
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

། དབུ་མ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་པ་ལོ། །

9 November 2004

As usual generate a virtuous motivation, thinking, 'I have to attain complete enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings and in order to attain that enlightenment I now listen to this profound teaching, and will then put it into practice.

EIGHTH GROUND, 'IMMOVEABLE'

8.3. Showing they have attained the ten powers (cont.)

Last time we reached the point where somebody brings up a point of discussion, saying that there is a discrepancy between on the one hand saying that an eighth level bodhisattva has exhausted all the mental afflictions, and on the other hand saying that complete enlightenment is attained over a succession of rebirths. This opponent says that if one takes rebirth in cyclic existence then it has to be through the force of karma and afflictions, and since an eighth level bodhisattva has exhausted all afflictions then such a bodhisattva can no longer take rebirth in cyclic existence.

The answer is that there is no contradiction, because even though eighth level bodhisattvas have exhausted all mental afflictions they can still take rebirth in cyclic existence, not through the force of karma and mental afflictions but through the force of the ten powers that they have attained, such as the power over life and so forth. Through those powers an eighth level bodhisattva can take rebirth in cyclic existence, taking a mental body where they wish, and in such a way can show the Dharma to sentient beings in a variety of bodies.

Ten powers of an eighth level bodhisattva

1. The power of life

Eighth level bodhisattvas have attained the power of life, because they are blessed by a lifespan that lasts for expressible many eons.

2. The power of mind

Eighth level bodhisattvas have attained the power of mind, because their mind abides in concentration through being engaged by boundless transcendental wisdoms.

3. The power of livelihood objects

Eighth level bodhisattvas have attained the power of livelihood objects, because they show the blessing of being adorned with various ornaments of all worldly realms. They are never without the necessary wealth and material possessions that one needs for daily life, unlike us.

4. The power of karma

Eighth level bodhisattvas have attained the power of

karma, because they have the blessing to accurately predict the timing of the ripening of karma. They still don't understand the subtle dependent arising between the karmas.

5. Power of birth

Eighth level bodhisattvas have attained the power of birth, because they exhibit all the different types of rebirths of the samsaric realms.

6. Power of prayer

Eighth level bodhisattvas have attained the power of prayer, because they reveal in which buddha field and at which time they want to attain perfect complete awakening.

7. Power of wish

Eighth level bodhisattvas have attained the power of wish, because they can show how all the realms of sentient beings are filled with buddhas.

8. Power of magical emanation

Eighth level bodhisattvas have attained the power of magical emanation, because they can emanate to all the Buddha realms of all the transitory worlds.

9. Power of transcendental wisdom

Eighth level bodhisattvas have attained the power of transcendental wisdom, because they are able to exhibit the ten powers of a tathagata, the four fearlessness, the uncommon dharmas of a buddha, the marks and signs of a buddha, and complete enlightenment.

10. Power of Dharma

Eighth level bodhisattvas have attained the power of Dharma, because they can show the Dharma without limits or centre. At one's present stage there are limits to one's ability to show the Dharma - one can only show the Dharma in certain places and in certain circumstances. However, for an eighth level bodhisattva these limits don't exist any more. This power is an expansion of the quality of a bodhisattva on the path of seeing of being able to show the Dharma in hundred-fold way.

NINTH GROUND, 'EXCELLENT WISDOM'

*On the ninth, look at its powers, all becomes completely pure,
Likewise it attains the dharmas of perfect knowledge - its pure qualities*

Mirror:

Take the subject 'bodhisattvas abiding *on the ninth*' - they have attained qualities superior to the eighth ground - because their perfection of the *powers becomes completely pure* and *likewise they attain the pure qualities of the individual perfect knowledges.*

Out of the ten perfections the bodhisattvas on this ground excel in the practice of the perfection of power. There are ten powers these bodhisattvas excel in, but they are different from the ten powers of a completely enlightened being.

Powers of a ninth level bodhisattva

1. Power of intent

The bodhisattva is completely without any afflicted type of action.

2. Power of superior intention

This power is the refinement of the transcendental wisdom of the ground. In general we have refinement of the ground on each of the ten grounds, which refers to eliminating the faults of the ground, and developing the qualities of the ground.

3. Power of perfect memory

The power of perfect memory is comprised of wisdom and mindfulness, which perfectly retain the different Dharma terms as well as their meaning.

4. Power of concentration

A ninth level bodhisattva has the power of being able to concentrate continuously and permanently without any mental wandering.

5. Power of perfect action

A ninth level bodhisattva is proficient in all the behaviours and customs of the different types of rebirth taken in all the limitless realms of the worlds.

6. Power of strength

What this means is that this bodhisattva has perfectly attained everything that one could mentally wish for.

7. Power of confidence

A ninth level bodhisattva is proficient in all the practices and divisions of the Buddha's teachings.

8. Power of prayer

They never give up training in the actions of all the buddhas.

