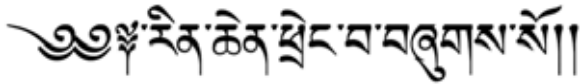

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

4 September 2012

Based on the motivation we generated earlier, we can now engage in the practice of meditation, which serves the purpose of subduing one's mind. Otherwise, the mind would remain in its natural unsubdued state.

Subduing the mind involves overcoming:

1. Grasping at the affairs of this life, which is an obstacle to our aspirations for our next life.
2. Grasping at cyclic existence, which is an obstacle to achieving liberation.
3. Grasping at self interest, which is an obstacle to developing the mind of bodhicitta, the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings.

We can see that all three aspects of subduing the mind involve overcoming grasping at some level. If we don't attempt to overcome these three forms of grasping, then there is no possible way that we can ensure that whatever we do carries the fruit of Dharma practice. These are really essential points to keep in mind.

At the very least our attempts to engage in the practice of meditation need to serve the purpose of transforming our clinging to the mere affairs of this life into a keen aspiration to ensure our welfare in future lives. Next, we focus our meditation at a higher level, where it should serve as a means to transform clinging to samsaric pleasures into a mind that aspires to achieve liberation and to be free from samsara. At the highest level, our meditation practice needs to serve the purpose of transforming our self-cherishing mind into a mind that aspires to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings.

If our meditation practice does not serve to transform these three different levels of clinging or grasping, then from the Dharma point of view our meditation practice has not become an authentic practice. No matter what we do, it will not bear the ultimate result or fruit. In fact it may serve to strengthen a mere worldly concern, where we might, for example, engage in the practice as a way merely to impress others. This would be a superficial and pretentious form of practice. If our practice does not serve the purpose of overcoming the different levels of clinging then, as mentioned previously, it does not serve the purpose of a real practice of Dharma. This is something that we really need to keep in mind.

As you would all be aware, there is no other way of ensuring that our practice is a pure Dharma practice either than by making sure that it falls into one of the three scopes. And it is not that we lack the knowledge of the three scopes and the practices that each scope entails; we are definitely not deprived of that! Personally, I can attest to having spent most of my life studying the texts. My early life was entirely dedicated to study, and although in my old age, it is harder to spend much time and energy in study, I still make the attempt to continue to study the texts. I have spent an enormous amount of time and energy in studying these

topics, and when I look back, I feel I can rejoice about that. You, too, have not been deprived of a basic understanding and knowledge of what the practice of the three scopes entails. What we do find lacking however is the actual practice of them. It is because we lack that practice that we find that our minds are still not subdued and that we still have strong clinging and grasping. We really need to understand that we are not deprived of the knowledge, but we are definitely lacking the practice.

There is no better reference for how to engage in practices than the present text we are studying, *Precious Garland*. We would be fooling ourselves if we thought that we could find some other form of practice that is not subsumed in this text and the three scopes. That would be quite a presumptuous thought! These are really essential points to consider if we are keen to engage in the practice of the Dharma, and so I wanted to share them with you.

We can now return to our practice of meditation which is based on the *tong len* practice, the practice of giving and taking. As I have described previously, this is essentially a technique to transform the self-cherishing mind into a mind of love and compassion. With that understanding, we need to make an attempt to overcome the self-cherishing attitude, which thinks only about oneself and one's own interests; and transform that mind into one based on love and compassion, which thinks about the welfare of others and how to benefit them.

When we have the right intention and the right techniques, then we are bound to benefit from it. Over time, we will see a gradual transformation taking place. Even though I cannot claim that I have significantly developed any true sense of love and compassion, a similitude of love and compassion does seem to arise when one makes repeated attempts. Even a similitude of love and compassion really moves the mind, and one feels a deeper sense of joy and happiness taking root. That sort of contemplation on love and compassion can move one to tears.

These things occur when one has spent significant time and energy practising in this way. As mentioned earlier we don't lack knowledge of the techniques. If we find that we are unable to hit the target of our practice, then we need to take the initiative to ensure that our practice is not superficial, but rather an authentic means to transform the self-cherishing mind and self-centred mind into a true sense of love and compassion. With that intention in our mind, we can now engage in the practice. [*meditation*]

The incident I am about to relate shows why we should not readily give into simple assumptions. Recently (on August 6 to be precise) I went down at St Kilda with Margot and Carol for lunch. As we were coming back and strolling along the pier there was a person who was selling magazines, one of which had an image of His Holiness on the front. When I noticed that I said, 'I would like to buy one of those', but when I approached the person he looked at me and said 'Oh, you don't have to pay for it. It's OK, you can have it for free!' He was selling the magazine for \$5, and I then learnt this person actually sells these magazines as a way to make a living, because he is a homeless. So selling these magazines is his livelihood. I don't know what percentage he makes from the sale of each issue, but he was willing to forsake that and his own livelihood by giving the magazine to me. So I ended up giving him \$10.

What struck me was how, even though he was homeless and so forth, he actually appeared to be quite joyful and happy. His clothes were shabby and he hadn't had a shower for a

while so with his unshaven face he looked a bit rough. Nevertheless he appeared to be quite joyful and happy, willing to share and give away something that was a means for his livelihood. This story can be a reminder that we should not make assumptions on the basis of superficial appearances.

Conversely (and to try and get to the moral of the story) there are those businessmen who, although they might have a million dollars in their bank account, are not really willing to take any loss, and when it comes to doing business they are not willing to make any compromises. Yet, here was a homeless person, owning hardly any possessions, willing to forsake his meagre livelihood and give it away. These are really significant points for us to consider.

Apparently selling these magazines is the only way he can earn an income because begging is not allowed, and in any case begging is not really that good a way to get money. This reminds me of when I was sitting in a cafeteria in Singapore and someone came by and placed a small packet of tissues on the table, apparently as a way to sell them. I was thinking 'How much could he make by just selling small packets of tissues?' Then I was told that he needed money, but because he was not allowed to beg, this was the only way he could get some money. When I heard that, I ended up giving more than what the tissues would have cost, as a contribution to his livelihood.

Now let us return to where we left off last time.

2.1.2. Good qualities of the ten grounds

2.1.2.1. GENERAL MEANING (CONT.)

In the last teaching the **four attributes of the grounds** were introduced as part of Gyalsab Je's commentary.

(1) We were at the point of defining the **nature** of a 'ground'. We had completed the quotation from *Clear Words* after which Gyalsab Je's commentary says:

Apart from an arya's non-conceptual wisdom of meditative equipoise, there is no consciousness that is not stained by the imprints of ignorance, prior to obtaining the buddha ground.

Following that, Gyalsab Je's commentary continues:

In the state subsequent to meditative equipoise, the consciousness manifests, stained by the imprints of ignorance. The stains of deluded ignorance can occur up until the seventh ground. Whereas from the eighth ground and for the foe destroyers, they cannot be stained because they have already extinguished deluded ignorance. However they can still be stained with the imprints of ignorance.

The commentary is explaining how ignorance is overcome or abandoned, in accordance with the Prasangika point of view. Deluded ignorance, is of course, overcome first, followed by the imprints of the ignorance. In relation to the grounds, deluded ignorance is progressively reduced up until it is completely eliminated on the seventh ground. From the eighth ground onwards, the imprints of ignorance are also worked on, and eventually overcome. This of course was explained in great detail when we studied the *Madhyamakavatara*.

2. We now come to the second, which is an explanation of the **qualities**.

With respect to this Gyalsab Je states:

2) They possess great compassion, the twelve hundred qualities and so forth.

Again, this is just a brief summary. You will find more detail about the qualities of each ground in the *Madhyamaka* teachings. Basically, the detailed explanation that is presented in the *Madhyamakavatara* is derived from the explanations given in commentaries such as *Precious Garland* and *Root Wisdom*, which are in turn is based on the commentaries given in the Buddha's *Sutra of the Ten Grounds*. The *Madhyamakavatara* clarifies the points explained in the earlier texts.

The previous translator, Ven. Fedor, mentioned to me that he had done quite a thorough translation of the commentary itself and he is quite confident that he has further clarified points, and that it is ready to be printed as a book. However, there are no funds so it has not been published yet. You already have copies of these teachings and it would be good to refer to them again and refresh your memory. These are really essential points on the path, and the way to do that is to refresh your memory by referring back to that text and commentary.

3) The third attribute, is the **reason** the term 'ground' is used. As Gyalsab Je explains:

3) The term ground is given because it serves as a base or support for qualities.

4) The fourth attribute is **meaning**. Here Gyalsab Je's commentary states:

4) The meaning is also likewise.

In other words the etymology of 'ground' is the same as the previous explanation of the term.

In his commentary Gyalsab Je goes on to explain:

The reason Very Joyful for the first ground and so forth is because of four unique features ...

The **four unique features** are then presented as a way to explain the significance of **each of the grounds**. As one moves through the ten grounds the number of qualities of each increase exponentially. You will recall that when we did the *Madhyamakavatara*, we had a bit of difficulty trying to find the right terms for the numbers, as there are no direct English equivalent to the Tibetan term. The Western way of counting is based on the terms 'hundred' and 'thousand' and you say ten thousand or one hundred thousand. In India *lakh* is a specific term for one hundred thousand, and it is called *bum* in Tibetan (which is derived from the Indian way of counting). In fact there are up to sixty different terms for specific numbers. In the Western system, there are the specific terms 'million' and 'billion' but I don't know how far it goes after that.

Student: A trillion.

I remember that there was some difficulty in grasping the concept of how much that is!

(1) The first unique feature of a ground is the **basis**.

As Gyalsab Je explains:

The reason Very Joyful is used for the first ground and so forth is because of four unique features. The first feature is in relation to their basis: the first ground possesses twelve hundred qualities, the second ground twelve thousand and so forth, in which the number of qualities increases further and further.

