
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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དབུ་མ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་པོ།

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Generate a virtuous motivation, thinking, 'I have to attain complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings' and in order to do so, I am now going to listen to this profound teaching. Then I am going to put in into practice as much as possible'.

6.3.5.2.2.1.11. Emptiness of that not to give up

*That labelled 'to give up' is accurately
Described as 'to discard' and 'to throw away'.
To not give up is to not cast aside.
Not to give up anything that is.*

*That which is the very emptiness
Of the mere lack of giving up,
Because it is that it should be described
As emptiness of not giving up.*

What you have to keep in mind is that 'not to give up' refers to the Mahayana. The Mahayana is that which is not to be given up.

In the second line that labelled 'to give up' is accurately described as 'to discard and 'to throw away'. Here what is being discarded or thrown away is cyclic existence. So, 'not giving up' refers to the Mahayana, and that which is being discarded or thrown away is cyclic existence. The lack of inherent existence of that not to be given up is the *emptiness* of the Mahayana.

Mirror:

Take the subject '*that which is Mahayana*' – it *is* something *not to give up* – because it isn't *anything* to give up both from the point of view of entity as well as time.

Take the subject '*that which is the very emptiness* of the quintessential nature *of the mere lack of giving up*' – *it should be described as the emptiness of not giving up* – *because it is* the emptiness *that* is the lack of the true existence of not giving up.

The Mahayana is that which should not be given up, both from the point of view of its nature as well as from the point of view of time. The lack of inherent existence of that which one shouldn't give up consequently refers to the emptiness or the lack of inherent existence of the Mahayana.

6.3.5.2.2.1.12. Emptiness of nature

*The identity of compounded phenomena and so forth,
It is not created by students,
Self-enlightened ones, conquerors' children and
Tathagatas.
Therefore the mere identity of compounded
phenomena*

And so forth is described

As mere nature.

That which is the emptiness of that itself,

It is the emptiness of nature

The emptiness of nature is very similar to the emptiness of emptiness. The emptiness of nature refers to the emptiness of the primordial nature of compounded phenomena and so forth, which has existed since beginningless times. It is not something that was fabricated or created by hearers, solitary realisers, students or self-enlightened ones. It was not created by bodhisattvas or by the Tathagatas. The lack of inherent existence of compounded phenomena and so forth is the mere nature or emptiness of those phenomena. The emptiness of that nature is the emptiness of nature, which is very similar to the emptiness of emptiness.

One might doubt whether the emptiness of nature is just a repetition of the emptiness of emptiness that was mentioned as emptiness number four. However, even though they basically talk about the same emptiness, each is explained from a different point of view in order to dispel slightly different misconceptions.

The emptiness of emptiness was taught in order to dispel the misconception that emptiness exists truly, because it is found by transcendental wisdom. Having established emptiness as being the object that is realised by transcendental wisdom, then the idea could arise that because it is realised by transcendental wisdom it therefore has to exist ultimately. In order to counteract this misconception, the emptiness of emptiness was taught.

With the emptiness of nature the misconception that is being dispelled is different. Here the misconception is thinking that emptiness exists truly because it has existed since beginningless time, and has not been created by anybody. When one is presented with the idea that emptiness is the primordial nature of everything that has existed since beginningless times, not being created by anything or anybody, the idea could arise in one's mind that emptiness exists truly. In order to dispel this misconception, the emptiness of nature was explained. In general we can say that we have the final mode of abiding of an object, but the object is not established within that final nature.

6.3.5.2.2.1.13. Emptiness of all dharmas

First we have to identify what those dharmas are.

*The eighteen spheres, six contacts and
The six feelings arising from them,
Possessing form and not possessing form,
Likewise compounded and non-compounded
phenomena,*

*Anything that is the void of
All these phenomena is emptiness.*

The *eighteen spheres* refer to:

i) The six sense powers:

1. Eye sense-power
 2. Ear sense-power
 3. Nose sense-power
 4. Tongue sense-power
 5. Body sense-power
-

6. Mental sense-power

ii) The six primary consciousnesses generated in dependence upon those six sense powers:

1. Eye primary consciousness
2. Ear primary consciousness
3. Nose primary consciousness
4. Tongue primary consciousness
5. Body primary consciousness
6. Mental primary consciousness

iii) The six objects of those six primary consciousnesses:

1. Form source, i.e. visual forms such as shapes and colours
2. Sound source
3. Smell source
4. Taste source
5. Tactile source, i.e. tactile stimulus such as hot, cold, smooth, coarse and so forth
6. Phenomena source, i.e. mental stimulus.

