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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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2 November 2004

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Generate a virtuous motivation as usual, thinking 'I have to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Therefore I am now going to listen to this profound Dharma, and then I am going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

We have gone through the different divisions of emptiness. First we had the concise version, where emptiness was divided into two. Then we had the elaborate version, where emptiness is divided into sixteen, and then we have the intermediate version, where emptiness is divided into four.

If you remember, the emptiness of nature was explained in the elaborate version. In the four-fold division of emptiness, the emptiness of nature is explained again. However, there is no fault of redundancy, because the emptiness of nature is important to consider in both cases for the reasons that we already mentioned before. When one comes to realise that emptiness is permanent and that emptiness is the object of the transcendental wisdom, then the idea could arise that since it is the object of the ultimate wisdom it therefore has ultimate existence. In order to overcome this misconception, the emptiness of nature was taught. This is important, regardless of whether one meditates on emptiness according to the intermediate version of the divisions, or the elaborate version.

### 6.4. Concluding by expressing the qualities of the ground

At the beginning of the sixth chapter, the qualities of the sixth ground were praised<sup>1</sup>. This part condenses the qualities of the sixth ground.

*Having thus realised all the three worlds, illuminated by the brilliance*

*Of wisdom light like a gyurura lying in their hand,  
To lack generation from the outset,*

*They enter cessation through the power of nominal truth.*

This verse refers to the qualities of knowledge on the sixth ground. On the sixth ground bodhisattvas enter the absorption on cessation through the power of nominal truth. This refers back to the two lines saying that the nominal truth becomes the method and the ultimate truth becomes the result. The nominal truth becomes the method through which the bodhisattvas on the sixth ground enter absorption on cessation. Within that absorption on cessation, they realise that all the three worlds lack generation from the very beginning, and

were never generated. They realise this through the illumination of the brilliance of their wisdom as clearly as if they would see this 'medicinal nut' lying in the hand.

*Although always in the meditative stabilisation classified as cessation*

*They also generated compassion for protectorless migrators,*

*And above they will embarrass all those born from the speech of*

*The Tatagata and middling buddhas through their awareness.*

This verse deals with the extensive qualities. The first verse deals with the profound qualities and the second verse with the extensive.

*Although always in the meditative stabilisation classified as cessation* (referring to the absorption on cessation) they still generate *compassion for protectorless migrators*. The *And above* refers to the seventh ground, when they outshine *all those born from the speech of the Tatagata*, which refers to the hearer arhats and the *middling buddhas* – the self-realised arhats - through the power of their awareness. This refers to what already was mentioned before. On the seventh ground, the bodhisattvas will outshine the hearers and self-liberated buddhas, not only through the force of their lineage, but also through the power of their awareness.

*The king possessing the expanding white vast wings  
Of the illusory and suchness, having progressed to the seventh*

*Through the needs of beings, goes on to the supreme perfection*

*Of the ocean of the conquerors' qualities through the force of the gale of virtues.*

*Mirror:*

Take the subject 'bodhisattvas abiding on the sixth ground...' they progress to buddhahood through the path that is complete with method and wisdom – because *the king possessing the expanding white vast wings* of the sequence of *the illusory* extensive path *and* the sequence of the profound path realising *suchness, having progressed to the seventh* ground...

Bodhisattvas on the sixth ground have the wing of the illusory extensive path, as well as the wing of the profound path, with which then they can progress to the seventh ground.

*Mirror:*

...that fulfils the *needs of beings, goes on to the supreme perfection of the ocean of the conquerors' qualities through the force of the gale of virtues.*

They are able to achieve this because they have the path that is complete with method and wisdom. The sixth ground bodhisattvas possess a path that is complete with method and wisdom. With this path complete with method and wisdom they can also induce others into the path. So in order to induce others into the path, one needs to have method and wisdom.

