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# Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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## ***THE FIRST GROUND EXTREMELY JOYFUL (CONT)***

Last week we started to talk about the first ground, Extremely Joyful. As we said then, the explanation of this ground has three major outlines: showing in brief the nature of the ground that is the basis for the characteristics; showing extensively the qualities of the ground (which are those characteristics); and concluding by briefly expressing the qualities of the ground.

### **1. Nature of the Ground**

Last week we completed the first of those three outlines, showing briefly the nature of the ground.

Next we come quite a few outlines. In general it is very good to go through those outlines point by point, but I'm wondering whether you are up to it.

Students: Yes!

Even though the outlines look very difficult at the beginning, once we are into their rhythm, and therefore more familiar with the text, then they can assist one's understanding of the text.

#### **How a Bodhisattva Progresses Along the Grounds and Paths**

As we said when we discussed the homage, Chandrakirti composed the text for developing bodhisattvas of sharp faculty.

#### **Path of Accumulation**

Such bodhisattvas first generate the non-dual awareness realising emptiness, then great compassion, and then bodhicitta. Together with the attainment of bodhicitta the practitioner enters the Mahayana path of accumulation.

The Mahayana path of accumulation has three paths: the small path of accumulation, the medium path of accumulation, and the greater path of accumulation. From the medium path of accumulation onwards every bodhisattva will have definitely realised emptiness. That is the latest point at which a bodhisattva realises emptiness.

We said that a bodhisattva enters the path of accumulation simultaneously with the generation of bodhicitta. Thus bodhicitta is the entrance gate through which the practitioner enters the Mahayana path.

#### **Path of Preparation**

Bodhisattvas reach the greater path of accumulation and meditate on emptiness while remaining in calm abiding. Then if they are able to induce the bliss of pliancy through analytical investigation into emptiness while remaining in calm abiding, they will have attained what is called the union of calm abiding and special insight. Simultaneously with that attainment they will then progress from the greater path of accumulation to the path of preparation. So the attainment of the path of preparation is simultaneous with the attainment of the union of calm abiding and special

insight focussing on emptiness.

There are four paths of preparation. There is the heat level, the peak level, the level of forbearance, and the level of supreme Dharma.

#### **Path of Seeing**

While the bodhisattva meditates on the level of supreme Dharma they have not yet realised emptiness directly. The practitioner has what is called the union of calm abiding and special insight as a result of focussing on emptiness while remaining in calm abiding. However their understanding of emptiness is still a conceptual understanding, and is not yet a direct realisation. Once that conceptual union of calm abiding and special insight is transformed into a non-conceptual understanding, then the bodhisattva has attained the first moment of the path of seeing, the path that sees emptiness directly.

The first level of the path of seeing that is attained is called the uninterrupted path of seeing, and this acts as the direct antidote to the abandonments through seeing.

After the uninterrupted path of seeing has acted as the direct antidote to the abandonments through seeing, then the bodhisattva attains the liberated path of seeing. Together with the liberated path of seeing, the bodhisattva attains the cessation free from the abandonments through seeing.

So first the uninterrupted path acts as the antidote, and then the liberated path is actually free from the abandonments through seeing, and that is also when the first instance of the truth of cessation is attained.

Then the bodhisattva arises from their meditative equipoise and goes into the post-meditational period during which merits are accumulated for the purpose of then being able to oppose and abandon the abandonments through meditation.

I explained this whole sequence of how the bodhisattva progresses along the grounds and paths when we talked about the Prasangika tenet. I said then that what you learn in the tenets can be applied later, when we study further texts. This year is one instance where you can apply what you have learned before. Or you can look it up.

When the bodhisattva reaches the path of seeing then they are called aryas or in English, superior beings. While on the path of accumulation and preparation the bodhisattvas are ordinary bodhisattvas.

One point that might be valuable to mention, is that if we talk about the paths of accumulation and preparation in the context of the Mahayana there's no pervasion that it is necessarily an ordinary ground. So if it is a Mahayana ordinary practitioner, there's no pervasion that it is necessarily an ordinary being. This is because the sequence we were talking about is from the point of view of a practitioner who abides within the Mahayana lineage from the start of their practice.

There are other types of practitioners who only enter the Mahayana path after having completed the Hinayana path. That is, they enter the Mahayana path after having already become arhats or superior beings through following the Hinayana path. After having entered the Mahayana path of accumulation and preparation, these arhats will still be referred to as ordinary Mahayana beings, even though in general they are not ordinary beings anymore; they are arya beings.

