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# Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

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10 September 2002

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Generate the motivation that I have to attain the state of complete enlightenment 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 teaching, and then put it into practice as much as possible.

## 2. Practising Morality

The division of praising morality has five subdivisions: enjoying the fruits of generosity in happy migrations depends upon morality; enjoying the fruits of generosity continuously depends upon morality; showing it to be extremely difficult to be liberated from the lower realms if one is separated from morality; the reason for teaching morality subsequently to generosity; and praising morality as the cause for both higher status and definite goodness.

### 2.1. Enjoying the Fruits of Generosity and Happy Migrations Depends Upon Morality

What this is saying is that one has to practise generosity on the basis of keeping pure morality.

The root text reads,

*Wealth arising from generosity in lower migrations  
Is due to the being's degenerated legs of morality.*

Previously we talked about how the second ground bodhisattva excels in the perfection of morality, and how they have achieved pure qualities through perfecting their practice of morality. Having established that, then here it praises the qualities of morality, the various beneficial aspects of morality.

If one wants to enjoy the fruits of generosity continuously on the basis of higher rebirth then one has to depend upon morality. So if one practises generosity on the basis of morality then one will enjoy the fruits of the generosity on the basis of a higher rebirth such as human or god.

As *Mirror* says:

*Since one wishes to enjoy the fruits of generosity on the basis of a happy migration one needs to keep morality, because if a sentient being's legs of morality degenerate, then wealth from generosity will arise on the basis of a lower migration.*

Wealth from generosity will arise, but if one lacks morality it will arise on the basis of a lower migration. Therefore if one wishes to enjoy the fruits of one's generosity on the basis of a higher rebirth then one has to practise morality.

We can observe for ourselves how some animals actually have more wealth than some human beings.

Here the projecting and establishing karma was non-virtuous karma causing rebirth in the animal realm, but then because of the virtuous completing karma, the animal enjoys great comfort and wealth during this life. There are many non-human beings that are said to have very great wealth, and here the same applies - they enjoy the fruits of virtuous completing karma while being thrown by non-virtuous projecting karma into a lower rebirth. Therefore we can see the significance of combining the practice of generosity with the practice of morality.

We have to relate those two lines to our own personal practice. Through our own experience we can confirm that there are some animals that enjoy a greater degree of wealth and comfort than some human beings. In fact in some situations they are often better off than the human beings that serve and take care of them. This comes about because they enjoy the fruits of virtuous completing karma. The care and comfort they enjoy is all the result of their previous generosity.

To relate this to ourselves, when we practise generosity we should remember that if our practice of generosity is devoid of the practice of morality then we will end up like that in a future life. The reason why those animals end up in that situation is because they didn't practice morality together with generosity.

Likewise many human beings who have attained a human rebirth because of virtuous projecting karma, endure great sufferings and destitution throughout their whole human life because of a non-virtuous completing karma. They practised morality in a previous life but their practice of morality lacked the practice of generosity.

We should remember those two situations when we practise generosity, and remind ourselves that we have to combine our practice of generosity with the practice of morality. Otherwise we will end up like those animals enjoying the fruits of their previous generosity.

Lama Tsong Khapa says that because they were separate from morality, then the wealth that arose as a result of the practice of their generosity didn't ripen on the basis of happy rebirth, but ripened on the basis of a lower rebirth.

This is shown in those two lines of the root text. Since one wishes for a higher rebirth, one needs the fruits of one's generosity to ripen into the basis of that higher rebirth. So, as was explained before, one should practise generosity on the basis of keeping morality.

### 2.2. Enjoying the Fruits of Generosity Continuously Depends Upon Morality

Having explained that if one doesn't practise morality then one will experience the fruits of one's generosity in a lower rebirth, the root text now explains the types of faults that ensue if one experiences the fruits of one's generosity in a lower rebirth.

