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# Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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16 April 2002

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Establish your motivation thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and for that purpose I am going to listen to the profound Mahayana Dharma, and put it into practice'.

## 1.1.2 Great Compassion as the Root Cause of the Other Two Causes of Bodhisattvas (cont)

Last time we finished what are called the three dharmas shown at this occasion, which refers to the three main causes of a bodhisattva. They are:

- ∞ Bodhicitta or wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings,
- ∞ Non-dual awareness, which is the wisdom realising emptiness via the door of limitless inference,
- ∞ The mind of compassion, which refers to great compassion.

Here it is important to understand that one arrives at the mind of great compassion as the initial cause, from which the other two causes arise.

To show this Chandrakirti said in his *Self Commentary*:

*Since compassion is the root of both the mind of enlightenment and non-dual transcendental wisdom I wished to show compassion as the very main cause and said:*

*Only compassion is conqueror's perfect crop's  
Seed and like water for its increase,  
Posited like ripening of state of longtime enjoyment  
Therefore, I first praise compassion*

*This is showing that in the same way as seed, water and ripening are essential during the beginning, middle and end for perfect external grain etc. and therefore definitely needed, compassion only is also definitely needed during the three times for a perfect conqueror's crop.*

From *Illumination*:

*Therefore compassion is important like a seed for the initial generation of this Conqueror's perfect crop and in the middle it is like water for its further and further increase. Finally, the state of its longtime enjoyment 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 explains how compassion is important at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the path. It does this by using the example of the way the seed, water, and the ripening of the crop itself are regarded as essential during the beginning, middle, and final stages of the growing of a crop. In that way compassion is the root of the other two causes of a bodhisattva, bodhicitta as well as of non-dual awareness.

In the same way that the seed is initially important to start a crop, great compassion is essential at the beginning of the

path because it awakens one's Mahayana lineage. Once the crop has started to grow, if it is not nourished with conducive conditions such as water, then it will not grow. Similarly, if one's bodhicitta is not nourished by great compassion during the medium stages, then one won't progress along the path. In the end, just as the actual ripening of the grain is essential to enjoy the benefit of the harvest, compassion is necessary so that sentient beings can enjoy the fruit of the final enlightened state. Therefore, just like the seed, water and the ripening of the crop, great compassion is important during the beginning, middle and end of the path. Because it is so important, Chandrakirti therefore pays homage to great compassion at the beginning of the text.

The verse says, 'only compassion'. The reason for this is to point out the difference between the analogy, and the meaning being explained. In the analogy we have the seed, water and the ripening while as the exemplified meaning we have compassion alone.

In order to further clarify the type of compassion being referred to here we have already made it very clear that it is talking about great compassion. Then again, does it talk about the great compassion that is in the continuum of the practitioner who hasn't yet entered the path, or does it talk about the great compassion in the continuum of an ordinary bodhisattva? Or does it talk about the great compassion in the continuum of an arya bodhisattva?

If it is the compassion in the continuum of a practitioner who hasn't yet entered the path, then, even though it would be important at the beginning, that great compassion is not important at the middle and the end. This is because we can find it only at the beginning.

If the great compassion mentioned here was the great compassion we find in the continuum of a bodhisattva, then compassion would be only important in the middle, but not at the beginning or at the end. The great compassion one is talking about is just great compassion by itself, without specifying any particular type of great compassion. It is what is referred to as the self isolate of great compassion—just great compassion by itself.

## Compassion at the Beginning

The compassion referred to here is just great compassion by itself. Why is great compassion important at the beginning like the seed? It is because once a practitioner generates great compassion in their mental continuum, then the Mahayana lineage in that practitioner's mind is awakened. The measure of whether or not the Mahayana lineage in the practitioner's mind has been awakened is whether or not that practitioner has great compassion. In that way great compassion becomes like the seed at the beginning. When we think about the meaning of this verse we shouldn't think about it in an abstract way, not relating to ourselves. Rather we should think about it in relation to our own practice. If we generate great compassion, then our Mahayana lineage will be awakened, and in that way great compassion is like the seed.

Once we have entered the path, then great compassion will nourish and increase the qualities we have generated. So in that way great compassion becomes important during the medium stages of the path. Once we have become enlightened and have completed the development of our qualities, then, in order for others to enjoy the benefit of our qualities, great compassion is again essential at this end stage. So therefore great compassion is important at the

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beginning, the middle and the end. If we relate it to ourselves then we can see the importance of great compassion to our own practice and development, and then become enlightened very quickly!

Since arya bodhisattvas are controlled by great compassion they don't get any rest. As soon as arya bodhisattvas perceive that somewhere a sentient being needs help, then their great compassion automatically pushes them to go there. So arya bodhisattvas never remain within equanimity not doing anything. They never rest, because they are compelled through great compassion to help wherever they can.

The three main causes of a bodhisattva are great compassion, bodhicitta and non-dual awareness. Here, non-dual awareness refers to the wisdom realising emptiness that is generated through the door of infinite analysis. Chandrakirti's *Self Commentary* explains those three dharmas as the main causes of bodhisattvas from the point of view of bodhisattvas with dull faculty. Even though Chandrakirti doesn't explicitly mention, or explain this verse, from the point of view of bodhisattvas of sharp faculties one can also understand that implicitly those three dharmas are also the cause of bodhisattvas of sharp faculty.

Of the three types of practitioners, (the practitioners of the hearer path, practitioners of the solitary realiser path, and the practitioners of the Mahayana path), the practitioners of the hearer's path are referred to as practitioners of smallest capacity. Practitioners following the self-liberator's path are referred to as practitioners of medium capacity. Any type of practitioner following the Mahayana path will be a practitioner of greatest capacity. From another point of view, any practitioner following the Mahayana path will be regarded as a practitioner of sharp faculty, hearer practitioners will be practitioners of dull faculty, while self-liberators are practitioners of medium faculty.

Even though all Mahayana practitioners are of sharp faculty, there are variations between them, as some are sharper than others. So the very sharp class of practitioners includes those who are very sharp, medium sharp ones and least sharp ones. Here there's a slight variation in the sequence in which bodhisattvas of dull faculty and bodhisattvas of the sharp faculty enter the path.

### Two Types of Bodhisattvas

Bodhisattvas of dull faculty generate great compassion first, then they generate bodhicitta<sup>1</sup> and then they engage in the practices of the six perfections. In the context of the six perfections they practice the perfection of wisdom, and then realise emptiness.

Bodhisattvas of sharp faculty also generate great compassion first, but before generating bodhicitta they realise emptiness. Then, after realising emptiness they generate bodhicitta, and then practise the six perfections.

### Bodhisattvas of Dull Faculty

From the point of view of the bodhisattva of dull faculty, both the generation of the wisdom realising emptiness and the generation of bodhicitta come from the root of the generation of great compassion. Here Chandrakirti is referring to great compassion as the root of the other two causes of a bodhisattva. From the point of view of a bodhisattva of dull faculty, great compassion is generated first, after seeing the suffering of sentient beings. Then being

unable to bear the suffering of sentient beings, because of their great compassion they secondly generate bodhicitta, wishing to attain complete enlightenment in order to liberate sentient beings from suffering. After the generation of bodhicitta comes the understanding that if one doesn't engage in the practice of the six perfections one won't become enlightened. So then the bodhisattva engages in the practice of the six perfections.

Here the first five perfections are likened to a blind person, and the sixth perfection of wisdom is likened to a person who can see, and who guides a host of blind people to their destination. In order for a practice to become perfection it has to be held by the wisdom realising emptiness, the motivation of bodhicitta and by dedication. So if you look at this sequence, then we can understand how compassion is important at the beginning for the bodhisattva of dull faculty.

### Bodhisattvas of Sharp Faculty

The bodhisattva of sharp faculty initially meditates on those first five points of the seven point cause-and-effect method starting out by recognising that all sentient beings have been one's mother and so on, generating in that way great concern, compassion, and love for sentient beings, wanting them to be happy and free from suffering. Then, having generated great compassion the bodhisattva arrives at the point where he understands that, in order to be able to free all sentient beings from their suffering, he needs to attain complete enlightenment for himself. So the need to attain enlightenment is understood. At the time when the bodhisattva of sharp faculty generates great compassion they understand the need to become enlightened for the benefit of sentient beings.

