

---

# Study Group - *Madhyamakavataram*

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

དབུ་མ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་པ་ལ།

19 November 2002

---

Please begin by generating the motivation of bodhicitta for listening to the teachings, thinking, 'I have to attain complete 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 Mahayana teaching, and then I'm going to put it into practise as much as I can'.

## **SIXTH GROUND, THE MANIFEST**

In finishing the first five grounds and the first five perfections we have also finished the outline that dealt with those. Now we come to the second outline, dealing with the sixth ground and the perfection of wisdom.

Here we have the following outlines: description of the ground and showing the perfection of wisdom to be supreme; praise of the perfection of wisdom; explaining the suchness of dependent arising; and concluding by expressing the qualities of the ground.

### **1. Description of the Ground and Showing the Perfection of Wisdom to be Supreme**

The description of the ground is in this verse,

*Manifestly abiding within the mind of  
equipoise,  
Facing the dharmas of a complete buddha,  
They who see the suchness of dependent arising,  
By abiding within wisdom attain cessation.*

The way one arrives at this point is by reflecting on how, on the fifth ground, the bodhisattva has achieved supremacy in the perfection of concentration, and so attained superior mental absorption. Then the question arises, what are the resultant qualities on the sixth ground that come about through the qualities of the fifth ground?

As a result of the qualities of the fifth ground one attains the sixth ground, called 'manifest'. Why it is called manifest? In this verse it says that, as a result of the practices on the fifth ground, one attains the sixth ground, which is called manifest. Then it also outlines the qualities of that ground that are the reason for it being called manifest.

### **Three Reasons Why It Is Called 'Manifest' according to Illumination**

**First Reason:** 'Illumination', 'because they thus manifested the reflection like suchness through superiority in wisdom.'

*Manifestly abiding within the mind of  
equipoise*

When we say 'manifest' it means something has become manifest to the meditator. If the object becomes manifest, it means that one realises the object directly. Here the object refers to emptiness. What it is saying here is that the sixth ground, 'manifest', is abiding within supreme meditative equipoise directly realising emptiness. So we have the mind that abides within superior meditative equipoise on emptiness that manifestly, or directly, realises emptiness. Then we jump to the third line,

*They who see the suchness of dependent arising,  
By abiding within wisdom attain cessation.*

This more clearly describes the mind that is being described in the first line. Through the condition of having understood dependent arising, the bodhisattva on the sixth ground sees the profound suchness of dependent arising.

As we said in earlier teachings, the bodhisattva on the sixth ground is proficient in the wisdom that realises both the sequential and reverse order of the twelve links. Through a condition of that wisdom of dependent arising the bodhisattva then attains a special insight into emptiness in meditative equipoise. That's what is being described here in the third line when it says, 'They who see the suchness of dependent arising'. Here the subject is the bodhisattvas on the sixth ground who see the profound suchness of dependent arising through the condition of dependent arising.

That has established the subject. Consider the subject 'bodhisattvas who abide manifestly within the mind of equipoise directly see the suchness of dependent arising', - they attain the uncommon absorption on cessation, - because they are bodhisattvas that abide within the superior perfection of wisdom. By abiding within wisdom they attain cessation.

**Second Reason:** 'Illumination', 'because the fifth ground meditates on the truth of the path.'

Because the bodhisattva becomes proficient in the wisdom of the Four Noble Truths on the fifth ground that wisdom becomes completed here on the sixth ground.

**Third Reason:** 'Illumination', 'because of directly facing the attainment of the complete dharmas of a buddha.'

*Facing the dharmas of a complete buddha,*

Another reason why this ground is called manifest is because this ground faces the dharmas of a complete buddha. Here the dharmas of a complete buddha are the dependent arisings. The bodhisattva on the fifth ground excelled in the perfection of mental stabilisation, and here on the sixth ground the bodhisattva excels in the perfection of superior insight, which needs as a basis the perfection of mental stabilisation. The bodhisattva excels in the perfection of superior insight, which is related to their proficiency in the sequential and reverse order of the twelve interdependent links. Here on the sixth ground the bodhisattva becomes proficient in the sequential as well as the reverse order of the twelve interdependent

---

---

links. For that reason the bodhisattva is said to face the dharmas of a complete buddha.

The subject, the sixth ground, is called 'manifest', because through being superior in wisdom it directly sees suchness that is appearing like a reflection, and because of having completed the wisdom proficient in the Four Noble Truths, as well as facing the dharmas of a complete buddha.

### **Reasons Why This Ground is Called 'Manifest' from Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen's *General Meaning of Madyamaka***

In the commentary by Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen on the etymology of this ground he also says this ground is called 'manifest' because the bodhisattva is proficient in the twelve dependent links, and through their reversal of the sequential order of the twelve dependent links they manifest the reversal of cyclic existence. By meditating on the reverse order of the twelve dependent links they manifest liberation, and for this reason also then this ground is called 'manifest'.

In *Illumination* it says that since it shows that here the bodhisattva completes the higher training of wisdom, which is proficient in both the sequential as well as reverse order of the twelve dependent links, then by way of having completed both of those higher trainings of wisdom, the bodhisattva here manifests both truth as well as dependent arising. If one looks at it from this point of view, the three higher trainings of wisdom are completed at this ground. The three higher trainings of wisdom are the higher training of wisdom that is proficient in the thirty-seven limbs of enlightenment on the fourth ground, the Four Noble Truths on the fifth ground, and the twelve dependent links on the sixth ground. On this ground, however much the bodhisattva meditates on calm abiding, they will also meditate on superior insight by that much. By having attained superiority in excelling in the perfection of mental stabilisation on the fifth ground, then here on this ground the bodhisattva has attained superior perfection of wisdom. Therefore the bodhisattva also attains here the uncommon absorption on cessation, which means the absorption that is held by the superior perfection of wisdom.

