
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

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Please begin by generating the motivation of bodhicitta for listening to the teachings, thinking, 'I have to attain complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, and in order to be able to do so I'm now going to listen to this profound Mahayana teaching, and then I'm going to put it into practise as much as I can'.

SIXTH GROUND, THE MANIFEST

In finishing the first five grounds and the first five perfections we have also finished the outline that dealt with those. Now we come to the second outline, dealing with the sixth ground and the perfection of wisdom.

Here we have the following outlines: description of the ground and showing the perfection of wisdom to be supreme; praise of the perfection of wisdom; explaining the suchness of dependent arising; and concluding by expressing the qualities of the ground.

1. Description of the Ground and Showing the Perfection of Wisdom to be Supreme

The description of the ground is in this verse,

*Manifestly abiding within the mind of
equipoise,
Facing the dharmas of a complete buddha,
They who see the suchness of dependent arising,
By abiding within wisdom attain cessation.*

The way one arrives at this point is by reflecting on how, on the fifth ground, the bodhisattva has achieved supremacy in the perfection of concentration, and so attained superior mental absorption. Then the question arises, what are the resultant qualities on the sixth ground that come about through the qualities of the fifth ground?

As a result of the qualities of the fifth ground one attains the sixth ground, called 'manifest'. Why it is called manifest? In this verse it says that, as a result of the practices on the fifth ground, one attains the sixth ground, which is called manifest. Then it also outlines the qualities of that ground that are the reason for it being called manifest.

Three Reasons Why It Is Called 'Manifest' according to Illumination

First Reason: 'Illumination', 'because they thus manifested the reflection like suchness through superiority in wisdom.'

*Manifestly abiding within the mind of
equipoise*

When we say 'manifest' it means something has become manifest to the meditator. If the object becomes manifest, it means that one realises the object directly. Here the object refers to emptiness. What it is saying here is that the sixth ground, 'manifest', is abiding within supreme meditative equipoise directly realising emptiness. So we have the mind that abides within superior meditative equipoise on emptiness that manifestly, or directly, realises emptiness. Then we jump to the third line,

*They who see the suchness of dependent arising,
By abiding within wisdom attain cessation.*

This more clearly describes the mind that is being described in the first line. Through the condition of having understood dependent arising, the bodhisattva on the sixth ground sees the profound suchness of dependent arising.

As we said in earlier teachings, the bodhisattva on the sixth ground is proficient in the wisdom that realises both the sequential and reverse order of the twelve links. Through a condition of that wisdom of dependent arising the bodhisattva then attains a special insight into emptiness in meditative equipoise. That's what is being described here in the third line when it says, 'They who see the suchness of dependent arising'. Here the subject is the bodhisattvas on the sixth ground who see the profound suchness of dependent arising through the condition of dependent arising.

That has established the subject. Consider the subject 'bodhisattvas who abide manifestly within the mind of equipoise directly see the suchness of dependent arising', - they attain the uncommon absorption on cessation, - because they are bodhisattvas that abide within the superior perfection of wisdom. By abiding within wisdom they attain cessation.

Second Reason: 'Illumination', 'because the fifth ground meditates on the truth of the path.'

Because the bodhisattva becomes proficient in the wisdom of the Four Noble Truths on the fifth ground that wisdom becomes completed here on the sixth ground.

Third Reason: 'Illumination', 'because of directly facing the attainment of the complete dharmas of a buddha.'

Facing the dharmas of a complete buddha,

Another reason why this ground is called manifest is because this ground faces the dharmas of a complete buddha. Here the dharmas of a complete buddha are the dependent arisings. The bodhisattva on the fifth ground excelled in the perfection of mental stabilisation, and here on the sixth ground the bodhisattva excels in the perfection of superior insight, which needs as a basis the perfection of mental stabilisation. The bodhisattva excels in the perfection of superior insight, which is related to their proficiency in the sequential and reverse order of the twelve interdependent links. Here on the sixth ground the bodhisattva becomes proficient in the sequential as well as the reverse order of the twelve interdependent

links. For that reason the bodhisattva is said to face the dharmas of a complete buddha.

The subject, the sixth ground, is called 'manifest', because through being superior in wisdom it directly sees suchness that is appearing like a reflection, and because of having completed the wisdom proficient in the Four Noble Truths, as well as facing the dharmas of a complete buddha.

Reasons Why This Ground is Called 'Manifest' from Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen's *General Meaning of Madyamaka*

In the commentary by Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen on the etymology of this ground he also says this ground is called 'manifest' because the bodhisattva is proficient in the twelve dependent links, and through their reversal of the sequential order of the twelve dependent links they manifest the reversal of cyclic existence. By meditating on the reverse order of the twelve dependent links they manifest liberation, and for this reason also then this ground is called 'manifest'.