The difference between bodhisattvas of sharp faculty and dull faculty is that at this stage the bodhisattva of sharp faculty investigates whether it is actually possible to actually attain the state of complete enlightenment free from the two obscurations<sup>2</sup>, including the karmic imprints. During this investigation the bodhisattva arrives at the root of all obscurations, which is true grasping. By investigating the nature of true grasping, via the door of limitless inference, with countless types of investigation, analyses and proofs, the bodhisattva negates the imputed object of true grasping. So by the door of infinite inference the bodhisattva negates the imputed object of true grasping. Having understood that the imputed object of true grasping is non-existent, the bodhisattva understands with valid cognition that true grasping can be abandoned. Then the bodhisattva also establishes through valid cognition that the attainment of complete enlightenment free from the two obscurations, including the imprints is possible.

Once the bodhisattva of sharp faculty has established with a valid cognition the possibility of attaining the state of complete enlightenment free from the two obscurations, including the imprints, then they will generate the wish to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings.

So we can see here that great compassion is important at the beginning, not just from the point of view of the bodhisattva of dull faculty, but also from the point of view of the bodhisattva of sharp faculty.

### Compassion in the Middle

<sup>2</sup> Obscurations to liberation, which are the delusions and their seeds, and obscurations to omniscience, which are the imprints of self-grasping together with the mistaken part of dualistic appearance.

<sup>1</sup> Bodhicitta like the bark of sugar cane.

Great compassion is important during the middle of one's practice in the same way, as water is important for the nourishment and growth of the crop. Though the seed of great compassion has generated the sprout of bodhicitta, if a practitioner doesn't again and again nourish that sprout of bodhicitta with the water of compassion, then that practitioner will find it impossible to build up the two types of accumulations in a very extensive way, and fall to the Hinayana path. This comes about through a lack of compassion in the middle stage of one's practice.

The attainment of complete enlightenment is very difficult, and much work needs to be done to attain it. The two accumulations need building up in a very expansive manner. If one lacks great compassion, when one encounters many difficulties one will tire of building up the two accumulations, and it will be easier to fall from the Mahayana path to the Hinayana path. If the practitioner continues to practice compassion then they will not become tired of building up the two accumulations.

Here there is a doubt, which is expressed in Chandrakirti's *Self Commentary*. There it says that if it is possible for a bodhisattva to fall from the Mahayana path to the Hinayana path, wouldn't it be possible for a bodhisattva to fall to the path of a self-liberator, since that is a Hinayana path?

The way this doubt is eliminated, according to the Prasangika point of view, is that since from the point of view of the result there is no great difference between a hearer arhat and a self-liberated arhat. According to the Prasangika tenet, there's no great difference in what they have abandoned and what they have realised. For example, according to the Prasangika tenet, once a practitioner has entered the hearer's path, the practitioner won't change his mind, and then later enter the path of self-liberator, for example. Why? Because there's no particular advantage to be gained from that.

According to the lower tenets there's a difference with regard to the level of abandonments between the hearer arhats and the self-liberated arhats. The self-liberated arhats have abandoned grasping at the subject and object being of different substance, which a hearer arhat hasn't done. So there is something to be gained for a hearer practitioner to enter the self-liberated path. In the Prasangika system, however, that is not the case.

What is important to keep in mind is that if we lack compassion, then even though we might generate the sprout of bodhicitta from the seed of great compassion, we will fall from the path, because we will find it very difficult to practise the two accumulations very extensively.

If we have not meditated very well on compassion, and our mind is not trained very well in compassion, then we will find it very difficult to complete the two accumulations. This is because sentient beings are very ungrateful and difficult to handle. So even if one tries to benefit them, over and over again other sentient beings will react badly, and treat one badly. In such a situation, if one loses the motivation of wanting to work for the benefit of sentient beings, then that is a sign that one hasn't meditated very well on compassion, and that one hasn't trained very well in compassion.

### Compassion at the End

We come to the final point, that great compassion is also important at the end of one's practice. The reason for this is that even though one might have attained the state of complete enlightenment with all the accompanying qualities, if one lacked great compassion then one wouldn't stay

around until the end of existence working for sentient beings. Therefore the long-time enjoyment by sentient beings of the enlightened state comes about through great compassion.

In this sequence we have been talking about how the hearers and solitary realisers are generated from buddhas, how the buddhas are generated from bodhisattvas, and how the bodhisattvas are in turn generated from their own teachers, whether they are buddhas and so forth. This whole chain would be non-existent if the buddhas lacked great compassion, because without great compassion the buddhas wouldn't teach, and then no further bodhisattvas would be generated, no further beings would become enlightened, and no hearers or solitary realiser arhats would come about. So the increase of the accumulations of the hearers, self-liberators and arya bodhisattvas, continuously without interruption from one life to the next, is due to great compassion in the continuum of the buddhas. Therefore great compassion is again essential at the end of one's practice.

One moral to be drawn from the above teaching, according to Lama Tsong Khapa, concerns one's understanding of one's practice. From *Illumination*:

*If one wishes to practise the Mahayana one needs to be someone who's mind first is overcome by great compassion and then generates the actual bodhicitta from the depths of one's heart in dependence upon that. Then, having generated the mind of enlightenment, one must practise the bodhisattva practises in general and in particular one needs to penetrate the meaning of the profound view. Having contemplated this one should gain a firm understanding that the explanation of the four verses 'Only compassion etc' teaches that one needs to practise in such a manner.*

This finishes praising great compassion in general. Next is praising compassion by discerning them individually, or the different types of compassion.

## 1.2 Praising Compassion By Discerning Them Individually

Praising great compassion by discerning the different types of compassion individually has two main points, prostration to compassion that focuses on sentient beings, and prostration to the two types of compassion focusing on dharmas and focussing on non-focus.

### 1.2.1 Prostration to Compassion Focussing on Sentient Beings

Chandrakirti said in his *Self Commentary*:

*Now, since I wish to compose a homage having clearly differentiated the instances of compassion by their way of engaging instances of the object of contemplation, I stated:*

*Starting grasping at self initially naming 'I'  
Generating attachment for phenomena naming 'mine'  
Praise to whatever becomes compassion for migrators  
Traversing without freedom like a bucket in a well.*

From *Illumination*:

*The view of the transitory collection grasping at 'I' generates the view of the transitory collection grasping at 'mine'. Therefore, those sentient beings, preceding the view of the transitory collection intensely grasping at 'mine', intensely grasp the mere meaning of that named 'I' to be truly existing, after the view of the transitory collection*

*grasping at 'I' has conceived the non naturally existing<sup>3</sup> self to be naturally existing. After that the view of the transitory collection grasping at 'mine' generates attachment for 'mine', the 'mine' named on phenomena other than the focal object of 'I-grasping', such as form, the eye and so forth, to be truly existing. Praise to whatever becomes compassion for migrators who because of that are circling without freedom like the circling, traversing bucket in a water well. This is the homage to the compassion focusing on sentient beings.*

Here the first two lines say that the view of the transitory collection grasping at 'I' generates the view of the transitory collection grasping at 'mine'. First we should clarify that there are two types of view of the transitory collections. There's the view of the transitory collection grasping at 'I' and there's the view of the transitory collection grasping at 'mine'.

According to the Prasangika system the definition of the view of the transitory collection is, **having focussed on the 'I' or 'mine' within one's own continuum, grasping either one of them to be inherently existing.** Of course in general the view of the transitory collection is self-grasping, but it is a specific type of self-grasping that takes as its object the 'I' within one's own continuum, and the 'mine' within one's own continuum.

#### **First Type of View of Transitory Collection**

If we go to the first line which is, 'Starting grasping at self initially naming 'I''. Of the two types of view of the transitory collection the first one is grasping at 'I'. If we relate it to the root text, then initially after having focussed on that named 'I', one starts to grasp at a truly existent self. So, after having focussed initially on that named 'I' then the grasping at the 'I' as truly existent starts.

#### **Second Type of View of Transitory Collection**

After that one generates attachment, grasping at true existence. Here we are talking about the attachment that grasps at true existence after having focussed on 'mine'. After the first view of the transitory collection, grasping at inherently existing 'I' is generated, one starts to name as 'mine' the various phenomena such as the five aggregates, the sense powers and so on, and then grasp at an inherently existing 'mine'.

The second type of view of the transitory collection generates the true grasping attachment that focuses on that 'mine'. Then in dependence upon that grasping at a truly existent 'mine' other delusions are generated, and then the various types of karma are generated. So one starts to circle within cyclic existence in the same way as a bucket traverses a well. Here the traversing refers to the cycling of sentient beings in samsara. Chandrakirti uses the bucket in a well as a metaphor for the situation of sentient beings in cyclic existence. That's why it says in the fourth line that one starts to wander 'without freedom like a bucket in the well'.