9. Power of perfection

These bodhisattvas ripen their own continuum through the Buddhadharmas, and perfectly ripen that of other sentient beings. They never give up actions benefiting all sentient beings.

10. Power of great love

Bodhisattvas at this level never give up in their extra strong effort to rescue all sentient beings.

11. Power of compassion

These bodhisattvas endeavour to eliminate all the sufferings of all sentient beings.

12. Power of suchness

Having manifested the illusory-like suchness, these bodhisattvas have attained the power of suchness.

13. Power of being blessed by all Tathagatas

They are just about to face the manifestation of the transcendental wisdom that unfolds into complete omniscience.

Four perfect knowledges

As it says in the root text, similarly to excelling in the perfection of power these bodhisattvas have also purified the individual perfect knowledges of the Dharma.

1. **Perfect knowledge of Dharma** - the knowledge of the individual definitions of the individual dharmas.
2. **Perfect knowledge of meaning** - the knowledge of the divisions of all phenomena.
3. **Perfect knowledge of words** - being able to show the dharmas purely and unmixed.
4. **Perfect knowledge of confidence** - being able to unobstructedly teach all Dharma terms and meanings.

This explanation of the four perfect knowledges is according to the *Self Commentary* by Chandrakirti. In other texts it lists them slightly differently, referring to:

1. Knowledge of the different lists of Dharma
2. Knowledge of the meaning of the subject that is being expressed
3. Knowledge of the terms
4. Knowledge of inexhaustible confidence.

TENTH GROUND, 'CLOUD OF DHARMA'

On the tenth ground they are initiated by the buddhas, They attain purity and receive supreme superior transcendental wisdom.

Like a shower of rain from a rain cloud, a shower of Dharma falls simultaneously

From the conquerors' child for the crop of virtue of migrators.

Mirror:

Take the subject 'bodhisattvas on the tenth ground' - they have attained qualities superior to the ninth ground and below - because **they are initiated** from all directions **by the buddhas** with the initiation of great light, because **they** have **attained purity** and because they attain excellence in the perfection of **transcendental wisdom**.

Take the subject 'the tenth ground' - there is a reason why it is labelled 'Cloud of Dharma' - because **a shower of exalted Dharma falls simultaneously from the conquerors' children** on the tenth ground, **like a shower of rain from a rain cloud, for the crop of virtue of migrators**.

Bodhisattvas on the tenth ground receive the initiation of great light. After having perfected tens of hundreds of thousands of uncountable concentrations they finally have attained a special concentration called Being Initiated into the Transcendental Wisdom of Omniscience.

Because of this particular type of concentration it is possible for all the buddhas of the ten directions to initiate this bodhisattva with the initiation of great light.

From the special hair that grows between the eyebrows of all the supreme emanation bodies of all the buddhas, light rays emanate that are in the nature of transcendental wisdom knowing omniscient mind. This light expands into hundreds of thousands of lights surrounded by hundreds and thousands of other lights, which then initiate the bodhisattva.

The bodhisattvas on the tenth ground have this vision that all these light rays come down from all the buddhas

of the ten directions and pacify the sufferings of all the sentient beings in the lower realms, and the three poisons. Then the light rays absorb into the crown of the bodhisattva and through this blessing of the light rays the bodhisattva experiences many different special types of concentrations not experienced previously.

Here a question is asked: What is the difference between the perfection of wisdom and the perfection of transcendental wisdom? The bodhisattva on the tenth ground excels in the practice of the perfection of the transcendental wisdom. What then is the difference between the perfection of transcendental wisdom and the perfection of wisdom? Regarding the difference between those two, Asanga said in his text *Bodhisattva Grounds*:

Having knowledge in meditative equipoise of all phenomena just as they are is the perfection of transcendental wisdom. The wisdom that apprehends the ultimate nature of all phenomena is the perfection of wisdom.

Here the perfection of transcendental wisdom is the apprehension of the illusory conventional while the perfection of wisdom is the apprehension of the ultimate.

It is good to contemplate the way a bodhisattva attains excellence in the individual perfections as he or she progresses along the grounds. The bodhisattva on the **first ground** has attained excellence in the practice of the perfection of generosity but has not yet attained excellence in the practice of morality, and is specifically training in the perfection of morality to refine that perfection. Once a bodhisattva has attained the **second ground** he or she excels in the perfection of morality but not in the practice of the perfection of patience and so endeavours to perfect the practice of patience. Likewise on the **third ground**, having mastered patience the bodhisattva trains in the perfection of enthusiasm. On the **fourth ground** the bodhisattva excels in the practice of the perfection of enthusiasm, on the **fifth ground** in the practice of the perfection of mental stabilization, on the **sixth ground** the practice of the perfection of wisdom and so forth. It is good to contemplate how the bodhisattva develops while progressing along the different grounds.