In *Illumination* it says that since it shows that here the bodhisattva completes the higher training of wisdom, which is proficient in both the sequential as well as reverse order of the twelve dependent links, then by way of having completed both of those higher trainings of wisdom, the bodhisattva here manifests both truth as well as dependent arising. If one looks at it from this point of view, the three higher trainings of wisdom are completed at this ground. The three higher trainings of wisdom are the higher training of wisdom that is proficient in the thirty-seven limbs of enlightenment on the fourth ground, the Four Noble Truths on the fifth ground, and the twelve dependent links on the sixth ground. On this ground, however much the bodhisattva meditates on calm abiding, they will also meditate on superior insight by that much. By having attained superiority in excelling in the perfection of mental stabilisation on the fifth ground, then here on this ground the bodhisattva has attained superior perfection of wisdom. Therefore the bodhisattva also attains here the uncommon absorption on cessation, which means the absorption that is held by the superior perfection of wisdom.

Absorption on cessation

By abiding within wisdom attain cessation.

As it says here, by abiding within the superior perfection of wisdom, then they attain the uncommon absorption of cessation. When it talks about the uncommon absorption of cessation it is referring to the absorption of cessation attained from the sixth ground onwards. So any absorption of cessation from the sixth ground onwards will be an uncommon absorption of cessation. It is also said that any absorption on cessation is an uncommon absorption on cessation.

Common and Uncommon Absorption on Cessation in General

Uncommon Absorption on Cessation

The definition of absorption on cessation is a **transcendental wisdom, abiding in the family of**

being free from all the manifest delusions contained within the peak of existence, that is in single pointed equipoise on emptiness in dependence upon the method of a liberated path as well as an absorption of the peak of existence, that become its cause. So basically absorption on cessation is a transcendental wisdom that realises emptiness.

It is the wisdom that directly realises emptiness **in dependence upon the liberated path.** Therefore the first instance of the path of seeing wouldn't be absorption on cessation, because it is not attained in dependence upon a liberated path. However in the following moments it is attained in dependence upon the preceding liberated path. Here it says, 'attained in dependence upon the method that becomes its cause'. So the liberated path is the method that becomes the cause for this absorption on cessation. It means that first one needs to have the cause of a liberated path, then afterwards one can have the absorption on cessation. So the first moment of the path of seeing wouldn't qualify as an absorption on cessation, because it does not have the necessary preceding liberated path. However the following moments would qualify as absorption on cessation.

The other method that becomes the cause for the absorption on cessation is the **absorption of the peak of existence** that is free from the manifest desires for the peak of existence. Here one doesn't talk about freedom from desires including the imprints. One only talks about the manifest desires, because the seed of the desires belonging to the peak of existence are only completely eliminated from the eighth ground onwards. So here one only talks about the abandonment that has been attained through a worldly path.

This definition of uncommon absorption on cessation is the definition according to the Prasangika system.

We also have the special definition for the absorption of cessation that is attained from the sixth ground onwards.

Common Absorption on Cessation

There is also the common absorption on cessation. What has ceased are the coarse feelings and recognitions on the basis of subtle mental consciousness. Through the force of one's meditation, the coarse recognitions and feelings that are associated with the five sense consciousness cease on the basis of the subtle mental consciousness. That type of meditation is called the common absorption on cessation, because it's common according to the sutras and the commentaries, and also with the other tenets. Is it an actual absorption on cessation? No. Although it's called the common absorption on cessation it is not an absorption on cessation.

Even though this meditative absorption that ends the coarse feelings and recognitions on the basis of the subtle mental consciousness is not absorption on cessation, it is still called the common absorption on cessation. Lama Tsong Khapa says that it is similar to the manner in which the grasping at the person as

being a self-sufficient substantially existent is called the common view of the transitory collection, even though it is not actually regarded as a view of the transitory collection.

An example for an actual absorption on cessation would be the transcendental wisdom that directly realises emptiness in the continuum of the bodhisattva on the path of seeing after the first instance. The first instance doesn't qualify, because it doesn't rely on the preceding liberated path. However from then onwards there's a preceding liberated path. Then the transcendental wisdom realising emptiness in the continuum of a bodhisattva on the path of seeing that has been attained through a preceding liberated path, and the mental absorption of the peak of existence is an example of actual absorption on cessation.

It is called the uncommon absorption on cessation because it is only asserted to be an absorption on cessation by the Prasangika proponents.

The Svatantrika-Madhyamika and below don't assert that type of transcendental wisdom to be an absorption on cessation.

That covers the common and uncommon absorption on cessation in general, but then also we have an uncommon absorption on cessation in the context of the sixth ground.

Common and Uncommon Absorption on Cessation in the present context

Common Absorption on Cessation

The transcendental wisdom directly realising emptiness that is posited as an absorption on cessation from the first ground to the fifth ground is referred to as the common absorption on cessation because that type of absorption on cessation is also attained by returners, non-returners, and arhats, like hearer non-returners and hearer-arhats.

Uncommon Absorption on Cessation

Here the uncommon absorption on cessation is attained in dependence upon the method of the superior perfection of wisdom, which is only attained from the sixth ground onwards.