Becoming aware of this situation of the migrators, and seeing how, like a bucket in a well, they are travelling or circling without freedom in cyclic existence, a bodhisattva generates compassion. So Chandrakirti is saying here, 'I praise whatever becomes that compassion for migrators'. This is the praise to the compassion focussing on sentient

beings. This is not just praising compassion, and explaining a particular type of compassion, but it also explains how to meditate on the generation of this compassion.

Next week we can go into the six ways in which sentient beings are like the bucket in the well. This is very important, because in general we might know that compassion is the wish for others to be free from suffering but if, in addition one knows how that suffering is generated, then one knows the way sentient beings have to cycle in cyclic existence, and are bound to that suffering. Then one's compassion will become that much more stable and stronger. This is explained with those six points. We can do this next time.

What are the three dharmas?

Student: Compassion, non-dual awareness, bodhicitta.

Geshe-la: How would you posit that great compassion? Which great compassion are we talking about here?

Student: Is it the great compassion of seven-point cause-and-effect?

Geshe-la: In general that is correct. We already decided that the bodhicitta that is explained here doesn't refer to actual bodhicitta. What was the reason we said why it couldn't be actual bodhicitta?

Student: Because it is a cause for bodhisattvas.

Geshe-la: As we said last time the three dharmas that are shown here are called the dharmas of ordinary beings, and the bodhicitta that is explicitly shown here is not actual bodhicitta, because it is shown as the cause of bodhisattva. However, it would be a mistake to say that actual bodhicitta is not shown here at all. The bodhicitta shown explicitly is the bodhicitta likened to the bark of sugar cane. Implicitly the actual bodhicitta is shown, because it refers here to the three dharmas of ordinary beings. Here the ordinary beings are ordinary bodhisattvas, so it is showing the three dharmas of ordinary bodhisattvas. Therefore it has to show actual bodhicitta, but it does it implicitly rather than explicitly.

It also posits the non-dual awareness as a cause of bodhisattvas from the point of view that most bodhisattvas of dull faculty realise emptiness before entering the Mahayana path, that is, they realise emptiness before generating bodhicitta. We explained before how it is the cause even for bodhisattvas of sharp faculty. Again there's no contradiction, because even though Chandrakirti talks explicitly from the point of view of bodhisattvas of dull faculty, he doesn't exclude the bodhisattvas with sharp faculty.

From the Prasangika point of view only bodhisattvas following the Svatarika-Madhyamika or Mind-Only point of view would be bodhisattvas that haven't realised emptiness. Those bodhisattvas first train in great compassion and bodhicitta, and then realise emptiness.

Most bodhisattva of dull faculty realise emptiness before entering the Mahayana path, before generating bodhicitta. Since that is the case, it is all right to posit those three dharmas as a cause of a bodhisattva, as they are the causes for most bodhisattvas. Since most bodhisattvas realise emptiness before entering the path, there's no mistake in positing those three dharmas as the cause of a bodhisattva.

So we come to the three types of compassion, compassion focussing merely on sentient beings, compassion focussing on dharmas and compassion focussing on the non-focus. Here the first type of compassion, compassion focussing

<sup>3</sup> Tib.: *rang-bshin gis med-pa*; since *rang-bshin* is usually translated as 'nature', i.e. the nature of the cup, it seems logical to translate this as 'not existing naturally'.

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merely on sentient beings, is probably shared by all types of religions. However I think the other two types of compassion can only be found in the continuum of a Buddhist, because they involve the realisation of subtle impermanence and so on. In the same way as we have three types of compassion there are also three types of love.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson*

*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*

*Edited Version*

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Please generate a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings. For that purpose I'm now going to listen to the profound Mahayana dharma, and make the determination that I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings.'

### *Prostration to Compassion Focussing on Sentient beings (cont.)*

Now, since I wish to compose a homage having clearly differentiated the instances of compassion by their way of engaging instances of the object of contemplation, I stated:

*Starting grasping at self initially naming 'I'  
Generating attachment for phenomena naming 'mine'  
Praise to whatever becomes compassion for  
migrators*

*Traversing without freedom like a bucket in a well.*

Those transitory beings, before intensely grasping at mine, intensely grasp the mere self to exist truly after self-grasping has intimately discriminated, thinking the non-existent self to be existent. They intensely grasp all types of phenomena other than the object of I-grasping by thinking 'mine'.

These transitory beings intensely grasping at 'I' and 'mine' are very tightly bound by the rope of karma and delusions. They enter depending on being impelled by consciousness, the pulley operator. They traverse without a break in the great well of cyclic existence, down from the peak of existence arriving at the depths of 'suffering without respite'. They impel themselves to go downward and correspondingly have to be pulled up with effort. Even though they have the three, the afflictions of not-knowing etc, karma and the heavy affliction of birth, the earlier, later and intermediate order hasn't been ascertained. Since they are completely overwhelmed by the suffering of suffering and suffering of change every single day they remain, never going beyond the state of a bucket in a well. Therefore, since a bodhisattva joyfully wants to rescue them, having deeply contemplated their suffering of suffering with compassion, I strongly prostrate at the very beginning to the baghawati great compassion alone. This is the bodhisattvas compassion focusing on sentient beings.

Last week we started with the first of the three types of compassion, the compassion that merely takes sentient beings as its object. We said that here one generates compassion for migrators by reflecting on how they are wandering in cyclic existence without any freedom. They are like a bucket in a well, under the control of self-grasping, as a result of grasping at the self as being truly existent, after having focussed on the meaning of that named 'I'. Then after that, they generate attachment

towards true existence of the phenomena named 'mine'.

### **Six Ways Sentient Beings Are Like a Bucket in a Well**

Here the bucket in a well is used as a metaphor for the situation of sentient beings in cyclic existence.

In the past in India, and even today, they dig these very deep wells, and to get the water they used the mechanism of a windlass at the top. The bucket is tied to the rope, and the rope goes over the wheel of the windlass, and this pulls the bucket up and down. The word that is translated here as 'bucket' means 'that which brings the water up from the well'. In this context it refers to the bucket.

Lama Tsong Khapa says that a bucket in a well and sentient beings are similar in six respects.

1. The bucket is very tightly bound by a rope.
2. For its up and down movement, the bucket is impelled by a pulley operator.
3. Without any interruption the bucket goes from the top of the well straight down to the bottom of the well.
4. The bucket travels down through its own power, and has to be pulled up with effort.
5. It is difficult to ascertain the beginning, middle and end of the bucket's journey.
6. Many many times every day, day after day after day the bucket goes up and down, up and down, up and down.

### **How Sentient Beings are Similar to a Bucket**

1. Sentient beings are similar to the bucket in that the rope of karma and delusions very tightly binds them. Because the rope of karma and delusions very tightly binds sentient beings, they don't have much choice with regard to where they go. Attaining liberation means to become free from the bounds of karma and delusion.
2. Just as the bucket depends upon the pulley operator in order to enter the well, in the same way sentient beings are also impelled by their own operator, which is consciousness.
3. In the same way as the bucket goes straight from the top of the well down to the very bottom of the well, sentient beings are also traversing, without a break, the great well of cyclic existence - down from the peak of existence to the very depth of the suffering without respite. The highest one can go in cyclic existence is the realm called the peak of existence, and the lowest one can go is the hell realm called suffering without respite.
4. In the same way as a bucket goes down the well through its own weight, and then has to be pulled up with effort, sentient beings will also impel themselves to the depth of cyclic existence. Similarly, great effort has to be exerted in order to go up in cyclic existence. Strictly speaking, however, one cannot say that sentient beings go down in cyclic existence without any effort, because the karma still has to be created.

Creating the causes for the lower realms is extremely easy and comes naturally to sentient beings, while creating the causes for a higher rebirth doesn't come naturally, and requires great effort. Therefore the Buddha said that

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those sentient beings taking rebirth from the higher realms to the lower realms equal all the grains of sand on the ground. The sentient beings that take rebirth from the lower migrations into the happy realms will be like the grains of sand we can find on our fingers if we pick up a few grains from the ground. So this shows that one goes down very easily while going up is very difficult. We have to apply this to our own experience and practice, thinking about our own karma, and the number of virtuous and non-virtuous karmas we create. Then we should apply it to the situation of others in such a way as to generate compassion.

