
Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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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

¹ Five sense powers, five sources, four elements etc.

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

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*.]

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Edited Version

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