to the wisdom free from the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism that realises emptiness via the door of limitless inference. Then on the side of effect, we have the result of a beginner bodhisattva.

If you are told that those three are the causes of a bodhisattva, does some doubt arise in your mind? Would you have something to dispute? Reflect a little bit on this point, and then it will become very clear to you that here there is in fact some point of dispute, and some occasion for doubt. This arises because cause and effect can never be simultaneous. Even though the Vaibashikas, by referring to mind and mental factors that arise simultaneously, posit a simultaneously arising cause-effect, a cause will always precede the effect, and an effect will always arise subsequent to the cause. If you reflect on that, then you will see how some doubt can be generated here.

Then there is another point for your contemplation. Is actual bodhicitta the mind generation wishing to make all sentient beings realise emptiness, after having realised emptiness oneself? In the sutras it mentions such a mind generation when it says, 'After I have realised the suchness of dharma myself I will make sentient beings perfectly realise this suchness.' All those saying 'yes', please raise your hands. All those who say 'no', please raise your hands.

To those who say no, what is your reason?

Student: It isn't Mahayana mind generation because it exists in the continuum of hearers and self-liberators as well.

Your reason is incorrect, because even though hearer and self-liberated arhats do realise emptiness, they don't have that mind generation saying, 'I will share this realisation with all sentient beings'. If you think about what aspects of bodhicitta are incomplete in this mind generation then it will become clear to you why it can't be bodhicitta.

Student: Isn't it the aspiration wanting to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings?

Yes, that is correct. Actual bodhicitta aims for complete enlightenment for the purpose of all sentient beings. Actual bodhicitta needs to be endowed with the two aspects of aim and purpose. It needs to focus on the attainment of enlightenment for the purpose of all sentient beings.

Here it is also good to know that when we generate bodhicitta we meditate first on the purpose of others. Having meditated on love, compassion and superior intention we generate the wish of aiming for complete enlightenment. Those are meditations on the purpose of others. Then after realising that one doesn't have any ability to help other sentient beings at the moment, one checks on who has such an ability. Realising that only an enlightened being has those abilities, one generates the wish of aiming for complete enlightenment. So you see how one first meditates on the purpose of others, and then on the purpose of self. Then when one actually

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<sup>1</sup> Sanskrit: bodhicitta is mind of enlightenment, from *bodhi* meaning enlightenment, and *citta* meaning mind.

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becomes enlightened the purpose of self is generated first, and then afterwards the purpose of others is established.

So actual bodhicitta aims for complete enlightenment, and the enlightenment one aims for is one's own future enlightenment. That becomes one's own attainment. One aims for the enlightenment that one will personally attain. Here there is also some debate with regard to whether or not bodhicitta exists in the continuum of an enlightened being.

When we actually meditate to generate bodhicitta we first meditate on love and compassion, wishing other sentient beings to be happy and free from suffering. Then we generate superior intention, meaning that we take upon ourself the responsibility to free all sentient beings from their sufferings. Having taken this responsibility upon oneself, when one checks up on whether or not at the present time one is able to do so, one realises that at the present time one doesn't have the ability to help other sentient beings. Then, by searching as to who actually has that type of capability, one realises that only an enlightened being has that capability. Through that understanding, one's mind automatically turns toward wishing to attain complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

From *Illumination of the Thought*<sup>2</sup>,

***At the point of generating the mind of enlightenment from compassion it states from the commentary,***

*the cause for the arising of the supreme taste of pure dharma nectar, by definition reversing all wrong concepts, having become the very friend of all migrants, wishing to perfectly attain enlightenment only.*

*This explains clearly that bodhicitta focuses on the attainment of enlightenment. Therefore, 'wishing to achieve the attainment of highest enlightenment for the purpose of all sentient beings' has to be posited as the complete definition of mind generation. This is excellent also according to 'drel-she', and there is also no difference between this system and what is explained in the 'Ornament of Clear Realisation'. Regarding the positing of those three dharmas as the cause of a bodhisattva, the 'Precious Garland' it states,*

*If oneself and the transitory ones;  
Wish to attain peerless enlightenment;  
The roots of that are bodhicitta;  
Compassion touching direction and limits;  
And stable as the powerful mountain king;  
Transcendental wisdom not relying on the two.*

*This quote shows them to be the roots of enlightenment and doesn't show them explicitly as the roots of a bodhisattva. Even though, since 'root' has the connotation of first, and since this is the occasion showing three main causes of that period, we can understand them to be the three main causes of a bodhisattvas from the occasion.*

