
Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Please establish a virtuous motivation for listening to the teachings thinking that I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and in order to be able to do so I am now going to listen to this profound Mahayana Dharma.

Whether or not the Dharma we are listening to becomes Mahayana Dharma depends upon the motivation with which we are listening to that Dharma.

2.1.3. *The Way of Practising the Path as an Arya Bodhisattva*

We have finished with the grounds of ordinary bodhisattvas, and now we start with the next outline, which is the grounds of arya bodhisattvas. Here there are three subdivisions, the presentation of the ten bodhisattva grounds in general, explaining each of the grounds individually, and explaining the qualities of the ten bodhisattva grounds.

2.1.3.1. *The Presentation of the Ten Bodhisattva Grounds in General*

Here the qualities and characteristics that are shared by all of the ten bodhisattva grounds are explained.

The explanation of eleven grounds, the ten bodhisattva grounds and the eleventh ground of a buddha is partly based on the Precious Garland. There it says,

'Just as there are eight hearer grounds; explained for the hearer vehicle; there are ten bodhisattva grounds; for the Mahayana.'

It is also based on the Sutra of the Ten Grounds. There it refers to the ten grounds of Extremely Joyful etc. as the ten mind generations from the point of view of them being ultimate mind generations.

There are two different interpretations of those eight grounds of the hearer's path.

According to the *Self Commentary* those eight hearer grounds refer to the eight types of arya¹. The *Commentary on the 'Precious Garland'* says that they refer to the eight grounds of the Hinayana.

Ultimate bodhicitta refers to the mind realising emptiness directly in the continuum of an arya bodhisattva. So we have two types of mind generation, conventional mind generation, and ultimate mind generation.

Conventional mind generation is done in dependence upon the seven-point cause and effect method, and on the method of exchanging self and others.

With respect to ultimate mind generation, sometimes in general we say that a mind that realises emptiness is ultimate bodhicitta. Here it is narrowed down further, saying that ultimate bodhicitta has to be at least the mind realising emptiness directly in the continuum of an arya bodhisattva.

Regarding the identity of the ten grounds posited as ultimate mind generations the commentary says:

'When a Bodhisattva's transcendental uncontaminated wisdom alone, being held by compassion etc., is divided, each part attains the name ground because of becoming the abode of qualities.'

This explains ground by way of the identity of a ground, what it is being held by, way of receiving the name ground and the etymology.

Regarding the identity of: uncontaminated transcendental wisdom, some people assert 'that which doesn't increase contamination' to be meaning of uncontaminated, as explained in the Abhidharma

According to the Abhidharma the meaning of contaminated is that which increases the contamination (delusions) through focus or concomitance. According to this system the table in front of me is contaminated because by focusing on it delusions are generated.

It appears that they haven't realised the uncommon meaning of uncontaminated according to this school. According to our school, being tainted by the ignorance of true grasping or its imprints is the meaning of contaminated and the transcendental wisdom free from those two contaminations is uncontaminated.

From the Clear Words:

'not from the point of view of the nature of the object but the transcendental wisdom free from the obscuration of ignorance is uncontaminated.'

Below the attainment of the ground of a buddha there is no consciousness untainted by the imprints of ignorance apart from the non-conceptual transcendental wisdom equipoise of aryas. This is also indefinite because when the arya arises from the meditative equipoise it becomes tainted by imprints. Until the seventh ground contamination by ignorance exists but from the eighth ground onwards and for arhats that contamination doesn't exist because by then ignorance is eliminated. Contamination through the imprints of ignorance however still exists.

So this is an uncommon tenet of this school.

What is the meaning of uncontaminated transcendental wisdom?

Student: Free from the true-grasping of karmic imprints

Why does it need to be untainted by both of them? What's the significance of making the point that it has to be untainted by both of them?

Student: It is only present in buddhas, or bodhisattvas meditating on emptiness.

Of course. It does exist only in the continuum of a buddha and during the meditative equipoise of an arya. What is the meaning of that uncontaminated transcendental wisdom? For it to be uncontaminated it

¹ Trainee Stream Enterer, Resultant Stream Enterer, trainee Once Returner, resultant Once Returner, trainee Never Returner, resultant Never Returner, trainee Arhat, resultant Arhat.

has to be untainted by both true-grasping and the imprints of true-grasping. For example the first four perfections of generosity, morality, patience and enthusiasm in the continuum of an arhat who has completely abandoned true grasping, are still tainted. Why are they tainted perfections? It is because they are tainted by the imprints of true grasping. Although arhats have abandoned true grasping itself, they haven't freed the mind from the imprints of true grasping, and therefore those various perfections become tainted perfections. In the continuum of an ordinary being who has not even realised emptiness directly, then any type of mind will be a tainted consciousness.