The first ground has a set of twelve qualities multiplied by a hundred times. On the second ground the twelve qualities are multiplied by a thousand times, on the third ground by one hundred thousand, on the fourth by ten million and so on.

The qualities that are multiplied on each of the ten grounds can be subsumed into the five paths. The significance of studying this is that it can serve as an inspiration, as we can see how the Buddha (the perfect enlightened being) was not a supreme being who became enlightened in a single step by skipping the ten grounds, or by taking a shorter path. Rather, the supreme enlightened being, who is now endowed with all good qualities, sequentially practised the path to obtain the realisations on each of the ten grounds, all the way up to obtaining the ultimate state of enlightenment. When it comes to our own personal practice, we need to remind ourselves that the only way to achieve enlightenment is by engaging in the practices in a sequential manner, gaining realisations at appropriate levels, leading up to the next level and so forth. Thinking that we can jump some of the sequence and become enlightened sooner than how long it took the Buddha would be very presumptuous indeed.

(2) The second unique feature is the **power of purifying the defilements**.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The second feature is, because the power of purifying the defilements and the power of travelling on the path on each ground continually grows ever greater, the power of majesty increases forevermore.

Due to the power of purifying certain defilements at a particular level, the power of travelling on that path on each ground continually grows and becomes more majestic and increases forevermore.

(3) The third unique feature is **surpassing the perfections**.

As explained in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

The third feature is, on the first ground the perfection of generosity is surpassed; on the second ground the perfection of morality is surpassed and so forth; i.e. on each subsequent ground the later perfections are surpassed.

We covered this in detail in our study of the *Madhyamakavatara*, but to refresh your memory, the ten perfections are related to each of the ten grounds. On each ground, the earlier perfection is said to be surpassed. Thus on the first ground, the perfection of generosity is surpassed. The perfection of morality is not yet surpassed on the first ground, because the practice of morality is said to be a little bit harder than the practice of generosity. So, in comparison to morality, the practice of generosity is a bit easier to engage in. Thus, on the first ground, the first of the ten perfections is surpassing the perfection of generosity. This is followed by the second ground, surpassing the perfection of morality, followed by surpassing the perfection of patience on the third ground and so forth.

As I have mentioned previously, we studied this in the past, so it is good to refer to the text and really understand the significance of these points. The main point here is that as the practice of the ten perfections becomes increasingly more difficult, surpassing each one is only achieved on its subsequent ground.

(4) The fourth feature is the fruition (or the **ripening result**) of each of those grounds. Thus as explained in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

The fourth feature is, on the first ground one rules over the Southern Continent, on the second ground one is reborn as a king that rules over the four continents and so forth; i.e. the status of the fruitional rebirths increases ever more. The [qualities] of the

grounds are completed in the state subsequent to meditative equipoise and not exclusively in the state of meditative equipoise.

As the commentary explains, these *qualities of the grounds* are *not exclusively* completed in the state of meditative equipoise. This implies that engaging in the practice of obtaining these qualities and completing them has to be done through a union of both meditative equipoise and the subsequent post-meditative equipoise state. In other words, being in meditative equipoise is not sufficient by itself.

In order to be able to engage in successful meditative equipoise, one needs to accumulate merit, which is only possible in the post-meditative state. Thus both the meditative state and the post-meditative state are equally necessary if one is to acquire the conditions for obtaining the qualities of the grounds. In the state of meditative equipoise, one is able to engage in the accumulation of wisdom, however one is not able to complete the accumulation of merit in that state.

Now of course a unique feature of tantric practice is it is possible to accumulate merit even while in meditative equipoise. Thus in meditative equipoise one can actually engage in both of the accumulations. Specifically, meditating on the self-generation of the deity by focusing on the image of the deity is a means to accumulate merit. When this is conjoined with an understanding that while the image of the deity appears on one's mind, it does not exist inherently, (even though it appears, it does not exist in the way that it appears to exist), then one is engaged in the accumulation of wisdom. When one meditates on that understanding of emptiness, then that is the means to accumulate the wisdom aspect. Thus in meditative equipoise, by focusing on the image of the deity while realising its emptiness, one is able to accumulate both merit and wisdom. Of course it is not easy to engage with the appearance of the deity while maintaining an understanding of emptiness; however this is the unique feature in tantra.

If one is able to apply this unique feature of tantra i.e. having a clear appearance of the deity conjoined with an understanding of the emptiness of the image of the deity while in meditative equipoise, then that can become a swift path to achieving enlightenment. However, it will not serve as a swift path if one is unable to practise at that level.

2.1.2.2. BRANCH MEANING

This is the second of the two subdivisions introduced in Gyaltsab Je's commentary. It is sub-divided into three, which brings us back to the subdivisions of the text.

2.1.2.2.1. Just as there are eight grounds of hearers, so there are ten bodhisattva grounds

2.1.2.2.2. Entities and good qualities of the ten grounds

2.1.2.2.3. Summation

2.1.2.2.1. Just as there are eight grounds of hearers, so there are ten bodhisattva grounds

The verse that relates to this section is:

440 *Just as eight grounds of hearers
Are described in the Hearers' Vehicle,
So ten grounds of bodhisattvas
Are described in the Great Vehicle.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary gives this explanation:

Just as the eight grounds of hearers are described in the Hearers' Vehicle as the ground of lineage, the eighth, seeing, diminishment, separation from attachment, realising all that is to be done, and hearer, plus the

ground of solitary realiser, making a total of *eight grounds*, likewise in the causal stage, *ten grounds of bodhisattvas* are described in the *Great Vehicle*.

With respect to the *eight grounds in the Hearers' Vehicle*, the *ground of lineage* refers to the clear realisation within the continuum of the path of preparation; the *eighth* refers to approacher to stream enterer; *seeing* refers to abider in the fruit of stream enterer; *diminishment* refers to approacher to non-returner; *separation from attachment* refers to abider in the fruit of non-returner; *realising all that is to be done* refers enterer into the fruit of a foe-destroyer; *hearer* refers to abider in the fruit of a foe-destroyer; and the *ground of the solitary realiser* refers to clear realisation within the mental continuum of a solitary realiser.

2.1.2.2.2. Entities and good qualities of the ten grounds

1. The first ground is called the **Very Joyful**. Of the ten perfections, the perfection of generosity is surpassed on the first ground.

To relevant verse from the text reads:

441 *The first of these is the Very Joyful
Because those bodhisattvas are rejoicing
From having forsaken the three entwinements
And being born into the lineage of Ones Gone
Thus.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

From these grounds, *the first of these is the Very Joyful*. As explained in the *Sutra on the Ten Grounds*, it is because having overcome the opposing factors abandoned by the path of seeing, *those bodhisattvas* have generated an uncommon extraordinary joy from having obtained the seven qualities and forsaken the principal hindrance to obtaining liberation...

As explained in the teachings, the unique feature of the first ground is that *those bodhisattvas have generated an uncommon extraordinary joy from having obtained the seven qualities*. If you recall, in the *Madhyamakavatara* text the joy of the first ground is explained as being the joy experienced merely by hearing someone asking for something. That mere sound of someone asking for something instils a great joy in their mind, and a spontaneous wish to be generous and give them whatever they are asked for arises. It is good to refer to the explanations in *Madhyamakavatara*.

As explained further in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

... *the three entwinements* which are the view of the transitory collection, afflicted doubt and holding bad ethics and discipline to be superior, and because they have gone beyond the hearers' and solitary realisers' grounds and particularly because they are concordant with the ground of constant illumination and have generated the path of seeing and are thus *born into the lineage of Ones Gone Thus*.

This is a clear explanation of how to identify *the three entwinements*.

The next verse reads:

442 *Through the maturation of those [good
qualities]
The perfection of giving becomes supreme.
They vibrate a hundred worlds
And become Great Lords of Jambudvipa.*

While the earlier verse was an explanation of the meaning of why the first ground is called Very Joyful, this second verse refers to the *qualities* that are obtained on this ground.

As the commentary further explains:

Through the maturation of those good qualities, consequently the perfection of giving becomes supreme or surpassed. This is particularly so for giving because the opposing factors of giving have been overcome while the other perfections are not yet surpassed. The distinctive feature of the number of qualities is that they vibrate and are able to perceive a hundred worlds and so forth. Becoming Great Lords of Jambudvipa is the distinctive feature indicating the increase of the fruitional result.

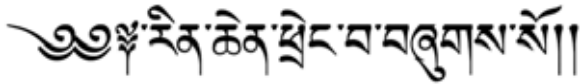
As indicated in the commentary, this verse particularly refers to the qualities of the ground.

The following verses basically cover the remaining nine grounds. The presentation of each consists of two verses, the first describing the nature of the ground, and why they are given their specific name, while the second verse describes the actual qualities of the ground. This is explained quite concisely in the following verses, which we can cover quite rapidly because of our previous study of the *Madhyamakavatara*. While we go through this part of the text quite rapidly, it is good to refer to those notes, transcripts and the text, to refresh your memory and gain a better understanding.

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In a comfortable and relaxed posture, with a clear state of mind that is based on the motivation that we generated during the recitation of the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

We can generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings, in order to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

2.1.2.2.2. Entities and good qualities of the ten grounds (cont.)

1. We have completed the explanation of the first ground, **Very Joyful** and the qualities that are obtained on that ground. It is good to recall that the perfection that is surpassed on the first ground is the perfection of generosity and the various qualities that are obtained on that ground. It is also good to reflect on how bodhisattvas engage in their practices in this sequential manner.

