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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

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Generate a bodhicitta motivation thinking that I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and for that purpose I am going to listen to this profound Mahayana Dharma, and will then put into practice what I have heard.

### Why Hearers and Self Liberators Need to Realise Phenomena as Lacking Natural Existence

#### 2.2.3.2.2. Commentaries and Hinayana sutras (contd.)

The outline that we reached was the commentaries and Hinayana sutras used as sources for the necessity to realise the selflessness of person in order to attain nirvana.

Here it is important that you understand that the Hinayana sutras and the other quotes are given as sources in order to show the above-mentioned point. These scriptural quotes are not being used to establish emptiness through scriptural proof. Emptiness is not an extremely hidden phenomenon and therefore it is not established by relying on scriptural texts. It is necessary to know this important difference.

Aryas also can realise the selflessness of phenomena, because the Hinayana sutras explain the selflessness of phenomena. In order for Hinayana practitioners to be able to abandon the obscuration of the afflictions then it is taught in a sutra for hearers:

*Forms are like foam,  
Feelings are like water bubbles,  
Recognitions are like mirages,  
Compositional factors are like reeds,  
Consciousness is like an illusion,  
The friend of the sun told it thus.*

This establishes emptiness with the help of an example for each of the five aggregates. In relation to the first aggregate of **form** it says that 'forms are like foam'. Here it is talking about the foam that we can find in polluted water, for example in a swamp and so forth. The foam arises through the accumulation of impure water, it is very transient, and it arises through the continuity of the water. In the same way the form aggregate is an accumulation of impure substances, it is very transient, and it arises through the river of conceptual thoughts.

When we contemplate the example of form relating these three characteristics (that it is transient, that it is an accumulation of impure substances, and that it comes about through the continuity of the imputing conception) back to the our body, then we can understand that the aggregates lack inherent or natural existence.

The next line states that, 'feelings are like water bubbles'. Water bubbles are dependent on the basis of the water, there is the time when they are actually formed, and then they rise up to the surface of the water and then disintegrate. In the same way as the water bubbles have three characteristics, our **feelings** also have three characteristics. They are dependent upon the basis of the sense powers, they are generated in relation to the object, and they are generated through the contact with the object. When one reflects on how feelings are generated in dependence upon the sense power, the object and contact, then one can understand the non-inherent nature of feelings.

**Recognition** is like a mirage, which is an example for how something actually exists in a different way from the way that it appears to exist. A mirage appears as water even though there isn't actually any water there.

**Compositional factors** are like reeds<sup>1</sup>, which are hollow in the inside. There are two ways of explaining this example. When one actually looks for the essence of the reed there's really nothing to find there. It is the same with the banana tree. If one peels off layer after layer of its stem, there's nothing to be found on the inside. When we investigate this fourth aggregate of compositional factors then like the reed one will also not find the imputed meaning at the time of analysis. When we investigate and look for the imputed meaning at the time of analysis, then it cannot be found. So this example shows how the imputed meaning vanishes at the time of analysis.

As an example of something that is without essence, it is said that one can also use the banana tree and the reed as an example of cyclic existence.

In the fifth line **consciousness** is likened to an illusion, for example to an illusory woman who appears to exist even though there is actually no woman, or any other type of illusion that actually appears to be an object that it is not. In the same way a consciousness appears also to be something that it is not.

What has been established through all of these various quotes is that there is a pervasion that if it is a hearer or self-liberated arhat then they realise emptiness. It is accepted by the lower tenets such as the Svatantrika-Madhyamika that hearer and self-liberated arhats can realise emptiness, but according to them there's no necessity or pervasion that they do.

#### 2.2.3.3. Eliminating Doubt

We now move to the third outline of the heading Why Hearers and Self-liberators Need to Realise Emptiness. Having given all of those quotations proving that the Hinayana scriptures show emptiness and that Hinayana practitioners need to realise emptiness, various doubts arise that need to be refuted. Here there are two sub-sections, eliminating doubts that were mentioned in Chandrakirti's *Self Commentary*, and eliminating doubts that come from other sources.

