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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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Please generate a virtuous motivation as usual.

### 6.3.5.2.2.1. The Sixteen Emptinesses (cont)

#### 6.3.5.2.2.1.14. The emptiness of one's definition

Last time we started with the fourteenth emptiness, the emptiness of one's definition, which had two parts - the condensed part and the extensive part.

#### 6.3.5.2.2.1.14.2. Extensive Explanation

The extensive explanation was further sub-divided into the definitions relating to basis, path and result and we completed the definitions relating to basis and path.

The definitions that we talked about last time, such as the three doors to liberation, the thirty-seven features of enlightenment and so forth, are all very useful to know.

#### 6.3.5.2.2.1.14.2.3. The definitions relating to the result

A definition is that which posits the object and its major distinguishing features, and the lack of inherent existence of the definition of these features is the emptiness of definition.

*The powers are in the nature of  
Strong understanding, it is taught.*

It starts with the definition of what a power is. It says here that the powers are in the nature of strong intense knowledge that is devoid of attachment and anger, and the lack of inherent existence of that is the emptiness of the definition of power.

*The saving fearlessnesses  
Have the identity of strong stability.*

The saving fearlessnesses are the four fearlessnesses of a buddha; i.e. the fearlessness of stating what has to be abandoned, the fearlessness of stating what has to be adapted, and so forth. The Buddha is completely fearless in explaining to sentient beings what has to be abandoned, for example. When the Buddha makes these statements they have so much weight and strength that they become irrefutable, so they have the characteristic of very strong stability. The lack of inherent existence of that stability is the emptiness of the definition of fearlessness.

Also, as I have already explained hundreds and thousands of times, if we visualise the throne of Shakyamuni Buddha with four lions then those four lions represent those four fearlessnesses.

*The individual perfect knowledges have the definition  
Of uninterrupted confidence and so forth.*

*Mirror:*

*The individual perfect knowledges have the  
definition of an uninterrupted continuum of the*

four, *confidence and so forth.*

The four individual perfect knowledges are the individual perfect knowledge of dharma, meaning, terms and confidence.

This refers, for example, to the ability of being able to explain the terms and meaning of the dharma without any problems and obstruction with a confidence that is not overcome by adverse conditions. The lack of inherent existence of that is the emptiness of the definition of individual fearlessness.

*Superbly achieving the welfare of migrators  
Has to be called great love.*

The lack of inherent existence of superbly achieving the welfare of migrators is the emptiness of definition of great love.

*Completely saving those who suffer  
Is great-hearted compassion.*

The difference between love and compassion is that love is a giving mind that gives happiness to sentient beings, while compassion is more concerned with taking away the suffering of sentient beings.

*Intense joy  
Is the definition of joy.*

Intense joy in bringing benefit and happiness to sentient beings is the definition of joy, and the lack of inherent existence of that is the emptiness of the definition of joy.

*Know that  
Equanimity has the definition of being undiluted.*

Equanimity has the definition of being undiluted with anger and attachment, and the lack of inherent existence of that is the emptiness of the definition of equanimity.

*The uncommon dharmas of a buddha,  
Whichever one of the ten and eight one asserts,  
Since they aren't taken from the Buddha  
By that, therefore the definition 'not taken'.*

Then we have the eighteen uncommon dharmas of a buddha.

*Mirror:*

*Whichever one of the ten and eight uncommon  
dharmas of a buddha one asserts, it has the  
definition 'not taken', since they aren't taken from  
the Buddha by adverse conditions.*

And the lack of inherent existence of that nature of not being taken away by adverse conditions is the emptiness of the definition of the uncommon dharmas.

The eighteen uncommon dharmas of a buddha come in three groups of six:

**The six uncommon behaviours;** i.e a buddha doesn't have any

- mistaken physical actions
  - idle speech; the Buddha has ascertained the needs and potential of the disciple and therefore he is able to guide the disciple perfectly and consequently everything the buddha says has impact and meaning for the disciple.
  - lessening of mindfulness
  - time out of meditative equipoise
  - discrimination between samsara and nirvana
  - equanimity that is not engaged in specific analysis;
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he possess the transcendental wisdom that is free from the equanimity that doesn't engage in individual analysis.

**The six uncommon realisations;** i.e. a buddha does not experience any lessening of

- aspiration
- enthusiasm
- mindfulness
- concentration
- wisdom
- liberation

**The six uncommon beneficial activities:**

- A buddha's physical enlightened activities are always preceded by transcendental wisdom and are also followed by transcendental wisdom.
- A buddha's enlightened activities of speech are always preceded by transcendental wisdom and followed by transcendental wisdom.
- A buddha's enlightened activities of the mind are always preceded by transcendental wisdom and followed by transcendental wisdom.
- The transcendental wisdom of a buddha sees the past without attachment and unobstructed.
- The transcendental wisdom of a buddha sees the future without attachment and unobstructed
- The transcendental wisdom of a buddha sees the present without attachment and unobstructed.