They begin by engaging in practices to obtain the realisations of the first ground, followed by the second ground and so forth. This indicates that great enlightened beings did not obtain enlightenment all of a sudden, but rather that they practised along the path and worked through the grounds in a sequential way, where each realisation was obtained to lead to the next realisation and so forth. This is a good way to remind ourselves that if we aspire to achieve enlightenment, we need to practise in exactly the same way. At the beginning we practise generosity to the best of our ability, followed by the other practices. This is how we need to take it as a personal instruction.

Understanding the significance and manner of these practices inspires us to engage in generosity and so forth whenever the occasion arises. From its definition we understand that we do not need to physically give something in order to practise generosity. Rather, when we develop the mind of giving, then it is that mental intention of giving that is the actual practice of generosity. So if we don't have the material wealth to give to others we need not feel that we are deprived of the opportunity to practice generosity. In fact our daily practice of placing offerings of water bowls, flowers and incense on the altar is a practice of generosity.

Even when we consume food and drink or when we go outside and stroll about and see beautiful parks, lakes and so forth, we can actually offer these beautiful sights and objects to the enlightened beings. This is yet another way of using external resources as an opportunity to practise generosity. In fact this is how great beings engaged in the practice, taking every opportunity whenever they went out and about. My late teacher Geshe Ngawang Dhargye used to practise in that way – when he went to a beautiful garden or park, he would offer the surroundings, and sometimes even

sit down and take bodhisattva vows. These are some of the incredible and practical ways that he engaged in practice.

We need to recall the advice of the great masters about how to engage in practice. You will recall that in *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Shantideva explains how one has surpassed the perfection of generosity when one reaches a point of having a limitless intention to give. The presentation on generosity occurs in the tenth chapter of *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* which, as you will recall, is primarily a chapter of dedication. That in itself indicates that the dedication of merit is also a form of generosity.

Shantideva's text specifically mentions that the perfection of generosity does not imply that we need to remove all forms of poverty in order to perfect the practice of generosity. Rather the perfection of generosity refers to surpassing in the intention to give. Thus we need to understand that it is our intention or mental state that actually counts.

Thus, as explained in the teachings, while dedicating one's merit seals our practice so that it isn't destroyed by anger, it is also a form of generosity. Thus we need to understand that engaging in the practices of purification and accumulating merit, and then dedicating that merit to the welfare of all sentient beings, is one of the highest forms of generosity. Since there are so many different ways of practising generosity, we can have many opportunities to practise generosity.

2. The second ground is called the **Stainless**.

As mentioned previously, the *Madhyamakavatara* described each ground in great detail, and clarified numerous qualms and doubts. So it is good for you to refer to those notes and teachings. So apart from covering the basic explanation in the text, I don't intend to spend much time on each one.

The verse that relates to the second ground reads:

443. The second is called the Stainless
Because all ten [virtuous] actions
Of body, speech, and mind are stainless
And they naturally abide in those [deeds of
ethics].

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

The second is called the Stainless because the bodhisattvas on this ground restrain themselves from contemplating liberation solely for themselves.

This is a very profound presentation of the way in which the perfection of ethics or morality is surpassed on the second ground. Here ethics is to be understood as refraining from the ten non-virtuous deeds without contemplating liberation solely for oneself. This means that ethics is practised with the intention to benefit all sentient beings and not just for personal gain (i.e. wanting to gain liberation just for one's own sake). I don't know whether or not it has registered in your memory, but I have indicated on many occasions in the past that practising each of the perfections can be also combined with the other perfections as well. These are important points to remember.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

...all ten virtuous actions of body, speech and mind are stainless, being free from immorality even in the dream state, and they naturally abide in those deeds of ethics.

All ten virtuous actions of body, speech and mind are stainless indicates that the bodhisattvas' actions are free from immorality, *even in the dream state*. Thus, even during sleep bodhisattvas are not stained by the ten non-virtuous deeds.

At this point it would be good to recall the ten non-virtuous actions: the actions of body and speech are both karma and a pathway of karma; whilst the three mental actions of covetousness, harmful intention and wrong views are a pathway to karma but not actually karma. As explained in the lam rim teachings, the three non-virtues of mind are delusions and therefore are not karma. I have previously explained how karma and delusions are mutually exclusive, but again, I'm not sure if you will recall those explanations. These are important points to understand, as I have noticed that some who assume they know a bit about karma fail to make this distinction.

So this verse explains that the second ground is called the Stainless, because the bodhisattvas on this ground are free from the stains of immorality, even during the dream state.

The second verse relating to this ground refers to the maturation of the good qualities of the ground:

**444. Through the maturation of those [good qualities]
The perfection of ethics becomes supreme.
They become Universal Monarchs helping beings,
Masters of the glorious [four continents] and of the seven precious objects.**

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Through the maturation of those good qualities and by the virtue of obtaining them, the perfection of ethics becomes supreme. ...

As clearly indicated here, the perfection of ethics is surpassed in this ground along with the perfection of generosity. However the perfection of patience is yet to be surpassed.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

... The twelve thousand qualities and so forth are also applied on this ground. The particular increase of the maturation on this ground is that they become universal monarchs, helping beings; masters of the glorious four continents and of the seven precious objects.

As presented here, the result of the maturation of the qualities is that they will become universal monarchs, helping beings on the four continents. Masters of the glorious four continents means that they become rulers of the four continents, and have control over the occupants of the four continents, as a way to benefit them. This surpasses the first ground, on which one becomes the universal monarch of the southern continent, which is the earth. As one's qualities are matured and surpassed on the second ground, one becomes a monarch with the ability to control beings on all four continents.

Here we can also relate to how the bodhisattvas on the various grounds manifest in many, many different ways to benefit sentient beings. It is for this reason that, as the great master Gyaltsab Rinpoche mentions, we must be very wary and careful not to be critical and judgemental of others, since we don't know their qualities. It's like walking over ground that contains a pit of burning coals covered with a layer of leaves. If you are not familiar with risk you could walk over the leaves and fall into that pit. Similarly, it is dangerous to be judgemental and critical of other beings, since one does not know who could be a bodhisattva. So, one must be extremely cautious lest one commits the great negative karma of criticising a bodhisattva. So these are points that we really need to keep in mind as they encourage us to train our mind to develop respect for others, whoever they may

be, and whatever their appearance. If we aren't certain, then it's best for us to develop a mind of respect rather than to be critical and judgemental. This is how we need to understand this point.

I covered the *seven precious objects* when I taught the mandala offering. They are the: *precious wheel, precious jewel, precious queen, precious minister, precious elephant, precious horse, and precious general*. Just by coming into contact with the precious queen for example, one experiences incredible bliss and happiness. Likewise, whoever rides the precious horse, or elephant will have a very easy ride, being swiftly taken to their destination. These precious objects are symbols of the ways to benefit other sentient beings. So having them in one's entourage and having control over them, means having more ways to vastly benefit all beings. This is how we need to understand the significance of the seven precious objects.

To understand how bodhisattvas benefit sentient beings we need to understand the aspirations of the awakening mind or bodhicitta. Through their aspirational prayers bodhisattvas intentionally choose to be re-born in cyclic existence. Rather than abiding in nirvana they forsake their own liberation, and take rebirth into cyclic existence in order to continue to benefit sentient beings.

As explained in the teachings, bodhisattvas have the ability to completely destroy all delusions, just as fire consumes wood. The wisdom within the bodhisattva's mind is able to completely consume and devour all stains of delusion, so they could, in an instant, obtain the state of liberation and abide in nirvana, if they so wished. However, they forsake their own personal liberation and intentionally remain in samsara for many eons, to help benefit sentient beings. In a sense they are willing to forsake their own enlightenment for the benefit of other sentient beings.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama once said, it seems that the bodhisattvas on the sutric path have a more courageous mind than the bodhisattvas on the tantric path. The very intention of tantric practice is to obtain liberation and enlightenment in this very lifetime, whereas the bodhisattvas on the sutric path are not daunted by the prospect of remaining in samsara even for many eons.

So, through these explanations we can gain an understanding of why the particular term 'stainless' is given to the second ground, and it is good to relate to that.

The presentation of the rest of the grounds follows a similar format. First, the reason why the particular name is given is presented, followed by the qualities of that ground, and then the maturation results of the qualities.

3. The third ground is called **Luminous**.

The verse from the root text is:

**445. The third ground is called the Luminous
Because the pacifying light of wisdom arises.
The concentrations and clairvoyances are generated,
And desire and hatred are completely extinguished.**

Again, you will recall that this ground was presented in very great detail in the *Madhyamakavatara*, along with dealing with qualms that were raised.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse:

The third ground is called Luminous, because during the state of meditative equipoise, the firewood-like

obscurations to omniscience are *pacified* by the *light of wisdom*. Furthermore due to the power of obtaining that, even during the state of post-meditative equipoise, one's body becomes luminous with a reddish-yellow, copper-like colour, like the colour of dawn....

On the third ground, during meditative equipoise, it dawns on the bodhisattva that they have the ability to overcome the obscurations to omniscience. This is a difficult point to comprehend, however as explained in the teachings an appearance of luminosity occurs in their mind, which is an indication that they have developed the unique capacity to overcome the obscurations to omniscience. Although they have not yet overcome the obscurations to omniscience, it dawns upon them that they have the capacity to do so. As a sign of the dawning of that capacity, there is an appearance of luminosity in their mind. As a result of that, *during the state of post-meditative equipoise the body itself becomes luminous with a reddish-yellow or copper-like colour, like the colour of dawn*. This explains why the third ground is called 'luminous'.

Then, as the commentary further explains:

... On this ground, *the four concentrations, four formlessness, four immeasurables and the five clairvoyances are generated*. Also, *desire, hatred and ignorance are completely extinguished*.