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<sup>1</sup> Here the Tibetan word is *chu-shing*, which seems to have to have two possible meanings. 1) A tree that dries out after having generated fruits once; 2) Reeds

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### 2.2.3.3.1. Eliminating Doubts Outlined in Chandrakirti's Self Commentary

*Illumination says: From the Self-Commentary: The school of someone who thinks, 'If the selflessness of phenomena is shown also in the hearer vehicle then it becomes senseless to teach the Mahayana', is contrary both to reason and scripture.*

Chandrakirti's *Self Commentary* mentions the doubt that was raised by Bhavaviveka, which is that if the hearer vehicle shows the selflessness of phenomena then it becomes pointless to teach the Mahayana. Thinking like that is contrary both to reason as well as to scripture.

Bhavaviveka says that it is unnecessary to teach the Mahayana if the Hinayana explains the selflessness of phenomena. His reason is that he has found fault with Buddhapalita who, in his commentary on the seventh chapter of the *Root Wisdom of Madhyamaka*, says that Hinayana sutras explain the selflessness of all phenomena, or show all phenomena to be selfless. Bhavaviveka says that if in the Hinayana sutras it shows the selflessness of phenomena then there's no need to teach the Mahayana. In his commentary, *Lamp of Wisdom*, he gives this very brief quote where it says, 'It becomes pointless to teach the Mahayana'.

Because this is not very clear, then the following question is asked of Bhavaviveka, 'When you say it becomes pointless to teach the Mahayana, do you mean it becomes pointless to teach the Mahayana in general, or do you mean it becomes pointless to teach the selflessness of phenomena in the Mahayana sutras?'

**If the first is the case**, then the consequence of your reasoning would be that the Mahayana teaches only the selflessness of phenomena and nothing else. Actually it is not like that, because the Mahayana teaches about the various bodhisattva grounds, it teaches about the bodhisattva practices of the six perfections such as generosity and so forth, it teaches about the great practices of prayer and dedication, it teaches about great compassion, the two accumulations, and the various powers and abilities of the bodhisattvas, and so on and so on.

*Nagarjuna's Precious Garland says:*

*Since the Hinayana vehicle  
Doesn't teach the aspiration, practice  
And dedications of a bodhisattva,  
How could one become a bodhisattva through  
those teachings?*

If you say there's no point to teaching the Mahayana at all as it teaches the selflessness of phenomena in the Hinayana sutras, then implicitly what you are saying is that that all the Mahayana sutras teach is the selflessness of phenomena, and nothing else.

However, actually there is a need to teach the Mahayana sutras because they also teach the various practices that we just mentioned, which are not taught in the uncommon Hinayana sutras.

I already mentioned to you previously that in the

sutras that are shared by the Mahayana and Hinayana we find teachings on the bodhisattva grounds, practices, and so on. However in the uncommon Hinayana sutras that are not shared with the Mahayana, one cannot find those explanations. So as Nagarjuna says here, 'Since in the uncommon Hinayana sutras, it doesn't teach the aspiration, practice and dedications of a bodhisattva, therefore there's a need to teach those in the Mahayana sutras'.

This refutes the first possibility if Bhavaviveka meant to say that there's no need to teach the Mahayana in general since it teaches the selflessness of phenomena in Hinayana sutras.

**If it is the second possibility**, that there's no need to teach the selflessness of phenomena in the Mahayana sutras, then there's also no pervasion to your reason, because the Hinayana scriptures only teach the selflessness of phenomena in a very condensed form. Whereas in the Mahayana sutras the selflessness of phenomena is explained very extensively.

There's a difference in the way the Hinayana scriptures and the Mahayana scriptures explain emptiness. In the Hinayana scriptures emptiness is only explained in a very condensed manner. In the Mahayana scriptures emptiness is explained via the door of limitless inference.

Here, as there's a difference in the way emptiness is explained, so too there's a difference the way the two types of practitioners, the Hinayana practitioner and the Mahayana practitioner, meditate on emptiness. The Hinayana practitioner will meditate on emptiness in a simplistic way, while a Mahayana practitioner meditates on emptiness via the door of limitless inference.

