
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Reinforce the motivation you generated earlier.
[Meditation]

Now make sure you cultivate the bodhicitta motivation.

The more we cultivate and develop this altruistic mental attitude or bodhicitta mind within us, the more we will prevent harm to other beings and at the same time enable us to extend more benefit towards other beings.

Always bear in our mind that our thoughts and deeds of benefiting others actually fulfil our own interests as well. Similarly, if we hold any thought of harming others or engage in any deeds that cause harm to others, that also has the same effect of harming ourselves. Based on this understanding, and the benefit that this altruistic mind has for other beings, it is very important to always try to cultivate this intention when you first get up in the morning, thinking: I will do as much as possible to benefit others and to prevent causing harm to them.

In this way, we make a gradual progress on the path in terms of what to achieve and what to abandon on a daily basis.

We left off the commentary at:

Regarding the second which is the wisdom arisen from listening by depending on the scriptures.

The wisdom arisen from listening by depending on the scriptures

Prior to this we covered how you cultivate the wisdom that arises mainly from contemplating, which is in turn dependent on the wisdom which arises from listening.

In terms of the order of the presentation, it presents the result first followed by the cause. Earlier on the text talked about how to gain the wisdom which arises from contemplating in dependence upon reason. So first there are the logical reasons, and then you develop the wisdom arising from contemplation.

Here the text talks about the wisdom arising from listening which primarily depends upon the scriptures, and this wisdom is really the one which leads to the wisdom arising from contemplation. Of course, the scriptures referred to here are those which are very authentic and reliable sources. So we can see the importance of authentic sources in giving rise to the wisdom arising from contemplation.

The verses regarding this read:

51. *The reasoning of the Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness, The Treatise on the Middle Way and so forth Explain that the nature of all things Is established as emptiness.*
52. *Since there are a great many passages, I have not cited them here,*

But have explained just their conclusions For the purpose of meditation.

The commentary reads:

The first four lines advise relying on the great many scriptures which contend emptiness as their definitive meaning or subject matter.

The root text gives examples of reliable and authentic scriptures which we must study in order to gain the wisdom arising from contemplation. The two main texts recommended here are Nagarjuna's middle way text, *The Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness* and his *Treatise on the Middle Way*. The second two lines of the first verse indicate the main subject matter of this text, which is an explanation of the way the nature of all things is established as emptiness.

With regard to the second verse the commentary says:

The next four lines confess the reason why only a few scriptures are cited here.

Therefore, those with intelligence must widely read, gain a definitive ascertainment of the profound emptiness and penetrate to the bottom of the view by relying upon the following:

Here we can note that the root text recommends the *Treatise on the Middle Way* and so forth as sources. The *so forth* includes:

- *Sutrasamucchaya, The Compendium of Sutras* (collection of excerpts from various sutras attributed to Nagarjuna as compiler) - the scripture which establishes emptiness as the definitive meaning.

That is just an example of a scripture in which emptiness is considered as a definitive meaning.

- Nagarjuna's text *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness* establishes emptiness by reason in it.
- Nagarjuna's *Root Verses of the Middle Way* or *Fundamental Wisdom (Mulamadhyamaka-karika)*, which establishes the profound view of emptiness through a myriad of reasons as well as read the rest of Nagarjuna's collection of reasoning.

I taught you these in the past, so now you know that I didn't make a mistake in choosing those texts and you didn't make a mistake in terms of hearing the words of the right texts. Then there are:

- The scriptures of Aryadeva [*Four Hundred Verses*] and Bhavaviveka
- Especially the supreme commentary on the arya's view Buddhapalita
- Chandrakirti's and Shantideva's commentaries

The four great commentaries by Chandrakirti are his *Supplement to the Middle Way* and *Clear Words* and a commentary on Nagarjuna's *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness* and as well as on Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses*. These are the important texts for studying on emptiness. Then there are Shantideva's commentaries.

In short, all the scriptures that unravel the meaning of the emptiness in terms of how all things are fundamentally or originally devoid of inherent existence as presented in the Buddha's profound discourses such as in the mother the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras.

The commentary continues with:

The question: Why is an extensive scriptural citation and reasoning not provided here? This is because there are a great many passages to cite.

Because there are so many passages and scriptures to cite they aren't quoted here. Then the commentary continues

Regarding the line in verse 51, 'The reasoning of the *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*', the *Self-commentary* says, 'This presents the reasoning of dependent origination'. Atisha's *Definitive Compendium of the Essence* also says, 'Through familiarisation with the reasoning of dependent origination'. Atisha's *Definitive Compendium of the Essence* also says, 'Through familiarisation with the reasoning of dependent origination and others, destroy the great demon of grasping at things without any remainder'.

Here the emphasis is on applying the reasoning of dependent origination.

