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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga  
Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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Please generate a virtuous motivation for listening to the teaching thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the purpose of all sentient beings, and in order to be able to do so I'm now going to listen to this profound Mahayana teaching. Then I'm going to put it into practice as much as possible.'

### Review

Last time we discussed the division of obscurations into afflictive obscurations and obscurations to knowledge. There was a further division of afflictive obscurations into the intellectually acquired afflictive obscurations, and innate afflictive obscurations. In relation to the two types of abandonments, the abandonments through seeing, and the abandonments through meditation, intellectually acquired afflictive obscurations fall into the category of abandonments through seeing, and innate afflictive obscurations fall into the category of abandonments through meditation.

Within the innate afflictive obscurations we have the nine circles of different levels of true grasping - the three great circles, the three medium circles, and the three small circles. Within the great great true grasping, there was a further division into coarse and subtle great great true grasping.

### First Ground

So the very first innate affliction that is abandoned is the **coarse great great true grasping** that is opposed by the uninterrupted path of meditation on the first ground. That uninterrupted path of meditation on the first ground acts as the direct antidote to the coarse great great innate true grasping, and when the coarse great great innate true grasping has been abandoned, then the practitioner has attained the cessation of that true grasping, and has attained the liberated path of meditation that was induced by the preceding uninterrupted path of meditation. Simultaneously with that attainment the practitioner moves toward the second ground. That's where we left off last time.

### Second Ground

The attainment of the second ground is simultaneous with this liberated path of meditation that has attained the cessation of the coarse great great innate true grasping. When the meditator arises from their meditative equipoise into the post-meditational period they accumulate merits until they feel able to abandon the next level of innate true grasping, which is the **subtle great great innate true grasping**.

Here again, it is the same as before. When the

meditator feels that they are able to abandon that level of true grasping then they go into a meditative equipoise that at first will be neither a liberated path nor an uninterrupted path. It will be common meditative equipoise. When that common meditative equipoise becomes the direct antidote to the subtle great great innate true grasping, then it has become the uninterrupted path of the second ground that is the direct antidote to the subtle great great true grasping.

The meaning of being an uninterrupted path is to be a direct antidote, and this uninterrupted path of the second ground is the direct antidote to the subtle great great innate true grasping.

Through that uninterrupted path of meditation of the second ground, then the subtle innate great great true grasping is abandoned and its cessation has been attained, and simultaneously with that one attains the liberated path of meditation of the first of the third ground.

### Third Ground

On the third ground the system is the same as before. The uninterrupted path of meditation at the end of the third ground acts again as an antidote to the next level of innate true grasping. It is the same is the uninterrupted path that is the end of the fourth ground, that is the end of the fifth ground, and that is the end of the sixth ground.

If we count up then, on the third ground the meditator has abandoned the great great innate true grasping

The uninterrupted path of meditation, that is the end of the third ground acts as the antidote to the **medium great innate true grasping**.

### Fourth Ground

The uninterrupted path that is the end of the fourth ground acts as the antidote to the **small great innate true grasping**.

### Fifth Ground

The uninterrupted path that is the end of the fifth ground acts as the antidote to the **great medium innate true grasping**.

### Sixth Ground

The uninterrupted path that is the end of the sixth ground acts as the antidote to **medium medium innate true grasping**.

When the meditator attains the liberated path of meditation that has been induced through the preceding uninterrupted path of meditation on the sixth ground, then the meditator has attained the seventh ground.

### Seventh Ground

The liberated path of meditation at the beginning of the seventh ground has abandoned the medium medium innate true grasping. Out of the afflictive obscurations for the meditator to abandon what is left are the small medium innate true grasping, and the three circles of the small innate true grasping.

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Again this is the same as before. On the seventh ground one has two uninterrupted paths, so again the meditator goes through the same sequence again as before. They generate the uninterrupted path that is the direct antidote to small medium innate true grasping, attain the liberated path of meditation that has been induced by that uninterrupted path, and then abandoned the small medium innate true grasping. Again the sequence is as before, the meditator, after having gone through the sequence generates again an uninterrupted path of meditation of the seventh ground that is the antidote to all three small innate true graspings.

### **Eighth Ground**

When through that uninterrupted path of meditation at the end of the seventh ground that abandons the three small innate true graspings, then one attains the cessation of the three small innate true graspings, and then one moves on towards the eighth ground and attains the liberated path of meditation of eighth ground. At the beginning of the eighth ground the bodhisattva has abandoned all afflictions and afflictive obscurations.