The eighteen spheres refer to the six sense-powers from the eye sense-power to the mental sense-power. The six primary consciousnesses are generated in dependence on those six sense-powers, starting with the eye-consciousness and up to the mental-consciousness. Then we have the six objects of those six primary consciousnesses starting with visual objects, up to the sphere of phenomena.

The six types of **contact** are contact generated in relation to the eye sense-power up to contact being generated in relation to the mental sense-power.

From the six types of contact the six types of **feeling** arise. Contact precedes feeling. Contact is posited in between the coming together of sense-power, consciousness and object, but before having any experience of the object. Feelings relate to the feelings that are generated in relation to the eye-consciousness upon contact with the eye sense-power and so forth, up to the feeling that is generated through contact with the mental sense-power. On contact with a pleasant object a feeling of happiness is generated. On contact with an unpleasant object one generates the feeling of unhappiness. First there has to be the coming together of object, sense-power and consciousness, and if the object is a pleasant object, then one generates a pleasant feeling.

Possessing form and not possessing form encompasses all phenomena. Here when it talks about all dharmas it is referring to dharmas in the context of phenomena. Possessing form and not possessing form encompasses all dharmas. When it says that all dharmas are contained within the eighteen spheres, it is not referring to dharma from the point of view of the exalted Dharma, but to the dharma from the point of view of phenomena.

Likewise compounded and non-compounded phenomena encompass all dharmas. **Anything that is the void of all these phenomena is emptiness.** Anything that is the lack of inherent existence of all dharmas is the emptiness of all dharmas.

6.3.5.2.2.1.14. The emptiness of one's definition

One's definition is that which characterises the object. The definition of the object is that which characterises the object, through which the object is posited.

The emptiness of one's definition is explained in three outlines:

6.3.5.2.2.1.14.1. Condensed explanation

6.3.5.2.2.1.14.2. Extensive explanation

6.3.5.2.2.1.14.3. Summary

6.3.5.2.2.1.14.1. Condensed explanation

***Any non-phenomenon such as suitable to be form
And so forth is the emptiness of definition.***

Mirror:

Take the subject '**the non-phenomenon** of truly existing **suitable to be form** and so forth' – it is **the emptiness of definition** – because it is the emptiness that is the lack of the true existence of definition.

6.3.5.2.2.1.14.2. Extensive explanation

The extensive explanation is divided into three:

6.3.5.2.2.1.14.2.1. Definitions relating to the bases

6.3.5.2.2.1.14.2.2. Definitions relating to the path

6.3.5.2.2.1.14.2.3. Definitions relating to the result.

6.3.5.2.2.1.14.2.1. The definitions relating to the basis

***Form has the definition of that suitable to
Be form, feeling has the nature of experience,
Recognition is apprehending characteristics,
Compositional factors are strongly activating.***

Mirror:

Take the subject '**that suitable to be form, the uncommon definition of form**' – it doesn't exist inherently – because it is neither inherently existing one nor inherently existing many.

One can apply this format to all the others as well.

Suitable to be form is posited as the definition of form. Here, the suitability aspect can relate to the suitability to transform into colour or shape.

Feeling has the nature of experience, feeling is basically the happiness, suffering or neutral experience that one has.

Recognition is the apprehending of the specific distinguishing characteristics of the object, such as the characteristics that distinguish a male from a female, so that one can say 'this is a male or this is a female'.

Compositional factors are strongly activating factors. What they activate is the mind. Compositional factors strongly activate the mind.

***Clearly knowing the individual objects
Is the definition of primary consciousness,
Misery is the definition of the aggregates,
The spheres' nature is asserted as a striking snake,***

In general, **aggregates** refer to, as it says, an aggregation of objects, and a **sphere** generally refers to a type. But here it states that the definition of the aggregates is misery and the spheres' nature is asserted as a striking snake.

***The sources were taught by the Buddha
As the very doors to birth,
That which arises dependently and related
Has the definition of meeting.***

The etymology of a **source** is that which generates primary consciousness. One has for example, form, like

shape and colour, that generates a visual primary consciousness and so forth.

Mirror:

...that which arises dependently and related has the definition of the meeting of causes and conditions.

In general, the meaning of dependent arising is being established in dependence upon its parts. The Prasangika assert that everything that exists is established in dependence on its parts, i.e. is dependent arising. But here it refers to the more coarse dependent arising of cause-and-effect.

On the side of the bases we have such things as form, feeling and so forth. The root text listed the different definitions, the different characteristics that define those objects, such as suitable to be form as form, and experience defining feeling and so forth.