To make it very clear: for a consciousness to be an untainted consciousness it has to be untainted by both true grasping, as well as by the imprints of true grasping. If it is tainted by either of those two then it becomes a contaminated consciousness.

The lower tenets such as the Mind Only tenet and Svatantrika-Madhyamika tenet assert that if it is a path it is a truth of the path. If it is a truth of the path, then according to these tenets, there is a pervasion that it will be an uncontaminated consciousness.

The Prasangika don't assert that if it is the truth of the path then there is necessarily a pervasion that it has to be an uncontaminated mind. Actually all types of conventional consciousnesses in the continuum of sentient beings will always be contaminated. Thus the various perfections such as generosity, morality, patience, enthusiasm, in addition to conventional bodhicitta, compassion, etc., in the continuum of sentient beings, are always contaminated awarenesses.

Why are they contaminated consciousnesses? It is because they are tainted by either the imprints of true-grasping or by true-grasping itself. At the level of a sentient being, the only consciousness that can be posited as being free from either of those two contaminations, (the contamination by ignorance itself or the contamination by the imprints of ignorance), is the uncontaminated transcendental wisdom in the continuum of an arya being in meditative equipoise.

That completes uncontaminated transcendental wisdom.

Further, that the first ground is called non-dual transcendental wisdom in the commentary is because object and object possessor don't appear as distant from one another. It doesn't merely refer to a transcendental wisdom that has abandoned the two extremes.

Both the transcendental wisdom equipoise of an arya bodhisattva, and the transcendental wisdom equipoise of hearer and self-liberator aryas, are the same in being untainted by the imprints of ignorance and realising suchness directly.

Both of those types of transcendental meditative equipoise are the same from both of those points of view. Since the wisdom realising emptiness is basically the same in being untainted, and being the wisdom realising suchness directly then why is one posited as bodhisattva ground and one isn't

Even though, from the point of view of being under the control of great compassion or not, and from the point

of view of having the abilities of the twelve hundred qualities or not, one is classified as an arya bodhisattva ground, and one isn't.

Further, as explained previously, there is a big difference as to whether or not realising suchness directly occurs through expanding ones awareness of the profound via the door of limitless inference into the two selflessnesses during the paths of accumulation and preparation.

Regarding 'is divided', the individual earlier and later parts of merely one uncontaminated transcendental wisdom, being a collection of parts that are sequentially divided, become the individual grounds. They are called grounds because like the ground they act as the place or basis for qualities.

Even though there is a division into the ten bodhisattva grounds they're actually all the same from the point of view of being uncontaminated transcendental wisdom. They are all part of one transcendental wisdom. The difference lies within the qualities that each ground attains.

Even though they are the same in that regard there four criteria why they are being divided into the individual grounds of Extremely Joyful etc.?

Firstly the number of their qualities increases higher and higher. The first ground has twelve hundred qualities and the second has twelve thousand and so forth.

The second criterion is that they attain greater and greater superior power. Thirdly, there is the criteria of superiority in a perfection, the first ground attains superiority in giving, the second in morality etc.

The fourth criterion is the increasing in the ripening result. The first grounder becomes ruler of Dsambuling, the second grounder becomes conqueror ruling the four continents etc.

So, the grounds are classified separately, because there is a big difference between the abilities of the individual non-conceptual transcendental wisdoms of the different grounds regarding their number of qualities and so forth. Since the post-meditational qualities of the individual grounds also need to be contained within the different grounds their classification doesn't pertain only to the meditative equipoise.

*That is the way the ultimate bodhisattva grounds are divided. They don't have any division based on a difference in focus and aspect, their nature. From the Sutra of the Ten Grounds: **'Just as scholars can't express or see the trail of birds in the sky; if all the grounds of the conqueror's children can't be expressed likewise, how can one by listening?'** Even though birds cross the sky, their trail can't be expressed in words or seen by the mind of scholars proficient in secular topics. Likewise, even though the ultimate grounds, like birds, progress in space like suchness, the manner of their progress, as experienced by aryas, can't be expressed even by the aryas themselves. Hence how can listeners hear it the way it is seen?*

There is no difference between the ten grounds from the point of view of their nature and focus - their meditational object, aspect and mode of realisation. Their nature is the same, they are all uncontaminated

transcendental wisdom; they all focus on emptiness as the object of meditation; they all are in the aspect of emptiness and they are all realising emptiness directly.