*The explanation of the three causes of a bodhisattva is the occasion of analysing where bodhisattvas are born from, since both hearers and self liberators are born from buddhas and buddhas are born from bodhisattvas. Therefore they are unsuited to be 'positing causes' of bodhisattvas and have to be 'generating causes'.*

There's much more to say about bodhicitta. What is definitely important to remember is that, firstly, bodhicitta aims for complete enlightenment, and secondly, it does so for the purpose of all sentient beings. To have actual bodhicitta those two characteristics need to be complete. If those two characteristics are complete in one consciousness it is actual bodhicitta. Within perfect complete enlightenment the four buddha bodies are contained. This definition of bodhicitta is as it states in the *Ornament of Clear Realisation* by Maitreya,

Mind generation, for the purpose of others;  
Wishes for perfectly complete enlightenment.

And as was mentioned at the beginning, this commentary explains the *Root Wisdom* by way of the extensive, that has been taken from another commentary of Nagarjuna's called *Precious Garland*. Those three dharmas that are mentioned here as the causes of a bodhisattva have been taken from that commentary.

Then *Precious Garland* goes on to say that the three causes of bodhisattvas explained here aren't what are called 'positing causes'. This is a particular sub-type of cause through imputation that actually refers to the definition of an object. For example, 'a flat bottomed round bellied functioning phenomena that is able to hold water' is the positing cause of a vase, but it is not the actual cause of a vase. So there could be this doubt as to which type of cause those three dharmas belong? In order to clarify this, it mentions that these three dharmas are generating causes.

Since those three dharmas are actual generating causes, and the effect is a beginner bodhisattva you can see how we are arriving at a doubt. The bodhisattva here has to be a beginner bodhisattva because, at the time of explaining the four causes of the buddhas to praise bodhisattvas, he is referred to as 'a bodhisattva like a rising moon', or as 'a bodhisattva like the sprout of a medicinal tree'.

An opponent expresses that doubt, saying that the bodhisattva referred to here cannot be a beginner bodhisattva, since bodhicitta is generated simultaneously with a beginner bodhisattva. He also says that it isn't correct to posit non-dual awareness as a cause of a bodhisattva, since it is in contradiction to the actual sequence of practice, where the conventional mind of enlightenment is generated first. Then the six perfections are practised, and in the context of that practice non-dual awareness is generated. So there is a first doubt with regard to the bodhicitta, and the second doubt is with regard to the non-dual awareness.

The reply is that here there is no mistake with regard to positing bodhicitta as the cause of a beginner bodhisattva, since the bodhicitta posited here as the cause doesn't refer to actual bodhicitta. The bodhicitta that is posited here as the cause of bodhisattvas, is the bodhicitta during the time of meditating to generate bodhicitta, and it doesn't refer to the real bodhicitta generated in dependence upon having meditated.

The difference between those two bodhicittas is like the difference between tasting just the bark of sugar cane, and tasting the actual inside of the sugar cane. The experience of the first type of bodhicitta during the time

<sup>2</sup> Geshe-la reads from Lama Tsong Khapa's commentary

of trying to generate actual bodhicitta refers to the former. One generates some type of mental attitude wishing to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. When one has this experience it is like just tasting the outside of the sugarcane. One hasn't actually had the full experience, the full taste of bodhicitta. This will only happen once one experiences the actual bodhicitta, which is the spontaneous bodhicitta that arises without any effort within one's mental continuum.

At the time of practice, while meditating on the seven point cause-and-effect method we go through the different stages, starting from recognising sentient beings as having been our mother, then remembering their kindness, wanting to repay their kindness, love through pleasing aspect, great compassion, superior intention and then bodhicitta. We train our mind in those different stages, going through them over and over again. At that time the bodhicitta we generate is not the actual bodhicitta but it is the bodhicitta that is referred to here. Then, once one generates the effortless spontaneous thought of enlightenment within one's mental continuum through one's continued meditation, then one has generated actual bodhicitta.

That refutes the first opposition. With respect to the second opposition, it is not contradictory, or wrong, to posit non-dual awareness as the cause of a bodhisattva, because this is done from the point of view of a bodhisattva of sharp faculties, who will realise emptiness before generating the mind of enlightenment<sup>3</sup>.