If you ask whether arhats who attain the Mahayana path of accumulation, are superior beings, then the answer is yes, they are superior or arya beings. Are they still arhats? Yes they are still arhats. Are they Mahayana aryas? No, they are aryas but they are not Mahayana aryas. Are they Mahayana

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arhats? No they are not Mahayana arhats; they are ordinary arhats but not Mahayana arhats. The reason is that in order to become a Mahayana arya one has to have attained the Mahayana path of seeing, which those arhats on the Mahayana path of accumulation haven't yet attained. So therefore they are aryas, but they not Mahayana aryas. Even though they aren't arhats they are not Mahayana arhats, because in order to be a Mahayana arhat one needs to be a buddha. They are not buddhas yet, so they are not Mahayana arhats.

It is good to have an idea of how the practitioner following the Mahayana path arrives at the Mahayana path of seeing, which is where we are now in the text. From now on the text describes how the qualities of the bodhisattvas develop once they have the attained the Mahayana path of seeing and onwards.

## 2. Showing Extensively the Qualities of the Ground

Now we arrive at the second outline, explaining the qualities extensively.

One has to build up the two collections over three countless great eons in order to become enlightened. The accumulations of the first countless great eon are built up during the path of accumulation and preparation. Then, from the path of seeing, from the first ground up until to the seventh ground, one builds up the accumulations of the second countless great eon. On the three pure grounds, the eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds, the accumulations of the third countless great eon are built up.

The first seven grounds are referred to as the seven impure bodhisattva grounds, and the eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds are referred to as the three pure grounds.

Here the characteristics, qualities, or features are this path, the nature of which we described in the previous outline, are explained.

Lama Tsong Khapa gives three major outlines, the qualities that beautify the continuum of the practitioner, the qualities that outshine the continuum of other practitioners, and the qualities of superior practice relating to this ground.

### 2.1. The Qualities Beautifying the Continuum of the Practitioner

The first outline, the qualities that beautify the continuum of the practitioner is explained in two stages. First it explains those qualities individually, and then it explains them in a condensed manner.

#### 2.1.1. Explaining Those Qualities Individually

These individual qualities are listed in three outlines: the quality of having attained a meaningful name; the four qualities of having being born into the lineage and so forth; and the three qualities of conquering higher grounds and so forth.

##### 2.1.1.1. The Quality of Having Attained a Meaningful Name

We start with the quality of having attained the meaningful name.

*From then onwards those by attaining  
Called only by the sound expressing bodhisattva.*

The commentary *Mirror Clarifying the Meaning of the Madhyamakavatara*<sup>1</sup>, says:

*Consider the subject, 'bodhisattvas from attaining*

*the first ground onwards' - they are called by the sound that expresses ultimate bodhisattva - because they are bodhisattvas who have attained ultimate bodhicitta.*

This refers to bodhisattvas who have attained the first ground and upwards.

The second line of the root text says, 'called only by the sound expressing bodhisattva'. Here one has to think that it is actually saying 'ultimate bodhisattva'. They are called only by the sound expressing ultimate bodhisattva, because they are bodhisattvas who have attained ultimate bodhicitta.

Then *Illumination* reads:

*From entering the first ground onwards, by attaining an ultimate mind, those Bodhisattvas will only to be called by the sound expressing 'Ultimate Bodhisattva' at the stage beyond the ground of ordinary beings'. Because at that time they are Arya Bodhisattvas they shouldn't be described in any other form.*

From the moment of entering the first ground and onwards bodhisattvas are beyond the grounds of ordinary beings because they have attained the ultimate bodhicitta. From that time onwards they're only referred to by the name 'ultimate bodhisattva'. Last Tuesday we talked about the nature of ultimate bodhicitta. Because they have attained ultimate bodhicitta from having attained the first ground onwards, they're only referred to by the name ultimate bodhisattva, because they have become Mahayana aryas. Once one becomes a Mahayana arya then one will be referred to as an ultimate bodhisattva.

Through knowing that from this stage onwards the practitioner deserves the name ultimate bodhisattva, we know that that bodhisattva has attained something which the bodhisattva on the previous path, the supreme path of preparation, hasn't attained. A bodhisattva on the supreme path of preparation hasn't yet attained an ultimate bodhisattva ground. We can understand this when we know why ultimate bodhisattvas are given that name.