#### **Absorption on cessation**

*By abiding within wisdom attain cessation.*

As it says here, by abiding within the superior perfection of wisdom, then they attain the uncommon absorption of cessation. When it talks about the uncommon absorption of cessation it is referring to the absorption of cessation attained from the sixth ground onwards. So any absorption of cessation from the sixth ground onwards will be an uncommon absorption of cessation. It is also said that any absorption on cessation is an uncommon absorption on cessation.

#### **Common and Uncommon Absorption on Cessation in General**

##### **Uncommon Absorption on Cessation**

The definition of absorption on cessation is a **transcendental wisdom, abiding in the family of**

**being free from all the manifest delusions contained within the peak of existence, that is in single pointed equipoise on emptiness in dependence upon the method of a liberated path as well as an absorption of the peak of existence, that become its cause.** So basically absorption on cessation is a transcendental wisdom that realises emptiness.

It is the wisdom that directly realises emptiness **in dependence upon the liberated path.** Therefore the first instance of the path of seeing wouldn't be absorption on cessation, because it is not attained in dependence upon a liberated path. However in the following moments it is attained in dependence upon the preceding liberated path. Here it says, 'attained in dependence upon the method that becomes its cause'. So the liberated path is the method that becomes the cause for this absorption on cessation. It means that first one needs to have the cause of a liberated path, then afterwards one can have the absorption on cessation. So the first moment of the path of seeing wouldn't qualify as an absorption on cessation, because it does not have the necessary preceding liberated path. However the following moments would qualify as absorption on cessation.

The other method that becomes the cause for the absorption on cessation is the **absorption of the peak of existence** that is free from the manifest desires for the peak of existence. Here one doesn't talk about freedom from desires including the imprints. One only talks about the manifest desires, because the seed of the desires belonging to the peak of existence are only completely eliminated from the eighth ground onwards. So here one only talks about the abandonment that has been attained through a worldly path.

This definition of uncommon absorption on cessation is the definition according to the Prasangika system.

We also have the special definition for the absorption of cessation that is attained from the sixth ground onwards.

##### **Common Absorption on Cessation**

There is also the common absorption on cessation. What has ceased are the coarse feelings and recognitions on the basis of subtle mental consciousness. Through the force of one's meditation, the coarse recognitions and feelings that are associated with the five sense consciousness cease on the basis of the subtle mental consciousness. That type of meditation is called the common absorption on cessation, because it's common according to the sutras and the commentaries, and also with the other tenets. Is it an actual absorption on cessation? No. Although it's called the common absorption on cessation it is not an absorption on cessation.

Even though this meditative absorption that ends the coarse feelings and recognitions on the basis of the subtle mental consciousness is not absorption on cessation, it is still called the common absorption on cessation. Lama Tsong Khapa says that it is similar to the manner in which the grasping at the person as

---

being a self-sufficient substantially existent is called the common view of the transitory collection, even though it is not actually regarded as a view of the transitory collection.

An example for an actual absorption on cessation would be the transcendental wisdom that directly realises emptiness in the continuum of the bodhisattva on the path of seeing after the first instance. The first instance doesn't qualify, because it doesn't rely on the preceding liberated path. However from then onwards there's a preceding liberated path. Then the transcendental wisdom realising emptiness in the continuum of a bodhisattva on the path of seeing that has been attained through a preceding liberated path, and the mental absorption of the peak of existence is an example of actual absorption on cessation.

It is called the uncommon absorption on cessation because it is only asserted to be an absorption on cessation by the Prasangika proponents.

The Svatantrika-Madhyamika and below don't assert that type of transcendental wisdom to be an absorption on cessation.

That covers the common and uncommon absorption on cessation in general, but then also we have an uncommon absorption on cessation in the context of the sixth ground.

### **Common and Uncommon Absorption on Cessation in the present context**

#### **Common Absorption on Cessation**

The transcendental wisdom directly realising emptiness that is posited as an absorption on cessation from the first ground to the fifth ground is referred to as the common absorption on cessation because that type of absorption on cessation is also attained by returners, non-returners, and arhats, like hearer non-returners and hearer-arhats.

#### **Uncommon Absorption on Cessation**

Here the uncommon absorption on cessation is attained in dependence upon the method of the superior perfection of wisdom, which is only attained from the sixth ground onwards.

The absorption on cessation is not attained simultaneously with attaining the transcendental wisdom of the sixth ground, but only from the second instance onwards. As it says in the definition, the absorption on cessation is attained in dependence upon the method of the superior perfection of wisdom. So there has to first be a superior perfection of wisdom that precedes it, and then comes this uncommon absorption on cessation. The attainment of the sixth ground is simultaneous with the attainment of the superior perfection of wisdom. One can't attain the uncommon absorption on cessation simultaneously with that moment. However from the second and third moment onwards then one can talk about the uncommon absorption on cessation.

It is referred to as the uncommon absorption on cessation because it is not shared with the lower

grounds - the fifth ground and below. The following grounds, the seventh, eighth, ninth, and so forth have this uncommon absorption on cessation.

If we look at the boundaries of the uncommon absorption on cessation it starts from the second moment of the sixth ground up to the state of buddhahood, the ground of a buddha.

