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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

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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

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.

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*Edited Version*

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