5. The next similarity is that there's no definiteness with regard to beginning, middle and end. One cannot definitely say what is the beginning of the journey of the bucket, what is the latter part and what is the intermediate part. In the same way there is no definite order with regard to the twelve links that show the movement of sentient beings in cyclic existence.

### The Twelve Links

The twelve links can be divided into three classes, the affliction of the delusions, the affliction of karma and the affliction of birth etc.

Within the class of **affliction by the delusions** are the links of:

- ∞ Ignorance (dependent link 1),
- ∞ Craving (dependent link 8),
- ∞ Grasping (dependent link 9).

Into the class of **karmic afflictions** fall the dependant links of:

- ∞ Throwing or compounding karma (dependent link 2),
- ∞ Becoming (dependent link 10).

That completes five of the twelve dependent links.

The other seven dependent links fall into the category of **affliction of birth etc.**

- ∞ Consciousness (dependent link 3),
- ∞ Name and form (dependent link 4),
- ∞ Six sources (dependent link 5),
- ∞ Contact (dependent link 6),
- ∞ Feeling (dependent link 7),
- ∞ Birth (dependent link 11),
- ∞ Aging and death (dependent link 12).

Of course, in general there's a beginning, middle and end to one set of those twelve interdependent links. However, if we look at the situation of existence in samsara as a whole, then it will be impossible to say which of those twelve dependent links came first. For example, even though we generally say that the dependent link of birth is classified as a resultant suffering dependent link arising from the dependent links that fall into the category of the truth of origin, it is implicit that in taking birth, one is also creating further causes for future rebirth in cyclic existence.

Implicit in taking rebirth under the control of karma of delusions is that one again creates virtuous and non-virtuous karma, causes for future rebirths in samsara. One takes rebirth with a whole lot of virtuous and non-

virtuous karmic potentials, which then further impel oneself to create different types of actions, have different experiences and so on. Because of that, it is very difficult to ascertain the link with which cyclic existence started.

6. The sixth way in which sentient beings are like the bucket in a well is that in the same way as the bucket in a well goes up and down, day after day after day, so too every single day sentient beings are completely overwhelmed by the suffering of suffering, and the suffering of change without respite. Therefore they never go beyond the state of being within cyclic existence. Every day one experiences the suffering of suffering, or mental or physical pain, suffering of change and pervasive compounded suffering.

### Developing Compassion

Therefore then, after deeply contemplating their suffering with compassion, a bodhisattva joyfully wants to rescue sentient beings. So Chandrakirti says, 'I prostrate at the beginning to the bhagavati great compassion alone'.

Here, by reflecting on the way in which sentient beings are bound to cyclic existence, and the way they circle within cyclic existence without any choice, one will then generate strong compassion for sentient beings, even though these are actually sufferings that one might not see directly with one's eyes. So in order for one to generate compassion it is not necessary that we observe the suffering of others directly. By reflecting upon the way they circle in cyclic existence, one will generate a very deep compassion for sentient beings.

From *Illumination*:

*Showing how they harmonise by way of the six characteristics isn't just to generate an understanding of how sentient beings wander in cyclic existence. Then, if you wonder what the purpose is: Previously, even though it was explained that if one wishes to enter the Mahayana one needs to generate great compassion, the way of generating compassion by meditating one what type of object wasn't explained. Therefore, here one meditates on the way sentient beings wander in cyclic existence without freedom as explained.*

What is the agent that is keeping sentient beings circling in cyclic existence? It is the extremely disturbed and unsubsdued mind alone. In what place does one go round, and in what manner? One circles from the peak of cyclic existence down to the hells called Suffering Without Respite, and the various realms of existence between. There's never a time or occasion when one is not wandering in cyclic existence. What are the causes and conditions through which one is circling? One is circling through the power of karma and delusions. Through the power of non-meritorious karma and the concordant delusions one circles in the lower migrations. Through the power of meritorious karma, immoveable karma and the concordant delusions one circles in the happy migrations. With regard to the first no effort is needed - it comes naturally.

*The second is difficult since the causes need to be created with great effort.*

Geshe Putchum related his whole Lam Rim practice to meditation on the twelve links, by relating the practice of

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the three capable beings to the meditation on the twelve dependent links. If we reflect on the first three dependent links, which deal with how one accumulates karma, this would generate an awareness of the happiness of future lives. It would generate the motivation of the small capable being, where one becomes aware of one's karma and the necessity to accumulate virtuous karma. Reflecting on the rest of the twelve dependent links, and how one takes rebirth through karma and delusions generates the motivation of the medium capable being. Generating an aversion to any type of rebirth in cyclic existence, one recognises the necessity of abandoning taking rebirth in cyclic existence altogether, or of abandoning any type of contaminated karma and delusion.

Having reflected on one's own situation in that manner, if one then reflects on how all other sentient beings are also in the same difficult situation, then one would generate the motivation of the great capable practitioner, the Mahayana motivation.

As Lama Tsong Khapa says in his *Illumination*:

*A beginner who hasn't previously manifested some renunciation by contemplating on the way oneself is wandering in cyclic existence won't find the suffering of others unbearable when reflecting on that in relation to others. It is as Chandrakirti said in his commentary on the Four Hundred Stanzas. First one has to contemplate in relation to oneself, and then meditate in relation to sentient beings.*

If one first reflects on suffering in relation to other sentient beings then one won't be able to generate a very strong compassion. In order to generate a very strong compassion one needs to first meditate on suffering in relation to oneself. If we can relate the suffering of other sentient beings to our own experience, then the compassion we generate for them will be much stronger.

*Having clarified that point, then there comes a doubt. Is meditating on the way sentient beings are afflicted by suffering, and the origin of suffering in cyclic existence, enough to induce great compassion, or are other conditions needed?*

This arises because, for example, arhats have the mere understanding of how sentient beings cycle in cyclic existence and suffer in cyclic existence. So are further conditions needed or not? The answer is yes, other conditions are needed.

*If one sees the suffering of an enemy then not only won't one find that unbearable but also one will generate joy. When seeing the suffering of someone that has neither benefited nor harmed us one will wave it off indifferently because of not liking the person. When seeing the suffering of a friend we find it unbearable. The more we like that person the more intense will be our inability to bear that they're suffering. Therefore, the need to generate sentient beings as likeable and cherishable is a very important point. According to the great scholars of the past, there are two systems for generating sentient beings in a pleasant aspect. The first system, followed by Chandrakirti, which is outlined in his commentary on the Four Hundred Stanzas, is that one reflects on how since beginningless times sentient beings have been one's friend many*

*times over, in the aspect of one's mother, father etc. Then one is able to bear being in cyclic existence in order to liberate those sentient beings. This system was also followed by, for example, the great Chandragomin and Kamalashila. Shantideva pioneered the second system.*

The first system refers, of course, to the seven point cause-and-effect method of generating bodhicitta, first reflecting on how sentient beings have been one's mother, then reflecting on the kindness of the mother, making determination to repay the kindness and so on.

Here sentient beings are established as near and dear by meditating on them as having been one's mother in the past. It would take a very, very hard, rough mind not to be moved by that type of meditation. Even though superficially we sometimes feel that we don't get on with our mother, and we have certain resentments towards her, if you think about these points of the meditation in great depth, it is virtually impossible not to be affected in a positive way. It will be impossible not to see other sentient beings as more near and dear.

The second method of generating bodhicitta is the method of exchanging self and others. Here we first meditate on equalising self and others, realising that just as one wants happiness and doesn't want suffering, so other sentient beings also want happiness and don't want suffering. Therefore one realises that there's no difference between oneself and others. Then one reflects in various ways on the disadvantages of the self-cherishing and the benefits of cherishing others. Here establishing other sentient beings as near and dear, in a pleasant aspect, is done by reflecting on the benefits of cherishing others and the disadvantages of cherishing self.

By doing this meditation, and establishing sentient beings as extremely cherishable and likeable, as near and dear, in a pleasant aspect, then if one reflects on the suffering of sentient beings, the compassion and love that is generated is like the compassion of a mother for her only child. If a mother has only one child and that child is afflicted by some severe illness, the mother will generate very strong concern, love and compassion for her only child. Likewise the compassion that one generates by doing this meditation, reflecting on the suffering of sentient beings after establishing them as near and dear will be as strong and intense as the compassion of a mother for her sick and only child.

If we generate that type of compassion, then it makes sense to praise great compassion in the homage. If we just recite the homage as mere words then it is quite meaningless. Then we might think Chandrakirti just praised great compassion in order to be different from other scholars, that he was just another scholar trying to be more clever than other scholars. In order to get the taste of this homage to compassion, one has to gain this experience in meditation. Chandrakirti, in this homage, basically outlined the whole path to enlightenment.

