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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Generate bodhicitta as your motivation for listening to the teachings thinking, 'I have to attain 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 teaching'. Then listen to the teaching with your whole mind, focusing it on the teaching. Don't be present with just one part of the mind, while being somewhere else with the rest! Otherwise it doesn't become what is called correct listening.

We come to the third outline, which is called 'showing the three main causes of a bodhisattva'.

### 1.1.1.c Showing the Three Main Causes of Bodhisattvas

To give you a very brief overview of how we arrived at the third part, we started at the homage - method for starting to compose the commentary, which has two parts, praising great compassion without discerning individually, and prostrating to great compassion discerning individually. Praising great compassion without discerning individually had two subdivisions, showing compassion to be the main cause of a bodhisattva, and showing it to be also the root of the other two causes of a bodhisattva. Showing compassion to be the main cause of a bodhisattva had three subdivisions. We have completed first two, the way hearers and self-liberators are born from the powerful able ones, and the way buddhas are born from bodhisattvas. We are now at the third, which is showing the three main causes of bodhisattvas.

The root text says,

***Mind of compassion and non-dual awareness;  
And bodhicitta are causes of conquerors children***

Lama Tsong Khapa's *Illumination of the Thought* says,

*In case it is asked, 'If both hearers and self liberators are born from the powerful able ones and the powerful able ones are born from bodhisattvas, then what is the cause of the bodhisattvas?' The three - the mind of compassion to be explained; the wisdom awareness realizing the meaning free from the two dualities, the two extremes of existence and non-existence and so forth; and bodhicitta<sup>1</sup> are the main causes of the bodhisattva children of the conquerors.*

The three dharmas shown at this occasion are the three main causes of bodhisattvas. They are the mind of compassion, non-dual awareness, which is the wisdom that is free from the two extremes of existence and non-existence, and bodhicitta, which is the mind of

enlightenment. On one side we have the three causes, which are great compassion, non-dual awareness and bodhicitta. Non-dual awareness refers to the wisdom free from the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism that realises emptiness via the door of limitless inference. Then on the side of effect, we have the result of a beginner bodhisattva.

If you are told that those three are the causes of a bodhisattva, does some doubt arise in your mind? Would you have something to dispute? Reflect a little bit on this point, and then it will become very clear to you that here there is in fact some point of dispute, and some occasion for doubt. This arises because cause and effect can never be simultaneous. Even though the Vaibashikas, by referring to mind and mental factors that arise simultaneously, posit a simultaneously arising cause-effect, a cause will always precede the effect, and an effect will always arise subsequent to the cause. If you reflect on that, then you will see how some doubt can be generated here.

Then there is another point for your contemplation. Is actual bodhicitta the mind generation wishing to make all sentient beings realise emptiness, after having realised emptiness oneself? In the sutras it mentions such a mind generation when it says, 'After I have realised the suchness of dharma myself I will make sentient beings perfectly realise this suchness.' All those saying 'yes', please raise your hands. All those who say 'no', please raise your hands.

To those who say no, what is your reason?

Student: It isn't Mahayana mind generation because it exists in the continuum of hearers and self-liberators as well.

Your reason is incorrect, because even though hearer and self-liberated arhats do realise emptiness, they don't have that mind generation saying, 'I will share this realisation with all sentient beings'. If you think about what aspects of bodhicitta are incomplete in this mind generation then it will become clear to you why it can't be bodhicitta.

Student: Isn't it the aspiration wanting to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings?

Yes, that is correct. Actual bodhicitta aims for complete enlightenment for the purpose of all sentient beings. Actual bodhicitta needs to be endowed with the two aspects of aim and purpose. It needs to focus on the attainment of enlightenment for the purpose of all sentient beings.

Here it is also good to know that when we generate bodhicitta we meditate first on the purpose of others. Having meditated on love, compassion and superior intention we generate the wish of aiming for complete enlightenment. Those are meditations on the purpose of others. Then after realising that one doesn't have any ability to help other sentient beings at the moment, one checks on who has such an ability. Realising that only an enlightened being has those abilities, one generates the wish of aiming for complete enlightenment. So you see how one first meditates on the purpose of others, and then on the purpose of self. Then when one actually

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<sup>1</sup> Sanskrit: bodhicitta is mind of enlightenment, from *bodhi* meaning enlightenment, and *citta* meaning mind.