### 1.1.2. Showing Great Compassion to also be the Root of the Other Two Causes of a Bodhisattva

*Only compassion Conqueror's perfect crop, its  
Seed and like water for increase.  
Likened to ripening of fact of long-time use  
Therefore, I first Praise Compassion*

From the *Illumination of the Thought*,

*Therefore compassion is important like a seed for the initial generation of this Conqueror's perfect crop and in the middle it*

<sup>3</sup> Some other debates from the *General Explanation*

1) A previous Tibetan opponent says, 'Here non-dual awareness refers to the awareness without the duality of subject-object and bodhicitta refers to ultimate bodhicitta'.

**Refutation by Jetsun-pa:** Here it is incorrect to posit the awareness without the duality of subject-object as the non-dual awareness – because the awareness without the duality of subject-object doesn't precede a beginner bodhisattva, and in the commentary it explains this non-dual awareness as the wisdom free from the extremes of externalism and nihilism.

2) An opponent says, 'The bodhicitta shown here is actual bodhicitta'.

**This is incorrect because:** It follows that the bodhicitta shown here at the time of preceding a beginner bodhisattva is actual bodhicitta – because your premise is correct. **If accepted.** This is contrary to *Tik-chen* where it states that the bodhicitta preceding bodhisattvas refers to the time of meditating on bodhicitta, not the real bodhicitta generated in dependence upon having meditated. Also it would follow that actual bodhicitta exists in the continuum of a person not having entered the path, which would leave you without reply.

*is like water for its further and further increase. Finally, the fact of its long-time use by the disciples is likened to the ripening of the fruit. Therefore, I Chandrakirti praise first great compassion before Hearers, Self-liberators, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and even before their other two causes. Or: I praise great compassion at the beginning of composing this commentary.*

This verse shows compassion to be the root of the other two causes, bodhicitta and non-dual awareness. Non-dual awareness here is the wisdom realising emptiness, via the door of limitless inference.

This isn't just a mere realisation of emptiness, but a realisation of emptiness coming out of the motivation of great compassion. This is important to remember, because we cannot state as a general fact that the realisation of emptiness depends upon great compassion, since hearer arhats and self-liberated arhats do realise emptiness. However they meditate on emptiness in a limited way. Bodhisattvas, being motivated by great compassion, meditate on emptiness in an expansive way. Therefore here great compassion is posited as the root of non-dual awareness that is the wisdom realising emptiness, via the door of limitless inference.

### Review

I think that if we don't have a short examination then maybe we will become lost. So first of all please tell me what is the middle way referred to in the title *Entering the Middle Way*.

Student: *The Root Wisdom*

Of course what you say is correct but if you want to say it in a very nice way then, first of all, 'The middle way referred to in *Entering the Middle Way* is a Madhyamika commentary, a middle way commentary. To which middle way commentary does it refer? It refers to the *Root Wisdom* by Nagarjuna'. If one goes through those stages in that sequence when giving an answer then it becomes very nice.

How do we know that the middle way referred to in the title is a commentary on the middle way? This was explained by Chandrakirti himself in his self-commentary where he states 'I intended to compose *Entering the Middle Way* in order to enter a Madhyamaka commentary'. So it was very clearly stated like that by Chandrakirti himself. How do we know that this Madhyamaka commentary he wishes to enter is this particular text called *Root Wisdom* by Nagarjuna? This we know because all the time Chandrakirti refers to the *Root Wisdom* as the Madhyamaka, as the Middle Way. So therefore we know that when Chandrakirti talks about Madhyamaka in this context he means the *Root Wisdom*. What is the mode in which it is entered? How it is explained?

Student: It is explained in both the profound and extensive ways.

First of all tell me what does 'profound' mean, and then explain how it enters the *Root Wisdom* by way of the profound? The profound is emptiness. Emptiness is referred to as the profound, since it is difficult to realise and also difficult to infer. How is the *Root Wisdom*

explained by way of the profound?

Student: It refutes the views on emptiness by the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka and Cittamatra, schools that hadn't been founded at the time of Nagarjuna.

That isn't the correct answer. Chandrakirti explains the profound lack of natural existence as the uncommon view on emptiness not shared with the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka and Cittamatras. What is the way of explaining the *Root Wisdom* by way of the extensive?

Student: The three dharmas, the ten bodhisattva grounds, [inaudible].

Can you posit those three dharmas of ordinary beings?

Student: Non-dual awareness [inaudible]

Its good to posit them each individually, then you have expressed them each once. There are also benefits in expressing them orally, not just keeping them in your mind. There's no need to be shy about it. What are the ten learner bodhisattva grounds?