*The king possessing the expanding white vast wings  
Of the illusory and suchness ...*

Here, the 'white' refers to the pure unstained non-dual transcendental wisdom. 'That they are extensive' is a

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<sup>1</sup> This was covered in the teaching of 19 November 2002, as 2. Praise of the Perfection of Wisdom.

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reference to the extensive path. That the wings are both white as well as vast, is a reference to the unification of the profound uncontaminated path and the extensive path. The **extensive** path refers to the superior intention, the thought of bodhicitta, the practice of the six perfections and so forth. The **profound** refers to the uncontaminated transcendental wisdom realising emptiness. Having both the wisdom - the profound uncontaminated transcendental wisdom - as well as method - bodhicitta and the other perfections - the bodhisattva can progress to the seventh ground and to the qualities of a conqueror.

*The king possessing the expanding white vast wings...*

This actually refers to a particular king and his minister who were able to engage in vast and extensive activities for the welfare of sentient beings. They are used here as an analogy.

Those who want to follow the example of the bodhisattvas on the sixth ground also need to progress along the path that is complete with the wings of both sequential paths of method and wisdom. We have previously given the sequence of the profound path and the sequence of the extensive path. If one wants to follow the example of a bodhisattvas on the sixth ground, one needs to progress along a path that possess both these wings. One should not be satisfied with practising just a partial path that possesses just one of those two wings. One has to proceed through enlightenment with a path that is complete in both method and wisdom.

### **THE SEVENTH GROUND**

First, a remark regarding the outlines. Here in *Mirror*, it is just simply the Seventh Mind Generation. One of the outlines at the beginning of the text was Explaining the Ten Grounds. So here it simply moves on from the sixth to the seventh ground. In *Illumination*, however, it is slightly different.

On the seventh ground, out of the ten perfections, the bodhisattva excels in the practice of method. The root text is:

***Here, Gone Afar, they enter cessation  
Moment by moment, and  
Have achieved the scorching perfection of method.***

*Mirror:*

Take the subject 'bodhisattvas abiding **here** in the seventh ground **Gone Afar**' - they have attained qualities distinguishing them from the sixth ground - because **they enter cessation moment by moment, and have achieved the scorching perfection of method**

One of the special qualities of this ground is that a bodhisattva on this ground can enter and exit meditative equipoise on cessation momentarily. Bodhisattvas on the lower grounds can also enter into and exit from meditative equipoise on cessation, but they are not able to do so on a moment-by-moment basis. This is that a bodhisattva on the seventh ground is able to do - enter into a cessation and then exit again in one moment This is special to this ground. They have also attained the perfection of method, because their actions are not hampered and stained by adverse conditions and

obscurations. Their activities to benefit others are not tainted by adverse conditions.

*The Bodhisattva Grounds* gives two sets of six methods. The first set of six methods relates to the inner practice of the buddhadharma. It concerns the ripening of one's own continuum.

1. Viewing all sentient beings with compassion
  2. Knowing the correct nature of all compounded phenomena accurately
  3. Wishing for the transcendental wisdom of highest unequalled enlightenment
  4. Not giving up on cyclic existence in dependence upon looking at sentient beings
  5. Circling in cyclic existence through a non-afflicted mind, in dependence on exactly knowing the way compounded phenomena exist
- Bodhisattvas circling in cyclic existence is a figurative expression. It actually refers to the bodhisattvas abiding within the *place* of cyclic existence. We will elaborate on this in the Eighth Mind Generation.
6. Their enthusiasm is inflamed because of their wish for enlightenment.

These are the six proficient methods regarding the inner practice of the Dharma - the ripening of the one's own continuum.

Then there are the six proficient methods concerning ripening the continuum of other sentient beings.