The Kadampa's pith instruction the *Blue Book* (Tib: *Beu bum sNgon po*) also praises the kingly reason of dependent origination.

Many of you have studied this topic in the past so I'm assuming that, as we go through this commentary, you will have some sort of understanding of what we are discussing here. Here the term *dependent origination* refers to the uncommon view of the Prasangika school that everything is dependent on mere imputation. The commentary then explains the significance of emphasising the reason of dependent origination with this quote from the *Blue Book*:

'Meditate on dependent origination in order to eliminate the extreme views of permanence and annihilation'.

This reasoning of dependent origination has the effect of simultaneously eliminating both types of extreme views –the extreme of permanence and the extreme of annihilation. So the reason of dependent origination is a very powerful reason.

The nihilistic view is that the law of karma doesn't exist, and this is countered by the fact that virtuous and non-virtuous actions result in happiness and suffering respectively. If we understand how things are dependent, then that knowledge explicitly eradicates the extreme view of annihilation. Therefore, there is no room for the extreme view of nihilism when we understand the truth of dependent arising or the dependent origination of things.

At the same time, through the realisation of the fact that things are dependent, we understand that things are dependently existent. Then we are automatically refuting the idea of things existing independently or without depending on any other phenomena. With an understanding of dependent origination this view of permanence or eternalism, such as the view that things exist inherently or independently, is implicitly negated.

When we think about it, relying on the reasoning of dependent arising is extremely effective in overcoming the wrong views of both of the two extremes – permanence and annihilation.

As the commentary says, by relying on this, one can truly understand the meaning of emptiness as dependent arising and the meaning of dependent arising as emptiness. These two things, dependent origination and

the emptiness of phenomena, are not separate; rather they are like one entity as they imply the truth of the same thing. That is why the reasoning of dependent origination is effective in realising the middle way, free from both extremes.

It is especially important when you are studying emptiness to make sure that your understanding of emptiness complements your understanding of dependent arising; likewise when you understand dependent arising properly then that complements and reinforces your understanding of emptiness.

Here is a question for you: Explain the quote from the *Blue Book* which says, 'Meditate on dependent origination in order to eliminate the extreme views of permanence and annihilation'.

[Student:] *If it is a phenomena of dependent arising then it arises from causes and conditions and that would defeat the extreme of permanence by showing it is not independent, and it also defeats the extreme of nihilism by showing there is cause and effect.*

So you meditate on dependent origination in order to eliminate the extreme view of permanence and annihilation. You said that by knowing that things depend on causes and conditions, you can overcome the extreme view of annihilation, and also overcome the extreme view of permanence.

[Student:] *If you show that something depends on cause and conditions it cannot be independent.*

That's good. The extreme of permanence means not depending on any other phenomena or any other things, and things existing in their own right.

In the commentary the quote from the *Blue Book* praises the reasoning of dependent origination as the *kingly reason of dependent origination*. It is called the king of all reasons because it eliminates both extreme views together.

At the end of this section, there is a line saying:

Hence [introducing the following syllogistic statement] Given: person and phenomena [i.e. the subject] are empty of inherent existence, because they are dependent originations.

This statement is the basis for meditating on emptiness. If you have gained an understanding just by focusing on this then you should be able to realise the wisdom of emptiness.

Then the commentary continues:

This point is mentioned in the *Sutra Requested by Madropa* (the Naga king) (Tib: *Ma.dros.pas zhus.pai.mDo*):

Whatever produces from conditions is unproduced.

It doesn't have the nature of production in itself.

Whatever depends on conditions is explained to be empty.

Whoever realises emptiness is pious.

Then it continues, 'Whatever is a dependent origination is devoid of its own identity even a tiny bit'.

In place of *devoid of its own identity* we can also say devoid of true existence, inherent existence or existing in its own right. These all have the same meaning.

The commentary also quotes:

As Chandrakirti's *Supplement to the Middle Way*, explains, 'Whatever is dependent arising is identityless'. Also, 'Depending on one thing another thing arises'.

All these scriptures cited in the commentary use dependent origination as a reason to establish that things are devoid of inherent or true existence. As you have studied in the past, you need to understand that *dependent origination* has different connotations depending on the various schools of tenets e.g. dependent in terms of depending on the parts of the things, or depending on things as being merely designated by conceptual thought.

Hopefully you might have some understanding of dependent origination, but what about emptiness? When you hear the word 'emptiness' does it carry any profound meaning or not? When it says that things are empty of inherent existence, and that things do not exist inherently, you should not get the notion that things don't exist at all.

Now the commentary continues:

The second is How One Trains in Special Insight

How one trains in special insight

53. *Thus, whatever is meditation
On selflessness, in that it does not observe
An inherent nature in phenomena,
Is the cultivation of wisdom.*

First we read the commentary:

Having thus presented all phenomena, encompassing sources, constituents and aggregates, ...