### **Etymology**

Take the subject 'the uninterrupted path of the sixth ground' - there's a reason why it is called the absorption on cessation - the emptiness and suchness are posited as cessation, and because it is an absorption on that cessation it is called an absorption on cessation.

Emptiness is referred to as a cessation, because the transcendental wisdom that directly realises it causes the obscurations of dualistic appearance regarding the two truths to cease.

We have now completed those first four lines,

*Manifestly abiding within the mind of  
equipoise,  
Facing the dharmas of a complete buddha,  
They who see the suchness of dependent arising,  
By abiding within wisdom attain cessation.*

## **2. Praise of the Perfection of Wisdom**

This is shown by this verse,

*In the same way one person with eyes  
Can easily lead all groups of blind people  
To their desired destination, here awareness  
also  
Takes the eyeless qualities to buddhahood  
alone*

What it is being shown here is that the preceding five perfections, which have already been explained, rely on the perfection of wisdom in order to guide them to enlightenment. It uses the metaphor of how, in order to arrive at their desired destination, blind people have to rely on a person with vision. Similarly, in order to arrive at their desired destination, the five perfections have to rely on the perfection of wisdom.

The verse likens the first five perfections of generosity and so forth to blind people, and the perfection of wisdom to a person with vision. In the same way as a person with eyes can easily lead all groups of blind people to their desired destination, the awareness that is the perfection of wisdom alone takes the qualities of generosity and so forth to buddhahood.

So in order to actually complete the perfection of generosity one needs to have the perfection of wisdom. The aim of the perfection of generosity is to attain complete enlightenment, but it can't be done without the support of the perfection of wisdom. So therefore in order for the perfection of generosity to be completed it needs to be complemented with the perfection of wisdom, because only the perfection of wisdom can lead to complete enlightenment.

In the *Diamond Cutter sutra* it says, 'In the same way as a person with eyes can't see anything when they are in darkness, so a bodhisattva who practises generosity

---

being bound by phenomena should be viewed as such a person.' A bodhisattva who is bound by phenomena is one who doesn't meditate on the three circles of the practice of generosity, and who doesn't realise the emptiness of phenomena. Such a bodhisattva is like a person walking around in darkness. 'Once the sun has risen, a person with eyes is able to see a variety of forms and so forth. One should view a bodhisattva who practices generosity, but who is not bound by phenomena in the same way.'

'Bodhisattvas who are brought down by phenomena' refers to bodhisattvas who don't realise the emptiness of the three circles. When one practises generosity and the other perfections one should apply one's understanding of emptiness. We all have a certain understanding of emptiness, and you have to apply that to your practice. Then through continuous application it will become more and more refined. When you practise generosity you should meditate on the emptiness of the three circles - the emptiness of the giver, the emptiness of the substance, and the emptiness of the recipient; when you dedicate, you'd meditate on the emptiness of the person that is dedicating, the emptiness of the merits that are being dedicated, and the emptiness of aim.

So in the dedication then there are the merits that are being dedicated, and the aim to which they are being dedicated, and by whom they are dedicated. So one meditates on the emptiness of those three, meditating on how, for example, the merits are not a partless, independent phenomena but an accumulation of various virtuous karmas. There is an accumulation of parts. Here one can meditate on the dependent arising of the merits, and how it comes about in dependence upon its parts. Meditate on the emptiness of the three circles, and how they are merely imputed by conception and don't exist truly from their own side.

### **3. Explaining the Suchness of Dependent Arising**

The third main outline has five sub-outlines: pledging to explain the profound; identifying the vessel for the profound; the way the ensuing qualities are generated; exhorting the student who is a vessel to listen; and the way suchness is explained.

The pledge to explain the profound comes only after having explained the first five perfections. It explains the type of emptiness that one has to realise in order to attain liberation. Then Chandrakirti makes a pledge to explain that emptiness, the realisation of which is necessary in order to attain liberation.

The vessel that the students should be explains the type of student that is a suitable vessel for the explanation of emptiness.

Also the outline, the way the ensuing qualities are generated, is very good and very informative. It's good for you to read up on that.

It's important that the students are a good vessel for the teachings of the teacher. One has to teach according to the capacity of the students. Otherwise if

things are taught that the students don't like, then that's not so good.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*

*Edited Version*

**© Tara Institute**

---

# Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

དངུམ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་པོ།

26 November 2002

---

It is good if, at the outset, you generate the motivation thinking, 'I have to become enlightened to liberate all sentient beings, and in order to do so I'm now going to listen to this profound Mahayana teaching, and then I'm going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

### 3. Explaining the Suchness of Dependent Arising

We mentioned last week the next five outlines: pledging to explain the profound, identifying the vessel for the profound and so forth.

#### 3.1. Pledging to Explain the Profound

Chandrakirti's pledge to explain the profound is done in the following verse,

*The same way they realised the extremely profound;  
Through quotation as well as reason;  
I shall explain it according to the school  
Concurring with the scriptural system of Nagarjuna.*

In brief what it is saying here is that Chandrakirti is making the pledge that he is going to explain the extremely profound - emptiness. He goes on to say that, 'I'm not just explaining emptiness as something that I pulled out of the sky, but I'm explaining it according to the school of Nagarjuna'. So he's explaining his lineage, and that he's explaining emptiness according to the system of Nagarjuna.