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becomes enlightened the purpose of self is generated first, and then afterwards the purpose of others is established.

So actual bodhicitta aims for complete enlightenment, and the enlightenment one aims for is one's own future enlightenment. That becomes one's own attainment. One aims for the enlightenment that one will personally attain. Here there is also some debate with regard to whether or not bodhicitta exists in the continuum of an enlightened being.

When we actually meditate to generate bodhicitta we first meditate on love and compassion, wishing other sentient beings to be happy and free from suffering. Then we generate superior intention, meaning that we take upon ourself the responsibility to free all sentient beings from their sufferings. Having taken this responsibility upon oneself, when one checks up on whether or not at the present time one is able to do so, one realises that at the present time one doesn't have the ability to help other sentient beings. Then, by searching as to who actually has that type of capability, one realises that only an enlightened being has that capability. Through that understanding, one's mind automatically turns toward wishing to attain complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

From *Illumination of the Thought*<sup>2</sup>,

***At the point of generating the mind of enlightenment from compassion it states from the commentary,***

*the cause for the arising of the supreme taste of pure dharma nectar, by definition reversing all wrong concepts, having become the very friend of all migrants, wishing to perfectly attain enlightenment only.*

*This explains clearly that bodhicitta focuses on the attainment of enlightenment. Therefore, 'wishing to achieve the attainment of highest enlightenment for the purpose of all sentient beings' has to be posited as the complete definition of mind generation. This is excellent also according to 'drel-she', and there is also no difference between this system and what is explained in the 'Ornament of Clear Realisation'. Regarding the positing of those three dharmas as the cause of a bodhisattva, the 'Precious Garland' it states,*

*If oneself and the transitory ones;  
Wish to attain peerless enlightenment;  
The roots of that are bodhicitta;  
Compassion touching direction and limits;  
And stable as the powerful mountain king;  
Transcendental wisdom not relying on the two.*

*This quote shows them to be the roots of enlightenment and doesn't show them explicitly as the roots of a bodhisattva. Even though, since 'root' has the connotation of first, and since this is the occasion showing three main causes of that period, we can understand them to be the three main causes of a bodhisattvas from the occasion.*

*The explanation of the three causes of a bodhisattva is the occasion of analysing where bodhisattvas are born from, since both hearers and self liberators are born from buddhas and buddhas are born from bodhisattvas. Therefore they are unsuited to be 'positing causes' of bodhisattvas and have to be 'generating causes'.*

There's much more to say about bodhicitta. What is definitely important to remember is that, firstly, bodhicitta aims for complete enlightenment, and secondly, it does so for the purpose of all sentient beings. To have actual bodhicitta those two characteristics need to be complete. If those two characteristics are complete in one consciousness it is actual bodhicitta. Within perfect complete enlightenment the four buddha bodies are contained. This definition of bodhicitta is as it states in the *Ornament of Clear Realisation* by Maitreya,

Mind generation, for the purpose of others;  
Wishes for perfectly complete enlightenment.

And as was mentioned at the beginning, this commentary explains the *Root Wisdom* by way of the extensive, that has been taken from another commentary of Nagarjuna's called *Precious Garland*. Those three dharmas that are mentioned here as the causes of a bodhisattva have been taken from that commentary.

Then *Precious Garland* goes on to say that the three causes of bodhisattvas explained here aren't what are called 'positing causes'. This is a particular sub-type of cause through imputation that actually refers to the definition of an object. For example, 'a flat bottomed round bellied functioning phenomena that is able to hold water' is the positing cause of a vase, but it is not the actual cause of a vase. So there could be this doubt as to which type of cause those three dharmas belong? In order to clarify this, it mentions that these three dharmas are generating causes.

Since those three dharmas are actual generating causes, and the effect is a beginner bodhisattva you can see how we are arriving at a doubt. The bodhisattva here has to be a beginner bodhisattva because, at the time of explaining the four causes of the buddhas to praise bodhisattvas, he is referred to as 'a bodhisattva like a rising moon', or as 'a bodhisattva like the sprout of a medicinal tree'.

An opponent expresses that doubt, saying that the bodhisattva referred to here cannot be a beginner bodhisattva, since bodhicitta is generated simultaneously with a beginner bodhisattva. He also says that it isn't correct to posit non-dual awareness as a cause of a bodhisattva, since it is in contradiction to the actual sequence of practice, where the conventional mind of enlightenment is generated first. Then the six perfections are practised, and in the context of that practice non-dual awareness is generated. So there is a first doubt with regard to the bodhicitta, and the second doubt is with regard to the non-dual awareness.