As clearly explained in the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings, there are particular qualities that are obtained on each ground. So on this ground, the qualities are generating the four concentrations and so forth.

The *five clairvoyances* are:

- ∞ the visual clairvoyance of the gods;
- ∞ the auditory clairvoyance of the gods;
- ∞ the clairvoyance of magical emanation;
- ∞ the clairvoyance of knowing the minds of others; and
- ∞ the clairvoyance of knowing former lives.

When it says that *desire, hatred and ignorance are completely extinguished*, it needs to be understood that the particular abandonments of desire, hatred and ignorance on this ground are completely extinguished. It this doesn't mean that the bodhisattvas on this ground have abandoned all desire, hatred and ignorance but rather those which are the particular abandonment on this ground.

The next verse covers the maturation of the qualities:

446. Through the maturation of those [good qualities]
*They practise supremely the deeds of patience
And become a great wise monarch of the gods.
They put an end to desire.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation reads:

Through the maturation and result of those good qualities, they practise supremely the deeds of patience, as well as joyous effort and the fruit of that is that they become a great wise monarch of the gods. And because of their wisdom, they put an end to desire of the desire realm.

Having covered the reason why the term 'luminous' is used, and the meaning of that term, next comes the qualities that are obtained and the particular defilements that are overcome. As it says here, bodhisattvas on this ground *become a great wise monarch of the gods*, referring to a particular realm called the gods free from combat. They also overcome the *desire of the desire realm* through *their wisdom*.

4. The fourth ground is called **Radiant**.

The verse from the root text reads:

447. The fourth is called the Radiant
*Because the light of true wisdom arises.
They cultivate supremely
All the harmonies with enlightenment.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The fourth is called the Radiant, because the light of true wisdom which surpasses the third ground arises here.

Here, the term 'radiant' has the connotation of emitting an even stronger light than usual. As explained here *because the light of true wisdom which surpasses the third ground arises* at this point, the fourth ground is called *radiant*.

Gyaltsab Je' commentary continues:

They cultivate supremely all thirty-seven harmonies with enlightenment, which are divided into seven categories such as the four close contemplations and so forth.

We briefly mentioned the seven categories of the thirty-seven harmonies with enlightenment earlier this year¹, and they are also explained in the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings². The unique feature of this ground is said to be the ability to distinguish the very subtle aspects of the thirty-seven harmonies with enlightenment. There is a distinction between the thirty seven harmonies with enlightenment that are explained from the Prasangika point of view which is subtler, and the thirty-seven harmonies as explained in *Abhidharma*. The same distinction between gross and subtle also applies to the four noble truths and so forth.

The next verse relates to the maturation of the good qualities of this ground:

448. Through the maturation of those [good qualities]
*They become monarchs of the gods in [the heaven] Without Combat.
They are skilled in quelling the arising of the view
That the transitory collection [is inherently existent I and mine].*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Through the maturation of those good qualities they become monarchs of the gods in the heaven Without Combat. They are skilled in quelling the innate subtle arising of the view that the transitory collection is an inherently existent 'I' and 'mine', and the gross which is that it is a self-sufficiently and independently existent 'I'.

It has to be understood that *quelling the innate subtle arising of the view* refers to the complete abandonment of the innate view of the transitory collection at this level. Also, though not specifically mentioned here, other teachings indicate that the perfection of joyous effort is surpassed on this ground.

5. The fifth, is called Extremely Difficult to Overcome and the relevant verse reads:

449. The fifth is called the Extremely Difficult to Overcome
*Because all evil ones find it extremely hard to conquer them.
They become skilled in knowing
The subtle meanings of the noble truths and so forth.*

¹ See the teachings of 8 May 2012.

² See the teachings of 5 October 2004.

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The fifth is called the Extremely Difficult to Overcome because, even if all the demons of the Devaputra are not able to conquer them, then it is not to mention that all evil ones, such as the obedient slaves of the demons, will find it extremely hard to conquer them.

Bodhisattvas are beyond the domination of the demons such as the *demons of the Devaputra*. Some find it hard to understand that demons can exist, however there are many who have had experiences with non-human entities. So it is possible there are some entities that can harm us and the term 'demon' is used to indicate a malicious harm that is inflicted upon others. In any case, the *demons of the Devaputra*, also known as the son of the gods, are said to hinder a lot of the practices. The main point here is that if the *demons of the Devaputra* themselves are not able to conquer the bodhisattva on this ground, then there is no need to mention that all the evil ones, such as the obedient slaves of that demon, will find it extremely hard to conquer them. Thus this ground is called 'extremely hard to conquer'.

The commentary continues:

They become skilled in knowing the gross and subtle meanings of the four noble truths and so forth. In the sutra of the Ten Grounds it has been explained that they will become skilled in knowing the subtle meanings of all objects of knowledge, such as the two truths and so forth.

The gross and subtle meanings of the four noble truths were explained previously³.

The next verse explains the maturation of the qualities:

**450. Through the maturation of those [good qualities]
They become monarchs of the gods abiding in the Joyous Land,
They overcome the foundations of all formers
Afflictive emotions and views.**

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Through the maturation of those good qualities they become monarchs of the gods abiding in the joyous land. The results on this ground are, they overcome the foundations of all afflictive emotions and views of inner and outer formers.

The joyous land indicated here does not refer to the joyous land known as Tushita, but to the joyous land that is one of the six realms of the desire gods.

The next point is that they *overcome the foundations of all afflictive emotions and views of inner and outer formers*. This refers to the delusions as well as the views relating to the inner and outer formers.

While it is not specifically indicated here, the perfection of concentration is surpassed on this ground.

6. The sixth is called the Approaching, which is presented in this verse:

**451. The sixth is called the Approaching
Because they are approaching the good qualities of a buddha.
Through familiarity with calm abiding and special insight
They attain cessation and hence are advanced [in wisdom].**

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

The sixth is called the Approaching, because they are approaching the good qualities of the Buddha's teachings on interdependent origination and all phenomena being like a reflection and so forth. As stated in the sutra, Compendium of all Dharmas, 'When the mind is in meditative equipoise the ultimate will be known just as it is'. On the fifth ground due to completing the perfection of concentration, the perfection of wisdom is also completed and thus through familiarity of the bodhisattvas' unique calm abiding and special insight. They attain cessation and hence are advanced in wisdom. In brief this means that their wisdom is advanced due to having obtained the cessation that enables them to focus directly on emptiness in meditative equipoise.

Thus as indicated here, the perfection of wisdom is surpassed on this ground.

The next verse explains the maturation of the qualities:

**452. Through the maturation of those [good qualities]
They become monarchs of the gods [in the land] of Liking Emanation.
Hearers cannot surpass them.
They pacify those with the pride of superiority.**

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates the verse:

Through the maturation of those good qualities they become monarchs of the gods in the land of Liking Emanation. Hearers cannot surpass them and they pacify those with pride of superiority.

Basically, as explained here, *they become monarchs of particular gods in the land of Liking Emanation*. Furthermore, the *hearers* and so forth *cannot surpass them* and reaching that state of ground enables them to naturally *pacify those with pride of superiority*.

Now we are up to the seventh ground, which we can leave for our next session.

Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version

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³ See teachings of 23 July 20102 and the supplement to the teaching of 20 July 2002.

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇིགས་མེད་ལྷན་དུ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

18 September 2012

Based on the motivation we generated earlier, let us engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

Now we can generate the positive motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines, 'For the sake of all mother sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment myself, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

This motivation is highly significant as it has three essential components: the *purpose*, which is to liberate all sentient beings; the *goal*, which is that one needs to achieve enlightenment to fulfil that purpose; and the *action*, which is listening to the teachings and putting them into practice well. When our motivation combines all of these three component parts, it becomes a highly meaningful motivation, and furthermore it encompasses the actual meaning of the Mahayana. If one were to ask, 'What is the Mahayana practice? How does the Mahayana practitioner engage in practice?', then this motivation indicates what the Mahayana practice entails.

When one understands that this motivation consists of the meaning of the Mahayana Vehicle, then through that one can understand how the Great or Mahayana Vehicle is distinguished from the Lesser or Hinayana Vehicle. In terms of *scope*, the purpose of the practice is much greater, as it is not solely for one's own purpose, but for the purpose of all sentient beings. In terms of *goal*, it is the ultimate state of perfection, the enlightened state, which is entirely free from all defilements and their very imprints. Thus the goal is the greatest achievement possible—the fully enlightened state of buddhahood.

Whereas in the Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle, the *scope* or purpose for engaging in the path is liberation mainly for oneself, which is why practitioners of the Lesser Vehicle are called seekers of self-liberation. The *goal* is the mere liberation from samsara where, although the delusions are eliminated, their imprints remain. So in this way that we can understand the distinction between the Great and Lesser Vehicles.

Of course I have gone over this hundreds of times in past, but sometimes when I check, it seems that you are not able to recall it! The Lam Rim teachings say that one of the faults for practising the Dharma is to become complacent. An example of this is saying, 'Oh yes, I know that; I have heard that before', and just leaving it at that, and not relating it to our own personal practice.

2.1.2.2.2. Entities and good qualities of the ten grounds (cont.)

We completed the sixth ground Difficult to Overcome in our last session. Briefly, we can understand that, in relation to the fifth ground, the sixth ground adds the additional quality (amongst others) of surpassing the

perfection of wisdom, which is the sixth of the ten perfections.

7. We now come to the seventh ground which is called **Gone Afar**.

The verse relating to this ground reads:

453 *The seventh is the Gone Afar
Because the number [of good qualities] has
increased.*

*Moment by moment they [can] enter
The equipoise of cessation.*

In relation to this verse Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The seventh is called the Gone Afar because, in terms of time, it is two countless eons and in relation to the lower grounds, the number of good qualities has increased significantly, and they are much closer to obtaining the eighth ground.