1. Bodhisattvas engage in transforming the small roots of virtue of sentient beings into an infinite result.
  2. Likewise bodhisattvas engage in establishing the small accumulations of sentient beings into great roots of virtue.
- They engage in eliminating the anger of those who don't like the Dharma.
4. They introduce those who have a neutral mind to the Dharma i.e. those who are still sitting on the fence, thinking they might want to enter the Dharma, but haven't yet done so.
  5. They ripen those who have already entered the Dharma.
  6. They liberate those whose continuum has already ripened.

In such a way, a bodhisattva on the seventh ground becomes proficient in the perfection of method.

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## THE EIGHTH GROUND

In the Eighth Mind Generation, we have three outlines:

- 8.1. Prayers are superior on this ground and the way of awaking them from cessation
- 8.2. Showing that they have exhausted all afflictions
- 8.3. Showing that they have attained ten powers

### 8.1. Prayers are superior on this ground and the way of awaking them from cessation

The root text reads:

***To repeatedly attain virtue superior to before,  
The Great Ones enter the Immoveable,  
Where they become completely irreversible.***

*Mirror:*

Take the subject '*the Great Ones*, bodhisattvas abiding on the seventh ground' - *they* have a reason for *entering the Immoveable* ground, *where they become completely irreversible* - it is in order *to repeatedly attain virtue superior to before* on the seventh ground.

What this refers to is being able to repeatedly achieve a virtue superior to before. Something special happens in the mind of a bodhisattva when he progresses from the seventh to the eighth ground. From then on the practice of the path will be natural, and he will naturally progress along the path without great effort.

Until reaching the Eighth Ground, a bodhisattva needs to work with great effort. Once the bodhisattva has progressed to the Eighth Ground, the practices that he engages in will come completely naturally, and as such he will progress along the path naturally. This is likened to the difference between getting a boat into the water which needs to be done with great effort and sailing along effortlessly once out into the open sea. First one has to carry the boat into the water, and then use the oars to row out into the open sea where there is good wind. (These days of course, one has an engine.) Then, once one has reached the open sea the boat will sail very easily and smoothly. This is the analogy that Lama Tsong Khapa used to explain the difference between the practice of the path on the seventh ground and below, and the eighth ground.

***Their prayers become extremely pure and***

*Mirror:*

Take the subject 'these bodhisattvas abiding on the eighth ground' - *their* countless hundred thousands of *prayers become extremely pure* - because they have completed the perfection of prayer.

On the eighth ground the bodhisattva becomes proficient in the perfection of prayer because on this ground the bodhisattva purifies the hundreds of thousands of prayers done since the first ground.

***Conquerors awake them from cessation***

'Cessation' refers to emptiness, and awakening the bodhisattvas from cessation means awakening them from their meditative equipoise on cessation. This highlights the point that one cannot attain enlightenment merely by remaining in meditative absorption on cessation. Even

though there is no danger that these bodhisattvas would fall into the extreme of nihilism, to prevent them from remaining in meditative equipoise on emptiness they are awakened.

There might be certain bodhisattvas who could decide to remain in meditative absorption on emptiness. But if they were to remain in meditative absorption on emptiness, then they could not achieve the welfare of sentient beings, and therefore could not become enlightened. So in order to prevent even the theoretical possibility of that happening they are awakened from cessation. Otherwise, just merely by remaining in meditative absorption on cessation, one will not be able to achieve the form-body of a buddha.

In the sutra path, there is no possibility of building up both the accumulation of merit as well as wisdom in one meditative equipoise. While they're in the meditative equipoise on emptiness, bodhisattvas cannot build up the accumulation of merits in the sutra system. This is different to the tantric system, where the meditation practice of visualising oneself as the deity while meditating on emptiness provides the possibility of building up both the accumulation of merit as well as wisdom in one equipoise.

Visualising of oneself as the deity becomes the cause for the achievement of the form-body of a buddha, and being aware of emptiness at the same time builds up the accumulation of wisdom, which becomes the cause for the wisdom-truth body of a buddha. In the tantric system this can be done simultaneously.