As I told you before, this practitioner will not be called an arhat because in order to be called an arhat the practitioner needs to have attained a path of no-more-learning.

After the practitioner has abandoned the afflictive obscurations they next move onto abandon the obscurations to knowledge. We defined these last time, and there was the two-fold division of the obscurations to knowledge into manifest and the seed.

The uncommon Prasangika system is that the bodhisattva starts to abandon the obscurations to knowledge only after having abandoned the afflictive obscurations. According to the lower tenets the bodhisattva starts to abandon the obscurations to knowledge at the same time as when they start to abandon the innate obscurations to liberation.

Here in the Prasangika system the bodhisattvas start to abandon the obscurations to knowledge only after having abandoned the afflictive obscurations, which again have a small, medium, and great part.

The bodhisattva starts to abandon the three levels of the obscurations to knowledge on the eighth ground. One can see the significance here that in order to become fully omniscient, to be able to see all objects of knowledge in one's hand like the medicinal nut that is called a *gyurura*, then one needs to abandon and purify from one's mind even the subtlest of faults and mistaken appearances. The eighth ground bodhisattva has completely abandoned all afflictions and all the seeds.

Here, when we talk about abandonments we talk about abandonments including the seeds of various afflictions. However even though this bodhisattva has abandoned all the afflictions and their seeds, they still have mistaken appearances within their mind, and those are obscurations to knowledge. Without

abandoning or purifying the mind from those mistaken appearances the bodhisattva cannot become an omniscient person, and the bodhisattva's consciousness won't become an omniscient or an all-knowing mind.

Here we have the three circles of obscurations to knowledge, and the great obscuration to knowledge again has a subdivision into coarse and subtle. At first the bodhisattva attains the liberated path of meditation of the eighth ground, then arises out of that meditative equipoise, and again accumulates merits. When they feel that they are able to abandon the coarse great obscurations to knowledge, they again go into meditative equipoise. This meditative equipoise is first a common meditative equipoise, but it then transforms into the uninterrupted path of the eighth ground that is the direct antidote to the **coarse great obscurations to knowledge**. When the great obscurations to knowledge are then abandoned by that uninterrupted path, the bodhisattva attains the liberated path of meditation that is free from the coarse great obscurations to knowledge. Simultaneously with the attainment of that liberated path the bodhisattva attains the ninth ground.

### **Ninth Ground**

It is similar with the uninterrupted path of meditation of the ninth ground. At the end of the ninth ground is the direct antidote to the **subtle great obscurations to knowledge**. When one attains the liberated path of meditation that is free from the subtle great obscurations to knowledge, a bodhisattva then simultaneously attains the tenth ground.

### **Tenth Ground**

When bodhisattvas attain the tenth ground they then go through the same sequence as before, and then generate the first uninterrupted path of meditation on the tenth ground that is the direct antidote to the **medium obscurations to knowledge**, attaining the liberated path of meditation that is free from the medium obscurations to knowledge. They arise again from meditative equipoise, go through the same sequence as before, again go into meditation and then generate the second uninterrupted path of meditation of the tenth ground that is also called the vajra-like concentration, which is the antidote to the **small obscurations to knowledge**. After that the mind of the bodhisattva becomes the actual all-knowing consciousness.

So the bodhisattva is in meditative equipoise within the second uninterrupted path of meditation on the tenth ground that is the direct antidote to small obscurations to knowledge. When they attain the liberated path of meditation that is induced by that uninterrupted path of meditation then the bodhisattva has attained omniscient consciousness. Progress from that last uninterrupted path of meditation to the liberated path occurs within meditative equipoise. The bodhisattva has progressed in meditative equipoise to the level of buddhahood. Following that a buddha doesn't arise from the meditative equipoise anymore.

Even though according to ordinary and conventional appearance it looks as if a buddha is sometimes in meditative equipoise and sometimes not, in actuality a buddha is always in meditative equipoise.

What this means is that a bodhisattva needs to arise from the meditative equipoise in order to benefit sentient beings, while a buddha benefits sentient beings from within meditative equipoise. Even though it might appear to all conventional appearance as if the practitioner is out of meditative equipoise, a buddha is actually always in meditative equipoise.