As explained in the sutric path, the bodhisattva takes three great countless eons to accumulate the merit and wisdom to obtain the goal of enlightenment. *In terms of time*, accomplishing the *two countless eons* means that two of the three countless eons are completed on the seventh ground. Thus the eighth, ninth and tenth grounds are accomplished in the third eon.

Gyaltsab Je goes on to explain:

The reason they are gone afar in comparison to the lower grounds is because moment by moment they can enter the equipoise of cessation.

Older students will recall from the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings¹ that one of unique features of obtaining the seventh ground is that within a moment, bodhisattvas are able to both enter into, and exit from, the equipoise of cessation. Here *equipoise of cessation* relates to the equipoise on emptiness. So within a moment they are able to enter and exit and re-enter the equipoise of focusing on emptiness.

As I have explained in previous teachings, the reason why equipoise of cessation relates to a single-pointed focus on emptiness is because according to the Prasangika system, cessation is regarded as emptiness. The Prasangika assert that when the understanding of the ultimate nature of reality or emptiness progressively becomes more and more profound, one is abandoning subtler levels of obscurations. Thus, as one gains more profound levels of realisation on emptiness one is obtaining higher levels of cessation.

As explained further in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

It is because of these reasons that they also outshine the hearers and solitary realisers through the power of their mind.

Here, *these reasons* refers to being able to enter and come out of meditative equipoise in a single moment. Hearers and solitary realisers do not possess this ability because it is only acquired on the seventh ground, thus the bodhisattvas on this ground *outshine the hearers and solitary realisers through the power of their mind*.

As I explained in the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings², up to the sixth ground bodhisattvas outshine the Hearers

¹ Teaching of 2 November 2004.

² *Ibid.*

because of their lineage. On the seventh ground however the bodhisattvas obtain the state where they particularly outshine the hearers and solitary realisers through the power of their mind. Although not mentioned here, the perfection of method is surpassed on the seventh ground.

Then the next verse explains the results:

454 *Through the maturation of those [good qualities]
They become masters of the gods [in the land] of
Control over Others' Emanations.
They become great leaders of teachers
Who know direct realisation of the [four] noble
truths.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Through the maturation of those good qualities they become masters of the gods in the land of Control over Other's Emanations. They become great leaders of teachers who know direct realisation of the four noble truths.

These are the qualities that bodhisattvas obtain on this ground.

8. We come now to the eighth ground, which is called **Immovable**³. The relevant verse reads:

455 *The eighth is the immovable, the youthful ground.
Through non-conceptuality they are
immovable,
And the spheres of activity
Of their body, speech, and mind are
inconceivable.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The eighth is the Immovable, the youthful ground. Because they have thoroughly abandoned the conception of true existence through non-conceptuality, they are immovable, i.e. they cannot be moved by grasping at signs. Likewise the spheres of activity of their body, speech and mind are inconceivable.

As explained here, one of the particular features of this ground is that they have thoroughly abandoned the conception of true existence. Of the ten perfections, they have surpassed the perfection of aspirational prayers. This verse explains why they are called immovable.

The next verse explains the maturation of those qualities:

456 *Through the maturation of those [good qualities]
They become a Brahma, master of a thousand worlds.
Foe destroyers, solitary realisers, and so forth
Cannot surpass them in positing the meaning
[of doctrines].*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse:

Through the maturation of those good qualities they become Brahma, master of a thousand worlds. Foe destroyers of hearers and solitary realisers and so forth cannot surpass them in positing the meaning of doctrines.

As explained here, through the maturation of those qualities, they become Brahma, a god who, within the three thousand world systems, is master of a thousand worlds. The main point of these qualities is that bodhisattvas have the majesty and ability to rule over the

beings in vast number of worlds within the three thousand world systems, and thus provide them with the benefit of the Dharma. Furthermore, the *foe destroyers, hearers and solitary realisers and so forth cannot surpass them in positing the meaning of the doctrines*. This means that they have obtained the ability to distinguish the subtle meanings of the doctrines, which surpasses that of hearers and solitary realisers including the foe destroyers.

It is good to keep in mind that in terms of the qualities of the ten perfections, bodhisattvas on this ground surpass the perfection of aspirational prayers. The text *Commentary to the Awakening Mind* explains that bodhisattvas have great might, and the ability to manifest as celestial beings such as *Brahma*, Shiva and Vishnu. Through manifesting as these celestial beings, they are able to benefit vast numbers of other sentient beings through their might and power, which is why they take those forms.

One needs to understand how, on each ground, qualities are surpassed in comparison to the earlier grounds. Thus on the eighth ground, particular qualities are obtained that surpass those of the seventh ground.

9. The ninth ground is **Excellent Intelligence**, which is explained in the following verse:

457 *The ninth ground is called Excellent Intelligence.
Like a regent they have attained
Correct individual realisation
And therefore have good intelligence.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

The ninth ground is called Excellent Intelligence. Just like a king's son that is bestowed with the role of becoming a regent, they have been bestowed with great illumination and have attained correct individual realisation of the four specific perfect understandings and so forth, and therefore have good intelligence.

So within the ten perfections bodhisattvas on this ground surpass the perfection of power or might.

In the presentation of *Madhyamakavatara*⁴ there was an explanation of *the four specific perfect understandings*, which are:

- ∞ the specific perfect understanding of Dharma;
- ∞ the specific perfect understanding of meaning;
- ∞ the specific perfect understanding of definite words, and
- ∞ the specific perfect understanding of confidence.

Next is the maturation of the qualities:

458 *Through the maturation of those [good qualities]
They become a Brahma, master of a million worlds⁵.
Foe destroyers and so forth cannot surpass them
In [responding to] questions in the thoughts of
sentient beings.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Through the maturation of those good qualities they become Brahma, master of two thousand worlds. Foe destroyers and so forth cannot surpass them, in responding

³ *Madhyamakavatara* teachings of 2 November 2004 and 9 November 2004.

⁴ Teaching of 9 November 2004.

⁵ The correct translation is two thousand worlds.

without any mistake and contradictions to questions in the thoughts of sentient beings.

While the English text uses *master of a million worlds*, the Tibetan text reads *master of two thousand worlds*. This is in comparison to being master of one thousand worlds on the previous ground. Thus one of the qualities the bodhisattvas obtain on this ground that surpasses the earlier ground is becoming master of two thousand worlds of the three thousand world system.

The unique quality of this ground is having the ability to respond to any questions that sentient beings may ask, without any mistake or contradiction. It is in this respect as well, that bodhisattvas on this ground surpass hearers, solitary realisers, and foe destroyers.

It is important for us to keep in mind how essential it is to be able to respond to questions without mistakes or contradictions. We need to understand that unique qualities such as this are obtained sequentially. It is not as if these qualities are obtained spontaneously, all at once! Rather, every quality that is obtained is based on qualities that have been obtained on previous grounds and paths.

We need to acknowledge the great significance of all the effort that we have made in gaining whatever understanding we have now. Each time we recall and refresh the understanding we had gained previously, we add more depth to our understanding of the meaning of the teachings. Thus, the great qualities that are obtained on the high bodhisattva grounds are based on the meagre qualities that were obtained on the trainee's path, and before that as an ordinary being like us.

In some situations our understanding of the Dharma derived from our daily practice and study, can be quite apparent. For example, if we have some familiarity with death and impermanence then, whenever we encounter some one's death it can immediately reinforce the sense of impermanence and the transient nature of one's life. When someone of status with fame or wealth passes away, then, as explained in the teachings, when they leave their body, there is nothing they can take along with them, no matter how minute. This is a clear indication that, as explained in the teachings, at the time of death wealth and possessions cannot help; one's family and friends cannot help; and even one's own body is of no help. Thus nothing but the Dharma can help at that crucial moment.

When we encounter the death of others it is a clear reminder to us that we too will have to face death. At that time, as there is nothing whatsoever that we can take with us, practising Dharma is most essential. If we don't familiarise ourselves with impermanence and don't think much about its significance, then the death of another might affect us for a while, but then the impact fades away until it no longer affects us at all. If, however, we have devoted some time to contemplating the nature of death and impermanence, it can actually move us and become an impetus for our own practice.

We need to pay attention and really reflect upon the great conditions that we have now, and put the Dharma into practice as much as we can. These conditions include the great good fortune of having access to the teachings and the teachers. Of course this would be quite irrelevant if

the teachings didn't really suit our disposition or if we were not capable of comprehending them. But as I see it, you not only have the conditions, but you also have the capacity to comprehend and understand the Dharma.

Since we enjoy these perfect conditions of having the Dharma and not being deprived of the mental capacity to comprehend and understand the Dharma we need to apply our understanding of the Dharma and put it into practice. If we don't utilise these good conditions now we will be wasting a wonderful opportunity. Sometimes it seems that rather than utilising these good conditions, it is as if we are intentionally placing obstacles in our own way; preventing ourselves from putting the teachings and the Dharma into practice! It seems we are looking for every opportunity to find an excuse to avoid practising Dharma, which is a great pity and shame.

As some lamas have indicated, while we have the perfect conditions of enjoying the eight leisures, which means that we are free from the eight adverse conditions, we bind ourselves to a ninth condition. This is a very meaningful point about how we create for ourselves the condition of not being able to practice the Dharma.

We also need to reflect on the Buddha's saying that 'Liberation is possible, even for a householder'. We must reflect on these words otherwise we might find excuses like, 'Oh, I'm a lay person so I cannot practise as well as those who are ordained!' The Buddha's words explain that if you are really keen, then liberation is possible, even in a lay life.