Mirror says,

*Take the subject 'Chandrakirti': - he explains suchness according to the school concurring with the scriptural system of Nagarjuna, - because Nagarjuna realised the extremely profound Dharma the same way a sixth ground bodhisattva realises it, and then conveyed it through quotations as well as through reason.*

We have already said that a sixth ground bodhisattva realises the extremely profound directly. In order to understand what the sixth ground bodhisattva realises one can rely upon the quotations of the sutras. However it is very difficult to ascertain the meaning of the sutras through one's own analysis and investigation. The meaning of the sutras is extremely difficult to ascertain without relying upon another person, who has already ascertained their meaning. 'Therefore', Chandrakirti says, 'In order to ascertain their meaning of the sutras I'm relying upon Nagarjuna. A pioneer of the Madhyamika teachings, Nagarjuna was predicted by the Buddha as someone who would be able to ascertain the meaning of the sutras through his own understanding, without relying upon other human teachers.

Chandrakirti is saying that, 'My explanation will exactly

follow the explanation of Nagarjuna. In the same way as Nagarjuna explained the extremely profound through quotation as well as reason, I too, will explain it through the quotation of sutras and commentaries as well as reasoning, concurring with the scriptural system of Nagarjuna.'

*In the same way as they realised the extremely profound*

This line refers to the sixth ground bodhisattva. In the same way as the sixth ground bodhisattva realises the extremely profound, Nagarjuna also realised the extremely profound. On that basis he explained emptiness, the extremely profound, through the quotation of sutras as well as employing various types of reason. 'Now', Chandrakirti says, 'I, Chandrakirti will explain it in exactly the same way as Nagarjuna's system'.

This pledge to explain the profound is the verse where Chandrakirti explicitly makes the pledge to explain the meaning of Nagarjuna's *Root Wisdom*. In the previous five chapters Chandrakirti drew from Nagarjuna's other works such as *Precious Garland*, but until this stage hasn't actually dealt with *Root Wisdom*. Chandrakirti's commentary on *Root Wisdom* starts here in the sixth chapter.

It was said earlier that Nagarjuna is a valid person upon whose interpretation of the wisdom sutras one can rely. The reason why is he such a valid person is because he was predicted by the Buddha in the sutras. There is a quote from the *Sutra of the Buddha's Journey to Sri Lanka*, which says,

*In the southern country of Bidha there will be a famous glorious bhikku, who will be renowned by the name of Naga, who will destroy the extremes of existence and non-existence, and who will explain my great vehicle to the world. He will have attained the ground of extreme joy, and then proceed to the pure realm of great bliss.*

This is the quotation from the sutra where the Buddha predicted the coming of Nagarjuna.

#### 3.2. Identifying the Vessel for the Profound

Having said that he will explain the extremely profound according to the system of Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti goes on to explain who is a suitable vessel for that explanation.

He says that he will explain the extremely profound only to those who are a correct vessel. He won't explain the extremely profound to those who aren't a correct vessel, because misconceptions arise in the minds of those beings.

Who is a vessel to be shown emptiness? Chandrakirti goes on to give the definition.

*Whoever, upon hearing emptiness while an ordinary being  
Repeatedly generates intense inner joy, whose eyes are  
Moistened by tears arising from intense joy,  
And whose body hairs stand on end.  
They possess the seed of a perfect buddha  
They are the vessel to be shown suchness, they  
Should be shown the truth of ultimate meaning*

If it is asked, 'Who is a vessel to be shown suchness?'

---

*Take the subject 'people who repeatedly generate intense inner joy through hearing emptiness while an ordinary being,*

As an ordinary being, before they have entered one of the grounds, they generate intense inner joy through hearing emptiness and through that joy

*their eyes are moistened by the tears arising from intense joy, whose body hairs stand on end from the joy of hearing emptiness'*

So the subject, those types of persons,

*should be shown the truth of ultimate meaning.*

Why are they the vessel to be shown the truth of ultimate meaning?

*Because they're endowed with the non-conceptualising seed of the awareness of a perfect buddha.*

So they have the karmic potential within their mind to realise emptiness. Here the seed for the realisation of emptiness refers to a powerful potential. In general everyone has the potential to realise emptiness, but here it talks about a very powerful potential.

Chandrakirti describes the vessel for receiving teachings on emptiness by listing the signs one needs to have in order to be shown emptiness. If we study emptiness in this life, then in the future we will become such a vessel. Lama Tsong Khapa also extended his hand to those who don't actually show those signs in this life. He says that even though you might not possess all those signs in this life, one can be the qualified vessel for realising emptiness by relying upon the pure teachings of a qualified teacher.

Lama Tsong Khapa says that,

*Those signs are unmistakable signs that a person is suitable to hear the unmistakable teachings on emptiness and they won't be in danger of not understanding what is explained. Such a person will definitely understand the teachings on emptiness, and that they are qualified to receive the unmistakable teachings on emptiness. However if there's a person who doesn't understand the teachings on emptiness and who doesn't display those signs, then one cannot say for certain that they are the vessel to receive teachings on emptiness.*

*However if they don't go beyond the teachings of the pure qualified lama then even though they don't understand emptiness the first time it is explained to them, if they follow the teachings of the qualified lama and don't go beyond those teachings, then there will be many practitioners who are suitable to freshly realise emptiness.*

### **3.3. The Way The Ensuing Qualities Are Generated**

The listener or disciple who has been just been described will generate fruits from listening to emptiness. Why? First of all, they will, of course, eliminate the wrong view concerning emptiness. However that will not be the only fruit or result that they receive from listening to teachings on emptiness.