6.3.5.2.2.1.14.2.2. The definitions relating to the path

Now we look at what defines the different aspects of the path. The root text reads:

Letting go is the perfection of generosity, the Definition of morality is lack of misery, the definition of patience is lack of anger, of enthusiasm Is the very lack of the unspeakable,

What defines the perfection of **generosity** is the thought of letting go. The actual generosity is not the act or the substance, but it is the thought of letting go.

The definition of morality is lack of the misery caused by mental afflictions. Morality soothes the suffering caused by the mental afflictions in the same way that shade soothes the suffering that is caused by heat. Here morality is defined by this aspect of soothing the suffering caused by mental afflictions. Of course there is also the other definition of morality, which is the mind of restraint, or self-discipline.

The definition of patience is the lack of anger. What do we define as patience? Patience is a mind that is not disturbed or agitated by suffering, and the causes of suffering, or harm. Patience is a lack of anger, a lack of agitation and disturbance in the face of suffering or harm. Patience is the antidote to anger, which overcomes anger.

The definition of **enthusiasm** is joy in virtue, lacking the unspeakable. The unspeakable refers to non-virtue, which is something that holy beings don't even want to talk about. Enthusiasm is the joy in the practice of virtue. If one just persists in one's practice of virtue without any joy, then that would be called just mere diligence or mere effort. However if it is combined with the aspect of joy, then it becomes enthusiasm.

Opposites

The opposite of **enthusiasm** is laziness, which is counteracted by enthusiasm. The opposite of **patience** is anger or mental agitation. If one is angry, then that can be overcome by patience. The opposite of **morality** is amorality. The opposite of **generosity** is greed.

Amorality is confused or distorted morality, i.e. unethical actions of body, speech and mind, which can be

overcome by morality. Greed can be overcome by generosity. If one is greedy, then by slowly practicing a little bit of generosity, one can increase one's generosity and overcome one's greed. One can overcome one's different mental afflictions by practising the appropriate perfection.

Mental stabilisation has the definition of bringing together, Wisdom's very definition is lack of attachment. The definitions of the six perfections Are stated as such.

Mirror:

Mental stabilisation has the definition of a single-pointed mind bringing together all virtuous dharmas.

What is being opposed by concentration is mental wandering, which is its opposite.

The definition of **wisdom** is the lack of attachment. What this means is that wisdom is liberating - wisdom liberates one from attachment and mental afflictions. Mental stabilisation ensures that the mind is not disturbed by the mental afflictions, and wisdom liberates one from the mental afflictions, such as attachment and so forth.

The definitions of the six perfections are stated as such in the sutras.

Mental stabilisations and the immeasurables and Likewise whatever other formless ones, These were taught by Perfect Transcendental Knowledge As having the definition of being undisturbed.

The mental stabilisations refer the four form absorptions, which are sometimes referred to as the four mental stabilisations. Then we have the four immeasurables and the four formless absorptions.

Mirror:

Take the subject 'mental stabilisations, the immeasurables, and likewise whatever other formless ones, these that were taught by Perfect Transcendental Knowledge as having the definition of being undisturbed' - they don't exist inherently

For example, through the practice of generosity, our mind won't be disturbed by greed. Through the practice of morality, our mind won't be disturbed by amorality, while the practice of patience prevents the mind being disturbed by anger and so forth.

The thirty-seven features of enlightenment - Their definition is definitely liberating. The definition of emptiness is The mere void aspect lacking focus,

The thirty-seven features of enlightenment' are:

i) The **four close placements by mindfulness**; i.e. Close placement by mindfulness on

1. the body
2. feelings
3. mind
4. phenomena

Purpose¹: Also called 'the paths that thoroughly realised phenomena', these four are meditated upon to realise the four noble truths on the body, feelings, mind and phenomena.

Etymology: Wisdom is placed closely by mindfulness on the object of meditation.

Path: Emphasised on the small path of accumulation.

ii) The **four perfect abandonments** i.e. the perfect abandonment of

1. not generating any new non-virtue not yet generated
2. abandoning the non-virtue already generated
3. generating new virtue not yet generated
4. increasing the virtue already generated

Also called 'the paths arising from striving', these four are explained after the four placements because they are the enthusiasm that is generated through realising what has to be abandoned and what has to be practised.

Etymology: They perfectly abandon the objects of abandonment.

Definition: Enthusiasm on the path that joyfully abandons that to be abandoned and joyfully adopts that to be practised.

Path: Emphasised on the middling path of accumulation.

iii) The **four legs of magical emanation** i.e. the leg of magical emanation of

1. aspiration
2. enthusiasm
3. intention
4. analysis

Also called 'the paths thoroughly training in concentration', they are explained subsequently to the four perfect abandonments, because somebody very enthusiastic about abandoning the obscurations and developing qualities needs concentration, a flexible workable mind, which can act as the basis for qualities.