More specifically, from the tantric point of view, you would recall from initiations, that there are three categories of Vajra holders: fully ordained Vajra holders, novice Vajra holders and lay Vajra holders. In other words, regardless of your ordination status, you can still be a Vajra holder. With respect to the lay persons vows, although one commitment is to refrain from sexual misconduct, that does not mean refraining from sexual activity entirely. The vow of celibacy is not expected of a lay person, but one can take the precept of refraining from sexual misconduct. This is a significant point to consider.

I'm mentioning all of this as a way to encourage you to not fall victim to your own lazy state of mind, thinking, 'Oh, because I am a lay person, I don't have the opportunity to practise and so forth'. In fact, if so inclined, one can find the time and energy to practise the Dharma as much as possible. Now in sharing this, I am not implying that I am a great practitioner myself! However what I can say with certainty is that I really don't waste my time; I try to utilise my time daily as best as I can.

Regarding having a significant state of mind, I went to visit the late Caryn Clarke at the hospice a few weeks before her passing. On seeing me she was moved to tears. She then confided in me that she didn't really have much fear about death itself, but her only real concern was not being able to meet with a spiritual friend in the next life. She said that she had derived a lot of meaning and purpose in her life in the seven years since she had encountered the Dharma, with me as her guide. She was basically concerned that she would not see me again.

When you think about it, this is a very profound way of thinking in terms of a Dharma point of view. I don't know if you also have such concerns of not meeting gurus in the next life?

She also said that she much preferred the hospice environment, because at home her mind seemed to be a bit more agitated and disturbed because of visiting relatives and so forth. Whereas in the hospice she felt more in tune with engaging in the practice of Dharma, in particular reciting Tara mantras. When she did the Tara mantras, even the nurses, who were not Buddhists, seemed to have felt a very calm and nice atmosphere in her presence. She confided in me that the nurses mentioned when they came to her room they felt very good and very calm. So this definitely shows the great significance of sincere practice; when such practice is done, the good atmosphere is felt by those around.

In relation to the ninth ground, the reason it is called *Excellent Intelligence* was explained in the earlier verse, and the particular qualities to be obtained and so forth was explained in the second one.

10. Now we come to the tenth ground which is **Cloud of Doctrine**.

The relevant verse reads:

459 *The tenth is the Cloud of Doctrine
Because the rain of holy doctrine falls.
The bodhisattva is bestowed empowerment
With light rays by the buddhas.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse thus:

The tenth is called the Cloud of Doctrine, because just as a great amount of rain falls from rain-bearing-clouds, similarly to increase the crops of virtue within sentient beings mental continuum, the rain of holy doctrine falls. When this ground is obtained, at the end of obtaining hundreds of thousands countless various concentrations, the bodhisattva is bestowed with the empowerment called light rays by the buddhas, which is no different to the wisdom of omniscience.

In relation to the qualities on the tenth ground, having obtained various concentrations, bodhisattvas are bestowed with *empowerment with light rays by the Buddhas*. As explained here, being *no different* doesn't mean being exactly the same, but it is very similar to that. In terms of the state of mind of the wisdom of the Buddha, it is a similitude of the Buddha's omniscient mind.

This reminds me of a time when I was staying at Kopan Monastery. During one of his courses, Lama Yeshe was teaching about the different bodhisattva grounds. After one session, as Lama Yeshe and I were having lunch together, he mentioned to me that he was explaining the ten grounds and that one of the students, (an American who later I found was called John Landau) asked, 'What is the difference between the tenth ground bodhisattva and a buddha?' This question arose from the words 'which is no different to the wisdom of omniscience'. Lama Yeshe said that this question was quite a significant one, and then he said to me. 'How would you have answered that?', but at the time I didn't really say anything.

When the explanation of the tenth ground bodhisattva's wisdom says, it is *no different to the wisdom of omniscience*, the implication is that it refers to the understanding of the 'objects to be known', or 'existence'. So bodhisattvas on this ground actually have the wisdom of knowing everything, however their mind could not be referred to being as an omniscient mind, because they have not yet overcome the subtlest level of obscurations.

In terms of knowledge, they are almost equal to the Buddha's omniscient mind, but they are not referred to as having an omniscient mind, because there remains a very subtle level of obscuration that is yet to be completely abandoned. The qualities of an omniscient mind, and how it understands all phenomena has been explained previously, so it is good to refer to that to understand what an omniscient mind is.

One example would be, perceiving an object such as a clock. Our eye consciousness perceives the clock, and likewise the Buddha's eye consciousness perceives the clock. So in terms of being unmistakable in perceiving the clock, the perception would be the same. However our eye consciousness perceiving the clock is not an omniscient consciousness perceiving the clock. Whereas the Buddha's eye consciousness perceiving the clock, is an omniscient consciousness. The difference has been previously explained with an analogy.

Our eye consciousness, even at the grossest level, would not perceive the impermanence and transient nature of the clock, let alone perceiving the emptiness of the clock, or each and every atom of the clock. Whereas in the single moment of perceiving a clock, the Buddha is able to perceive the impermanence of the clock as well as its ultimate reality, which is the emptiness of the clock. In terms of the substances which make up the clock, the Buddha would perceive every single atom of the clock simultaneously. He would also perceive the derivation of each and every atom, where it came from, and how the atoms were gathered together to make up the clock and so forth. This perception would also include the person who actually made the clock, along with each and every individual who contributed to making the clock. Thus a Buddha's eye consciousness perceiving a clock will simultaneously perceive each and every aspect, up to the finest detail that relates to the clock.

This shows the unique and incredible feature of the eye consciousness of the Buddha, which is made possible by removing and completely abandoning all defilements. Without abandoning all defilements, it is not possible for the eye consciousness of ordinary beings (even at an advanced bodhisattva level) to perceive the finest details to the same extent as the Buddha's eye consciousness. This is how it is to be understood.

The qualities of the tenth ground surpass the qualities of the earlier grounds, particularly the ninth ground. In relation to the ten perfections; the perfection of primordial wisdom is surpassed on the tenth ground.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇིགས་ཆེན་ཕྱིར་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

25 September 2012

In a relaxed posture, along with the motivation we have generated with the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [Meditation]

It is also good to remember to generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines, 'For the sake of all mother sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

Ensuring that we spend some time generating a positive motivation, specifically the bodhicitta motivation, is a very significant practice in itself. Generating a bodhicitta motivation is a means to purify negative karma and to accumulate extensive merit. As a practice, the bodhicitta motivation encompasses these two essential elements.

You will have heard in the teachings about the necessity for accumulating a great amount of merit. The commentary on bodhicitta indicates that the merit from generating the bodhicitta mind, just for a moment, cannot be expressed even by all the buddhas. This is an indication of the vast amount of merit that is accumulated by generating the bodhicitta motivation. So we need to understand the great significance of this practice.

Although we may not yet be able to generate actual bodhicitta right now, even a similitude of it, such as generating the contrived bodhicitta attitude, is highly meaningful, as it serves as the basis for further developing the altruistic mind. We are all familiar with the bodhicitta attitude, as we know what it encompasses and how to generate it. However if we neglect that and then wonder how we should practice to accumulate merit and purify negative karma, then we have really missed the point!

I have often encountered those who have spent many years receiving teachings, but when it comes to practice they ask 'What should I meditate on?' or 'What practice do I need to do?' That just goes to show that they have missed the point about what 'practice' actually means. In fact, practice entails contemplating, and meditating on the teachings one has heard, i.e. whatever understanding one has gained from those teachings is to be used as the substance for one's practice.

We have been incredibly fortunate to have received numerous teachings and explanations on what bodhicitta means, and so forth, from our great gurus. Thus, the seed of bodhicitta has already been implanted in our mental continuum, and that needs to be nourished and further developed. Just as the seed of a flower requires moisture, warmth, soil and so forth in order to germinate, the seed of bodhicitta in our mental continuum needs the

conditions of further practice and contemplation if it is to develop and flourish. It is through the kindness of the gurus that we have received the seed, but it is our responsibility to actually apply the right conditions to nourish that seed, and further develop it.

As you would recall from the teachings on bodhicitta, the basis for the bodhicitta mind to be cultivated is that one's mind has to be pure and free from negative imprints of misdeeds. That is to say, a mind filled with negativities is not a suitable basis on which to develop bodhicitta. That is the reason why prior to taking the bodhisattva vows, as means to accumulate merit and purify misdeeds, the lama asks us to repeat these lines:

I take refuge in the three jewels.
I confess all misdeeds individually,
And rejoice in the virtuous deeds of all beings.
I hold in my mind, the intention to achieve
enlightenment, the perfect state of buddhahood.

We need to engage in the meaning of these lines wholeheartedly, and try to contemplate the point of each line, as a way to be moved from the depth of our heart.

One takes refuge in the Three Jewels from the depth of one's heart with complete and total reliance on the three objects of refuge, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Confessing all individual misdeeds, requires a very strong mind of regret and a keen determination to purify them. We also need to rejoice in the virtuous deeds of all living beings. Thus these lines encompass the essential elements required for developing bodhicitta, which is the accumulation of merit and purifying misdeeds. The accumulation of merit is practiced by taking refuge and rejoicing, while purifying misdeeds is achieved through confession. So, it is in this way that we acquire the proper conditions for developing the bodhicitta mind.

2.1. Temporary good qualities

2.1.2. Good qualities of the ten grounds

2.1.2.2. BRANCH MEANING

2.1.2.2.2. Entities and good qualities of the ten grounds

10. Following on from our last session we are up to the tenth ground, which is the **Cloud of Doctrine**.

The relevant verse reads:

459 *The tenth is the Cloud of Doctrine
Because the rain of holy doctrine falls.
The bodhisattva is bestowed empowerment
With light rays by the buddhas.*

The reason for the name Cloud of Doctrine is presented in the first two lines, while the next two lines of the verse refer to the qualities bestowed on a bodhisattva on this ground, which surpass the qualities on the ninth ground.