Not only will they generate an unmistakable understanding of emptiness, but also

*They generate the ensuing qualities  
Remaining always practising perfect morality  
Practising generosity and relying on compassion  
Meditating on patience and perfectly dedicating the*

*virtues*

*For enlightenment in order to liberate migrators  
And being respectful to perfect bodhisattvas*

Regarding the second line, *Remaining always practising perfect morality*, *Illumination* says,

*For the disciple who is such a vessel the opportunity to listen to the view of emptiness will be like finding a treasure. In order for that view of emptiness not to degenerate in a future lifetimes, then they will always continuously practise perfect morality.*

They will continuously practise perfect morality in order to achieve that aim.

The disciple, who is the suitable vessel to be shown emptiness, is enthusiastic about listening to teachings on emptiness. They will become concerned about what will happen to their understanding of emptiness in future lives, and about finding the opportunity to listen to teachings on emptiness again, in future lives. Even though it's questionable as to whether one can say that a person who has realised emptiness will be reborn in the lower realms, this is talking about what practitioner themselves feels about their sequence of practice. They arrive at this concern because through practising immorality one will fall into the lower realms, and the continuity of the view of emptiness will be severed. By reflecting and thinking, 'If I don't keep my morality then I will be reborn in the lower realms, and then the continuity of the view of emptiness will be severed'. By thinking in this way they generate the motivation of wanting to always keep an undegenerate morality. Practising immorality doesn't necessarily mean that one has actually accepted some type of morality, and then breaks that morality. The practice of immorality can also be engaging in the natural non-virtuous actions

Regarding the third line, *Practising generosity and relying on compassion*, then the practitioner reflects that, as *Illumination* states,

*By keeping pure morality one would be reborn in the higher realms. If in that rebirth one were to be born destitute, then one would lack food, drink, medicine, and clothing, and all the necessities of life. Then one would have to engage in a great deal of effort in order to attain those necessities of life, and again the continuity of listening to teachings on emptiness and meditating on the view of emptiness would be severed.*

In our case it's not a question of attaining the necessities of life, it's a question of multiplying the necessities of life! In our case the continuity of the meditation on emptiness is severed or degenerates not because we have to exert so much effort in order to attain the necessities of life, but because we exert so much effort in order to increase the necessities of life that we already have. That's a very important point to consider.

Therefore towards the higher side, the bodhisattva practises making offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and towards the lower side they practise generosity towards sentient beings. Further, the bodhisattva also reflects on the necessity of combining one's realisation of emptiness with compassion, seeing that the view of emptiness has to be held by great compassion in order to be able to go to the state of buddhahood. Just having the view of emptiness by itself

---

is not enough to become enlightened. It needs to be combined with great compassion. Therefore the line, 'practising generosity and relying on compassion'. Understanding this, a bodhisattva relies on compassion.

Further, the practitioner reflects that through anger they would again be led to the lower realms, and that anger would also destroy their virtues. Even if they were to be reborn as a human they would have an exceedingly ugly appearance, and because of that exceedingly ugly appearance then arya beings wouldn't be very pleased to meet them. Then they would miss out on the opportunity of meeting arya beings. So having generated that doubt the practitioner practises patience.

Ordinary beings, who are not concerned with meeting arya beings, and who are only concerned with meeting their worldly friends, are worried that their outer appearance will not please their friends, so they apply all types of colours and makeup and so on in order to make themselves pleasing to the eye. Here, however, we are talking about the practitioner who thinks about everything from the Dharma point of view.

*Perfectly dedicating the virtues for enlightenment in order to liberate migrators*

Here the virtues of meditating on emptiness, practising morality, practising generosity, compassion, patience, have to be dedicated for complete enlightenment in order to become a cause for complete enlightenment. The merits that have been dedicated to complete enlightenment become inexhaustible, once their fruition has been attained.

They become respectful to perfect bodhisattvas as a result of listening to teachings on emptiness, because they understand that hearers and self liberators can't explain the profound dependent arising like bodhisattvas. Understanding that, then they become extremely respectful to perfect bodhisattvas.

By listening to teachings on emptiness and generating an understanding of emptiness, then not only will the profound aspect of the path be increased, but also the extensive aspect of the path will be increased. As a result the bodhisattva develops respect, not only for the practice of emptiness, but also the method aspect of the path.

Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak

Edited Version

© *Tara Institute*

---

# Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

དབྱིངས་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

3 December 2002

---

Please generate a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and towards that end I'm now going to listen to these teachings, and then I'm going to put them into practice as much as possible, so that I can accomplish that aim'.

### 3. Explanation of the Suchness of Dependent Arising

We finished the outlines such as the praise of the perfection of wisdom, and explaining the suchness of dependent arising, which has five sub-outlines. Of these we have finished pledging to explain the profound, identifying the vessel for the profound, the way the ensuing qualities are generated, and we are up to exhorting the student who is a vessel to listen.

#### 3.1. Exhorting the Student Who Is a Vessel to Listen

Having explained how, by listening to the teachings on it, the specific disciple of the *Madhyamakavatara* generates different qualities apart from the understanding of emptiness, one goes onto exhort the specific disciples to listen to those teachings.

The root text reads,

*Beings proficient in the profound and extensive ways  
Gradually attain the ground of extreme joy, therefore  
Those aspiring towards that should listen to this path*

So it is appropriate to exhort those aspiring to the ground Extremely Joyful to listen to this profound path, because beings proficient in the profound and extensive ways gradually attain this ground of extreme joy.

