
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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26 November 2002

It is good if, at the outset, you generate the motivation thinking, 'I have to become enlightened to liberate all sentient beings, and in order to do so I'm now going to listen to this profound Mahayana teaching, and then I'm going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

3. Explaining the Suchness of Dependent Arising

We mentioned last week the next five outlines: pledging to explain the profound, identifying the vessel for the profound and so forth.

3.1. Pledging to Explain the Profound

Chandrakirti's pledge to explain the profound is done in the following verse,

*The same way they realised the extremely profound;
Through quotation as well as reason;
I shall explain it according to the school
Concurring with the scriptural system of Nagarjuna.*

In brief what it is saying here is that Chandrakirti is making the pledge that he is going to explain the extremely profound - emptiness. He goes on to say that, 'I'm not just explaining emptiness as something that I pulled out of the sky, but I'm explaining it according to the school of Nagarjuna'. So he's explaining his lineage, and that he's explaining emptiness according to the system of Nagarjuna.

Mirror says,

Take the subject 'Chandrakirti': - he explains suchness according to the school concurring with the scriptural system of Nagarjuna, - because Nagarjuna realised the extremely profound Dharma the same way a sixth ground bodhisattva realises it, and then conveyed it through quotations as well as through reason.

We have already said that a sixth ground bodhisattva realises the extremely profound directly. In order to understand what the sixth ground bodhisattva realises one can rely upon the quotations of the sutras. However it is very difficult to ascertain the meaning of the sutras through one's own analysis and investigation. The meaning of the sutras is extremely difficult to ascertain without relying upon another person, who has already ascertained their meaning. 'Therefore', Chandrakirti says, 'In order to ascertain their meaning of the sutras I'm relying upon Nagarjuna. A pioneer of the Madhyamika teachings, Nagarjuna was predicted by the Buddha as someone who would be able to ascertain the meaning of the sutras through his own understanding, without relying upon other human teachers.

Chandrakirti is saying that, 'My explanation will exactly

follow the explanation of Nagarjuna. In the same way as Nagarjuna explained the extremely profound through quotation as well as reason, I too, will explain it through the quotation of sutras and commentaries as well as reasoning, concurring with the scriptural system of Nagarjuna.'

In the same way as they realised the extremely profound

This line refers to the sixth ground bodhisattva. In the same way as the sixth ground bodhisattva realises the extremely profound, Nagarjuna also realised the extremely profound. On that basis he explained emptiness, the extremely profound, through the quotation of sutras as well as employing various types of reason. 'Now', Chandrakirti says, 'I, Chandrakirti will explain it in exactly the same way as Nagarjuna's system'.

This pledge to explain the profound is the verse where Chandrakirti explicitly makes the pledge to explain the meaning of Nagarjuna's *Root Wisdom*. In the previous five chapters Chandrakirti drew from Nagarjuna's other works such as *Precious Garland*, but until this stage hasn't actually dealt with *Root Wisdom*. Chandrakirti's commentary on *Root Wisdom* starts here in the sixth chapter.

It was said earlier that Nagarjuna is a valid person upon whose interpretation of the wisdom sutras one can rely. The reason why is he such a valid person is because he was predicted by the Buddha in the sutras. There is a quote from the *Sutra of the Buddha's Journey to Sri Lanka*, which says,

In the southern country of Bidha there will be a famous glorious bhikku, who will be renowned by the name of Naga, who will destroy the extremes of existence and non-existence, and who will explain my great vehicle to the world. He will have attained the ground of extreme joy, and then proceed to the pure realm of great bliss.

This is the quotation from the sutra where the Buddha predicted the coming of Nagarjuna.

3.2. Identifying the Vessel for the Profound

Having said that he will explain the extremely profound according to the system of Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti goes on to explain who is a suitable vessel for that explanation.

He says that he will explain the extremely profound only to those who are a correct vessel. He won't explain the extremely profound to those who aren't a correct vessel, because misconceptions arise in the minds of those beings.

Who is a vessel to be shown emptiness? Chandrakirti goes on to give the definition.

*Whoever, upon hearing emptiness while an ordinary being
Repeatedly generates intense inner joy, whose eyes are
Moistened by tears arising from intense joy,
And whose body hairs stand on end.
They possess the seed of a perfect buddha
They are the vessel to be shown suchness, they
Should be shown the truth of ultimate meaning*

If it is asked, 'Who is a vessel to be shown suchness?'

Take the subject 'people who repeatedly generate intense inner joy through hearing emptiness while an ordinary being,

As an ordinary being, before they have entered one of the grounds, they generate intense inner joy through hearing emptiness and through that joy

their eyes are moistened by the tears arising from intense joy, whose body hairs stand on end from the joy of hearing emptiness'

So the subject, those types of persons,

should be shown the truth of ultimate meaning.

Why are they the vessel to be shown the truth of ultimate meaning?

Because they're endowed with the non-conceptualising seed of the awareness of a perfect buddha.

So they have the karmic potential within their mind to realise emptiness. Here the seed for the realisation of emptiness refers to a powerful potential. In general everyone has the potential to realise emptiness, but here it talks about a very powerful potential.

Chandrakirti describes the vessel for receiving teachings on emptiness by listing the signs one needs to have in order to be shown emptiness. If we study emptiness in this life, then in the future we will become such a vessel. Lama Tsong Khapa also extended his hand to those who don't actually show those signs in this life. He says that even though you might not possess all those signs in this life, one can be the qualified vessel for realising emptiness by relying upon the pure teachings of a qualified teacher.

