
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

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Motivation

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

The text we are studying, called *Entering the Middle Way*, is a commentary unmistakably conveying the extensive¹ as well as the profound².

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

1. MEANING OF THE TITLE

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

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

Madhyamaka means Middle Way³, *avatara* means entering and *nama* means 'being called'.

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

The Madhyamaka mentioned in the title refers to neither of those. This Madhyamaka refers to Nagarjuna's *Root Wisdom*⁴. The title of the text is *Entering the Middle Way*, and the Middle Way that is being entered is the Madhyamaka commentary by Nagarjuna called *Root Wisdom*. It also doesn't refer to the *Collection Of Six Texts* by Nagarjuna⁴, but it relates particularly to the text of

¹ Conventional aspects of the path

² Emptiness

³ Tib: *Uma*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Take the subject, this commentary
It follows there is a reason for it to be called
Entering the Middle Way

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

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

Take the subject, this commentary
It follows that it enters the *Root Wisdom* by way of
the extensive

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here there are two views. Gyaltsab Je says that *Root Wisdom* does explain the extensive⁵.

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

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

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

That concludes the first division, meaning of the title.

2 TRANSLATOR'S PROSTRATION

I prostrate to the youthful Manjushri

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

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

So prostrating to Manjushri shows that the commentary

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

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

3. MEANING OF THE TEXT

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

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

1 Homage-Method for Starting to Compose the Commentary

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

1.1 Praising Great Compassion Without Discerning Compassion Individually

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

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

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

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

The two lines,

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hearers

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

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

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

Middling Buddhas⁷

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

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

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

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

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

Review

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

Meaning of the Title

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

Prostration to the Translator

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

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

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Edited Version

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

⁷ Middling Buddhas = Self-liberated Buddhas