This system of how bodhisattva progresses along the path up to buddhahood that I have explained is according to the *Commentary on Madhyamika* by Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen, who is the author of the textbooks used at Sera Je Monastery. That's how it is taught in Sera Je Monastery.

There's also a slightly different explanation that has been handed down from one of the main disciples of Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen, where there are no divisions into coarse and subtle. Then it becomes more straightforward. The uninterrupted path of meditation on the first ground is the direct antidote to the great great innate true grasping. On the second ground it is the medium great, on third ground the small great, until the sixth ground abandons the small medium innate true grasping. Then, on the seventh ground there's only one uninterrupted path of meditation, where the three small circles of innate true grasping are abandoned simultaneously. The uninterrupted path of meditation on the eighth, ninth, and tenth ground, respectively abandon the great obscurations to knowledge on the eighth ground, the medium obscurations to knowledge on the ninth ground, and the small obscurations to knowledge on the tenth ground. At the end of the tenth ground there is only one uninterrupted path of meditation, which is the vajra-like concentration. It's good if you make a note of that system because it is taught sometimes. However Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen's system clarifies the *Illumination* by Lama Tsong Khapa.

Last time we mentioned this verse from the root text,

*Conquerors' children on that ground have  
mental stabilisation  
And clairvoyance attachment and anger  
completely cease  
They also become able to always destroy  
Transitory realm's beings attachment to desire*

The line from 'conquerors' children' up to 'and clairvoyance', shows the qualities of realisation on this ground apart from the realisation of superiority in the practice of patience. When it goes on to say 'anger and attachment completely cease and they also become able to always destroy', this shows the qualities of cessation, or the qualities of abandonment on this ground.

When it says 'they also become able to always destroy transitory realm's beings attachment to desire', this refers to all those bodhisattvas who for the better part completely destroyed their manifest attachment contained within the desire realm. For the benefit of

sentient beings they take rebirth as Indra in order to be able to liberate transitory realm's beings from their attachment that is contained within the desire realm.

### 3. The Characteristics of the First Three Perfections

*The first dharmas of generosity etc, are mostly  
Praised by Sugatas for householders.  
These accumulation described as merit is the  
cause  
Of the buddha body in the nature of form.*

We have now gone through the first three perfections, (generosity, morality, patience), that the Buddha prescribed primarily for the practice by householders, because they're easier for householders to practise.

This verse shows the nature of the accumulation described, and also the result of that accumulation.

There are both lay bodhisattvas as well as ordained bodhisattvas. As the basis for bodhisattva practices, one can find both lay bodhisattvas as well as ordained bodhisattvas.

What the root text says is that some of the perfections are more easily practiced by householder bodhisattvas, and some of the perfections are more easily practised by ordained bodhisattvas.

Here the Sugatas praise the first three perfections of generosity and so forth as a practice for the householders, because householders can practice them more easily.

The accumulation that constitutes the practice of those perfections is the accumulation described as merit. So the practice of those perfections constitutes the practice of building up the accumulation of merit.

The accumulation of merit is the cause of the form body of the buddha. Here when it says the cause of the form body of the buddha it means the main cause. The three dharmas that the root text is talking about, the three dharmas of generosity, morality, and patience, are the three perfections that are already completed at this point in the text.

The Buddha praised the first three perfections as a practice for lay bodhisattvas because they are more convenient for lay bodhisattvas, particularly material **generosity**, and the generosity of protection, and providing of fearlessness. Generally householders, lay bodhisattvas, and lay people have more money than monks, so they can practise material generosity better. Also someone who is very powerful, for example a king and so forth, has a great opportunity to practise the generosity of protection and the giving of fearlessness.

Within the practice of **morality** there are the individual types of vows and pledges that lay people make, such as the upasaka vows, the 24 hour vows, and so forth.

Within the practice of **patience** is the patience of ascertaining the Dharma, through the practices of listening, contemplation, and meditation, and so ascertaining the various aspects of the Dharma such as

the Three Jewels and so forth. One can't do that without the patience of ascertaining the Dharma.

The other three perfections of **enthusiasm**, **mental stabilisation**, and **wisdom**, are more easily practised by ordained bodhisattvas. However that doesn't mean that ordained bodhisattvas don't practise the first three types of perfection, and that lay bodhisattvas don't practise the last three perfections. The reason for that differentiation is from the point of view what perfections are sometimes more conveniently practised by particular types of practitioners. In general, of course, every bodhisattva practises all of the perfections.