Why is it appropriate to exhort those who aspire to the ground Extremely Joyful to listen to this teaching on the profound path? It is because those who are proficient in the profound and extensive aspects of the path gradually attain this ground of extreme joy. This reason shows that the specific disciples of *Entering the Middle Way* are ordinary beings, who haven't attained the arya ground yet. They will gradually attain the ground of Extreme Joy if they become proficient in profound and extensive ways, which shows that they are not yet at the ground of extreme joy.

The commentary on the *Four Hundred Stanzas* by Aryadeva says that by listening to teachings on emptiness, and generating an understanding of emptiness, then one will generate respect for the teachings on emptiness. This is because the greater the understanding of emptiness the more respect one will generate for those teachings. Through these conducive conditions one will generate greater faith. One's clear

faith in emptiness will be increased and one will also have greater compassion, and one will be more careful regarding one's actions towards the Tathagata.

Through listening to the teachings on emptiness and gaining some understanding of it, they will generate a very intense wish to thoroughly abandon the cause for one's downfall - the obscuration towards the holy Dharma, which refers here to the intellectually acquired true grasping. It is not just a matter of having innate true grasping, but that the person also actually decides that things exist truly. This decision acts as an obscuration for one's practice of the Dharma.

Because of special experiences they are even able to practise the generosity that are usually very difficult to do. They will also practise the four Dharmas for collecting disciples and in short all Dharma practice will be increased. Such a person is a suitable vessel for the holy Dharma on emptiness.

As we said the other day, generating intense inner joy, hairs standing on end, and so forth, are the signs. However it's not just that. When they listen to emptiness they do not just get those signs but they actually generate an understanding of emptiness. Together with that they generate those qualities that benefit their whole Dharma practice in the way just explained. That's what a proper vessel for those teachings is.

To such a disciple one should show this Dharma with great effort, because they are free of the two faults of a faulty vessel. To those who, even though they have great belief in those teachings, cannot understand them the way they are first explained, one should teach them in a manner that doesn't harm their belief, and their ascertaining of dependent arising. There's a danger that someone who is not a proper recipient could fall into the extreme of nihilism, and then there's a danger that of course it would harm their understanding and belief in dependent arising. By showing them that dependent arising and the lack of inherent existence are complimentary and not contradictory, then one can teach them in a skilful manner that doesn't harm the disciples understanding of dependent arising.

It is extremely meritorious for someone who is well learned in this topic to explain it to a listener who is, at the very least, a suitable vessel. To prove this point Lama Tsong Khapa gives here a quote from the *Compendium of Sutras* by Nagarjuna. In the *Compendium of Sutras*, Nagarjuna conveyed emptiness through both scriptural quotation as well as through reasoning. In the *Root of Wisdom* Nagarjuna conveyed emptiness only through reasoning and inference. So here then the *Compendium of Sutras* says that by having belief in the profound Dharma then all merits are condensed, because until one becomes enlightened all goodness and perfections that are contained within cyclic existence, and those that are beyond cyclic existence, will all be established through emptiness.

Further Lama Tsong Khapa gives a quote from the *Sutra of the Ungenerated Enemy*, the name of a king who had committed one of the five uninterrupted karmas with regard to his parents. The Buddha said to him that,

---

‘those who listen to this profound Dharma and then engage in and believe in it, even though they have generated uninterrupted karmas, I proclaim that those karmas will not be obscurations for them.’

Listening to teachings on emptiness, and meditating on emptiness, and generating that belief in emptiness again and again has those benefits. *Illumination* says that in order to attain the benefits then two conditions are needed.

*In order for a person who explaining emptiness to receive benefits from explaining emptiness, two conditions are needed. First of all they need to have a pure motivation not looking for praise and fame.*

This needs to be explained correctly without confusing its meaning. In order to receive great benefits from explaining emptiness when both those conditions need to be present. If anyone of those conditions are not present then that will be an obstacle to gaining great benefits from explaining emptiness. So even though one might explain emptiness correctly, if one’s motivation is not free from wishing for praise and fame then that will be an obstacle. Likewise the reverse.

Here Lama Tsong Khapa quotes Vasubandhu in order to support this statement. One wants to receive great benefits from explaining emptiness but if one doesn’t have those two conditions present that will prevent one from receiving great benefits from explaining emptiness. Vasubandhu says that if one explains the Dharma incorrectly, with an afflictive mind wishing for praise and fame, then the great merits that can be attained from teaching the Dharma will be decreased.

Therefore both the listener should have a pure motivation for listening to the teachings, and also the person who is explaining shouldn’t convey it mistakenly, and should also have a pure motivation. For example one looks into the mirror and then cleans off the dirt and impurities on one’s face. One looks then one cleans, one looks and one cleans. Likewise when one is listening to the teachings or when explaining the Dharma, one should repeatedly check upon one’s motivation. Is it still a pure motivation or has it become diluted with the faults explained above?

That’s enough for today, and we can stop here. Next time we can start a little with the next major outline, the way suchness is explained, and I will go through the ten equalities, which are not actually mentioned in the root text itself, but which Lama Tsong Khapa mentions in his commentary. I’m going to go through those ten equalities mentioned, I think, in the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis* next time.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson*

*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*

*Edited Version*

© **Tara Institute**

---

## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

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

། དབྱ་མ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་པོ། །

10 December 2002

---

Generate a virtuous motivation, thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and in order to be able to do so then I have to practise the Dharma well. For that purpose I'm now going to listen to this profound Mahayana teaching.'

Lama Tsong Khapa said in his *Lines Of Experience* that the precious human rebirth that has freedoms and endowments is like a wish granting jewel. It has great purpose, is very rare, and very easily lost. Like a flash of lightning in the sky it is lost quickly and it lasts just an instant. Therefore one should try to make the greatest use of it. The great yogis have meditated on this and travelled this path, and you who desire enlightenment should do likewise.

