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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པོའི་བཀའ་སློབ་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་རྐྱེན་གྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ལྟར་།།

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In a comfortable and relaxed posture, with a clear state of mind that is based on the motivation that we generated during the recitation of the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. *[meditation]*

We can generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings, in order to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

## 2.1.2.2.2. Entities and good qualities of the ten grounds (cont.)

1. We have completed the explanation of the first ground, **Very Joyful** and the qualities that are obtained on that ground. It is good to recall that the perfection that is surpassed on the first ground is the perfection of generosity and the various qualities that are obtained on that ground. It is also good to reflect on how bodhisattvas engage in their practices in this sequential manner.

They begin by engaging in practices to obtain the realisations of the first ground, followed by the second ground and so forth. This indicates that great enlightened beings did not obtain enlightenment all of a sudden, but rather that they practised along the path and worked through the grounds in a sequential way, where each realisation was obtained to lead to the next realisation and so forth. This is a good way to remind ourselves that if we aspire to achieve enlightenment, we need to practise in exactly the same way. At the beginning we practise generosity to the best of our ability, followed by the other practices. This is how we need to take it as a personal instruction.

Understanding the significance and manner of these practices inspires us to engage in generosity and so forth whenever the occasion arises. From its definition we understand that we do not need to physically give something in order to practise generosity. Rather, when we develop the mind of giving, then it is that mental intention of giving that is the actual practice of generosity. So if we don't have the material wealth to give to others we need not feel that we are deprived of the opportunity to practice generosity. In fact our daily practice of placing offerings of water bowls, flowers and incense on the altar is a practice of generosity.

Even when we consume food and drink or when we go outside and stroll about and see beautiful parks, lakes and so forth, we can actually offer these beautiful sights and objects to the enlightened beings. This is yet another way of using external resources as an opportunity to practise generosity. In fact this is how great beings engaged in the practice, taking every opportunity whenever they went out and about. My late teacher Geshe Ngawang Dhargye used to practise in that way—when he went to a beautiful garden or park, he would offer the surroundings, and sometimes even

sit down and take bodhisattva vows. These are some of the incredible and practical ways that he engaged in practice.

We need to recall the advice of the great masters about how to engage in practice. You will recall that in *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Shantideva explains how one has surpassed the perfection of generosity when one reaches a point of having a limitless intention to give. The presentation on generosity occurs in the tenth chapter of *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* which, as you will recall, is primarily a chapter of dedication. That in itself indicates that the dedication of merit is also a form of generosity.

Shantideva's text specifically mentions that the perfection of generosity does not imply that we need to remove all forms of poverty in order to perfect the practice of generosity. Rather the perfection of generosity refers to surpassing in the intention to give. Thus we need to understand that it is our intention or mental state that actually counts.

Thus, as explained in the teachings, while dedicating one's merit seals our practice so that it isn't destroyed by anger, it is also a form of generosity. Thus we need to understand that engaging in the practices of purification and accumulating merit, and then dedicating that merit to the welfare of all sentient beings, is one of the highest forms of generosity. Since there are so many different ways of practising generosity, we can have many opportunities to practise generosity.

2. The second ground is called the **Stainless**.

As mentioned previously, the *Madhyamakavatara* described each ground in great detail, and clarified numerous qualms and doubts. So it is good for you to refer to those notes and teachings. So apart from covering the basic explanation in the text, I don't intend to spend much time on each one.

The verse that relates to the second ground reads:

443. *The second is called the Stainless  
Because all ten [virtuous] actions  
Of body, speech, and mind are stainless  
And they naturally abide in those [deeds of  
ethics].*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

*The second is called the Stainless because the bodhisattvas on this ground restrain themselves from contemplating liberation solely for themselves.*

This is a very profound presentation of the way in which the perfection of ethics or morality is surpassed on the second ground. Here ethics is to be understood as refraining from the ten non-virtuous deeds without contemplating liberation solely for oneself. This means that ethics is practised with the intention to benefit all sentient beings and not just for personal gain (i.e. wanting to gain liberation just for one's own sake). I don't know whether or not it has registered in your memory, but I have indicated on many occasions in the past that practising each of the perfections can be also combined with the other perfections as well. These are important points to remember.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