It is said that Hinayana practitioners don't fully meditate on the selflessness of phenomena. The reasoning for this view is that even though they meditate on the selflessness of phenomena, they don't do so fully because they don't meditate on the selflessness of phenomena in order to eliminate the obscurations to omniscience. Hinayana practitioners do fully meditate on the selflessness of a person. Why? It is because their practice is aimed primarily at abandoning the obscurations to liberation. In order to fully meditate on the selflessness of phenomena the practice has to be directed primarily at the elimination of the obscurations to omniscience. So because Hinayana practitioners don't meditate primarily to eliminate the obscurations to omniscience, it is said that they don't meditate fully on the selflessness of phenomena. Bodhisattvas fully meditate on the selflessness on phenomena because their primary aim is to overcome the obscurations to omniscience.

### 2.2.3.3.2 Eliminating Doubts Not Mentioned in the Self Commentary

This doubt is raised by Haribadra in relation to a quote from the *Ornament of Clear Realisation* where it says that in order to attain the state of a solitary realiser one abandons the conception of objects, but one doesn't need to abandon the conception of subjects.

The system of the *Ornament of Clear Realisation* posits the grasping at outer objects as coarse obscurations to omniscience, and the grasping at the true existence of subjects as the subtle obscurations to omniscience. It says that, in order to attain the state of a solitary realiser, or a self-liberated arhat, one needs to abandon the grasping at outer existing objects, but one doesn't need to abandon the grasping at truly existent subjects. Therefore Haribadra asserts that it is incorrect to say arhats need to abandon the self-grasping of phenomena. However that is another debate, which we won't go into here. The Prasangikas do accept outer existence.

We have now completed the qualities beautifying the bodhisattva's continuum, and the qualities outshining the continuum of others.

### **2.3 The Superiority of the Perfection**

Now we come to the third major outline, the superiority of the perfection, which has four subdivisions: explaining the generosity of the first ground; explaining generosity of lesser practitioners on a lower base; explaining the generosity of bodhisattvas; and explaining the division of the perfection of generosity.

#### **2.3.1. Explaining the Generosity of the First Ground**

Regarding this first subdivision, the root text says,

*At that time generosity alone first cause of  
Complete enlightenment becomes superior for  
them,  
Having devotion for even giving one's flesh  
Further becomes cause for inferring the  
unimaginable.*

This shows that of the ten perfections, the perfection of generosity is superior on the first ground.

With reference to 'at that time', what time is one talking about? It's talking about at the time of attaining the first ground. 'Become superior' refers to the bodhisattvas at the time of attaining the first ground. Here one can take the subject bodhisattvas at the time of attaining the first ground - the perfection of generosity alone becomes superior for them - because they are without the stains of insatiable greed that prevents the giving away of a body and wealth.

This perfection of generosity is the first cause of complete enlightenment. Here there comes a doubt. What does saying the perfection of generosity on the first ground becomes the first cause for complete enlightenment mean, because actually the first cause for complete enlightenment is the path of accumulation. Here it is from the point of view of being a perfection that has gone beyond.

Then one might ask why is the generosity of a bodhisattva on the first ground superior, and how do we know it is special? The next two lines of the root text say, 'having devotion for even giving one's flesh further becomes cause for inferring the unimaginable'.

How can one know that the first ground bodhisattva has very great qualities? One can infer those inner qualities by observing a first ground bodhisattva

practising generosity. Not only do first ground bodhisattvas practise material generosity, but with strong devotion they also practise the giving of their own flesh. So this practice of generosity of one's own body with strong devotion becomes the cause or proof for inferring the attainment of the inner qualities that otherwise are very difficult for us to imagine. It is like when we see smoke on a distant mountain pass and infer from the smoke that there is a fire, or when we see smoke over the horizon on the ocean. Even though we don't see the fire directly with our eyes, through the sign of smoke we can faultlessly infer that there has to be fire on the smoky mountain path, or somewhere over the horizon. In the same way, by seeing the practice of generosity of first ground bodhisattvas, then we can infer that they have very great inner qualities.