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary (as presented last week) indicated that bodhisattvas on the tenth ground receive this direct empowerment from the buddhas in all the ten directions through light radiated from the spiral hair curl on the foreheads of the buddhas. Receiving that empowerment enables the bodhisattvas on that ground to have an incredibly profound and high level of concentration. The words *the empowerment of the rays of light* indicate that a direct realisation of primordial wisdom is bestowed upon the bodhisattvas.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then continues:

As explained, when this state is actualised the ground is adorned with jewelled lotuses equalling ten times a hundred thousand-fold of the three thousand world systems, and as many atoms as there are in ten times a hundred thousand-fold of the three thousand world systems. The bodhisattva's body also conforms with that many world systems. As soon as they obtain this concentration they sit on top of the lotuses, at which time the Conqueror and all buddhas radiate light from their hair curl and bestow on the bodhisattva the so-called 'empowerment of great rays of light'.

Lama Tsong Khapa's commentary, *Illumination of the Thought, an Extensive Explanation of the Madhyamakavatara* contains an explanation of the qualities of the ten grounds, which were explained in the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings. So if you want a clear explanation of this then refer to that text.¹

In brief, the qualities on the tenth ground are that bodhisattvas on this ground surpass the perfection of primordial wisdom, and having been bestowed with the empowerment of great rays of light, they obtain innumerable levels of concentration.

The next verse relates to the maturation qualities of this ground:

*460 Through the maturation of those [good qualities]
They become master of the gods of Pure Abode.
They are supreme great lords,
Master of the sphere of infinite wisdom.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Through the maturation of those good qualities they become master of the gods of Pure Abode.

There is said to be seventeen different abodes of arya beings, and the Pure Abode is one of the abodes within the god realms. Bodhisattvas on this level *become master of the Pure Abode*. Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

They are supreme great lords, and because they are bestowed with the empowerment of infinite wisdom which is the wisdom of the Buddhas, they are master of the sphere of infinite wisdom.

Because of the *empowerment bestowed* on them on this level, bodhisattvas achieve *infinite wisdom* and thus called *the masters of the sphere of infinite wisdom*. The rays of light emanating from the hair curl of the buddhas are symbolic of the fact that bodhisattvas on this ground are empowered to receive infinite wisdom, which is equal to that of the omniscient mind. Thus they are referred to as the *masters of the sphere of infinite wisdom*.

As I regularly indicate during initiations, when visualising receiving light and nectar from the enlightened beings in the aspect of deities, we must understand that in essence we are receiving the primordial wisdom of the enlightened beings. Contemplating in this way is a means to receive the blessings of the enlightened beings, which is very

powerful for purifying negativities and removing obscurations within our mind. What is explained in this commentary is that when the bodhisattvas receive this empowerment, it is in the aspect of light radiated from the spiral hair of the buddhas, which in actual fact is the omniscient wisdom of the buddhas.

It is important to incorporate and implement that understanding in our practice when we do visualisations. For example during an initiation, when we receive the water from the vase, we need to think of it as actual nectar, and that, in itself, is definitely a great blessing. Even though the water from the vase is consecrated and is representative of the nectar, if we don't really understand the deeper significance, it may not have a strong effect on our mind. But when we understand its significance and what it symbolises, there is no doubt that it is highly beneficial.

We need to familiarise ourselves with the significance of all this and then implement it in our daily practice as well. If we discipline ourselves and make the effort, then our practice will naturally become spontaneous. Then, whatever practice we do, will be meaningful, due to our acquaintance with the practice and the correct way of thinking.

2.1.2.2.3. Summation

The first two lines of the next verse are a summary of the temporary good qualities of the ten grounds:

*461ab Thus those ten grounds are renowned
As the ten bodhisattva grounds.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates these lines:

Thus, those ten grounds are renowned in the sutras as the ten bodhisattva grounds.

The commentary specifically explains that the ten grounds are renowned in the sutras, i.e. in the Buddha's own teachings.

2.2. Final good qualities

The good qualities of the ten grounds can also be referred as temporary good qualities. Here, the final good qualities are explained. This explanation is sub-divided into two:

2.2.1. Each of a buddha's good qualities is limitless

2.2.2. Causes for generating belief and faith in the limitless good qualities of buddhas

Again it is good to see how the outline itself extracts the meaning of the text itself.

2.2.1. Each of a buddha's good qualities is limitless

The following verses indicate how each and every one of the good qualities of the Buddha are limitless. One may wonder, what are the causes that enable one to generate belief and faith in the limitless good qualities of the buddhas? The answer to that question is then presented very meticulously.

This heading is sub-divided into two:

2.2.1.1. The buddhas' limitless good qualities depend on the ten powers

2.2.1.2. Examples of the limitlessness of buddhas' good qualities

¹ See teaching of 9 November 2004.

2.2.1.1. THE BUDDHAS' LIMITLESS GOOD QUALITIES DEPEND ON THE TEN POWERS

I explained the ten powers in detail when we did the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings. So it would be good for you to refer to that again.²

As mentioned in the heading itself, the Buddha's good qualities are dependent on the ten powers.

The relevant lines of the root text read:

*461cd The ground of buddhahood is different.
Being in all ways inconceivable,
462ab Its great extent is merely said
To be endowed with the ten powers.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of these lines:

The ground of buddhahood is different from the previously explained ten grounds, being in all ways inconceivable. Even though the universe's great extent is infinite but condensed into the ten directions, similarly the buddha ground is merely said to be endowed with the ten powers.

The Buddha's qualities are limitless, however as way to understand some of the main qualities, they are condensed into the *ten powers*. The analogy used here is that the *extent of the universe is infinite* thus we are unable to determine its limits. However we can condense it into the *ten directions* (the four main directions, the four cardinal directions, above and below). The main point here is that the Buddha's qualities are limitless and infinite; however for the sake of convention and in order to understand them, they are condensed into the ten powers.

The *qualities* referred to here includes all of the qualities of the ten grounds, plus the qualities of buddhahood, which are infinite.

The ten powers of a buddha are translated as³:

- ∞ Power of knowing right from wrong
- ∞ Power of knowing the consequences of actions
- ∞ Power of knowing various mental inclinations
- ∞ Power of knowing various mental faculties
- ∞ Power of knowing various degrees of intelligence
- ∞ Power of knowing the path to all goals
- ∞ Power of knowing the ever-afflicted and purified phenomena
- ∞ Power of knowing past lives
- ∞ Power of knowing death and birth
- ∞ Power of knowing the exhaustion of contamination.

The last two lines of verse 462 refer to the limitlessness of the Buddha's good qualities:

*462cd Each power is immeasurable too
Like [the limitless number of] all
transmigrators.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse, it reads:

Each power, such as the power of knowing right from wrong is immeasurable too, like the limitless number of all transmigrators.

Thus each of the powers are in themselves immeasurable or limitless. A more accurate translation of the first power would be the power of knowing locations as well as non-locations. This power, for example, refers to the Buddha's ability to know exactly specific virtuous actions leading to specific positive results and specific misdeeds leading to specific negative results. In this way when related to the infinite objects of knowledge that are known by the omniscient mind, the limitless qualities of the buddhas can be understood.

The analogy here is that just as transmigrators or living beings are limitless, likewise each of the powers are also limitless.

The limitless qualities of the buddhas are explained with further analogies:

*463 The limitlessness of a buddha's [good qualities]
Is said to be like the limitlessness
Of space, earth, water, fire,
And wind in all directions.*

The Buddha's qualities are as limitless as space, which pervades limitlessly. There is a limitless quantity of water on this planet and it is the same with fire. In brief, just as the five elements are limitless, so too are the Buddha's qualities limitless.

2.2.2. Causes for generating belief and faith in the limitless good qualities of buddhas

As mentioned previously, having presented the Buddha's qualities as limitless, then one may wonder what are the causes for one to generate belief or faith in that?

This section is very meticulously presented in four subdivisions:

2.2.2.1. The reason why buddhas' good qualities are

limitless is that the causal merits are limitless

2.2.2.2. Limitlessness of the causes because of aspiring to help limitless beings

2.2.2.3. Immeasurability of the merit of those virtues

2.2.2.4. The sources

2.2.2.1. THE REASON WHY BUDDHAS' GOOD QUALITIES ARE LIMITLESS IS THAT THE CAUSAL MERITS ARE LIMITLESS

Just as the qualities of the buddhas are limitless, the merit required to obtain those qualities is also limitless. It is important to understand that connection.

We can see the logical presentation here. As the causes are limitless, the inference is that the results are also limitless. Conversely if the causes themselves can be defined and have some limitation, then one can assume that the effects will also have limits. But if the very causes are understood to be limitless then the results must also be limitless. These are good points to understand. Then we can recall how even one good deed such as a prostration, can have limitless benefits.

This logical presentation helps us to gain a clear insight into the logic of this syllogism: the effects – are limitless – because the causes are limitless.

² See teachings 23 November 2004. The powers relating to ordinary beings are explained on the ninth ground, where bodhisattvas surpass the perfection of power or might.

³ From Tsepak Rigzin, *Tibetan-English Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology*.