The reply is that here there is no mistake with regard to positing bodhicitta as the cause of a beginner bodhisattva, since the bodhicitta posited here as the cause doesn't refer to actual bodhicitta. The bodhicitta that is posited here as the cause of bodhisattvas, is the bodhicitta during the time of meditating to generate bodhicitta, and it doesn't refer to the real bodhicitta generated in dependence upon having meditated.

The difference between those two bodhicittas is like the difference between tasting just the bark of sugar cane, and tasting the actual inside of the sugar cane. The experience of the first type of bodhicitta during the time

<sup>2</sup> Geshe-la reads from Lama Tsong Khapa's commentary

of trying to generate actual bodhicitta refers to the former. One generates some type of mental attitude wishing to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. When one has this experience it is like just tasting the outside of the sugarcane. One hasn't actually had the full experience, the full taste of bodhicitta. This will only happen once one experiences the actual bodhicitta, which is the spontaneous bodhicitta that arises without any effort within one's mental continuum.

At the time of practice, while meditating on the seven point cause-and-effect method we go through the different stages, starting from recognising sentient beings as having been our mother, then remembering their kindness, wanting to repay their kindness, love through pleasing aspect, great compassion, superior intention and then bodhicitta. We train our mind in those different stages, going through them over and over again. At that time the bodhicitta we generate is not the actual bodhicitta but it is the bodhicitta that is referred to here. Then, once one generates the effortless spontaneous thought of enlightenment within one's mental continuum through one's continued meditation, then one has generated actual bodhicitta.

That refutes the first opposition. With respect to the second opposition, it is not contradictory, or wrong, to posit non-dual awareness as the cause of a bodhisattva, because this is done from the point of view of a bodhisattva of sharp faculties, who will realise emptiness before generating the mind of enlightenment<sup>3</sup>.

### **1.1.2. Showing Great Compassion to also be the Root of the Other Two Causes of a Bodhisattva**

***Only compassion Conqueror's perfect crop, its Seed and like water for increase.***

***Likened to ripening of fact of long-time use Therefore, I first Praise Compassion***

From the *Illumination of the Thought*,

*Therefore compassion is important like a seed for the initial generation of this Conqueror's perfect crop and in the middle it*

<sup>3</sup> Some other debates from the *General Explanation*

1) A previous Tibetan opponent says, 'Here non-dual awareness refers to the awareness without the duality of subject-object and bodhicitta refers to ultimate bodhicitta'.

**Refutation by Jetsun-pa:** Here it is incorrect to posit the awareness without the duality of subject-object as the non-dual awareness – because the awareness without the duality of subject-object doesn't precede a beginner bodhisattva, and in the commentary it explains this non-dual awareness as the wisdom free from the extremes of externalism and nihilism.

2) An opponent says, 'The bodhicitta shown here is actual bodhicitta'.

**This is incorrect because:** It follows that the bodhicitta shown here at the time of preceding a beginner bodhisattva is actual bodhicitta – because your premise is correct. **If accepted.** This is contrary to *Tik-chen* where it states that the bodhicitta preceding bodhisattvas refers to the time of meditating on bodhicitta, not the real bodhicitta generated in dependence upon having meditated. Also it would follow that actual bodhicitta exists in the continuum of a person not having entered the path, which would leave you without reply.

*is like water for its further and further increase. Finally, the fact of its long-time use by the disciples is likened to the ripening of the fruit. Therefore, I Chandrakirti praise first great compassion before Hearers, Self-liberators, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and even before their other two causes. Or: I praise great compassion at the beginning of composing this commentary.*

This verse shows compassion to be the root of the other two causes, bodhicitta and non-dual awareness. Non-dual awareness here is the wisdom realising emptiness, via the door of limitless inference.

This isn't just a mere realisation of emptiness, but a realisation of emptiness coming out of the motivation of great compassion. This is important to remember, because we cannot state as a general fact that the realisation of emptiness depends upon great compassion, since hearer arhats and self-liberated arhats do realise emptiness. However they meditate on emptiness in a limited way. Bodhisattvas, being motivated by great compassion, meditate on emptiness in an expansive way. Therefore here great compassion is posited as the root of non-dual awareness that is the wisdom realising emptiness, via the door of limitless inference.