The first three perfections fall into the category of accumulation of merit, and the accumulation of merit is the main cause for the form body of a buddha. So it is the main imprint for the form body of a buddha.

The fifth and the sixth perfection of mental stabilisation and wisdom, fall into the category of the accumulation of wisdom, which is then main cause for the wisdom truth body of a buddha.

The fourth perfection of enthusiasm can be both the accumulation of merit as well as accumulation of wisdom.

As it says in the text, the Buddha praised the first three perfections for lay bodhisattvas. Then the Buddha praised the last two perfections for ordained practitioners. The practice of the last two perfections constitutes the accumulation of wisdom, the practice of the first three perfections constitutes the accumulation of merit, and the perfection of enthusiasm is both. Did you understand that?

#### 4. Summarising Briefly by Expressing the Qualities of the Ground

The root text reads,

*The luminosity within the sun of conquerors' children  
Having first completely dispelled their darkness  
Intensely wishes to completely dispel migrator's darkness.  
On this ground though very sharp they don't become angry.*

From *Mirror*:

*Take the subject, the luminous third ground abiding within the sun of conquerors' children: it dispels the darkness of self of other, because after having first completely dispelled the darkness of its own continuum, it intensely wishes to completely dispel the darkness of the ignorance of migrators.*

The 'luminosity with the sun of conquerors' children', refers to the third ground that abides within the sun of the conquerors' children, first completely dispelling the darkness of self. First it dispels the ignorance within its own continuum, and then after that strongly wishes to completely dispel the darkness of ignorance of migrators.

With respect to the fourth line, 'On this third ground, though very sharp they don't become angry', *Mirror*

says:

*Take the subject the 'bodhisattvas abiding on this third ground': even though they are very sharp regarding the elimination of the afflictions of others, they don't become angry at those who have faults.*

Why?

*Because they excel in the meditation on patience and because their continuum is saturated with compassion.*

This completes the third mind generation of the *Madhyamakaavatara* from *Illumination of Madyamaka's Thought*.

#### THE FOURTH GROUND 'RADIANT'

This has three headings: showing enthusiasm to be superior on this ground; description of the ground; and showing the attribute of abandonment.

#### 1. Showing enthusiasm to be superior on this ground

The first verse of the root text,

*All qualities follow enthusiasm, the cause of  
Both accumulations of merit and wisdom,  
The ground where enthusiasm starts to blaze  
Is the fourth, the one radiating light*

shows enthusiasm to be superior on this ground.

After excelling in the perfection of patience on the third ground, then what qualities does a fourth ground bodhisattva possess that came about through the practices on the third ground? It shows the superiority in enthusiasm, which is then shown in these words, 'all qualities follow enthusiasm'.

The definition of **enthusiasm is a mind joyful with regard to virtue**. Exerting lots of effort without the joy would be called effort.

#### Why We Need Enthusiasm

- It is useful to mention that enthusiasm is the antidote to laziness, and that we need enthusiasm in order to overcome laziness. The function of laziness is to not accomplish or to lose one's purpose. It is said that those with laziness don't possess any Dharmic success.
- All qualities of generosity and so forth will be developed in dependence upon enthusiasm, and without enthusiasm the qualities of generosity and so forth will not arise.
- In dependence upon enthusiasm one attains the qualities of generosity and so forth not yet attained, and the already attained qualities of generosity and so forth increase more and more.
- Enthusiasm is also the cause for both the accumulation of merit as well as the accumulation of wisdom. Enthusiasm can contain both accumulations.

*Take the subject 'the fourth ground, "the one radiating light": it excels in enthusiasm, because it is the ground where enthusiasm, the cause of the two*

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*accumulations blazes intensely.*

### **How To Practice Enthusiasm on the Fourth Ground**

If the qualities of enthusiasm are such, then what is the way of practising enthusiasm on this ground?

The fourth ground bodhisattva excels in the practice of enthusiasm, because in dependence upon superiority in the higher training of concentration they attain the pliancy that cannot be overcome by laziness.

The fourth ground bodhisattva excels in the higher training of concentration, and through that attains the pliancy that cannot be overcome by laziness, the pliancy that is completely unharmed by laziness.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson*

*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*

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