The essence is that a buddha perceives the three times without attachment and obstruction. One can relate the lack of attachment to not being obscured by the afflictive obscuration, and the lack of obstruction to not being obscured by the obscuration to knowledge. What it is saying is that a buddha can see the three times unobstructed and unmistakably.

The meaning of uncommon in 'uncommon dharmas of a buddha' refers to the fact that those eighteen are found only on the level of enlightenment and there is no other being that possesses those qualities. You should try to know the eighteen dharmas of a buddha well.

*Exalted omniscient transcendental wisdom knowledge  
Is posited as having the definition 'direct perception'.  
Others, being merely partial,  
Aren't called direct perception.*

*Mirror:*

*Exalted omniscient transcendental wisdom knowledge is posited as having the definition of 'an exalted knower directly perceiving all objects of knowledge'. Other consciousnesses, by a mere partial engagement of the object, aren't called a direct perception of all objects of knowledge.*

The other consciousnesses that are referred to here can be consciousnesses of hearers or self-liberated arhats. Of course they also have direct perceptions but they are only partial direct perceptions of objects of knowledge, and not direct perceptions of all objects of knowledge.

#### 6.3.5.2.2.1.14.3. Summary

*Any definitions of compounded phenomena  
And any definitions of non-compounded phenomena,*

*The emptiness of that alone,  
It is the emptiness of definitions.*

*Mirror:*

Take the subject '*the emptiness of the quintessential nature of the definitions of compounded and non-compounded phenomena alone*' – *it is the emptiness of definitions* – because it is the emptiness that is the lack of the true existence of definitions.

#### 6.3.5.2.2.1.15. The emptiness of the unobservable

*The present doesn't abide and  
The past and future do not exist.  
They are unobservable at any time,  
They are called unobservable.*

*That which is the mere void  
Of the unobservable is not unchanging,  
And it also does not disintegrate, hence  
It is the emptiness of that called unobservable.*

The three times are referred to as unobservable because they are mutually unobservable at any time since the present does not abide in the next moment. So at the time of the present only the present exists; the past has disintegrated, and the future is yet about to come. At the time of the future only the future exists, and so forth.

*Mirror:*

*...the present doesn't abide in the next moment and, since the past has disintegrated and the future hasn't yet generated, they do not exist in the present.*

The three times are not observable at one time and the lack of inherent existence of them being such unobservable is the emptiness of the unobservable.

*Mirror:*

Take the subject '*that which is the mere void of the unobservable*' – *it is the emptiness of that called unobservable* – because it is the lack of the truly existing unobservable. The unobservable *is not* ultimately *unchanging and it also does not disintegrate*.

So the unobservable on the one hand is not ultimately unchanging and also it does not ultimately disintegrate.

#### 6.3.5.2.2.1.16. The emptiness of the quintessential nature of non-functionalities

*Since functionalities arise from conditions  
They don't have the nature of being compounded.  
The emptiness of the compounded itself  
Is the emptiness of non-functionalities.*

*Mirror:*

Take the subject '*functionalities*' – *they don't have the nature of being compounded* inherently – because they *arise from conditions*.

As we have said before, functionalities arise through the aggregation of causes and conditions, and therefore they are not in the nature of being compounded inherently.

#### Why sixteen emptinesses?

Regarding the distinctions of the sixteen emptinesses, first of all there is no distinction regarding the logical reasoning with which they are established. As we already

said before, once one has generated an inferential cognition of one emptiness then the only thing one needs to do is to transfer that understanding to another object, without employing any new type of reasoning. One can rely on the force of the old reasoning. If sixteen different types of reasoning were needed then one would have sixteen different emptinesses. One would need one reasoning to establish inner emptiness, then one reason to establish outer emptiness, and so forth. But this is not the case; there is no difference in the reasoning with which they are established.

**From the point of view of one individual**, after having meditated on emptiness with the reasoning that establishes emptiness, then that individual will meditate on these different emptinesses sequentially. So they describe the sequential stages of meditating on these different emptiness, but not with different reasoning. After the practitioner has initially realised emptiness with the reasoning establishing emptiness, then he or she just transfers that understanding to those individual different bases of emptiness.

Apart from being taught as the sequential basis for meditating on the emptiness of different objects for one individual, the sixteen emptinesses were also taught for the purpose of **opposing specific types of true-grasping on the continuum of different practitioners**. Certain individual beings hold different types of true-grasping - some might have stronger true-grasping for inner phenomena than outer phenomena, some might have stronger true-grasping for some other type of phenomena. These sixteen emptiness were also taught to eliminate specific types of true-grasping in certain individuals.