Purpose: With concentration the bodhisattva can then send out emanations, and develop the worldly and supramundane qualities.

Etymology: Being endowed with the legs that can go to the pure buddha fields through magical emanation.

Definition: Concentration on the path, having overcome the five faults with the eight antidotes.

Path: Emphasised on the great path of accumulation.

iv) The **five powers** i.e. the power of

1. faith
2. enthusiasm
3. mindfulness
4. concentration
5. wisdom

Also called 'the paths training in clear realisation', they are explained subsequently to the paths thoroughly training in concentration, because through training one's mind in aspiration etc. one develops the heat and peak stages of the path of preparation, which will propel one

to see truth directly.

Purpose: To quickly complete the heat and peaks stages, and to quickly attain the forbearance and supreme dharma stages of the path of preparation.

Etymology: Having becoming empowered to generate its resultant arya path.

Path: Start on the heat and peak levels of the path of preparation.

v) The **five forces** i.e. the force of

1. faith
2. enthusiasm
3. mindfulness
4. concentration
5. wisdom

Also called 'the paths related to clear realisation', they are explained subsequently to the paths training in clear realisation because after having attained the five powers in the nature of heat and peak, one then attains the five forces in the nature of forbearance and supreme dharma.

Purpose: To quickly complete the forbearance and supreme dharma stages of the path of preparation, and to quickly generate the path of seeing.

Etymology: 'Force' because they won't be overcome by their opposite mental states.

Path: Start on the forbearance and supreme dharma levels of the path of preparation.

vi) The **seven limbs of enlightenment** i.e. the limb of enlightenment of

1. perfect mindfulness
2. clear discernment
3. enthusiasm,
4. joy
5. pliancy
6. concentration
7. equanimity

Also called the 'the paths of clear realisation', they are explained subsequently to the paths related to clear realisation, because the path clearly realising truth newly is generated upon completion of the forbearance and supreme dharma levels of the paths of preparation.

Purpose: To abandon all *abandonments through seeing*.

Definition: Exalted knowledge that becomes the cause of its resultant enlightenment.

Etymology: 'Limbs of enlightenment' because they are the causes of their resultant enlightenment.

Path: Start on the path of seeing.

vii) The **eight limbs of the arya path**: i.e. the limb of the arya path of

1. right view
2. right thought
3. right speech
4. right action
5. right livelihood
6. right striving
7. right concentration
8. right wisdom

Also called 'the paths that definitively liberate', they are explained subsequently to the paths of clear realisation because the definitely liberating and purifying entity of

¹ Here and below I have added some points from Jetsun Chogigyaltsen's commentary on the thirty-seven, which you may or may not find interesting. Regards, Tenzin Fedor

the path of meditation arises subsequently to the path of seeing.

Purpose: To abandon the *abandonments through meditation*, to investigate the meaning realised during meditative equipoise, convey the exalted dharma, generate faith in others, to purify the afflicted obscurations and the obscurations preventing becoming empowered with qualities.

Etymology: 'Limbs of the arya path' because they are the causes of their resultant arya path.

Path: Emphasised on the path of seeing.

These thirty-seven features of enlightenment are sometimes referred to as the thirty-seven features concordant with enlightenment, because they are concordant with enlightenment.

Their definition is definitely liberating. All of the thirty-seven features of enlightenment are in the definition of definitely liberating, because they are all an actual path.

***The lack of signs is mere pacification,
The third's definition is a lack of suffering
And ignorance. The definition of
Emancipation is to liberate.***

There are three doors to liberation.

Mirror:

The definition of the first door to liberation, i.e. ***emptiness, is the mere void aspect*** empty of true-grasping since it is ***lacking*** the ***focus*** of true-grasping, ***the*** definition of the second door to liberation, i.e. ***the lack of signs, is the mere pacification*** of signs, ***the third door's definition is a lack of suffering and ignorance,*** and ***the definition of emancipation is to liberate*** from the obscuration of absorption.

Emancipation refers here to the eight emancipations, such as the emancipation, looking at that which possesses form as form and so forth.

To prepare for the exam you have to be able to list all of the thirty-seven features of enlightenment. There are many places where you can look. For example one very good place to look, even for those who don't speak Tibetan, is the blue *Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology* by Tsepak Rigzin. All thirty-seven features are listed in there.

Likewise, you should also ascertain the different aspects of the result, such as the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses, the four types of confidence, the uncommon dharmas of a Buddha and so forth. Also you need to know what is meant by a valid being, a valid quote and a valid cogniser. Knowing those qualities is very important, because by knowing them, one will generate the wish to become enlightened thinking, 'these are qualities that I would like to attain'.

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Edited Version

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