We cannot see the inner qualities of another person directly with our eye consciousness. We can see the form of the other person but we don't know their mind. It's very important to take this moral that one cannot know the qualities of another person. A bodhisattva of lesser realisation cannot realise or understand directly the realisations of a higher bodhisattva. We are not able to see the qualities of another person just by looking at them; it is impossible to say what qualities they have or don't have. So therefore saying, 'That person doesn't have any qualities because I cannot see them' is a faulty reasoning.

This is very important to keep in mind. It is an absolutely essential instruction that one has to practise pure appearance with regard to others. Our ordinary reasoning that, 'That person doesn't have any qualities, because I don't see them' doesn't apply, as we are not able to know the inner qualities of another person just by looking at them.

#### **2.3.2. Explaining Generosity of a Lower Base**

The next section is explaining generosity of a lower base. Here there are two subdivisions, attaining samsaric happiness through generosity, and attaining the happiness of liberation through generosity.

##### **2.3.2.1. Attaining Samsaric Happiness Through Generosity**

As the root text says,

*All beings strongly wish for happiness and  
Without wealth there isn't any happiness for  
humans either*

*Having realised that wealth arises from  
generosity*

*The Able One initially taught generosity*

*All beings strongly wish for happiness, and without  
having wealth, meaning without having food, drink,  
etc., there isn't any happiness for humans either.*

Having understood that, as well as knowing that that the wealth that is needed arises from generosity, and that generosity is a method easily practised, then the Able One initially taught his disciples generosity.

In case it is thought that in order to attain wealth by practising generosity the giver needs to practise correctly, then this isn't necessary. As it says in the next

verse,

*Whoever is working only for their own purpose  
Having a very rough mind and inferior  
compassion  
Even their desired wealth arises from generosity  
that  
Becomes the cause for completely pacifying  
suffering*

In order to attain wealth by practising generosity it is not necessary for the giver to practise correctly. That is because even the desired wealth arising from the generosity of one who is working solely for their own purpose, with a very rough mind and inferior compassion, becomes the cause for completely pacifying their sufferings.

With reference to, 'since it is a method easily practised', of all the six perfections generosity is easiest one to practise. The only thing that prevents one from practising generosity is greed. Practising morality is a little bit more difficult.

As we will see later, the text mentions that in general the practice of generosity is particularly taught for lay people, and the practice of morality is particularly taught for ordained people. The reason is that if ordained people had to practise generosity very extensively then they would have to engage in too many activities to attain the materials to give. Of course that doesn't mean that lay or ordained people aren't allowed to practise either generosity or morality.

That completes the outline attaining samsaric happiness through generosity.

### **2.3.2.2. Attaining the Happiness of Nirvana Through Generosity**

The root text reads:

*At one time through the occasion of generosity  
Even they quickly achieve a meeting with Arya  
beings  
Then, having perfectly cut existences continuum  
Those possessing such cause start going to peace*

When it says, 'at one time through the occasion of generosity, even they', the 'even they' refers to the same person we mentioned above, which is a person working only for their own purpose, having a very rough mind, with inferior compassion. 'Even they' can quickly achieve a meeting with an arya being by practising generosity. So Chandrakirti says, generosity establishes the bliss of nirvana; even those of inferior character practising generosity quickly achieve a meeting with an arya being through the occasion of their generosity.

Through practising the Dharma taught to them by that superior being, they perfectly cut existence's continuum. Then having done so those who possess such a cause of meeting with an arya being start going towards peaceful nirvana.

#### **Summary**

- The first verse we discussed tonight explains that generosity on the first ground, the first cause of complete enlightenment, becomes superior. For

bodhisattvas, having the devotion to even give one's own flesh further becomes a cause for inferring the unimaginable experiences. This explains why the practice of generosity on the first ground is superior.

- The next verse, 'all beings strongly wish for happiness and without wealth there isn't any happiness for humans either' says that having realised that wealth arises from generosity, then everyone is initially taught generosity. This explains how the even lesser beings attain worldly happiness through the practice of generosity.
- Then the question was asked, in order to get that benefit from the practice of generosity, is it necessary to practise correctly? The answer was no. Even for the person working only for their own purpose, having a very rough mind and inferior compassion, their desired wealth arises from generosity, and that becomes the cause for completely pacifying their suffering.
- Attaining the happiness of nirvana explains that through generosity one meets with aryas, and are so able to cut existences continuum Those possessing such cause start going to peace.