It is important that one put what one learns into practice. Out of subduing one's mind and acquiring intellectual knowledge, subduing one's mind is more important than acquiring intellectual knowledge. Of course intellectual knowledge supports the action of subduing one's mind and it is important that one is able to subdue one's mind, but out of the two the emphasis should be on subduing one's mind.

The precious human life is even more precious, more valuable, and superior to a wish granting jewel. One has been in cyclic existence since beginningless time, so there is no type of rebirth that one hasn't experienced yet. Therefore it is important that one makes use of this very precious opportunity now, and tries to take its essence.

This precious human rebirth is superior, more precious and more valuable than a wish granting jewel. It is difficult to find and very easily lost. It lasts only a mere instant. When there's a flash of lightning in the dark night, it lights everything up for just one instant. Similarly that's the time span the precious human rebirth lasts. So therefore one should make great use of it.

Why is the precious human rebirth so precious? It is because one can achieve the three types of purposes. This is not just thinking about the temporary transitory benefits of this life. Rather, on the basis of having a precious human rebirth now, one can create the causes for a happy future life, or one can create the causes for liberation on the basis of this precious human rebirth, or one can attain the causes for enlightenment and become enlightened.

The only reason why one now wastes the precious human rebirth is because one doesn't regard it as something valuable. It is because we don't hold it to be very precious and valuable that we waste this precious human rebirth so easily. So we have to contemplate its preciousness, value and potential. If this precious human

rebirth were not so rare then one could perhaps relax and sit back. However since the precious human rebirth is so very rare then one has to make use of it right now, as one can not rely upon getting the same opportunity again in the future.

If we look at the causes for a precious human rebirth then the main one is morality. How difficult is it to practice pure morality? Of the ten non-virtuous actions how many can one really keep purely? Morality has to be practised in conjunction with generosity. One has now attained a human rebirth with sufficient material means, which came about through one's previous practice of generosity. How does one's good human body come about? Good physical form and so forth comes about through the previous practice of patience. Having charisma comes about through the previous practice of enthusiasm. Being able to practise meditation and keep one's mind on the object of meditation even for a short while comes about through having previously created the concordant cause of practising mental stabilisation. It is the same with regard to wisdom. One is able to generate discriminating awareness through the concordant cause of having practised wisdom before.

So you can see that if one looks at one's present situation and contemplates its causes, then that is something that one should rejoice about, because one was able to create those causes previously.

This precious human body is very easily lost, and there is no definiteness with regard to it. We take it for granted that if we get up in the morning that we will go to bed in the evening, and the other way round, but there is really no guarantee.

The precious human rebirth is superior to a wish granting jewel. It is very rare and it is very easily lost. When we meditate on how easily the precious human rebirth is lost then we meditate on impermanence. So we should meditate on the three roots that are supported by the nine reasons.

So at the time of death the conscious, together with the self, separates from the body. Where does the self of this life come from? It also comes from a preceding continuum. In the same way as the self stretches over this lifetime, so too it stretches over all lifetimes. It comes from beginningless lifetimes and it goes towards the future limitless lifetimes. Together with the self goes the consciousness: wherever the self goes the consciousness goes. Within the consciousness then karma is active, and we have virtuous karma and non-virtuous karma. At the time of death one sends you to a higher realm and the other one sends you to a lower realm. So it's very good now to meditate on death impermanence, and make a preparation for death.

Reflecting on how the non-virtuous karma will send one to the lower realms, one then generates fear of the lower realms and develops a single-pointed conviction ascertaining that the Three Jewels - Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha - definitely have the ability to rescue one from the lower realms. If you take refuge on the basis of fear of suffering in the lower realms, then your refuge will become very solid.

---

---

One generates a strong conviction that the Three Jewels can protect oneself from the dangers of the lower realms, and then one takes heartfelt refuge in the Three Jewels. One also needs to put into practise the practices that come with going for refuge. These are abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions and practising the ten virtuous actions. By abandoning each of the ten non-virtuous actions then one practises the virtuous actions.

So practising the Dharma, reflecting upon the infallibility of the Three Jewels and the law of cause and effect, should also give some sort of mental comfort. Through one's practice one should get some mental comfort, feeling it is OK to die. If one is not joyfully looking forwards towards death, then at least one should die without any regrets, and have some kind of conviction that one will not be reborn in the lower realms.

Of course the door of the lower realms is completely closed only from the forbearance level of the path of preparation onwards. Through one's patience in abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions, one should develop some kind of confidence that one will not be reborn in the lower realms in the next life. It is very good if one can die with that type of mind. Then at least one doesn't have any regrets.

Reflecting further, one realises that even if one takes a higher rebirth in the next life, then that still would be a rebirth within cyclic existence, which would mean continuing to experience the various sufferings of cyclic existence.

One realises that even though one might close the door to the lower realms by practising the ten non-virtuous actions, taking rebirth in the higher realms still means that one experiences the general sufferings of cyclic existence, as well as the sufferings of the higher realms. Looking to the cause for those sufferings of cyclic existence, then one finds that the root is ignorance grasping at self, true grasping.

When one searches for the antidote to the root of suffering, then one finds that the wisdom that realises selflessness is the antidote to the ignorance grasping at the self. Then one will generate very strong conviction, and will arrive at a point feeling that, 'If I put an effort into it then I will definitely be able to liberate myself from cyclic existence'.