That completes the outline, homage to compassion taking merely sentient beings as its object. Next time we can go onto the compassion that focuses on dharmas.

The first two verses pay homage to great compassion in



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general. It is also very good to memorise the next verse reading,

*Starting grasping at self initially naming 'I'  
Generating attachment for phenomena naming  
'mine'  
Praise to whatever becomes compassion for  
migrators  
Traversing without freedom like a bucket in a well.*

Since this verse pays homage to the compassion merely taking sentient beings as its object, it is very good to memorise. So you should memorise it.

I have received a letter asking us to do 21 Tara praises, if that is impossible then the short praise and if that is impossible the mantra, for the long life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Some oracles and high Lamas advice that 100 million had to be accumulated. Maybe it might be a good idea to do a special puja. It is also good to do them at home, because it is for His Holiness. There is nothing better than doing a practice for one's teacher.

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

*Edited Version*

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# Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

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

དབྱུག་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བརྟུགས་པོ།

30 April 2002

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As usual please generate a virtuous motivation for the listening to the teaching, thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and for that purpose, I'm now going to listen to the profound Mahayana teaching and then practice it.

Last time we finished the compassion that merely takes sentient beings as its object, which is one of the three types of compassion. Here, a very important point is that we don't just intellectually understand what this type of compassion means, but that we also put what we learn into practice, so that we actually develop and increase our compassion. If we don't increase and develop our compassion now while we have the opportunity, then that would be a very great loss.

## 1.2.2 *Compassion Focussing<sup>1</sup> on Dharmas and Non-Focus*

### Compassion Focussing on Dharmas

First we will talk about the compassion that takes dharmas as its object.

*Chandrakirti: In order to clarify compassion focusing on dharma and focusing on non-focus I stated:*

They, seeing migrators as unstable and empty of Mere inherent existence like a moon in stirred water

'Praise to whatever becomes compassion' has to be added to this.

It is important to know how we have to meditate to generate this type of compassion. We already know how we generate the first type of compassion, by meditating on the way sentient beings are bound to cyclic existence through the twelve links. Here it explains how one has to meditate in order to generate the compassion focussing on dharmas, which is basically meditating on impermanence.

*From Illumination: Praise to whatever becomes compassion for migrators after having seen them disintegrating moment by moment like the moon moving in water stirred by wind. This is the homage to the compassion focusing on Dharmas.*

We have to understand how reflecting on impermanence can help us to generate a compassion that is superior to the compassion that was explained before. We have to reflect on the way sentient beings create lots of suffering

and non-virtuous karma for themselves because of not having realised impermanence.

Without having realised impermanence one grasps at permanence. Then because of grasping at permanence lots of sufferings and non-virtues are created. In the same way, if a person has realised impermanence then there is no grasping or attachment for this life. However, if a person hasn't realised impermanence then exactly the opposite happens: there's lots of grasping and attachment for this life, lots of non-virtue created, and lots of suffering.

### Compassion Focussing on Non-Focus

*From Illumination: Praise to whatever becomes compassion for migrators after having seen them, even though appearing to be inherently established, to be empty of being inherently established like the form of a moon in stirred water. This is the homage to compassion without focus.*

Here the meditator focuses on sentient beings who haven't realised emptiness, and who because of this create various karmas, and in that way stay in cyclic existence and experience various sufferings.

It is as the Buddha said in the sutra requested by Pagpa Yul Khor Kyong, 'since migrators don't know emptiness, peace and non-generation<sup>2</sup> they started to wander in samsara. The compassionate ones guide them with method and hundreds of analyses.

As it is necessary to realise emptiness in order to be liberated from cyclic existence, it is important that one tries to understand emptiness. It is also important that one tries to understand the subject of impermanence, which is slightly less difficult to understand than emptiness. We should relate this to our own practice by reflecting on impermanence and emptiness according to our potential. We should try to see that if one doesn't realise emptiness then, because of true grasping, delusions are generated, and through delusions karma is generated, and how through that process one continues to stay in cyclic existence. This is how we should relate it to our own practice. It will be very beneficial if, as we go through the text, we relate it to our own mind and to our practice. Even if we can't realise emptiness in this life we place imprints in our mind to realise it in the future.

If we read the root text then it becomes very clear that all three types of compassion focus on sentient beings, or migrators. They take migrators, or sentient beings, as their object.

From Illumination:

*Sometimes the two phenomena, the reflection of the moon in a part of very clear water pervaded by ripples because of a slight wind, and its momentary disintegration simultaneously with that of the water, which is the basic object focused on before the reflection, appear directly observable. Then the superior beings, namely those that are proficient in these ways, see momentarily changing impermanence and the lack of the appearing moon's nature.*

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<sup>1</sup> The Tibetan word *mig-pa* can mean to concentrate ones mind on, to think or to meditate. I think here it is more in the context of the first. Suffering migrators are the focal point of compassion and the apprehended object is 'the goodness if they were free from suffering'.

<sup>2</sup> Three doors to liberation

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*In the same way as in the example, bodhisattvas overcome by compassion see sentient beings abiding in the ocean of the view of the transitory collections that is fed by the wide blue river of ignorance and stirred by the wind of the mistaken conceptions. (As we know, in order for anger or attachment to arise, first the mind has to be prepared by the misleading conceptions. In order for attachment to arise, misleading conceptions have to first generate the object as being very desirable to one's own mind. After that attachment arises.)*

*They abiding before them, similar to the moon in the sky, like reflections of their black and white karma. Having taken them as their object of meditation while seeing them burdened with the compounded suffering of disintegrating moment by moment and lacking natural existence they generate great compassion for them.*

*This comes from having contemplated sentient beings as endearing and their way of wandering in cyclic existence, as was explained previously.*

*Ignorance is mentioned separately even though the view of the transitory collections is ignorance. This was done with the self-grasping at phenomena that induces the view of the transitory collections in mind.*

## **How Are the Three Types of Compassion Different?**

### **Aspect and Focus**

Having gone through how one has to meditate in order to generate those different types of compassion, then the question arises, what differentiates those three types of compassion? Are they different by way of aspect or are they different by way of focus? All three types of compassion are the same in arising in the **aspect** of wishing their object, sentient beings, to be free from suffering. So all three types of compassion are the same in aspect. Even though they are differentiated by **focus**, the three types of compassion are the still same in that they focus on sentient beings.

### **1. Compassion Merely Focussing on Sentient Beings**

The first type of compassion is called compassion focussing merely on sentient beings. Here the importance lies with the use of 'merely', because it is not as if the other types of compassion don't focus on sentient beings. There's no compassion that doesn't focus on sentient beings, because every compassion takes sentient beings as its object. The definition of the first type of compassion is **compassion as well as not directly held either by the wisdom that realises sentient beings as being impermanent, nor by the wisdom realising sentient beings as lacking inherent existence**. So the first part is that it is compassion and secondly, it is not directly held either by the wisdom realising sentient beings to be impermanent, nor the wisdom realising sentient beings' lack of inherent existence.

### **2. Compassion Focussing on Dharmas**

**Compassion as well as being directly held by the wisdom realising sentient beings as impermanent** is the definition of compassion focussing at dharmas.

### **3. Compassion Focussing on Non-Focus**

**Compassion as well as being directly held by the**

**wisdom realising sentient beings lack of inherent existence** is the definition of the third type of

compassion.

As we said before, all three types of compassion are the same in aspect, as they have the same way of apprehending the object. This means that they apprehend 'the goodness if they were free from suffering'.

That is all that the compassion apprehends. If we just said that compassion apprehended suffering itself, then that would create various problems. Actually the way the compassion looks at sentient beings is to see that it would be very good if sentient beings were to be free from suffering. That's the way compassion apprehends its object - that's its aspect. In this respect all three types of compassion are the same.

So what is the difference? The difference is that the first type of compassion focuses merely on sentient beings. Here, 'merely' means that sentient beings haven't been differentiated or qualified in any way. One hasn't thought about sentient beings in any particular way, one just thinks about sentient beings and how good it would be if they could be free from suffering.

The compassion focussing on dharmas focuses on sentient beings that have been distinguished as being impermanent. Here there's also the sequence that the second type of compassion focuses on sentient beings that have already been distinguished as being impermanent. The third type of compassion focuses on sentient beings that have been distinguished as lacking inherent existence. The first type of compassion focuses on sentient beings that haven't been distinguished in either of those two ways.