Bodhisattvas at that stage, deserve to be called 'ultimate bodhisattva', while bodhisattvas on lower levels, such as on the level of preparation, deserve the name 'bodhisattva' but they don't deserve the name 'ultimate bodhisattva'. One only deserves to be called by the name 'ultimate bodhisattva' once one has reached this stage.

##### 2.1.1.2. The Four Qualities of Being Born into the Lineage and so forth

It's good if you also follow the root text when we go through it. Here the root text reads:

*They are born into the Tathagata lineage  
It has abandoned all three strong fetters  
Those Bodhisattvas came to hold supreme joy and  
Became able to thoroughly shake one hundred  
transitory realms*

The first line of the root text reads:

*They are born into the Tathagata lineage.*

Here 'they' are the subject bodhisattvas abiding on the first ground. They are born into the Tathagata lineage because they have generated in their continuum the path that definitely leads to buddhahood, and thus have gone beyond the grounds of hearers and self-liberators. Because bodhisattvas that abide on the first ground have gone beyond the grounds of hearer and self-liberators, and because they've generated in their continuum the path that definitely leads to buddhahood, they will not fall into any other type of path from that stage onwards. Therefore they

are born into the Tathagata lineage.

So the first line, 'They are born into the Tathagata lineage' refers to the fact that from then on those bodhisattvas just go straight to buddhahood, and do not deviate onto other paths.

The second line of the root text reads:

***It has abandoned all three strong fetters.***

The first ground abandons all three strong fetters belonging to the abandonments through seeing. One fetter is the intellectually acquired view of the transitory collection, the second fetter is afflictive doubt, and the third fetter is holding moralities and disciplines as supreme. Those three fetters have been abandoned on this ground.

The three delusions referred to here as the three strong fetters belong to the class of abandonments through seeing. This first ground has abandoned them by seeing directly the selflessness of person, or the lack of an inherently established person. The fetters are abandoned because this ground has made their further generation impossible. This shows that the seeds of those three delusions, which belong to the class of intellectually acquired delusions, are abandoned.

The view holding moralities and disciplines as supreme is intellectually acquired, as is afflictive doubt. The spontaneous view of the transitory collection belongs to the class of abandonments that is called abandonments through meditation. Here we are talking about the view of the transitory collection that is intellectually acquired. Delusions that are intellectually acquired belong to the class of abandonments that are called abandonments through seeing.

Here the view of the transitory collection is the intellectually acquired one. What this means is that first of all one grasps at true existence, and in addition one also accepts true existence. It means that one has actually intellectually formed the idea of thinking that there must be inherent or true existence. One would find this type of true grasping in the continuum of a Mind Only for example. We would find the intellectually acquired view of the transitory collection grasping at inherent existence in the continuum of Svatantrika-Madhyamika. In our case, however, even though of course we grasp at inherent existence, we don't accept the existence of inherent existence.

Here we have to think about the different types of delusions - the five delusions belonging to a type of view, and the delusions that are not a view. There are delusions that are an afflictive view, and delusions that are just an affliction, but not a view. Delusions that are an afflictive view are abandonments through seeing. The other type of delusions have a common base with abandonments through meditation.

If you look at the various delusions like attachment, anger, ignorance, pride, or afflictive doubt, for example, then afflictive doubt is definitely an afflictive view. Wrong view, extreme view, and the view of holding disciplines and moralities as supreme and so forth, will be all abandonments through seeing.

Here *Illumination* says:

*Since this ground also abandons all the other subtle and extensive types of abandonments through seeing, then why does it only mention those three here?*

*The reason why it only mentions those three delusions here is because they're the main obstacles preventing the practitioner from attaining liberation. As it is mentioned in the Abhidharma, not wishing to go and mistaking the path, having doubt with regard to the path, whichever of those obscures the advancing of towards liberation, therefore those*

*three are shown.*

### **Three Factors Obscuring the Advance to Liberation**

In the everyday context, there are three main factors that prevent us from going to another country if we wish to do so. First of all, we may not even have the wish to go. Secondly, we are mistaken with regard to the path. Thirdly, we have doubt with regard to the way.

In the same way there are also three factors that primarily obscure us from advancing towards liberation.

The first one is the view of the transitory collections, which causes us to not want liberation, because it makes us afraid of liberation.

Second, is being mistaken with regard to the path. This comes about because of the view holding moralities and disciplines as supreme. Here it of course it is referring to mistaken moralities and disciplines. If we regard mistaken practices and supreme practices as perfect, then we are mistaken with regard to path leading to liberation.