One also understands that developing the practice of wisdom, which is necessary in order counteract true grasping, depends upon the training of concentration, and that the training of concentration depends upon the training of morality. Then by practising the three higher trainings one will arrive at a point where one feels, 'If I just practise enough then I will definitely be able to attain liberation. I will be able to free myself from cyclic existence.'

Then to go one step further, one thinks that, 'If I only attain liberation myself that would be very limited, because all other mother sentient beings are still within cyclic existence. Even though I might be liberated all the other sentient beings are still experiencing the same sufferings as myself. There's no sentient being that hasn't been my mother in the past, they have always been very

kind to me.' By reflecting upon those points one finds out one's motivation is thinking that one has to liberate not only oneself, but all sentient beings.

One reflects upon the kindness of sentient beings and then makes the determination to repay that kindness, then one meditates upon great compassion. One meditates upon pleasant love reflecting that all sentient beings lack happiness and experience suffering, and then one generates love and compassion to the point where it becomes spontaneous. Then, reflecting that if one doesn't take upon oneself the responsibility to liberate all sentient beings, then they wouldn't really be OK, so it is something that one definitely has to do. So one generates the superior intention of taking upon oneself the responsibility to liberate all sentient beings.

Those three awarenesses - love, compassion, and superior intention - are awarenesses that are concerned with the welfare of others. Then one realises that one doesn't actually have the ability to bring about the welfare of others at the present time.

If one looks for one who has such an ability, one finds that only an enlightened being has this ability. Then one generates the wish of wanting to become enlightened in order to fulfil one's aspiration of wanting to help all sentient beings. That's when one generates bodhicitta. One meditates upon bodhicitta again and again, and makes it stronger and stronger, so it becomes more and more natural. One also practises the six perfections and the various bodhisattva practices in order to achieve one's aim.

What I have just said is like a short glance meditation on graduated path to enlightenment. There's not really anything there that you don't know. Everything I've explained here you already know, but it's also important to know that there are things there you need to practise.

You can add a further meditation on how while generating bodhicitta you enter the Mahayana path of accumulation, and then from there you proceed to the path of preparation, to the path of seeing, and to the path of meditation. Then when one enters the path of meditation, one enters the first ground. Then one proceeds through all the ten grounds up to level of buddhahood. The detailed explanation of the grounds is not found within the *Lam Rim*. So it is good to add the knowledge that one gains from studying *Entering the Middle Way* to one's *Lam Rim* meditation. One needs to be skilful in that way. In such a way one does not forget the exposition of the grounds and paths.

It is important that one generates knowledge of contentment. If one can be content then one can be happy within this life. It is also important that one gets benefit from one's practice. Otherwise, without some benefit from one's practice, one feels there is nothing to show for one's practice, and one gets the idea that maybe the methods don't work, and then one loses one's aspiration to practise. Then one starts to put oneself down, thinking in a negative way, 'I've tried this, I've tried that, and nothing works!'

What I have explained today is nothing that you haven't heard before. In the past you couldn't know that there

---

was some benefit in Dharma practice without me telling you. I had to tell you that the practice has these and these benefits, but by now you should be able to tell me, 'I received these and these benefits from Dharma practice'.

If one generates pure concern for the happiness of future lives then through that one will give up grasping for the happinesses of this life. One will cling less and grasp less towards the happinesses of this life by generating concern for the happinesses of future lives.

Happiness is an inner comfort within one's mind, so that at the time of death one is not destitute of Dharma knowledge. One won't be destitute of an inner refuge, an some inner form of help, discriminating awareness and so forth, at the time of death. Because at that time one will experience outer destitution. One will be separated from one's friends and relatives, one will be separated from materials, one will even be separated from one's body. At such a time it's very important that one has some inner type of refuge otherwise one will experience heavy suffering.

The mind is very concerned now with the things of this life: one is very concerned with the help one has received from others, one is very concerned with how kind others have been to oneself, one is very concerned with how much pleasantness one experiences in this life, but this type of attitude shows a very strong worldly concern. If we think about all these things at the time of death what type of benefit do they have? We find that they have very little meaning at the time of death, because one has to leave all of them behind.

It is important that one has some strong inner refuge, and that one is not destitute of Dharma knowledge, not destitute of inner wisdom, or discriminating awareness, and that one has some inner sources of help. Then in such a way one can die relaxed and comfortable. Without those things, when the outer things fall away then the person becomes mentally very unhappy. As one gets older and the outer things fall away, then the person becomes more and more unhappy and depressed.

So there are things that one has to practise, and also one's practice should show some inner signs. The practice has to do with subduing ones mind, and is not about kneeling or sitting down, or being able to talk very cleverly about the Dharma. The Buddha didn't teach that the world is bad or that the body is bad. What the Buddha taught was that craving attachment for the body is bad, and that attachment for wealth is bad. If one doesn't have attachment for the body, then if one is separated from the body one doesn't experience any suffering. Likewise if one doesn't have any attachment for wealth, then if one is separated from wealth one doesn't experience any suffering. So really it is the attachment that is the problem.

So one should try as much as possible to just sit down for a short while, and try to have some good meditation, such as thinking that one shouldn't covet the possessions of others, that one shouldn't be jealous of the possessions of others, that one should rejoice in the success of others, and so forth. Being able to direct one's mind in that direction even just for a little while, like a minute or just a few moments, is very powerful. Meditating like that for

short periods of time again and again acquaints the mind with those virtuous states. It is important that one also practises the Dharma.

Maybe that's enough for today.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*

*Edited Version*

**© Tara Institute**