In order to have the third type of compassion one has to have the realisation of sentient beings as being impermanent. We can say that if a person has generated the second type of compassion there is a pervasion that that person has realised impermanence. In the same way, there's a pervasion that if a person has generated the third type of compassion then that person has realised emptiness. In order to have the first type of compassion neither of those two realisations is necessary.

If you think about the process, the way it works is that first of all the practitioner realises impermanence, and then meditates on the impermanence of sentient beings. Through that, sentient beings will obviously appear differently to the meditator. One has distinguished sentient beings as actually being impermanent. So they will appear differently to the meditator's mind. Therefore then, the compassion that is generated for sentient beings is also different. In the same way also by reflecting on the lack of natural existence of sentient beings they will also appear differently to the meditator's mind, and then the compassion that is induced through that will also be different.

We can finish at this point for tonight, and then finish the remaining two points with regard to the three types of compassion, the etymology, and the boundaries of the three types of compassions, next Tuesday.

Geshe-la: First of please, what are the three types of

compassion?

Student: Compassion merely focussing on sentient beings, compassion focussing on dharmas, and compassion focussing on non-focus.

Geshe-la: Is there a pervasion that if it is compassion focussing on sentient beings, that it is the first type of compassion?

Student: No.

Geshe-la: So what is the meaning of the 'merely'?

Student: Compassion that is not qualified by impermanence or inherent existence.

Geshe-la: Very good. What do we understand under the compassion focussing on dharmas?

Student: Compassion focussing on the impermanence of sentient beings.

Geshe-la: What type of person is needed for that type of compassion?

Student: A person who has realised subtle impermanence.

Geshe-la: What do we understand under compassion focussing on non-focus?

Student: One who has realised emptiness.

Geshe-la: Which type of selflessness do we talk about here?

Student: The selflessness of phenomena.

Geshe-la: The lack of inherently existing person is the selflessness of person isn't it, not the selflessness of phenomena.

Student: [answer inaudible].

Geshe-la: In the Prasangika school the two types of selflessness are differentiated by the way of the focal object, and not by way of the object of negation. In the Svatantrika-Madhyamika school the two types of selflessnesses are differentiated by way of the object of negation. For the Prasangika school, whether it is selflessness of person, or selflessness of phenomena depends on the object itself.

Is the selflessness here subtle or coarse selflessness?

Student: Subtle selflessness.

Geshe-la: What is the coarse selflessness?

Student: Lack of a person being a self-sufficient substantial existent.

Geshe-la: Is the impermanence coarse impermanence or subtle impermanence?

Student: Subtle impermanence.

Geshe-la: What is subtle impermanence?

Student: That which is recognised by yogic direct cognisers that recognises that things change moment by moment.

Geshe-la: Other types of impermanence are not understood by direct yogic perception? If you posit subtle impermanence, you just posit it from the side of the object actually, you don't need to identify the subject. Direct yogic perception will realise a glass, but the glass is not

subtle impermanence.

Subtle impermanence is the momentariness of impermanent phenomena. There's no moment of abiding, as impermanent phenomena are changing moment by moment continuously. Coarse impermanence is something we can observe. We can observe that a person changes from year to year, or even from week to week. We can directly observe that the person is not the same this week as they were last week. That weekly change comes about only because the person is changing moment by moment. Let's say a person has a life span of one hundred years. Even after one minute has passed in the life span of that person, they will have changed.

Actually the person who goes to bed in the evening is not the same person who wakes up in the morning. Even though intellectually we say that it is the same person, and we accept that the person is changing moment by moment, we will not really have the feeling that the person is changing moment by moment. Maybe it is because the momentariness is not something we can observe directly. So even though superficially we will assert that we are changing every moment, we will not actually have the feeling that this is the case. Rather we will have the feeling that we are always the same.

If it is any of those three types of compassion there is a pervasion that it is great compassion. It has to be compassion that arises in the aspect wishing to rescue all sentient beings from their sufferings. This type of compassion is higher than the compassion one can find in the continuum of arhats.

Where do the hearers and self-liberators come from? Where are they generated from?

Students: From powerful able ones.

Geshe-la: How are the hearers and self-liberators born from the powerful able one? Are they born as in the same way as a baby is born from the mother?

Student: They are born from the teaching on dependent arising.

Geshe-la: Where are the buddhas born from?

Students: Bodhisattvas.

Geshe-la: What do we understand by 'a bodhisattva'? Is a person who has bodhicitta in their mental continuum a bodhisattva?

Student: What type of bodhicitta?

Geshe-la: Any of the two types.

Student: The second.

Geshe-la: What do you mean by the first and second?

Student: Contrived or wishing bodhicitta, and actual bodhicitta.

Geshe-la: Take the subject 'arya buddhas<sup>3</sup>': does it follow that it is a bodhisattva?

Student: To be an arya one has to be on the path of

<sup>3</sup> A difference is made between buddha and arya buddha. Buddha is synonymous with resultant dharma kaya, permanent, and encompasses the four buddha bodies. Arya buddha is impermanent and refers specifically to the person that became enlightened.

seeing.

Geshe-la: The question is whether an arya buddha is a bodhisattva?

Student: Buddhas are born from bodhisattvas.

Geshe-la: Think about it. It actually becomes very simple. The bodhisattvas are those who practise the Mahayana path, at the time of the learner stage. Once one becomes enlightened, one has gone beyond that stage, so one is no longer a bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas will always be sentient beings, so a bodhisattva is necessarily a sentient being. Buddhas are not classified as sentient beings any more, they have gone beyond that. So therefore if a being has bodhicitta there's no pervasion that they have to be a bodhisattva.

It is good to know this distinction but don't worry about it, there are many who also think as you do.

If we look at it in reference to the five paths, the paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning, then the first four paths are the learner's path. As long as a practitioner is on any of those four paths then they are a bodhisattva. Once the practitioner has attained the path of no-more-learning then the practitioner goes beyond the learner's path and become a buddha. They are no longer a bodhisattva, however they still have bodhicitta.

Once a practitioner becomes a buddha then they have completed the practice of the path. The development of all the qualities is done at the time of the learner's stage. This has been completed and achieved to the final stage by the time of the path of no-more-learning. So there's no question that a buddha has great compassion and bodhicitta

Geshe-la: How would you qualify a bodhisattva?

Student: A practitioner with bodhicitta, on the final learner path and a sentient being.

Geshe-la: If you said, 'a sentient being with bodhicitta' then that perfectly captures it. Also that person's Mahayana lineage has to be ripened by great compassion. We explained previously the Mahayana lineage becomes ripened through great compassion.

We have established how the hearers and self-liberators are generated from buddhas. Where are the buddhas born from?

Students: From bodhisattvas.

Geshe-la: How are they born from bodhisattvas?

Student: From bodhisattvas of their own previous continuum and from bodhisattvas that became their teachers.

Geshe-la: Where are the bodhisattvas born from?

Students: The mind of compassion, non-dual awareness and bodhicitta.

Geshe-la: What is the root of non-dual awareness and bodhicitta?

Students: Compassion!

Geshe-la: By reflecting on this sequence then we can see how everything depends on the root of great compassion.

Why did Chandrakirti expressively praise only great compassion alone at the beginning of the text, and not pay homage to buddhas, bodhisattvas and so on expressively.

Student: Because compassion is the one factor that makes a Buddha. Without it one cannot become a buddha.

Geshe-la: Because great compassion is important at the beginning, middle and end. What is the compassion that is the direct object of the homage?

Student: Great compassion by itself.

Geshe-la: Does it specify the great compassion of bodhisattvas?

Student: No.

Geshe-la: So it doesn't pay homage to the great compassion in the continuum of bodhisattvas?

Students: No, yes.

Geshe-la: Some say no, and some say yes. Even though it doesn't pay homage expressively to the great compassion in the continuum of bodhisattvas, that compassion is still included implicitly.

I have the feeling that you are following the classes and listening to them very well. Thank you for following the classes so well. Thank you very much.

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

*Edited Version*

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# Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

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

དབྱེ་མ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བརྒྱགས་པོ།

7 May 2002

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Establish a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and for that purpose I am now going to listen to, and then practise the profound Mahayana Dharma'. After having listened to the profound Mahayana Dharma, one has to practice what one hears, and in that way accomplish one's purpose.

We have completed the explanation of how to meditate in order to generate the three different types of compassion. We also talked about the definition of the three different types of compassion. What remains is the etymology, and the boundaries of the three types of compassion.