This refers to the categories and parts of phenomena.

... as being devoid of true existence, the conclusion is that person and other phenomena are absent of the self that exists by its own nature or inherently.

This gives a guide to engaging in, or meditating on, the fact that all phenomena are empty or devoid of true existence. The implication is that we need to ascertain the object of negation. That is to say, if a person exists truly, or inherently, or exists by itself or in its own right, there has to be a person or a self which exists independently, without depending on any other object. That is, the person should exist from the side of its own uncommon basis of designation. On the basis of the designation, that self or person should be a self that exists independently, and not depending on the aggregates or any other object. As the commentary says:

This is so because if they do have such a unique self-identity, then it should be found upon analysis, ...

In meditation you need to ascertain the negated self. If that self really reflects the ultimate nature of the person then how should the person exist? As it says in the commentary, such a person should exist independently on the uncommon basis of the designation and without depending on anything. Then we investigate whether it is possible to find such a person. Essentially, in your previous seminar you studied the four points of

ascertainment of i.e. the object of negation, the pervasion and the ascertainment of being empty of one or of many. These four logical points of ascertainment should be applied in order to see whether the existence of such a self is tenable or not.

To continue with the commentary:

... however not even an atom of it can be observed and found. Meditating and searching for (the self) in the analysis itself is meditating on the perfection of wisdom. As the *Middling Stages of Meditation* by Acharya Kamalashila says, 'Since you use wisdom to investigate the essence of all things, you practise concentration without objectification. Therefore, you are a practitioner of the concentration of supreme wisdom'.

At this point, we have established the fact that objects are devoid of true or inherent existence. Next:

As to the question, 'How do you abandon the grasping at that realised wisdom?', the answer is found here:

What follows is looking at the ultimate nature of the subjective mind, which we will cover in next week's teaching. In the meantime, take the time to read more about this topic, and more importantly, not just read but actually think over the subject matter. Finding it difficult is no reason to get frustrated or give up. Rather, what is important is to try to read some text, and as well, give some thought to reflecting on its meaning. Then gradually you will notice an increase in your understanding of the subject matter.

¹Especially when you have a thought of 'I', investigate how the 'I' appears to your mind. This is very important. At that time, you experience an 'I' which seems to have its own self-sufficient existence and which exists nominally. I believe that it is not possible to separate these two 'I's until you have gained the wisdom of emptiness. Nonetheless, from deep down we experience the arising of a sense of 'I', 'I'. If we look at that 'I' and investigate how it exists, we can notice it appears to exist in its right, without depending on any other objects. If we grasp at it as it appears to our mind as being the true mode of existence of a person, that's called the self-grasping of person. As discussed earlier, in order to identify the object of negation, you need to let that sense of 'I' appear to your mind, then investigate and verify its mode of existence as it appears to your mind.

You need to ask yourself whether the 'I' exists in the same way as it appears to your mind. If you go about it in this way then you will find it beneficial. If, instead of relating your investigation to your own experience you treat the subject of emptiness as something to stimulate your external intellect, you won't get anywhere. When we hear the terms 'person' and 'aggregates' we think of other people or their aggregates, but not ourselves and our own aggregates. We should be investigating the 'I' within us, not the 'I' of other people. Otherwise, we are like a detective who is looking for the footprint of a thief

¹ At Geshe-la's request, this section of the commentary was not translated on the night due to time constraints. It has been translated from the sound file.

in a grassland when the thief has already run into the forest; we won't be able to recognise the object of negation and thus we won't be able to refute it. Truly, we are so fortunate even just to hear about this profound teaching, and for it to be able to leave a positive imprint within our mental continuum. The teaching of emptiness – that all things do not exist inherently and are devoid of inherent existence – is the unique doctrine of the Buddha as mentioned in the *Diamond Cutter Sutra*.

We are going to read out *The King of Prayers* for Maria's brother, who passed away last week. Maria has been a TI resident and long-term friend of many of us, and she is close to me. She is a very good student who regularly comes to the teachings. She is a very lovely lady with a gentle nature and warm-heartedness, so we recite this to express our condolences to her and her family.

As we recite this prayer try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation and pray for the good rebirth and happiness of Maria's late brother. By doing this, not only do we help her brother, herself and her family, but it also gives us an opportunity to recite this great prayer and to cultivate the bodhicitta mind.

Not only do I pray for all sentient beings, but I am good at remembering in my prayers my friends and people I know when they face hardship. As we said in another teaching, when people face life's difficulties they pin their hope not on humans, but on God. So in alignment with this tradition we recite this prayer.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen is used with the kind permission of Sandup Tsering.

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