This sub-heading is further divided into three:

2.2.2.1.1. Source for the limitlessness of the buddhas' good qualities

2.2.2.1.2. Way to amass limitless merit

2.2.2.1.3. Brief presentation of the seven branches

2.2.2.1.1. Source for the limitlessness of the buddhas' good qualities

The relevant verse reads:

464 *If the causes are [reduced] to a mere [measure]
And not seen to be limitless,
One will not believe the limitlessness
[Of the good qualities] of the buddhas.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

It is not possible to measure the limit of the Buddha's qualities because, *if the causes of the Buddha are reduced to a mere measure and not seen to be limitless, one will not believe the limitlessness of the effects, which are the good qualities of the buddhas.* Thus, the qualities of the buddhas are limitless because their causes are infinite and limitless.

As explained in the commentary the causes for the Buddha's qualities are limitless and therefore the results, the Buddha's qualities, are also inferred as being limitless. What is being posed here is a rhetorical question: If the causes themselves are shown to have limits, then how could one possibly believe that the effects are limitless? It would not be logical or reasonable. So the conclusion is that because the causes of the qualities of the Buddha are limitless, the effects (which are the Buddha's qualities themselves) are to be inferred as being limitless as well.

With respect to the meaning of these words, *if the causes of the Buddha are reduced to a mere measure, if one could say 'this is the measure of the causes', then this would mean there is a limit to the causes. Thus, if the causes themselves had a limit, how could one possibly explain the effects to be limitlessness? However when the causes themselves are understood to be limitless, then it can be understood that the effects are also limitless. One can see how meticulously this reasoning is presented.*

2.2.2.1.2. Way to amass limitless merit

When the ways of amassing limitless merit are understood, then one can also understand the effect, which is that the Buddha's qualities are also limitless.

The relevant verse is:

465 *Therefore in the presence of an image
Or monument or something else
Say these twenty stanzas
Three times every day:*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Because the cause requires limitless amount of merit, *therefore in the presence of images of buddhas or monuments or something else such as the extraordinary assembly of the sangha, say these following twenty stanzas three times every day.* As the merit accumulated from reciting these prayers is limitless, the result will be limitless qualities of the buddhas.

Here one can recall the amount of merit required to obtain each of the Buddha's thirty-two major marks and the eighty minor signs. Obtaining each of those marks and signs requires the accumulation of vast merit. This is another a way for us to understand the extent of the merit that needs to be accumulated in order to obtain the qualities of the buddhas. If one recites these prayers and does the following practices in the presence of images of buddhas or stupas, or any kind of holy object, or in the presence of the sangha and so forth, then one accumulates an extensive amount of merit, which is a cause to obtain those limitless qualities. It is very significant for us to understand how beneficial these practices are when we do them in the correct way, and with the proper understanding.

As I have indicated in the past, if we take the time to offer whatever we eat or drink to the Three Jewels, and in particular to the gurus and the buddhas, then that can be a way to accumulate a vast amount of merit from our daily activities. Following from the explanations about limitlessness, if we make an offering of an object whose very existence comes about as a result of accumulating extensive limitless merit, then we can imagine the merit we receive must also be limitless, because we are offering it to an object endowed with limitless qualities. Thus the merit we accumulate can be limitless when we do it in the appropriate way.

So it is highly significant to have a strong relationship with a particular deity as the manifestation of one's guru, and then offer whatever one consumes to the enlightened beings in that aspect. When incorporated into our daily lives, this becomes a very significant practice.

The buddhas who are endowed with limitless qualities come about as the result of having first obtained the qualities of the arya beings. Thus if we make offerings and engage in practices in relation to the aryas, then the result of making offerings and practices to the arya beings will also be limitless.

If the result is limitless qualities, then the cause of that requires the accumulation of limitless merit. Arya beings on the ten grounds are engaged in accumulating limitless merit in order to obtain the result of being endowed with limitless qualities. Thus through making offerings, veneration, prostrations and so forth to the arya beings, we too can obtain limitless merit.

It is highly significant that the causes of the limitless qualities of the Buddha are the accumulation of limitless merit, along with obtaining the qualities of the tenth ground. Those qualities are related to the merit that is accumulated on the ninth ground. We can back-track in this way to the bodhisattva on the first ground, and even prior to that, to the practices and merits which are accumulated at the level of an ordinary bodhisattva (who is not yet an arya bodhisattva). The causes for obtaining the next level lie in the previous level. So as we progress down to the practices of the practitioners at ordinary levels, we can see how, from the very beginning, the accumulation of the merit and so forth is worthy of veneration and respect, because it serves as the cause to obtain the ultimate resultant good qualities of a buddha.

The way to incorporate this significant understanding is to relate it to the resultant qualities and the causal merits to be accumulated within the mental continuum of one individual being, such as Buddha Shakyamuni. The Buddha Shakyamuni's qualities were dependent on a bodhisattva of the same mental continuum on the tenth ground, which was dependent on a bodhisattva within the same mental continuum on the ninth ground, right back to the individual being of the same mental continuum accumulating merit at the beginner's level. In this way, the Buddha moved through the different bodhisattva grounds, ultimately achieving the state of enlightenment.

By applying that sequence to the mental continuum of one individual being, we can relate it to ourselves, at a personal level. Then it will actually dawn upon us, that it is possible for us to obtain those qualities ourselves too. If we wish to achieve those qualities, we need to also engage in the practices of accumulating merit, just as an enlightened being such as Buddha Shakyamuni did. At the same time, we need to realise that it is our own responsibility to engage in such practices. No-one else can provide these qualities and we ourselves need to take the initiative to acquire the causes to obtain them.

We enjoy incredibly good conditions now. We have been born as a human being with all of the good conditions intact, enabling us to engage in the practice of Dharma. All of this is possible as a direct result of the incredible causes that were created in our previous life. It was an individual of the same mental continuum as ourselves who, in our previous lives created the causes for what we enjoy now. So we can feel great gratitude for that.

However, just as the individual in the past took the responsibility for accumulating the appropriate causes for obtaining the result we are enjoying now, we have to take the initiative to accumulate those same causes ourselves if we wish to enjoy the same conditions in the future. No-one else can create those causes for us; if we wish to have good results in our future lives, we are the ones who have to create the causes now.

If we secure a good future life then, and in the life after that and so forth, the causes will be continually accumulated in each subsequent life, leading all the way to enlightenment. That is how we need to understand our individual personal journey of transformation and progress towards enlightenment.

More specifically, we need to really contemplate how, to a great extent the causes we enjoy and take for granted were accumulated by the individual being of our own previous existence. If we don't take the initiative to use these great, incredible conditions that we have now – being born as a human being, having all internal and external conditions, such as having met with perfect Mahayana teachers, being born in an area where the Dharma is prevalent, where we are able to access and have the inclination to practise the Dharma, to actually engage in the practice of Dharma now – we might be wasting the great work that our previous being has done for us, and we will not secure a good rebirth for ourselves.

If we have an unfortunate rebirth, such as not being born as a human, we will be deprived of the practice of Dharma. Even if we are re-born as a human, we could be deprived of meeting with the perfect Mahayana teacher or spiritual guide. We could be re-born into a condition where we have neither the faith nor the inclination to practise Dharma. Just imagine what kind of unfortunate situations one could be in. If we are not mindful and we don't apply good conditions now, there could be great misfortune waiting for us in the future. We need to consider this carefully.

So take the initiative to engage in practice now, otherwise it will be as Geshe Potawa said, 'I don't fear death itself, but I fear the next rebirth'. As I mentioned in the last session, before Caryn Clarke passed away, she confided in me that she didn't have much fear of death, but did she fear that she might not meet with teachers like myself in her future life. In essence, she was saying the same thing as Geshe Potawa, and these are highly significant points for us to consider. Caryn's fear is a reminder to us of what we really need to be concerned about.

If one doesn't think in this way, then it will be really difficult for us to be confident that our practice of Dharma is a pure Dharma practice. Actually, it is quite impossible for it to become a pure Dharma practice if we don't have that inclination to think of our future life.

As you will be aware, the next session is the discussion and following that is the exam, so please take the initiative to engage in that well.

The remaining verses in the text are, on one hand, easy to comprehend, but they are also very meaningful with respect to the great depth of the instructions for practice. Nagarjuna has presented us with incredibly profound ways to engage in practice. This is really significant and meaningful.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Discussion Block 6, Week 5 (02.10.2012)

Week: 1 (4 September 2012)

1. What are the four attributes of the grounds and explain what they mean? {8}

2.a) Name the first ground and give a brief explanation of what this means. [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

Week: 2 (11 September 2012)

3. a) What is the second ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

4. a) What is the third ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

5. a) What is the fourth ground called and what does it mean? [4]

c) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

6. a) What is the fifth ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

7. a) What is the sixth ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

Week: 3 (18 September 2012)

8. a) What is the seventh ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) How do Bodhisattvas outshine the hearers and solitary realisers on the sixth and seventh grounds? [4]

c) Which perfection is surpassed on the seventh ground? [2]

9. a) What is the eighth ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [2]

10. a) What is the ninth ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [2]

11. a) What is the tenth ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) What is the difference between a bodhisattva on the tenth ground and a Buddha? [4]

c) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [2]

Week: 4 (25 September 2012)

12. How can we accumulate a vast amount of merit from our daily activities?. [4] pg. 4, column 2, paragraph 2

Exam

Name: _____

Mark: _____

Block 6

Week 6: (09.10.2012)

1. a) Name the first ground and give a brief explanation of what this means. [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

2. a) What is the second ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

3. a) What is the third ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

4. a) What is the fourth ground called and what does it mean? [4]

c) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

5. a) What is the fifth ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

6. a) What is the sixth ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

7. a) What is the seventh ground called and what does it mean? [4]

c) Which perfection is surpassed on the seventh ground? [1]

8. a) What is the eighth ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

9. a) What is the ninth ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]

10. a) What is the tenth ground called and what does it mean? [4]

b) Which perfection is surpassed on this ground? [1]