## Etymology of Three Types of Compassion

1. Take the subject first compassion – it follows there is a reason why it is called compassion focusing on sentient beings – because 'compassion focusing on sentient beings' is the short form without the word 'merely' for 'focusing merely on sentient beings afflicted by suffering that become the focal object without having been differentiated by impermanence and selflessness.

The first type of compassion is called compassion focussing on sentient beings. The longer term is compassion that focuses merely on sentient beings. It is called like that because it takes as its object 'merely sentient beings', which are not differentiated as being impermanent, and not differentiated as lacking inherent existence. This compassion merely takes sentient beings as its object. It is in the aspect of wishing migrators to be free from suffering and it focuses on sentient beings. What the 'merely' eliminates is the differentiation of sentient beings as being either impermanent, or as lacking inherent existence.

Remember what we covered last week. We said that the person who has the first type of compassion doesn't need to realise impermanence or selflessness, and the person who has the second type of compassion has realised impermanence and focuses on sentient beings as having been differentiated as impermanent, while the third type of compassion needs someone who has realised selflessness, and focuses on sentient beings that have been differentiated as lacking inherent existence.

As it says in *Illumination* by Lama Tsong Khapa: *having considered that, compassion focusing on sentient beings is a short name for the sake of convenience.*

2. The second type of compassion is called 'compassion focusing on dharmas'. The dharmas being referred to is the basis in dependence upon which the person is imputed, the five aggregates. Again, in order to shorten the name, one doesn't say compassion focussing on

sentient beings that have been labelled in dependence on the dharmas of the five aggregates. Rather, one merely says compassion focusing on dharmas.

As it says in *Illumination* by Lama Tsong Khapa: 'focusing on sentient beings labelled on mere dharmas' is expressed as 'focusing on dharmas' without expressively mentioning the words in the middle.

## The Five Aggregates

What are five aggregates that are the basis of imputation of the person?

Students: Form, feeling, recognition, karmic formations and consciousness.

Normally the aggregate called here karmic formations is called compositional factors. The aggregates of form, feeling, recognition, and consciousness are clearly identified. Any other type of aggregate falls into the fourth aggregate, which is why it is called the aggregate of compositional factors.

- ∞ The first aggregate, form, refers to our particular body for example. You are basically familiar with what 'form' means.
- ∞ The second aggregate, feeling, refers to the experiences of happiness, suffering and so forth.
- ∞ The third aggregate is the aggregate of recognition, which refers to the type of consciousness that differentiates between different objects. Recognition is apprehending the particular characteristics of the object, and in that way is able to differentiate them.
- ∞ The fifth aggregate is consciousness.
- ∞ Since there are only five aggregates everything else falls into fourth aggregate, which is the aggregate of compositional factors.

So for example a table would be the aggregate of form, and the impermanence of the table would fall into the fourth aggregate, compositional factors. In the same way all the different types of delusion such as anger, pride, desire and so on, fall into the fourth aggregate of compositional factors.

In the case of human beings the basis of imputation is the five aggregates. In case one takes rebirth in the formless realm then the basis of imputation will only be four aggregates. Most of the time however, the basis of imputation will be the five aggregates.

The person with this type of compassion realises that sentient beings are impermanent. Since they have ascertained that sentient beings are impermanent, then they are able to ascertain that sentient beings are merely labelled on the five aggregates. Since they have ascertained sentient beings as impermanent they realise the lack of a permanent, single, independent person.

When we say permanent, single, independent self, what does 'permanent, single and independent' refer to?

Student: A permanent solidly existing self.

I want to know what those three words refer to. When

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<sup>1</sup> Five sense powers, five sources, four elements etc.

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you say 'permanent self' what does it say? What does singular, or single self refer to? What is the mode of appearance of an independent self?

Sentient beings are changing momentarily, and this shows that sentient beings lack permanence. The lack of permanence of sentient beings is that they are changing momentarily. If we perceive sentient beings as permanent, then we perceive them in exactly the opposite way - we perceive them as not changing momentarily.

- ∞ Sentient beings lack permanence because they are changing momentarily.
- ∞ Sentient beings are empty of being a singular entity because they are established in dependence upon parts.
- ∞ Sentient beings lack an independent existence because they are established in dependence upon causes and conditions.

When we ascertain that sentient beings are impermanent, then in a way we ascertain all of these three characteristics of sentient beings. By ascertaining sentient beings as being impermanent, we ascertain that sentient beings are empty of being permanent, singular and independent.

By ascertaining that sentient beings are empty of being permanent, singular and independent we ascertain that sentient beings are merely labelled on the aggregates. In that way we eliminate sentient beings as existing as a different entity from the basis of imputation, the aggregates.

3. The third type of compassion is compassion focussing on non-focus.

Here focus refers to true existence, and non-focus refers to the lack of true existence. The third type of compassion refers to the compassion that focuses on sentient beings that have been differentiated as lacking true existence. Instead of saying it in a very long version, then one just says compassion that focuses on non-focus. Even though we say compassion focussing on non-focus it would be more correct to say 'compassion without focus. Focus refers to the determined object of true grasping, true existence, while non-focus refers to the lack of the determined object of true grasping.

### **Boundaries of the Three Types of Compassion**

Now we move on to the boundaries of the three types of compassion. Tell me, how many of those three types of compassion can we find in the continuum of a person who hasn't realised impermanence?

Student: One.

How many types of compassion can we find in the continuum of a person who has realised impermanence, but who hasn't realised the lack of true existence.

Student: Two.

Impermanence refers to subtle impermanence. How many of those three types of compassion can we find in the continuum of a person who has realised subtle selflessness?

Student: Three

We can find the third type of compassion in the continuum of a person who has realised subtle selflessness.

In order to develop the second type of compassion one needs to have realised coarse selflessness. The second type of compassion has to be held directly by the wisdom realising coarse selflessness, and the third type of compassion has to be held directly by the wisdom realising subtle selflessness.

How many of the three types of compassion can we find in the mind of a buddha?

[Students give different answers.]

Damien said one, which one?

Damien: The third one.

So Anthony [who said types two and three] was correct. [laughter]

If you think about it, compassion in the continuum of a buddha will be held directly both by the wisdom realising impermanence, and the wisdom realising selflessness.

First all we can say that if it is compassion in the continuum of a buddha, then there's a pervasion that it is both the compassion focussing on dharmas as well as compassion focussing on non-focus. We can also say that if it is compassion in the continuum of a bodhisattva who is abiding in the post-meditational period, then that compassion will also be both the compassion focusing on dharmas and the compassion focussing on non-focus.

Then we come to the compassion in the continuum of a bodhisattva who is abiding in meditational equipoise. That compassion will be the compassion focussing on sentient beings. The reason is because that compassion is not directly held by the wisdom realising coarse or subtle selflessness.

In order for the compassion to be directly held by the wisdom realising coarse or subtle selflessness both the compassion and the wisdom need to exist manifestly in the mind of that person. That condition is present in the continuum of a bodhisattva who is abiding in the post-meditational period. Because they are not in meditative equipoise, both the wisdom realising selflessness as well as the compassion manifestly exist within the bodhisattva's mind.

In the case of a bodhisattva who is abiding in meditative equipoise, then even though the wisdom realising selflessness is manifest, compassion is not manifest. We have to say that compassion still exists within a bodhisattva who is abiding in meditational equipoise, in the same way as we have to say that bodhicitta still exists in the continuum of a bodhisattva who is abiding in meditational equipoise, but that compassion and bodhicitta are not manifest. Rather, they exist in a non-manifest manner.

There are some scholars who make a point of saying that in the continuum of a bodhisattva remaining in meditative equipoise, no compassion or bodhicitta exists. However it would be a mistake to say that. What we say is that compassion and bodhicitta do not exist manifestly,

but they still exist in a latent state. Therefore, since they don't exist manifestly, they cannot be held directly by the wisdom realising emptiness, or coarse selflessness. Therefore that compassion can only be the compassion focussing on sentient beings.

We can also check up within our own mind. If we think about how sentient beings are afflicted by suffering and the lack of happiness, and then generate love and compassion for sentient beings, that love and compassion are manifestly present in our mind at that stage of our meditation. Then, during the meditation on emptiness that mental state of bodhicitta and compassion is not manifest anymore. However, because we motivated very strongly with Bodhicitta and compassion our meditation on emptiness still carried on the force of that love and compassion. So love and compassion are still there, but they are in a latent state.

