
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

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27 August 2002

We are up to the headings that explain the generosity of bodhisattvas. The previous headings were: explaining the generosity of the first ground; and explaining the generosity of a lower base.

Here the outlines are: showing the uncommon benefits of a bodhisattva's generosity; showing generosity to be the main advice for both bases, showing which joy bodhisattvas experience at the time of generosity; and showing whether or not bodhisattvas experience pain when giving their body.

2.3.3. Showing the Uncommon Benefits of a Bodhisattva's Generosity

The outline, showing the uncommon benefits of a bodhisattvas' generosity is shown in the next two lines of the root text,

*Those with mental commitment pledging to benefit
migrators, attain joy from generosity not long
after.*

We explained earlier how bodhisattvas experience joy by practising generosity. Under this heading we explain the uncommon joy experienced by a bodhisattva practising generosity.

When it says, 'Those with mental commitment pledging to benefit migrators', the subject, bodhisattvas, have made the mental commitment pledging to give all sentient beings both long-term benefit as well as temporary happiness. The long-term benefit is placing sentient beings in the state of enlightenment, while the short-term benefit is the happiness that the sentient beings get from their practise of virtue at the time. They have made a determination to benefit sentient beings both in the short-term as well as in the long-term, which is what bodhisattvas are about.

There's a reason why bodhisattvas have such great devotion to the practice of generosity. Immediately after having practised generosity, when bodhisattvas see the satisfaction that has been attained by the recipient, supreme joy is generated within their mind, which is the fruit of their generosity. That is the reason why they are so devoted to the practice of generosity.

It is good to know that only bodhisattvas experience supreme joy immediately after having practised generosity, and upon seeing the satisfaction of the recipient. When what are called lower base sentient beings practise generosity they don't attain this supreme joy from seeing the satisfaction of the

recipient. That's also why lower beings are more easily discouraged from the practice of generosity; they cannot directly attain that benefit from the practise of generosity.

2.3.3.1. Showing Generosity to be the Main Advice for Both Bases

For the next heading, showing generosity to be the main advice for both bases, the root text reads,

*Thus for compassionate ones and those without compassion,
Therefore the very advice of generosity is central.*

From *Mirror*:

The central advice on generosity alone, given to both types of practitioners, is very important. This is because the higher status and definite goodness of both compassionate bodhisattvas, and those who aren't compassionate bodhisattvas, are induced by generosity.

2.3.3.2. Showing Which Joy Bodhisattvas Experience at the Time of Generosity

From *Mirror*:

If it is asked, 'what type of joy do bodhisattvas experience at the time of generosity, and from which cause does that joy arise?'

then the answer is this verse from the root text is given:

*If able ones can't generate the same bliss by abiding
Within peace, as the joy conquerors' children generate
by contemplating the word they heard, saying 'give',
What need is there to mention giving everything
The bodhisattva's joy in giving away everything,
body, possessions etc., is superior to the joy experienced by hearers and self-liberators through entering the sphere of peace.*

The inner joy that bodhisattvas experience from practising generosity is superior to the joy experienced by arhats in meditative absorption on peace, or cessation. When it says in the root text, 'if able ones can't generate the same bliss by abiding within peace', 'able ones' refers to the hearer and self-liberated arhats.

Mirror goes on:

There is actually not even the need to talk about the joy that bodhisattvas experience when they actually practise generosity, because by abiding within peace the able hearer and self-liberated arhats can't even generate the same joy as conquerors' children receive from hearing, and contemplating the word saying 'give'.

So for bodhisattvas not even practising generosity, but just being asked for something generates this very great joy in their continuum, which exceeds by far the joy experienced by arhats who are in meditative absorption on peace.

Since bodhisattvas generate this very strong joy even when they are just requested to give something, when they hear the word 'give', then what need is there to

mention the joy derived from giving everything? What need is there to mention the joy that arises for bodhisattvas from giving away everything, including their body, possessions, merits, and so on.

Therefore the activities engaged in by arhats and by bodhisattvas for the benefit of others differ very greatly. Actually an arhat is distracted from the purpose of others by their absorption in cessation, whereas a bodhisattva's mind becomes captivated by the bliss that arises from the practice of generosity. Then, with their mind captivated by the bliss arising from generosity, the bodhisattva whole-heartedly engages in the practice of benefiting sentient beings. Therefore the benefit that the bodhisattvas bring to sentient beings is far greater than the benefit brought to sentient beings by arhats.

2.3.3.3. Showing Whether or Not Bodhisattvas Experience Pain at the Time of Giving Away Their Body

Here we have four lines,

*Giving cut body and through having seen
Suffering of self as mere knower of
The sufferings of hells etc. of others,
They quickly engage in efforts to eliminate
those.*

Here the question is asked, do bodhisattva experience suffering or not when giving away their bodies?