Thirdly, having doubts regarding the path prevents one from progressing along the path.

The third line of the root text says:

***Those bodhisattvas come to hold supreme joy.***

As it says in *Mirror*:

*Take the subject Bodhisattvas abiding on the first ground - they came to hold supreme joy - because they have generated vast uncommon joy through freeing themselves from the abandonments of the first ground.*

After having entered the Tathagata lineage they attain the resultant qualities, and by becoming free from the faults of the abandonments relating to that ground then they attain uncommon joy. Because of that they experience a vast amount of extreme joy.

The children of the conquerors come to hold supreme joy, and because on this ground one has superior extreme joy, therefore this ground is referred to as extremely joyful.

Then comes this line in the root text:

***Became able to thoroughly shake one hundred transitory realms.***

As it says in *Mirror*:

*Take the subject a bodhisattvas abiding on the first ground - they're endowed with special abilities and power - because they became able to thoroughly shake one hundred transitory realms.*

Those are the four qualities referred to here in this outline, the qualities of being born into the Tathagata lineage, having abandoned the three strong fetters, having come to hold supreme joy, and having become able to thoroughly shake one hundred transitory realms.

### **Review**

First of all what are the ten grounds?

Students: Joyful, Stainless, Luminous, Radiant, Difficult....

Why is the first ground called 'Extremely Joyful'?

Student: After removing obstacles, one finds extreme joy

This ground is called the extremely joyful, because by having freed oneself from the faults relating to that level, and by having attained the qualities relating to that level, then one has attained uncommon supreme joy. Therefore this ground is called Extremely Joyful.

Please give me the three dharmas of ordinary beings.

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Students: Compassion, non-dual awareness, bodhicitta.

Then what are the three compassions.

Students: Compassion focussing merely of sentient beings, compassion focussing on dharmas, and compassion focussing on non-focus

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When does the practitioner become a bodhisattva?

Students: When they generate bodhicitta.

What is the entrance gate to the Mahayana path?

Students: Bodhicitta.

What is the name of the first Mahayana path?

Students: Path of Accumulation.

Is there a common basis between a bodhisattva on the Mahayana path of accumulation, and an arya being?

[Student answer unclear]

With regard to the way the practitioner advances from one ground to the next, it should be clear here that is done in meditative equipoise. A bodhisattva advances from one path to the next, or from one ground to the next whilst in meditative equipoise.

[Student answer unclear]

Yes, so that was a correct example. How does one progress from the path of accumulation to the path of preparation?

Student: By attaining the union of calm abiding and special insight focussing on emptiness.

How do we posit calm abiding focussing on emptiness?

Student: Single-pointed concentration

Calm abiding focussing on emptiness is a consciousness that effortlessly focusses single-pointedly on emptiness and is held by the bliss of pliancy. Here the qualities are that the concentration is single-pointed, and that the single-pointedness is effortless. Also the single-pointed meditation is completely and effortlessly unified with the bliss of pliancy.

Even though the practitioner experiences mental and physical pliancy at the ninth stage of calm abiding this effortless combination of single-pointed meditation and bliss hasn't come about. In order to have a fully qualified calm abiding this single-pointed concentration that is unified with the bliss of pliancy has to come about completely naturally, without any effort. If that concentration focuses on emptiness, then it is the calm abiding focussing on emptiness. Here the bliss of pliancy comes about through single-pointed concentration. Then after having focussed on emptiness the practitioner engages in analytical investigation into the subject of emptiness, while remaining in the state of calm abiding. Through the force of this investigation into emptiness further bliss of pliancy is induced, and that meditation is combined with the bliss that is induced through the analysis into emptiness. Then the practitioner has attained the unification of calm abiding and special insight while remaining in calm abiding. If, while remaining in calm abiding this meditation becomes combined with the bliss that arises through the analysis into emptiness, then one has attained the unification of calm abiding and special insight.

What do we call a Mahayana arya?

[Student answer unclear]

You become a Mahayana arya when you attain the Mahayana path of seeing. There are five Mahayana paths. The first four, the paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, and meditation are referred to as learners' paths. The fifth path is the path of no-more-learning. Within the group of learners' paths the first two, the paths of accumulation, and preparation, are referred to as ordinary paths, or as paths of ordinary beings. The paths of seeing, and meditation are referred to as superior or arya paths. Of course the fifth path is called the path of no-more-learning because one has then perfected all one's Dharma practice.

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