We could compare this to the example of when we are meditating on calm abiding by taking the visualisation of Shakyamuni Buddha as our meditational object. It would be a distraction if, while we are in single-pointed concentration on the form of Shakyamuni Buddha, compassion for sentient beings arises within our mind because we remember the way they suffer. So a distraction during the course of single-pointed meditation can occur as both virtuous as well as non-virtuous minds. Of course the generation of compassion is incredible important, but sometimes, like during those stages of calm abiding, then it becomes a slight distraction.

Regardless of the type of compassion, all three types of compassion are always in the aspect of aspiring to rescue all sentient beings from all their suffering. Therefore those three types of compassion are superior to the types of compassion that we find in the continuum of hearers and self-liberators. By generating that type of compassion one then generates the thought 'I have to definitely become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings'.

Here a doubt arises. Can any of the three types of compassion be posited as the compassion important at the beginning of the path? We have talked about the compassion being important at the beginning, middle and end, so can any one of the three types of compassion be the compassion that is important at the beginning of the path? Here we have to think of the two types of bodhisattva, bodhisattvas of dull faculty and bodhisattvas of sharp faculty, and the different sequences of generating great compassion, bodhicitta and the realisation of emptiness. As we have said, bodhisattvas of dull faculty generate a great compassion, then conventional bodhicitta and then realise emptiness. Whereas bodhisattvas of sharp faculty generate great compassion, then realise emptiness and then generate bodhicitta. Therefore we can find all three types of compassion at the beginning of the path.

### Pledge of the Author

That completes the homage of the text. Traditionally what follows in a text is the pledge of the author. Even though in this text we don't find an expressive pledge by the author there is no fault. In two of Nagarjuna's treatises, *Root Wisdom*, and *Sixty Reasonings*, the pledge of the author is also not stated expressively. And in the 'Letter

to a King' Nagarjuna states the authors pledge expressively but not the homage. Since Chandrakirti composed the homage after intending to compose the 'Entering the Middle way', the authors pledge is present implicitly.

Normally when an author composes a commentary then at the beginning, after the homage, there are the four limbs of purpose and relation. They are the subject of the text, the purpose of the text, the essential purpose of the text, and the relation of those three.

The **subject** of *Entering The Middle Way* is the profound as well as the extensive.

As we have already explained the *Root Wisdom* explains the profound. Here, Chandrakirti's **purpose** in composing *Entering the Middle Way* is to induce his disciples to practise the *Root Wisdom* in both a profound as well as an extensive manner, by taking the subjects of the extensive from other texts of Nagarjuna such as the *Garland of Madhyamika* and so on.

The **essential** or **final purpose** is for the disciples to reach the perfected state. The disciples will reach the perfected state, which is the essential or final purpose, by practising the *Root Wisdom* in both a profound as well as an extensive manner. So we can see that the essential purpose relies upon the purpose. The essential purpose is related to, and dependent upon the purpose. The purpose is dependent on the subject of *Entering The Middle Way*, and the subject is dependent on the commentary itself. This is the fourth limb, the **relation** between the essential purpose, the purpose, the subject, and the commentary.

That completes the first of the four main outlines, the homage of the text. We said at the beginning that the whole commentary is basically divided into four major outlines that are the homage, the actual body of the commentary, the way the commentary was composed, and as a conclusion there is the dedication of merits.

We have now finished the first major outline, the homage of the text. Next we start with the actual body of the commentary.

### Review

Who is the composer of *Entering the Middle Way*?

Students: Chandrakirti.

Where is Chandrakirti from?

Students: India.

From where in India?

Students: Southern India, Nalanda.

His birth place wasn't Nalanda, but he was of course a Nalanda pandita. Nalanda was his monastery. At one time Chandrakirti acted as the manager of the monastery, and he left all the livestock of the monastery behind in the forest, then when the time came to serve tea to all the monks, there was no milk. So Chandrakirti drew a picture of a cow and then milked the picture. When you can understand emptiness then you can do things that others can't!

With regard to the subject of the text, is *Entering The Middle Way* a commentary with a subject or without a



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subject?

Student: It is a commentary with a subject.

Sometimes even though the commentary has a subject it is a subject without purpose and meaning. Does this commentary have a meaning?

Student: Yes.

Even though they have a subject and a purpose, some commentaries have a purpose that cannot be fulfilled; there is no final purpose. Does this one have a final purpose?

Students: Yes.

Even though some texts have a subject, a purpose and a final purpose these three are completely unrelated. Is there a relationship here?

Students: Yes.

In order to have a good commentary then, we need to have those four characteristics present; there needs to be a subject, the subject needs to have a purpose, there needs also to be a final purpose that can be accomplished, and those three need to be related. Then if all those four characteristics are present in a commentary it will become more valid.

Since *Entering the Middle Way* was first composed in Sanskrit, what is the name of the translator?

Student: Nyima Drakpa.

The earliest translator was Nyima Drakpa. There's also a later translation by Loden Sherab.

Next week is discussion group. The following Tuesday would normally be the exam week, but that is when His Holiness is here, so the exam will be on the following Tuesday, 28 May.

One needs lots of merit for one's studies to be successful. In Tibet, before starting debate the monks would recite the Twenty-One Tara Praises twenty-one times slowly, and then they would recite the *Heart Sutra* nineteen times. They did that every day before debate. Then there are certain times where in the morning Tara praises are recited for the purpose of having success in one's study. Then the long Tara praises will be recited fifty one times.

[Geshe-la gave a chanting demonstration of the slow way of doing the *Twenty-One Praises to Tara* and the *Heart Sutra*.]

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

*Edited Version*

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# DISCUSSION

BLOCK: 2  
WEEK: 5  
14<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2002

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## 16/04

1. Geshe-hla said: "the bodhisattva establishes with a valid cognition the possibility of attaining the state of complete enlightenment free from the two obscurations..." What are these 'obscurations', what causes them and how are they overcome?
  2. How do these 'obscurations' relate to the two 'accumulations'?
  3. What three conditions are necessary in order for a practice to become 'a perfection'?
  4. What steps precede the sharp bodhisattva's understanding of the need to attain enlightenment?
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## 23/04

5. What are the causes that perpetuate samsara? And what is behind these two?
6. Discuss in general how the 12 links of dependent origination describe a self-perpetuating wheel (samsara).
7. Name and list the steps of the two great systems for developing bodhichitta
8. Why is a feeling of likeness and pleasantness needed for a true feeling of compassion?

## 30/04

9. Why is an understanding of emptiness needed to stop our delusions and reach Nirvana?
10. What is the practical benefit of realizing impermanence?

## 7/05

11. What are the five parts of a person (aggregates)? Is the 'basis of imputation' always these five aggregates?
  12. What three features disprove a 'permanent, single, and independent' self?
  13. Why are these three types of compassion (mentioned in 'Entering') superior to hearers' and self-liberators' compassion?
  14. The third type of compassion looks at sentient beings and sees their lack of true existence. Discuss what it means to 'lack true existence'.
  15. Why is a spontaneous feeling of bodhichitta during a Shakyamuni Buddha meditation a distraction and an obstacle to that meditation?
  16. Debate: Because there's no particular purpose of a homage at the beginning of a Buddhist text. Discuss.
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*Tara Institute Study Group 2002 - 'Entering the Middle Way'*

**EXAM**

NAME:

BLOCK: **2**  
WEEK: **6**  
ASSIGNED: **28<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2002**

MARK:

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1. From 'Entering': *"Compassion only, is posited as the seed of a Conqueror's perfect crop, like water for its increase, and like the ripening of state of long-time enjoyment. Therefore, I first praise compassion."*  
Explain the way in which this verse describes (by way of analogy) the importance of compassion in the beginning, middle, and end. [6 marks]

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2. Name the two types of the 'view of transitory collections'. Describe what trouble follows from grasping at these two views. [5 marks]

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3. Give the six features of the bucket in a well, and explain their similarities to sentient beings. [12 marks]

## *Tara Institute Study Group 2002 - 'Entering the Middle Way'*

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4. Why did Lord Tsongkapa express the need to think about our own suffering in order to develop strong compassion for others' suffering? [2 marks]

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5. How does realizing subtle impermanence and emptiness progressively strengthen your compassion for others? [4 marks]

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6. The three Compassions all focus on sentient beings and wish them to be free of pain. How then are they differentiated? [3 marks]

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7. Give the long names for the three types of compassion, and explain their meaning. [6 marks]

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8. List the four features of an authors pledge in Buddhist literature, and demonstrate with 'Entering the Middle Way' [8 marks]