### **Review**

I think that if we don't have a short examination then maybe we will become lost. So first of all please tell me what is the middle way referred to in the title *Entering the Middle Way*.

Student: The *Root Wisdom*

Of course what you say is correct but if you want to say it in a very nice way then, first of all, 'The middle way referred to in *Entering the Middle Way* is a Madhyamika commentary, a middle way commentary. To which middle way commentary does it refer? It refers to the *Root Wisdom* by Nagarjuna'. If one goes through those stages in that sequence when giving an answer then it becomes very nice.

How do we know that the middle way referred to in the title is a commentary on the middle way? This was explained by Chandrakirti himself in his self-commentary where he states 'I intended to compose *Entering the Middle Way* in order to enter a Madhyamaka commentary'. So it was very clearly stated like that by Chandrakirti himself. How do we know that this Madhyamaka commentary he wishes to enter is this particular text called *Root Wisdom* by Nagarjuna? This we know because all the time Chandrakirti refers to the *Root Wisdom* as the Madhyamaka, as the Middle Way. So therefore we know that when Chandrakirti talks about Madhyamaka in this context he means the *Root Wisdom*. What is the mode in which it is entered? How it is explained?

Student: It is explained in both the profound and extensive ways.

First of all tell me what does 'profound' mean, and then explain how it enters the *Root Wisdom* by way of the profound? The profound is emptiness. Emptiness is referred to as the profound, since it is difficult to realise and also difficult to infer. How is the *Root Wisdom*

explained by way of the profound?

Student: It refutes the views on emptiness by the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka and Cittamatra, schools that hadn't been founded at the time of Nagarjuna.

That isn't the correct answer. Chandrakirti explains the profound lack of natural existence as the uncommon view on emptiness not shared with the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka and Cittamatras. What is the way of explaining the *Root Wisdom* by way of the extensive?

Student: The three dharmas, the ten bodhisattva grounds, [inaudible].

Can you posit those three dharmas of ordinary beings?

Student: Non-dual awareness [inaudible]

Its good to posit them each individually, then you have expressed them each once. There are also benefits in expressing them orally, not just keeping them in your mind. There's no need to be shy about it. What are the ten learner bodhisattva grounds?

Student: The ten bodhisattva grounds are shown in the first ten chapters of *Entering the Middle Way*.

The translator's prostration is to whom?

Students: Manjushri!

Who is the translator?

Student: Chandrakirti.

Chandrakirti is the composer. The translator is called Nyima Drakpa, Renowned Sun. *Entering the Middle Way* was composed by Dawa Drakpa, Renowned Moon, it was translated by Nyima Drakpa, Renowned Sun, and it was explained by Losang Drakpa, Renowned Virtuous Mind. So we have three Renowned Ones in relation to this text. What is the purpose of prostrating to Manjushri?

Student: To show the text belongs to the wisdom basket.

In general, the purpose of the translator's prostration is to accumulate merits in order to be able to complete the translation of the text, and the purpose of particularly prostrating to Manjushri is to classify the text being translated as belonging to the Abhidharma basket, which is one of the three baskets. What does the first line 'the powerful able ones generate hearers, middling buddhas' express?

Translator: It expresses great silence (laughter).

If you don't know it and you don't say anything then that's OK, but if you know it and you don't say then that's actually a fault - you place harmful imprints on your mind.

Student: Powerful able ones give birth to hearer and self-liberator arhats.

Then comes the doubt, since there are also bodhisattvas generated from buddhas why aren't they mentioned here. So you see, if you want to debate, there is plenty to debate about. Here it particularly mentions that the powerful able ones generate hearers and self liberators in order to show that the root, great compassion, is not only the root of bodhisattva, but also the root of hearers and

self liberators. It is very important to have this sequence very clearly in mind.

- The hearers and self-liberators are generated from the buddhas.
- The buddhas in turn are generated from the bodhisattvas.
- The bodhisattvas in turn are generated from the three causes of great compassion, non-dual awareness and bodhicitta.
- Within those three causes, non-dual awareness and bodhicitta are in turn generated from great compassion.

Reflecting on the meaning of those lines and reflecting on this sequence has a very great benefit for our mind.

Now we can all meditate a little bit on the meaning of those lines, 'powerful able ones generate hearers, self liberators etc'.

[meditation]

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*Edited Version*

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