The absorption on cessation is not attained simultaneously with attaining the transcendental wisdom of the sixth ground, but only from the second instance onwards. As it says in the definition, the absorption on cessation is attained in dependence upon the method of the superior perfection of wisdom. So there has to first be a superior perfection of wisdom that precedes it, and then comes this uncommon absorption on cessation. The attainment of the sixth ground is simultaneous with the attainment of the superior perfection of wisdom. One can't attain the uncommon absorption on cessation simultaneously with that moment. However from the second and third moment onwards then one can talk about the uncommon absorption on cessation.

It is referred to as the uncommon absorption on cessation because it is not shared with the lower

grounds - the fifth ground and below. The following grounds, the seventh, eighth, ninth, and so forth have this uncommon absorption on cessation.

If we look at the boundaries of the uncommon absorption on cessation it starts from the second moment of the sixth ground up to the state of buddhahood, the ground of a buddha.

Etymology

Take the subject 'the uninterrupted path of the sixth ground' - there's a reason why it is called the absorption on cessation - the emptiness and suchness are posited as cessation, and because it is an absorption on that cessation it is called an absorption on cessation.

Emptiness is referred to as a cessation, because the transcendental wisdom that directly realises it causes the obscurations of dualistic appearance regarding the two truths to cease.

We have now completed those first four lines,

*Manifestly abiding within the mind of
equipoise,
Facing the dharmas of a complete buddha,
They who see the suchness of dependent arising,
By abiding within wisdom attain cessation.*

2. Praise of the Perfection of Wisdom

This is shown by this verse,

*In the same way one person with eyes
Can easily lead all groups of blind people
To their desired destination, here awareness
also
Takes the eyeless qualities to buddhahood
alone*

What it is being shown here is that the preceding five perfections, which have already been explained, rely on the perfection of wisdom in order to guide them to enlightenment. It uses the metaphor of how, in order to arrive at their desired destination, blind people have to rely on a person with vision. Similarly, in order to arrive at their desired destination, the five perfections have to rely on the perfection of wisdom.

The verse likens the first five perfections of generosity and so forth to blind people, and the perfection of wisdom to a person with vision. In the same way as a person with eyes can easily lead all groups of blind people to their desired destination, the awareness that is the perfection of wisdom alone takes the qualities of generosity and so forth to buddhahood.

So in order to actually complete the perfection of generosity one needs to have the perfection of wisdom. The aim of the perfection of generosity is to attain complete enlightenment, but it can't be done without the support of the perfection of wisdom. So therefore in order for the perfection of generosity to be completed it needs to be complemented with the perfection of wisdom, because only the perfection of wisdom can lead to complete enlightenment.

In the *Diamond Cutter sutra* it says, 'In the same way as a person with eyes can't see anything when they are in darkness, so a bodhisattva who practises generosity

being bound by phenomena should be viewed as such a person.' A bodhisattva who is bound by phenomena is one who doesn't meditate on the three circles of the practice of generosity, and who doesn't realise the emptiness of phenomena. Such a bodhisattva is like a person walking around in darkness. 'Once the sun has risen, a person with eyes is able to see a variety of forms and so forth. One should view a bodhisattva who practices generosity, but who is not bound by phenomena in the same way.'

'Bodhisattvas who are brought down by phenomena' refers to bodhisattvas who don't realise the emptiness of the three circles. When one practises generosity and the other perfections one should apply one's understanding of emptiness. We all have a certain understanding of emptiness, and you have to apply that to your practice. Then through continuous application it will become more and more refined. When you practise generosity you should meditate on the emptiness of the three circles - the emptiness of the giver, the emptiness of the substance, and the emptiness of the recipient; when you dedicate, you'd meditate on the emptiness of the person that is dedicating, the emptiness of the merits that are being dedicated, and the emptiness of aim.

So in the dedication then there are the merits that are being dedicated, and the aim to which they are being dedicated, and by whom they are dedicated. So one meditates on the emptiness of those three, meditating on how, for example, the merits are not a partless, independent phenomena but an accumulation of various virtuous karmas. There is an accumulation of parts. Here one can meditate on the dependent arising of the merits, and how it comes about in dependence upon its parts. Meditate on the emptiness of the three circles, and how they are merely imputed by conception and don't exist truly from their own side.

3. Explaining the Suchness of Dependent Arising

The third main outline has five sub-outlines: pledging to explain the profound; identifying the vessel for the profound; the way the ensuing qualities are generated; exhorting the student who is a vessel to listen; and the way suchness is explained.

The pledge to explain the profound comes only after having explained the first five perfections. It explains the type of emptiness that one has to realise in order to attain liberation. Then Chandrakirti makes a pledge to explain that emptiness, the realisation of which is necessary in order to attain liberation.

The vessel that the students should be explains the type of student that is a suitable vessel for the explanation of emptiness.

Also the outline, the way the ensuing qualities are generated, is very good and very informative. It's good for you to read up on that.

It's important that the students are a good vessel for the teachings of the teacher. One has to teach according to the capacity of the students. Otherwise if

things are taught that the students don't like, then that's not so good.

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Edited Version

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