THE INDIVIDUAL QUALITIES OF THE TEN GROUNDS

This is divided into three parts:

3.2.1.2.1.1. The qualities of the first ground

3.2.1.2.1.2. The qualities of the second to the seventh ground

3.2.1.2.1.3. The qualities of the three pure grounds

3.2.1.2.1.1. The qualities of the first ground

*At that time they see one hundred buddhas,
Are blessed by them and realised by them.
They abide for a life of one hundred eons and
Perfectly enter the earlier and later boundaries.*

Those with awareness enter and exit from a hundred-fold equipoise.

One hundred transitory realms are moved and perceived by them.

Likewise, with magical power they ripen one hundred sentient beings

And they go to realms as many as the number one hundred.

They perfectly open the door of Dharma and

The body of this child of the able ones shows bodies wholly,

Having one's own entourage makes for beauty and training, each body

Is shown in the company of one hundred children of the conqueror.

Here we have the set of twelve one-hundred fold qualities that a bodhisattva attains on reaching the first ground. When we read through those qualities it is important to keep in mind that these are things that a bodhisattva can do in one instant. This bodhisattva can see one hundred buddhas in one moment. Generally, for a bodhisattva this wouldn't be such a great achievement over time, but here the special thing is that it is done in one instant, and that applies to the whole set of twelve qualities.

Mirror:

1. *see one hundred buddhas,*
2. *are blessed by them and realised by them;*
3. *they abide for a life of one hundred eons*
4. *and perfectly enter the earlier and later boundaries of one hundred eons;*
- I. *those with awareness enter and exit from a one hundred-fold concentrative equipoise; so they enter and exit from one hundred concentrations.*
6. *one hundred transitory realms are moved*
7. *and perceived by these bodhisattvas;*
8. *likewise, with magical powers they ripen one hundred sentient beings*
9. *and they go to realms as many as the number one hundred;*
10. *these bodhisattvas perfectly open the door of one hundred dharmas*
11. *and the body of this child of the able ones shows one hundred bodies wholly;*
12. *each body is shown in the company of one hundred children of the conquerors - having one's own entourage makes for beauty and training.*

3.2.1.2.1.2. The qualities of the second to the seventh ground

*After those with awareness have attained these qualities through abiding
On the Extremely Joyful, then just likewise, through abiding on the Stainless,
They perfectly attain them in thousands. On the five grounds
Bodhisattvas attain one hundred thousand and*

*One billion; they attain also ten billion;
Then they also attain one trillion; ten million
Ten trillion are completed. Again they are completed
By a thousand and all are attained.*

From the second to the seventh ground the set of qualities will always be the same twelve-fold set of qualities, but the power of each of these qualities increases exponentially as the bodhisattva progresses along the path.

Mirror:

After those with awareness have attained these, a set of twelve hundred-fold qualities, through abiding on the Extremely Joyful, then likewise bodhisattvas, through abiding on the second ground Stainless, perfectly attain a set of twelve thousand-fold qualities, because they can see in one instant the faces of one thousand buddhas and so forth, up to being able to show one thousand bodies, each surrounded by one thousand bodhisattvas.

Bodhisattvas on the five grounds, from the third ground to the seventh, attain sets of twelve qualities because on the third ground they attain twelve one-hundred-thousand-fold qualities, on the fourth ground twelve one-billion-fold qualities.

On the **first ground** these qualities are hundred-fold.

On the **second ground** they are thousand-fold so we have twelve thousand-fold qualities.

On **third ground** we have twelve one hundred thousand-fold qualities.

On the **fourth ground** there are twelve one billion¹-fold qualities.

On the **fifth ground** there are twelve ten billion-fold qualities.

On the **sixth ground** there are one trillion²-fold qualities.

On the **seventh ground** they attain twelve ten million times ten trillion-fold qualities.

On the **eighth ground** the qualities are simply beyond count, so it says that these twelve qualities equal the number of atoms found in the sum of one hundred thousand great world systems.

On the **ninth ground** the qualities equal the number of atoms of ten sets of one hundred thousand of one hundred countless ones perfectly multiplied by one thousand. 'Countless ones' refers to a particular world system. On the previous ground we had the great world system and here 'countless ones' refers to an even greater type of world system. The qualities on this ground equal the number of sets of ten of one hundred of the countless ones, further multiplied by one thousand.

On the **tenth ground** their qualities have gone far beyond any words. They find qualities as many as there are atoms in the sum of the inexpressible buddha fields.

Next time we can continue with the verses from the qualities from the eighth ground which we haven't read

yet. Also I think there is a summary of those qualities mentioned in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, where it talks about the qualities of the Sangha.

After the remaining verses of the grounds we reach the resultant ground. There it talks about the results of the long bodhisattva path, which is very inspiring. It shows what the final fruit is of all these long labours that one has engaged in beforehand.

Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak

Edited Version

© Tara Institute

¹ One billion - one thousand million

² One trillion - one thousand billion