### 8.2. Showing that they have exhausted all afflictions

***Since awareness without attachment does not abide  
simultaneously with faults,  
The stains and their roots are completely  
pacified on the eighth ground.  
Though afflictions are purged and they are above  
the three realms, they  
Haven't attained all the limitless space-like  
actions of a buddha.***

*Mirror:*

Take the subject 'bodhisattvas abiding *on the eighth ground*' - they have *completely pacified the stains* of the afflictions *and their roots*...

Here, the 'roots' of the afflictions refers to the seeds of the afflictions, and the potential for the subsequent regeneration of the affliction. So bodhisattvas on this ground have abandoned both the afflictions as well as their seeds.

*Mirror:*

...- because they have become empowered in the non-conceptual transcendental wisdom *awareness without attachment*, that *doesn't abide simultaneously with the faults* of the afflictions.

They have become empowered by the non-conceptual transcendental wisdom awareness that lacks attachment, which doesn't abide simultaneously with the faults of the afflictions. There is not enough space for both in the mental continuum - there can be only one or the other.

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They are a non-simultaneous dichotomy, simply meaning that they can never abide simultaneously together.

Here somebody comes up with a debate saying: Take the subject 'the bodhisattva on the eighth ground' – there is no purpose for that bodhisattva to engage in Dharma practice - because they are Mahayana practitioners without any afflictions and they have become the highest of the three realms.'

The answer is that even though afflictions are purged and they are above the three realms, they haven't obtained all the limitless space-like actions of a buddha. They have to strive along the path because they still need to attain the state of complete enlightenment. In order to attain the space-like actions of a buddha, these bodhisattvas need to strive further along the path.

### **8.3. Showing that they have attained ten powers**

*Though having ceased to be in cyclic existence they attain ten powers and show themselves to migrators in cyclic existence in various ways.*

At this point another doubt is voiced. Take the subject 'bodhisattvas on the eighth ground' – they don't need to take further re-birth in cyclic existence - because they have exhausted all their mental afflictions. If one takes re-birth in cyclic existence, one has to take re-birth through the power or through the force of karma and afflictions. But if it were to be the case that an eighth level bodhisattva does not take re-birth in cyclic existence, then they would not be able to complete the path to enlightenment, because the path to enlightenment is completed over a series of re-births.

The answer to that is stated in the two lines: 'though having ceased to be in cyclic existence...' and so forth.

*Mirror:*

Take the subject 'bodhisattvas abiding *on the eighth ground* - *though having ceased to be in cyclic existence* through karma and afflictions, that doesn't stop them from completing their accumulations - because *they attain ten powers*, and though those ten powers they *show* bodies of *themselves to migrators in cyclic existence in various ways*.

They have attained the ten powers, one of which is the power of life, through which they are able to take bodies in the nature of mind.

We will do the ten powers next time. They are very easy. It is also very good to remember the twelve methods that were mentioned before. Next time we can do the ninth ground, which is very quick.

#### **Summary**

On the seventh ground 'Gone Afar', the bodhisattva becomes proficient in the perfection of method, and here we had these different methods that have been explained.

Then on the eighth ground 'Immoveable', the bodhisattva becomes proficient in the perfection of prayer. Why? Because on the eighth ground the hundreds of thousands of prayers that were engaged in by the bodhisattva from

the first ground onwards become purified.

Bodhisattvas excel in one of the perfections on each of the grounds, but this doesn't mean that the perfections don't exist on all the grounds. For example, the bodhisattva on the first ground attains proficiency in the practice of generosity, but has not attained proficiency in the practice of morality. That does not mean that this bodhisattva does not possess the practice of the perfection of morality. Rather he has not become proficient or has not excelled in the practice of that perfection. On the next ground, the bodhisattva attains proficiency in the practice of the perfection of morality and so forth. In this way, each of the progressing grounds adds further qualities to the grounds below, by excelling in the practice of another perfection.

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*Edited Version*

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