Here the root text reads,

*Once accumulated wealth and interest are  
completely exhausted,  
From then on they won't receive resources.*

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From *Mirror*:

*The continuous enjoyment of the fruit of generosity depends upon morality, because if the result of generosity ripens upon a lower base on account of degenerated morality, then once the accumulated wealth and interest from practising generosity are completely exhausted, from then on that person won't receive the slightest resources.*

If one's practice of generosity is devoid of the practice of morality the results of the practice of generosity will ripen on a lower base. If that lower rebirth happens, one lacks the opportunity of increasing one's wealth through further practice of generosity. All that one will do is use up the accumulated merits. One will use up one's good karma through the experience of all of one's good fortune in that lower rebirth, but one won't create any further new karma. It is the same way as a farmer, who instead of planting all the seeds uses them for food. Once he has eaten all the seed he has nothing left, and also no means to produce any further crop. If, in the same way, one uses up all the fruits of previous generosity in a lower rebirth, one will not have the opportunity to create any further causes for future wealth.

The way one has to look at it is that human beings are more intelligent than animals, so therefore human beings are able to practise generosity, whereas animals are too stupid to practice generosity. If one is a human being and in possession of wealth or resources then automatically one will think about ways of not losing those resources, and increasing them. This makes that point very clear.

One should remind oneself that one has a very precious opportunity to practise generosity now, and in such a way create the causes for the future experience of that generosity. One is in a situation now where it is very easy to practise generosity, where it is very easy to practice morality, where it is very easy to practise patience, where it is very easy to practise enthusiastic effort, where it is very easy to practise mental stabilisation and wisdom. In short, one is in a very good situation to practise the six perfections now, and to create very good causes for future good results. One should consider this very carefully and make full use of one's present situation.

At the beginning of the teaching sessions when reciting the four line refuge prayer one should try to recite the prayer very well, meditating on the combination of the words and the meaning. If this prayer to the buddhas is offered in such a way with good motivation, it becomes the practise of generosity. Enduring the difficulty of practising the asceticism of sitting in the proper posture becomes the practise of morality. Then one practises patience as one bears the difficulties that arise during the recitation of the prayers. One practises joyous enthusiasm when one is very happy to recite those prayers, and when the mind remains on the prayers, one has mental stabilisation. One also has wisdom, because one understands the meaning of the prayers. In such a way then, the practise of the six perfections becomes complete during the practise of

reciting the prayers. It is very important to keep in mind how one can practise the six perfections in order to make one's life meaningful.

If one visualises that one's surroundings are filled with other sentient beings, and that they hear one's recitations of prayers, then that also becomes the generosity of the Dharma.

### ***2.3. Showing It To Be Extremely Difficult To Be Liberated from the Lower Realms if Separated from Morality***

It is very important to keep this verse from the root text in mind, and to reflect upon it well,

***If while acting freely and living agreeably  
One doesn't act to protect oneself,  
Losing control by falling into an abyss,  
How will one rise after that?***

From *Mirror*:

*If one's morality degenerates then it is difficult to find liberation from the lower realms. If while acting freely and living in the agreeable realm of gods or humans, which are agreeable with Dharma practice, one doesn't act to protect oneself from the lower realms through the practise of morality, then once one has fallen into the abyss of the lower realms, it is very difficult to rise by any means.*

This is because in the lower realms the practice of immorality and non-virtue is much greater and more widespread than the practice of virtue and morality.

You should relate this to your practice and to your path. In the lower realms the practice of immorality and non-virtue is very widespread and common. These practices are actually natural to those realms, while the practice of morality and virtue is extremely rare and difficult. For example, in the animal realm it is very, very common and natural for one animal to only eat other animals. So once one is reborn in the lower realms then one goes from the lower realms to the lower realms. One should try to go from to higher realm to another higher realm now, while one is reborn in the higher realms, and has the opportunity to practice morality and virtue. Once one has fallen into a lower realm then one will go from that lower realm onto another lower realm. This is very important to understand and to relate to one's practice.