Student: The ten bodhisattva grounds are shown in the first ten chapters of *Entering the Middle Way*.

The translator's prostration is to whom?

Students: Manjushri!

Who is the translator?

Student: Chandrakirti.

Chandrakirti is the composer. The translator is called Nyima Drakpa, Renowned Sun. *Entering the Middle Way* was composed by Dawa Drakpa, Renowned Moon, it was translated by Nyima Drakpa, Renowned Sun, and it was explained by Losang Drakpa, Renowned Virtuous Mind. So we have three Renowned Ones in relation to this text. What is the purpose of prostrating to Manjushri?

Student: To show the text belongs to the wisdom basket.

In general, the purpose of the translator's prostration is to accumulate merits in order to be able to complete the translation of the text, and the purpose of particularly prostrating to Manjushri is to classify the text being translated as belonging to the Abhidharma basket, which is one of the three baskets. What does the first line 'the powerful able ones generate hearers, middling buddhas' express?

Translator: It expresses great silence (laughter).

If you don't know it and you don't say anything then that's OK, but if you know it and you don't say then that's actually a fault - you place harmful imprints on your mind.

Student: Powerful able ones give birth to hearer and self-liberator arhats.

Then comes the doubt, since there are also bodhisattvas generated from buddhas why aren't they mentioned here. So you see, if you want to debate, there is plenty to debate about. Here it particularly mentions that the powerful able ones generate hearers and self liberators in order to show that the root, great compassion, is not only the root of bodhisattva, but also the root of hearers and

self liberators. It is very important to have this sequence very clearly in mind.

∞ The hearers and self-liberators are generated from the buddhas.

∞ The buddhas in turn are generated from the bodhisattvas.

∞ The bodhisattvas in turn are generated from the three causes of great compassion, non-dual awareness and bodhicitta.

∞ Within those three causes, non-dual awareness and bodhicitta are in turn generated from great compassion.

Reflecting on the meaning of those lines and reflecting on this sequence has a very great benefit for our mind.

Now we can all meditate a little bit on the meaning of those lines, 'powerful able ones generate hearers, self liberators etc'.

[meditation]

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson*

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*Edited Version*

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# DISCUSSION

BLOCK: 1  
WEEK: 5  
2<sup>ND</sup> APRIL 2002

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## 5/03

1. What's the purpose of a 'precious human rebirth'?
2. Discuss the sequential order from reflecting upon the precious human rebirth, up to enlightenment itself.
3. "The fault lies not in the lack of knowledge... but with the lack of practice." Discuss tips to integrate Dharma practice into our everyday lives.

## 12/03

4. Explain the specific meaning of the title '*Madhyamakavataranama*' 'Entering the Middle Way'. What other text is being referred to?
5. Why are hearers called 'hearers'? Why are these practitioners sometimes called 'Listeners-Expounders'?
6. The root text says, "Powerful Able Ones generate Hearers and Middling Buddhas". What is Chandrakirti trying to say? (Comment also on the meaning of these names.)

## 19/03

7. 'You should reflect upon the meaning of what I have said, and not just accept it just because I have said so.' Discuss this attitude Lord Buddha wanted his students to have.
8. Conquerors (buddhas) are born from Children of Conquerors (bodhisattvas). Explain why this statement isn't contradictory.
9. Buddhas are born from bodhisattvas by 'occasion' and 'different continuum'. Why?
10. What are the 'substantial' and 'concurrent' causes of a Buddha?

## 26/03

11. "The subject of emptiness has no relation to the emotion of compassion" discuss.
  12. What are the seven steps in the cause-and-effect method for developing the wish for enlightenment (bodhicitta)? Why is each necessary for the next?
  13. How does Chandrakirti show 'great compassion' as the root of the other two causes of a bodhisattva?
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*Tara Institute Study Group 2002 - 'Entering the Middle Way'*

**EXAM**

NAME:

BLOCK: **1**  
WEEK: **6**  
ASSIGNED: **9<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2002**

MARK:

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1. Name the title and author of the root text. [2 marks]

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2. Name and describe the two special features of this text. [6 marks]

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3. Why does Chandrakirti choose to pay homage to 'great compassion' at the beginning of his text? [2 marks]

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4. Describe the three-step process for achieving one's aims. Illustrate with a real-life example. Why do the latter two depend on their preceding steps? [5 marks]