Just before, it was explained that bodhisattvas experience supreme mental joy from the practise of generosity. So if they experience supreme mental joy during the practise of generosity, do they experience physical pain when giving away their body?

If this question is asked from the point of view of those great bodhisattvas who have attained a ground, then the answer is that they don't have physical suffering. For them it would be like a mindless object: if one cuts a mindless object there's no experience of pain. So for a bodhisattva who has attained one of the grounds, cutting off parts of the body will be exactly like that. This is supported by various quotations from the sutras

It states in the Precious Garland,

*Since those bodhisattvas don't experience any **physical pain**
then what need is there to mention mental pain?*

In answer to the question, 'Do bodhisattvas experience physical pain at the time of giving away their body?' then if the question is from the point of view of a bodhisattva who has attained a ground, then the answer is no. To support this, Lama Tsong Khapa gives this quotation from the Precious Garland by Nagarjuna, where it says that bodhisattvas who have attained a ground don't experience any physical suffering, and since they don't experience any physical suffering there's no need to even mention any mental suffering.

From *Illumination*:

If it is asked from the point of view of not having attained the ground 'Extremely Joyful' that is

without the attachment completely grasping at body and possessions, physical suffering will definitely arise because of the body meeting with obstructive conditions to its abiding.

Even so, at that time, by depending on that suffering they abide¹ on the cause of superior engagement for the welfare of all sentient beings.

*They look upon hell, animal, hungry ghost beings etc. as having a thousand-fold superior suffering, the intense great uninterrupted suffering without respite of having one's body destroyed, greater than the suffering of cutting one's own body. Having discounted their own suffering of being **cut** and **giving** their own flesh to the beggar they very **quickly engage in effort to cut off** those sufferings of the hell realms etc. of other sentient beings by taking the mere experience of **their suffering** as proof.*

They view their own suffering (of cutting off, and giving away parts of their body) as a mere self-knower, as a reason to quickly engage in an effort to eliminate the terrifying sufferings experienced by others in the hells. So bodhisattvas who haven't attained a ground view the suffering of self that arises through cutting off parts of the body as a self-knower, which shows them the greatly superior suffering experienced by sentient beings in the hell realms.

In such a way they can discount their own suffering of being cut and giving away their flesh to a beggar, and they very quickly engage in an effort to cut off the suffering of beings in the hell realms etc by taking the mere experience of their own suffering as a taste of the suffering that is experienced by others in the hells. In such a way they discount their own suffering, and very quickly become very enthusiastic about eliminating the suffering of beings in the hell realms.

Since it is possible for bodhisattvas who haven't attained the ground to have this strength of mind and motivation, it is explained that it is also possible for bodhisattvas who haven't attained the ground to give away their body. So giving away the body is not a practice that is exclusive to arya bodhisattvas.

2.3.4. The Divisions of the Perfection of Generosity

This is shown in the verse,

*Generosity empty of gift recipient and giver
Is called perfection gone beyond transitory
existence,
That generating attachment for the three
Is shown as perfection of transitory existence.*

The perfection of generosity gone beyond is shown in the first two lines where it says, 'the generosity empty of gift recipient and giver is called perfection gone beyond transitory existence'.

What it is saying here is that the generosity that is held by the direct realisation of the lack of inherent existence of a gift, recipient and giver is called 'perfection beyond transitory existence'. As we have said before, to become a perfection an action needs to

¹They abide on compassion.

arise out of the motivation of bodhicitta, and it needs to be concluded with a dedication. To become a perfection gone beyond, at the time of the action it also needs to be held by the direct realisation of the lack of inherent existence of the gift, recipient the giver. So it needs to be held by an uncontaminated wisdom realising the lack of inherent existence of the three circles. Therefore the first instance of a perfection gone beyond can only occur on the first ground, and not before.

The uncontaminated wisdom realising emptiness directly is the mind that has gone beyond worldly existence, or beyond transitory existence. Therefore a person who has that wisdom is a person who has gone beyond transitory existence. Therefore their generosity, which is combined with that wisdom and the motivation of bodhicitta, and the dedication for complete enlightenment, will be a perfection gone beyond.

The practice of generosity will become only a perfection if it is based on the motivation of bodhicitta and the dedication for complete enlightenment. If it is then further combined with the non-dual wisdom realising emptiness it will be a perfection gone beyond. The significance here is that even though hearers and self-liberated arhats practise generosity, they don't practise the perfection of generosity, because they don't include bodhicitta motivation and the dedication in their practice. Also, as we explained before, in the uncommon Hinayana sutras the practice of the perfections aren't explained.

The generosity obscured by the generation of attachment for the true existence of the three circles is shown as perfection of transitory existence.

Illumination:

The generosity bound by the generation of attachment that is true grasping for the three circles of giving is shown in the sutra as 'Perfection of Transitory Existence'.