In *Illumination* Lama Tsong Khapa says:

*Then starting right now one should protect oneself from falling into the lower realms, and one should know that the way to do so is by putting effort into the practice of morality.*

So Lama Tsong Khapa says that one should start practising morality right now.

### ***2.4. The Reason for Teaching Morality Subsequently to Generosity***

Here the root text says

***Thus the conqueror, having taught on generosity,  
Gave the ensuing discourse on morality alone.***

This verse arises from the question, 'What is the reason that the Buddha taught morality after teaching

generosity?'

There is a reason why the Conqueror after having taught on generosity gave the ensuing discourse on morality alone. The Conqueror refers to someone who has abandoned all non-virtue and immorality, who has abandoned all faults, and who has accomplished all qualities and all virtue. The reason why the Conqueror would teach morality alone after generosity is that if the qualities of generosity etc. are cultivated in the field of morality, the enjoyment of the fruits becomes unceasing, but if morality degenerates then it becomes the source of many faults. So in order to ensure that the enjoyment of the fruits of the other perfections such as generosity etc. becomes unceasing, one has to cultivate them in the field of morality, and that is the reason why the Conqueror, after having taught on generosity, gave the ensuing discourse on morality alone.

***If qualities are cultivated in the field of morality,  
And the enjoyment of the fruits becomes  
unceasing.***

So morality is like a field in which the fruits of the other perfections such as generosity and so forth can be cultivated. If they are cultivated in the field of morality, then the enjoyment of those fruits becomes unceasing. However if one's morality degenerates then this degeneration of morality becomes a source for many faults.

### ***2.5. Praising Morality as the Cause for Both Higher Status and Definite Goodness***

Here we have the four lines,

***For ordinary beings, those born from teachings,  
Those in definite nature of self-enlightenment,  
And conquerors' children, the cause for definite  
goodness  
And higher status is none other than morality.***

From *Mirror*:

*Other than morality there isn't any cause for ordinary beings, higher status and definite goodness of hearers born from the teachings of self-liberators in a definite nature of self-enlightenment and conquerors' children. This is because morality is the indispensable cause for continuously enjoying the fruits of generosity on the basis of happy migrations, and the indispensable cause for definite goodness.*

If one doesn't practise morality one will neither be liberated from the lower realms nor attain liberation; one will attain neither a higher status nor definite goodness.

Why is it like that? It is because apart from morality there isn't any cause for the higher rebirth of ordinary beings who haven't entered any of the paths. Morality is the only cause to attain a higher rebirth for ordinary beings who haven't entered any of the paths. Also, there's no cause other than morality for the definite goodness of hearers born from teachings. So apart from morality there is no cause for the definite goodness, the liberation of the conquerors' children - the bodhisattvas, the hearers, and the self-liberators.

So morality is the indispensable cause for ordinary

beings who haven't entered any of the paths to attain a higher rebirth; it is the indispensable cause for the attainment of liberation by hearer arhats and self-liberated arhats; and it is also the indispensable cause for the attainment of enlightenment by the conquerors' children, the bodhisattvas. This is not saying that morality is the only cause and that there are no other causes. Rather, what it is saying is that morality is an indispensable cause.

It doesn't say that there's no other cause than morality. What it does say is that morality is an indispensable cause to attain, for example, the special higher status of a precious human rebirth with freedoms and endowments (for ordinary beings who haven't entered the path), and for the attainment of the individual types of liberation by arhats and bodhisattvas.

It is explained in the *Sutra of the Ten Bhūmis* that extremely strong non-virtue leads to a rebirth in the hell realms, that medium non-virtue leads to rebirth in the hungry ghost realm, and the slighter non-virtue leads to rebirth in the animal realm. In the *Sutra of the Ten Bhūmis* it is explained just like in the *Lam Rim*, how the various levels of non-virtue lead to rebirth in the various levels of lower realms.

The ten virtuous actions are the opposite of the ten non-virtuous actions. For ordinary beings who haven't entered any path yet, the practice of the ten virtuous actions becomes the cause for rebirth as a desire realm god, or as a human, or for rebirth in any type of realm from the human realm up to the realm of the peak of existence.

