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# Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Please generate a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and towards that end I'm now going to listen to these teachings, and then I'm going to put them into practice as much as possible, so that I can accomplish that aim'.

### 3. Explanation of the Suchness of Dependent Arising

We finished the outlines such as the praise of the perfection of wisdom, and explaining the suchness of dependent arising, which has five sub-outlines. Of these we have finished pledging to explain the profound, identifying the vessel for the profound, the way the ensuing qualities are generated, and we are up to exhorting the student who is a vessel to listen.

#### 3.1. Exhorting the Student Who Is a Vessel to Listen

Having explained how, by listening to the teachings on it, the specific disciple of the *Madhyamakavatara* generates different qualities apart from the understanding of emptiness, one goes onto exhort the specific disciples to listen to those teachings.

The root text reads,

*Beings proficient in the profound and extensive ways  
Gradually attain the ground of extreme joy, therefore  
Those aspiring towards that should listen to this path*

So it is appropriate to exhort those aspiring to the ground Extremely Joyful to listen to this profound path, because beings proficient in the profound and extensive ways gradually attain this ground of extreme joy.

Why is it appropriate to exhort those who aspire to the ground Extremely Joyful to listen to this teaching on the profound path? It is because those who are proficient in the profound and extensive aspects of the path gradually attain this ground of extreme joy. This reason shows that the specific disciples of *Entering the Middle Way* are ordinary beings, who haven't attained the arya ground yet. They will gradually attain the ground of Extreme Joy if they become proficient in profound and extensive ways, which shows that they are not yet at the ground of extreme joy.

The commentary on the *Four Hundred Stanzas* by Aryadeva says that by listening to teachings on emptiness, and generating an understanding of emptiness, then one will generate respect for the teachings on emptiness. This is because the greater the understanding of emptiness the more respect one will generate for those teachings. Through these conducive conditions one will generate greater faith. One's clear

faith in emptiness will be increased and one will also have greater compassion, and one will be more careful regarding one's actions towards the Tathagata.

Through listening to the teachings on emptiness and gaining some understanding of it, they will generate a very intense wish to thoroughly abandon the cause for one's downfall - the obscuration towards the holy Dharma, which refers here to the intellectually acquired true grasping. It is not just a matter of having innate true grasping, but that the person also actually decides that things exist truly. This decision acts as an obscuration for one's practice of the Dharma.

Because of special experiences they are even able to practise the generosity that are usually very difficult to do. They will also practise the four Dharmas for collecting disciples and in short all Dharma practice will be increased. Such a person is a suitable vessel for the holy Dharma on emptiness.

As we said the other day, generating intense inner joy, hairs standing on end, and so forth, are the signs. However it's not just that. When they listen to emptiness they do not just get those signs but they actually generate an understanding of emptiness. Together with that they generate those qualities that benefit their whole Dharma practice in the way just explained. That's what a proper vessel for those teachings is.

To such a disciple one should show this Dharma with great effort, because they are free of the two faults of a faulty vessel. To those who, even though they have great belief in those teachings, cannot understand them the way they are first explained, one should teach them in a manner that doesn't harm their belief, and their ascertaining of dependent arising. There's a danger that someone who is not a proper recipient could fall into the extreme of nihilism, and then there's a danger that of course it would harm their understanding and belief in dependent arising. By showing them that dependent arising and the lack of inherent existence are complimentary and not contradictory, then one can teach them in a skilful manner that doesn't harm the disciples understanding of dependent arising.

It is extremely meritorious for someone who is well learned in this topic to explain it to a listener who is, at the very least, a suitable vessel. To prove this point Lama Tsong Khapa gives here a quote from the *Compendium of Sutras* by Nagarjuna. In the *Compendium of Sutras*, Nagarjuna conveyed emptiness through both scriptural quotation as well as through reasoning. In the *Root of Wisdom* Nagarjuna conveyed emptiness only through reasoning and inference. So here then the *Compendium of Sutras* says that by having belief in the profound Dharma then all merits are condensed, because until one becomes enlightened all goodness and perfections that are contained within cyclic existence, and those that are beyond cyclic existence, will all be established through emptiness.

Further Lama Tsong Khapa gives a quote from the *Sutra of the Ungenerated Enemy*, the name of a king who had committed one of the five uninterrupted karmas with regard to his parents. The Buddha said to him that,

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‘those who listen to this profound Dharma and then engage in and believe in it, even though they have generated uninterrupted karmas, I proclaim that those karmas will not be obscurations for them.’

Listening to teachings on emptiness, and meditating on emptiness, and generating that belief in emptiness again and again has those benefits. *Illumination* says that in order to attain the benefits then two conditions are needed.

*In order for a person who explaining emptiness to receive benefits from explaining emptiness, two conditions are needed. First of all they need to have a pure motivation not looking for praise and fame.*

This needs to be explained correctly without confusing its meaning. In order to receive great benefits from explaining emptiness when both those conditions need to be present. If anyone of those conditions are not present then that will be an obstacle to gaining great benefits from explaining emptiness. So even though one might explain emptiness correctly, if one’s motivation is not free from wishing for praise and fame then that will be an obstacle. Likewise the reverse.

Here Lama Tsong Khapa quotes Vasubandhu in order to support this statement. One wants to receive great benefits from explaining emptiness but if one doesn’t have those two conditions present that will prevent one from receiving great benefits from explaining emptiness. Vasubandhu says that if one explains the Dharma incorrectly, with an afflictive mind wishing for praise and fame, then the great merits that can be attained from teaching the Dharma will be decreased.

Therefore both the listener should have a pure motivation for listening to the teachings, and also the person who is explaining shouldn’t convey it mistakenly, and should also have a pure motivation. For example one looks into the mirror and then cleans off the dirt and impurities on one’s face. One looks then one cleans, one looks and one cleans. Likewise when one is listening to the teachings or when explaining the Dharma, one should repeatedly check upon one’s motivation. Is it still a pure motivation or has it become diluted with the faults explained above?

That’s enough for today, and we can stop here. Next time we can start a little with the next major outline, the way suchness is explained, and I will go through the ten equalities, which are not actually mentioned in the root text itself, but which Lama Tsong Khapa mentions in his commentary. I’m going to go through those ten equalities mentioned, I think, in the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis* next time.

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*Edited Version*

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