In the past in India, some scholars investigated how birds flew but they couldn't see their trail across the sky. When we see birds flying in the sky, we can of course see that they are individual birds but we can't see their trail, which is inexpressible and unexplainable.

It is like saying that that molasses is sweet. Just saying the words won't make that person understand what 'sweet' actually is. In the same way one cannot explain the ultimate bodhisattva grounds with words, and even if one could say the words, listeners cannot comprehend how it actually is. One has to gain a direct experience of emptiness for oneself, and this cannot be conveyed in words. Neither can it be understood by listening to the words of those who have realised it. Practitioners have to see emptiness directly for themselves, and that is the only way one can gain an understanding of the direct experience of emptiness. Even after one has direct experience of emptiness it will not be possible for the practitioner to explain what it is like in words. Neither will a listener be able to comprehend it by listening. It is like the example of the molasses; one has to taste the sweetness for oneself to know what it tastes like. Just having someone telling us that something is sweet will not give us any idea of what 'sweet' is actually like.

In the same way as this individual experience of the direct realisation of emptiness is inexpressible, so too the difference between the ten ultimate bodhisattva grounds is also inexpressible. As already said, they are the same in inexpressible aspect and focus.

2.1.3.2. Explaining the Ten Bodhisattva Grounds Individually

Here there are three subdivisions, explaining the first five grounds of Extremely Joyful and so on, explaining the sixth ground, Manifest, and then the last four grounds of Gone Far and so on.

2.1.3.2.1. Explaining the First Five Grounds

This of course has five subdivisions relating to each of the first five bodhisattva grounds. They are the first ground, Extremely Joyful; the second ground, Stainless; the third ground, Illuminating; the fourth ground, Radiant; and the fifth ground Difficult Training.

EXTREMELY JOYFUL

The first ground Extremely Joyful is explained in three outlines, showing briefly the nature of the ground itself (which is the basis for the various characteristics of the ground), explaining extensively the qualities of the ground (which are the characteristics), and concluding by expressing the qualities of the ground.

1. Nature of the Ground

This verse from the root text starts the explanation of the nature of the first ground Extremely Joyful:

*Every mind of the children of the conquerors
Overpowered by compassion to completely
liberate migrators*

*Strongly dedicating with the prayer of
Samantabhadra*

*That intensely abiding within joy is called the
first*

Here Lama Tsong Khapa says in relation to this verse:

*Every mind of the children of the conquerors
abiding on the first ground, who by the method
mentioned above, take the lack of natural existence out
of "seeing migrators lack of natural existence" as the
distinguishing characteristic of the focal object of
compassion, becomes **overpowered by** great
compassion to completely liberate migrators.*

*The ultimate mind of the Bodhisattvas **intensely
abiding within** the transcendental wisdom without
dualistic appearance that has the name 'Extremely
Joyful' and is clearly defined by the count etc. of its
resultant qualities **is called the first** mind beyond
transitory existence. They **strongly dedicate** virtues
with the prayer of Samantabhadra.*

By the method mentioned above, the generation of bodhicitta preceded by non-dual awareness and the mind of compassion, the mind of the children of the conquerors becomes overpowered by compassion to completely liberate sentient beings from samsara. They take migrators lack of inherent existence as the distinguishing characteristic of the focal object of their compassion.

*The ten great prayers explained in the sutra of the ten
grounds, the ten boundless one hundred thousand fold
prayers done by a first grounder, are contained in the
prayer of Samantabhadra. Therefore, the prayer of
Samantabhadra, the prayer of good conduct, is
mentioned in the root text in order to include all
prayers. It is taught in the Compendium of Deeds
that out of that the two verses of 'Just as the brave
Manjushri...' are dedications second to none.*

End of discourse

Maybe we can leave it here and recite a few OM MANIs.

Di's mother died some days ago, so we will recite some OM MANIs for her. I actually set out a whole program of what prayers to do when a person has died, what prayers to do when a person is sick and so on, but it seems that in this case my advice has not been followed!

The Centre is for the benefit of others. If we have to work or encounter difficulties and become tired, that doesn't matter. The most important thing is that others benefit from the Centre.

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Edited Version

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