A hearer practitioner is someone who has generated the one-sided mind of thinking only of one's own purpose, being afraid from cyclic existence but lacking great compassion. Having generated the training in the wisdom realising selflessness in dependence upon listening to teachings from others they will definitely become liberated through the vehicle of the hearer by practising the ten virtuous actions as a minimum. Of course there needs to be more practice but the minimum are the ten virtuous actions.

If one goes even higher than the hearer to the practitioners, who in the final lifetime don't rely on an outer teacher, and who aim for the enlightenment of a self-buddha, but who lack direct compassion and skilful means, then when they comprehend and train in the suchness of profound dependent arising they become liberated through the vehicle of the self-liberator again in dependence upon the minimum practice of the ten virtues.

To go even higher than the self-liberated arhats, then the minimum practise of the ten virtuous actions forms the basis for the immeasurable and extensive compassion and love, affection, and the skilful means, the great waves of prayers, and the practice of holding all sentient beings dear, the purity of the grounds of a bodhisattva, the extensive practise of the pure six perfections and the extensive profound transcendental wisdom of a buddha that are attained by a bodhisattva.

From Nagarjuna's *Letter to a King*,

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You will not fall into lower rebirth if you don't degenerate your morality, therefore you should always rely on it, never be separated from it, and not be afraid of it. Morality is like the ground for the generation of qualities in the same way as houses etc rely on the cause of the earth.

Quoting in that manner from the *Letter to a King* by Nagarjuna, then Lama Tsong Khapa concludes by saying that training in morality is extremely important.

Then Lama Tsong Khapa goes onto say:

Even though this explanation is given here now at the second ground the practice also has to be done by a first ground bodhisattva. It is very important to rely on the morality of restraining ones' mind even from the cause, non-virtuous motivation, that would lead to the ten non-virtuous actions. One not only abandons the ten non-virtuous actions, but the mind should be restrained even from the causal motivation of the ten non-virtuous actions, it is very important to rely on the morality of restraint in that way.

One has to practise a pure morality that is held by the wisdom realising the lack of true existence.

On top of training in morality one should also train one's mind in the wisdom realising the lack of true existence, and then train our mind to hold our practice of morality with this wisdom realising the lack of true existence. This cannot be done just on the basis of just a mere superficial understanding. Nor can it be accomplished on the basis of partially meditating only from time to time. One has to train one's mind continuously in the morality being held by the wisdom realising the lack of true existence. If one trains one's mind continuously, if one practises continuously, if one meditates continuously then one will be able to train one's mind in the very difficult bodhisattva practices that even cause fear in our mind when we first hear them, and that we find so incredibly difficult to practise. The Buddha explained them to us, but by continuously training our mind in those practices then we will be able to achieve their spontaneous and natural generation within our mind.

Then he gives a quote from *Praise to Limitless Qualities* where it says the same thing.

By continuously familiarising one's mind with those qualities that cause fear in the minds of ordinary beings when they first hear them, those practices and qualities that seem to be so incredibly difficult to accomplish and to practise, one will be able to achieve their spontaneous generation within one's mind. One will be able to make them a natural part of one's mental continuum through the force of familiarity and meditation.

So Lama Tsong Khapa advises us first of all to practice morality, to regard the practice of morality as very important and also not to let our practice be partial. Through continuously acquainting our mind in all aspects of the path we will be able to accomplish the natural and spontaneous realisation of those practices within our mind through the force of continuous

familiarity. This is the advice from Lama Tsong Khapa.

Lama Tsong Khapa cautions you very strongly to be very careful with regard to the practice of morality saying that if one is not very careful with regard to one's morality, then one's practice of generosity will only lead to an enjoyment of the generosity in a lower realm.

So if Lama Tsong Khapa is really telling you to be very careful, then you should take great care.

We didn't quite finish the second chapter today, but there are only a couple of verses left.

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*Edited Version*

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