So there are two scenarios why the Buddha taught the sixteen emptinesses. From the point of view of one practitioner they describe the sequence of meditating on the different types of emptiness, and the other possible situation is that the Buddha taught the sixteen emptinesses in order to over-come specific types of true grasping in certain individuals.

#### **6.3.5.2.2.2. The four emptinesses**

The four emptinesses are the emptiness of functionalities, the emptiness of non-functionalities, the lack of the quintessential nature of nature, and the emptiness of other functionalities.

***If summarised, the word 'functionality'***

***Describes the five aggregates.***

***Any such emptiness of theirs***

***Is described as emptiness of functionalities.***

All functionalities are contained within the five aggregates, and if one does not describe all functionalities individually, then one can just summarise them as the five aggregates.

*Mirror:*

***...ny such emptiness of their quintessential nature – it is described as emptiness of functionalities – because it is the emptiness that is the lack of the true existence of functionalities.***

***In short, non-functionalities***

***Are described as non-compounded phenomena.***

***The emptiness of the non-functionality itself  
Is the emptiness of non-functionalities.***

Non-functionalities can either refer to three objects or four objects. If it refers to three non-functionalities then it refers to non-compounded space, individually analysed cessation and not individually analysed cessation. If it refers to four then it refers to non-compounded space, nirvana with remainder, nirvana without remainder, and non-abiding nirvana.

In general ***phenomenon that can perform a function*** is the definition of a functionality and a ***phenomenon that can't perform a function*** is the definition of a non-functioning phenomenon, here non-functionality. If we don't list all the functionalities individually then they can just be condensed within the five aggregates, and if we don't list all the non-functionalities individually then here they can just be condensed into these three.

The lack of inherent existence of non-compounded space and the two types of cessation here is then the emptiness of non-functionalities. This of course can also be applied to all other types of non-compounded phenomena, such as emptiness itself, such as the sixteen emptinesses and so forth; they all are non-compounded phenomena.

***The lack of the quintessential nature of nature***

***Is the emptiness of that called nature.***

***Because nature wasn't created***

***It is taught that it should be called nature.***

What is here referred to as nature is emptiness itself.

*Mirror:*

Take the subject 'the nature emptiness' – ***it is taught that it should be called nature – because it wasn't created*** by hearers, solitary realisers and so forth, but is the mode of abiding of phenomena and its lack of inherent existence is therefore the emptiness of nature.

***Whether the buddhas are present***

***Or not, this very emptiness is the***

***Nature of all phenomena, a nature***

***Apart<sup>1</sup>, that is proclaimed to be empty<sup>2</sup>.***

This nature apart, the functionality apart refers to either emptiness or nirvana, and there are three reasons why they are referred to as a nature apart.

*Illumination:*

*The meaning of the words 'a nature apart' is threefold. In the first case it means supreme suchness. 'Supreme' means that it exists never straying from the definition of suchness. In the second case 'apart' means apart from the world, i.e. the non-conceptual transcendental wisdom, which is the supreme among transcendental wisdoms having gone beyond the world. The 'nature' is that realised by that wisdom. In the third case 'a nature apart' means to exist on the other shore. The perfect end is the 'shore beyond samsara' because it is beyond samsara. End refers here to nirvana that has exhausted samsara.*

*Mirror:*

Take the subject 'the lack of an inherently existing ***perfect ending and suchness***, [we said the perfect ending refers to nirvana. And we already explained why these two are referred to as nature apart - because of being the object of the non-dual

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transcendental wisdom having gone beyond, because of existing on the shore beyond samsara, and so forth] the *very emptiness* that *is the nature of all phenomena, whether the buddhas are present* in the world *or not* – it is the emptiness *of the nature apart* – because it is the emptiness that is the lack of a truly existing nature apart.

*The perfect end and suchness*

*Are the emptiness of phenomena apart.*

*In the sutras of the Perfection of Wisdom Method*

*These are emphatically proclaimed in those words.*

*Mirror:*

Take the subject ‘these emptinesses’ – they are explained in the sutras – because they are *emphatically proclaimed in those words* in the *sutras* of the *Method of the Perfection of Wisdom* as explained earlier.

What this means is that Chandrakirti didn’t just pull those sixteen emptinesses out of thin air, but those sixteen emptinesses are actually explained in the *Perfection of Wisdom sutras* by the Buddha himself in those words.

So then we can finish here. The conclusion through explaining the qualities of the ground and so forth we can do next time. From here on we will be very quick to finish the text and I want to thank you very much for your enthusiastic participation and your effort and study.

*Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks*

*Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*

*Edited Version*

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