The Tibetan word for perfection is *pa-rol te-chen-pa* which is literally means having gone to the other side. Here one has the resultant perfection in the continuum of a Buddha and the causal perfection in the continuum of trainees.

1. One could look at it from the point of view as having already gone somewhere, so one looks at it from the point of view of the **result**. So as the result is already perfected, one says that the perfection exists in the continuum of a buddha.

That's the reason why the lower tenets say that perfections exist only in the continuum of a buddha, and that below the level of a buddha one has only the practice of a perfection, but one doesn't have the perfection.

2. There is another way of looking at 'gone to the other side', which is like the **cause**, so then one posits the perfection as also being the cause.

It is explained in the *Bodhisattva charyavatara* by Shantideva, that the resultant perfection of giving, the

perfected generous intention, exists only in the continuum of a buddha

Below that, one is perfecting the generous attitude, which makes it a causal perfection. There's an objection that could be made, which is that the perfection of generosity hasn't been attained, because there are still people in the world who are dissatisfied and who also, for example, experience the sufferings of hunger and thirst etc. The answer is that the perfection of generosity refers to the perfection of the generous thought. The fact that there are still sentient beings who experience hunger and thirst is not a sign that the perfection of generosity has not been achieved.

3. Qualities of the Ground

The final outline of the chapter is a brief summary of the qualities of the ground, The final verse of the chapter reads,

*Thus abiding intensely within a conqueror's child's mind,
This joy beautifying with brilliance its superior base,
Conquers by completely eliminating all impenetrable darkness,
In the same way as a brilliantly white jewel.*

Mirror:

The first ground 'Extremely Joyful' is like the brilliantly white moon jewel. The moon resides high in the sky and beautifies that residence with white light. It abides there completely eliminating all impenetrable darkness. In the same way the first ground 'Extremely Joyful' intensely abides within the mind of a conqueror's child on the first ground. It beautifies with the brilliance of transcendental wisdom its superior base, the first ground. It conquered the 'abandonment through seeing'.

Illumination:

The word 'thus' is to show that it has been explained above. Saying 'joy' perfectly proclaims the name of the ground. Saying, 'conquer' has the meaning of 'abiding after having eradicated adversaries'. By being merely in the nature of consciousness it abides in the mind of the children of conquerors. Therefore it abides high since the extremely joyful ground even conquers all impenetrable darkness by completely eliminating it in the manner explained above. In order to clarify the meaning explained above with an example I said 'like a brilliant white jewel'.

Showing the ground explained above called 'Extremely Joyful' by summarising briefly its qualities with the characteristics of uncontaminated consciousness.

This ground 'Extremely Joyful' is like the brilliant white jewel moon mandala. There are three ways of being like the moon.

Firstly abiding on a high place: It abides on a high path because of abiding intensely within the mind of a first ground conqueror's child who has attained the qualities of the ground explained before. Therefore it is like the moon residing high up in the sky. Since the first ground is a part of the mind of those

Bodhisattvas it can be described as abiding there. For example like the eyes abiding within the head.

The mental continuum that is the supreme basis of the ultimate mind of the first ground, its superior residence, is beautified with the brilliant light of transcendental wisdom. This is like the moon beautifying with its white light its basis space.

Also the first ground abides within the victory over its adversarys, the abandonments of seeing. Therefore it is like the abiding of the moon after it has completely eliminated all impenetrable darkness.

That completes the First Mind Generation 'Very Joyful'.

Next week we can start the second mind generation.

Having gone through the first chapter maybe you understand a little bit more about the practice of generosity.

You know that generally the definition of generosity is the generous attitude or intention. Even if one finds it difficult to practise generosity by giving something away, then it is important that one at least mentally trains one's mind, by being generous mentally. Then slowly, slowly through training one's mind in generosity, one will also be able to actually practice generosity - to actually give things away.

The perfection of generosity has a two-fold division into perfection of gone beyond, and worldly perfection. The difference is whether or not the perfection is held by the non-dual wisdom realising the emptiness of the three circles. Such wisdom is attained only from the first ground onwards, so the perfection that isn't held by that wisdom is called worldly perfection, which would refer to the perfection of ordinary beings.

Lama Tsong Khapa says that even though one might not yet be able to practise those very advanced practices of generosity, at least one should try to do it on a visualised level, or practise giving material offerings, or even just the very small offering of water to the Triple Gem etc. One can already start training in the practice of generosity, by giving these things on the basis of a motivation of bodhicitta. Then while one is practising, try to meditate on the emptiness of the three circles, and finally dedicating the merits for complete enlightenment. In such a way one trains one's mind and will then gradually reach the point where one will be able to attain the uncommon joy that is experienced by bodhisattvas at the time of practising generosity.

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Edited Version

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