We can do the next outline, explaining the generosity of bodhisattvas, next time.

#### **Definitions of Generosity**

Although the bodhisattva on the first ground excels in the practice of the perfection of generosity, this doesn't mean that the bodhisattva doesn't practise the other ten perfections. They practise the perfections of morality and so on, but on the first ground the bodhisattva excels in the practise of the perfection of generosity. The first ground bodhisattva excels in the practice of the perfection of generosity. Does that mean that they don't practise any of the other perfections? No, they still practise also all the other perfections, for example the perfection of morality. Does the bodhisattva on the first ground excel in the perfection of morality? No, the bodhisattva on the first ground doesn't excel in any of the other nine perfections; they excel only in the practice of the perfection of generosity.

The bodhisattva on the first ground is completely free from the stains of greed that prevent giving anything away freely. So a bodhisattva on the first ground can give away freely everything including his or her own body. They haven't also excelled in the practice of the perfection of morality, because they aren't completely free from the impurities of the stains of immorality.

What is the meaning of generosity?

Student: The mind of wishing to give.

The mind of giving, which is a generous attitude. Then what is the perfection of generosity?

Student: Giving up one's own purpose for the sake of others.

That's going in the right direction. For generosity to become a perfection of generosity it first of all needs to

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be induced by the motivation of bodhicitta. Then it has to be followed by dedication of the merits for complete enlightenment. So if the practice of generosity is first of all based upon the motivation of bodhicitta, and then completed with the dedication of the merits for complete enlightenment then it is called a worldly perfection of generosity.

If one has realised emptiness and then meditates on the emptiness of the three circles at the time of actually practising generosity, then it becomes a perfection gone beyond.

So there are two possibilities. First of all the practice of generosity has to be based on the motivation of bodhicitta, and then if one has realised emptiness then one has to meditate on the lack of natural existence of the three circles of the practice of generosity, and then complete the practice with a dedication of the merits for complete enlightenment. In that case it would be the **perfection of generosity gone beyond**. If it is lacking the wisdom realising emptiness at the time of actually practising the generosity, then it will be a **worldly perfection of generosity**.

The wisdom realising emptiness is the path that has gone beyond worldly or transitory existence. It is no longer contained within transitory existence, that's why it is said to have 'gone beyond'.

It is very good to keep this principle in mind and then apply it also to our practice as much as we can. For example when we offer prostrations, first of all we should do it on the basis of a motivation of bodhicitta, first meditating on bodhicitta; then while doing the prostrations meditate on the emptiness of the object of prostration, the action of the prostration, and the person that is performing the prostration; and then having done the prostrations then one can complete it with the dedication of the merits for complete enlightenment.

Although our practice is not yet able to equal the practice of bodhisattvas, we should take the practice of bodhisattvas as an example for our own practice, and according to our ability practice like them. We all have an understanding of bodhicitta and know what it means, we also have an understanding of emptiness, in addition to an understanding of complete enlightenment, so therefore those three seeds are already present. All you need to do now is to further habituate your minds with those potentials, so as to increase them further and further, and then finally your practice will be the practice of a bodhisattva.

Nobody starts out with the first bodhisattva ground. All bodhisattvas start out as beginners and work their way up to the bodhisattva ground.

For example by using one's understanding of emptiness when one has created a non-virtuous karma to meditate on the emptiness of the non-virtuous karma, on its lack of inherent existence or natural existence, one will have already purified a great deal of that non-virtuous karma.

If one has created strong non-virtuous karma at one

moment, we have the methods purify it the moment afterwards. Then there are also the practices of combining the view with virtue and combining virtue with the view. Combining virtue with the view means that one meditates on the emptiness of the virtuous karma that has been created. Combining the view with virtue would be if out of the meditation of emptiness one then engages in a virtuous activity.

Next week there's discussion group.

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Edited Version

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