Lama Tsong Khapa says that,

Those signs are unmistakable signs that a person is suitable to hear the unmistakable teachings on emptiness and they won't be in danger of not understanding what is explained. Such a person will definitely understand the teachings on emptiness, and that they are qualified to receive the unmistakable teachings on emptiness. However if there's a person who doesn't understand the teachings on emptiness and who doesn't display those signs, then one cannot say for certain that they are the vessel to receive teachings on emptiness.

However if they don't go beyond the teachings of the pure qualified lama then even though they don't understand emptiness the first time it is explained to them, if they follow the teachings of the qualified lama and don't go beyond those teachings, then there will be many practitioners who are suitable to freshly realise emptiness.

3.3. The Way The Ensuing Qualities Are Generated

The listener or disciple who has been just been described will generate fruits from listening to emptiness. Why? First of all, they will, of course, eliminate the wrong view concerning emptiness. However that will not be the only fruit or result that they receive from listening to teachings on emptiness.

Not only will they generate an unmistakable understanding of emptiness, but also

***They generate the ensuing qualities
Remaining always practising perfect morality
Practising generosity and relying on compassion
Meditating on patience and perfectly dedicating the***

virtues

***For enlightenment in order to liberate migrators
And being respectful to perfect bodhisattvas***

Regarding the second line, ***Remaining always practising perfect morality***, *Illumination* says,

For the disciple who is such a vessel the opportunity to listen to the view of emptiness will be like finding a treasure. In order for that view of emptiness not to degenerate in a future lifetimes, then they will always continuously practise perfect morality.

They will continuously practise perfect morality in order to achieve that aim.

The disciple, who is the suitable vessel to be shown emptiness, is enthusiastic about listening to teachings on emptiness. They will become concerned about what will happen to their understanding of emptiness in future lives, and about finding the opportunity to listen to teachings on emptiness again, in future lives. Even though it's questionable as to whether one can say that a person who has realised emptiness will be reborn in the lower realms, this is talking about what practitioner themselves feels about their sequence of practice. They arrive at this concern because through practising immorality one will fall into the lower realms, and the continuity of the view of emptiness will be severed. By reflecting and thinking, 'If I don't keep my morality then I will be reborn in the lower realms, and then the continuity of the view of emptiness will be severed'. By thinking in this way they generate the motivation of wanting to always keep an undegenerate morality. Practising immorality doesn't necessarily mean that one has actually accepted some type of morality, and then breaks that morality. The practice of immorality can also be engaging in the natural non-virtuous actions

Regarding the third line, ***Practising generosity and relying on compassion***, then the practitioner reflects that, as *Illumination* states,

By keeping pure morality one would be reborn in the higher realms. If in that rebirth one were to be born destitute, then one would lack food, drink, medicine, and clothing, and all the necessities of life. Then one would have to engage in a great deal of effort in order to attain those necessities of life, and again the continuity of listening to teachings on emptiness and meditating on the view of emptiness would be severed.

In our case it's not a question of attaining the necessities of life, it's a question of multiplying the necessities of life! In our case the continuity of the meditation on emptiness is severed or degenerates not because we have to exert so much effort in order to attain the necessities of life, but because we exert so much effort in order to increase the necessities of life that we already have. That's a very important point to consider.

Therefore towards the higher side, the bodhisattva practises making offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and towards the lower side they practise generosity towards sentient beings. Further, the bodhisattva also reflects on the necessity of combining one's realisation of emptiness with compassion, seeing that the view of emptiness has to be held by great compassion in order to be able to go to the state of buddhahood. Just having the view of emptiness by itself

is not enough to become enlightened. It needs to be combined with great compassion. Therefore the line, 'practising generosity and relying on compassion'. Understanding this, a bodhisattva relies on compassion.

Further, the practitioner reflects that through anger they would again be led to the lower realms, and that anger would also destroy their virtues. Even if they were to be reborn as a human they would have an exceedingly ugly appearance, and because of that exceedingly ugly appearance then arya beings wouldn't be very pleased to meet them. Then they would miss out on the opportunity of meeting arya beings. So having generated that doubt the practitioner practises patience.

Ordinary beings, who are not concerned with meeting arya beings, and who are only concerned with meeting their worldly friends, are worried that their outer appearance will not please their friends, so they apply all types of colours and makeup and so on in order to make themselves pleasing to the eye. Here, however, we are talking about the practitioner who thinks about everything from the Dharma point of view.

Perfectly dedicating the virtues for enlightenment in order to liberate migrators

Here the virtues of meditating on emptiness, practising morality, practising generosity, compassion, patience, have to be dedicated for complete enlightenment in order to become a cause for complete enlightenment. The merits that have been dedicated to complete enlightenment become inexhaustible, once their fruition has been attained.

They become respectful to perfect bodhisattvas as a result of listening to teachings on emptiness, because they understand that hearers and self liberators can't explain the profound dependent arising like bodhisattvas. Understanding that, then they become extremely respectful to perfect bodhisattvas.

By listening to teachings on emptiness and generating an understanding of emptiness, then not only will the profound aspect of the path be increased, but also the extensive aspect of the path will be increased. As a result the bodhisattva develops respect, not only for the practice of emptiness, but also the method aspect of the path.

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Edited Version

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