*...all ten virtuous actions of body, speech and mind are stainless, being free from immorality even in the dream state, and they naturally abide in those deeds of ethics.*

*All ten virtuous actions of body, speech and mind are stainless indicates that the bodhisattvas' actions are free from immorality, even in the dream state. Thus, even during sleep bodhisattvas are not stained by the ten non-virtuous deeds.*

At this point it would be good to recall the ten non-virtuous actions: the actions of body and speech are both karma and a pathway of karma; whilst the three mental actions of covetousness, harmful intention and wrong views are a pathway to karma but not actually karma. As explained in the lam rim teachings, the three non-virtues of mind are delusions and therefore are not karma. I have previously explained how karma and delusions are mutually exclusive, but again, I'm not sure if you will recall those explanations. These are important points to understand, as I have noticed that some who assume they know a bit about karma fail to make this distinction.

So this verse explains that the second ground is called the Stainless, because the bodhisattvas on this ground are free from the stains of immorality, even during the dream state.

The second verse relating to this ground refers to the maturation of the good qualities of the ground:

*444. Through the maturation of those [good qualities]  
The perfection of ethics becomes supreme.  
They become Universal Monarchs helping beings,  
Masters of the glorious [four continents] and of the seven precious objects.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*Through the maturation of those good qualities and by the virtue of obtaining them, the perfection of ethics becomes supreme. ...*

As clearly indicated here, the perfection of ethics is surpassed in this ground along with the perfection of generosity. However the perfection of patience is yet to be surpassed.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

*... The twelve thousand qualities and so forth are also applied on this ground. The particular increase of the maturation on this ground is that they become universal monarchs, helping beings; masters of the glorious four continents and of the seven precious objects.*

As presented here, the result of the maturation of the qualities is that they will become universal monarchs, helping beings on the four continents. Masters of the glorious four continents means that they become rulers of the four continents, and have control over the occupants of the four continents, as a way to benefit them. This surpasses the first ground, on which one becomes the universal monarch of the southern continent, which is the earth. As one's qualities are matured and surpassed on the second ground, one becomes a monarch with the ability to control beings on all four continents.

Here we can also relate to how the bodhisattvas on the various grounds manifest in many, many different ways to benefit sentient beings. It is for this reason that, as the great master Gyaltsab Rinpoche mentions, we must be very wary and careful not to be critical and judgemental of others, since we don't know their qualities. It's like walking over ground that contains a pit of burning coals covered with a layer of leaves. If you are not familiar with risk you could walk over the leaves and fall into that pit. Similarly, it is dangerous to be judgemental and critical of other beings, since one does not know who could be a bodhisattva. So, one must be extremely cautious lest one commits the great negative karma of criticising a bodhisattva. So these are points that we really need to keep in mind as they encourage us to train our mind to develop respect for others, whoever they may

be, and whatever their appearance. If we aren't certain, then it's best for us to develop a mind of respect rather than to be critical and judgemental. This is how we need to understand this point.

I covered the *seven precious objects* when I taught the mandala offering. They are the: *precious wheel, precious jewel, precious queen, precious minister, precious elephant, precious horse, and precious general*. Just by coming into contact with the precious queen for example, one experiences incredible bliss and happiness. Likewise, whoever rides the precious horse, or elephant will have a very easy ride, being swiftly taken to their destination. These precious objects are symbols of the ways to benefit other sentient beings. So having them in one's entourage and having control over them, means having more ways to vastly benefit all beings. This is how we need to understand the significance of the seven precious objects.

To understand how bodhisattvas benefit sentient beings we need to understand the aspirations of the awakening mind or bodhicitta. Through their aspirational prayers bodhisattvas intentionally choose to be re-born in cyclic existence. Rather than abiding in nirvana they forsake their own liberation, and take rebirth into cyclic existence in order to continue to benefit sentient beings.

As explained in the teachings, bodhisattvas have the ability to completely destroy all delusions, just as fire consumes wood. The wisdom within the bodhisattva's mind is able to completely consume and devour all stains of delusion, so they could, in an instant, obtain the state of liberation and abide in nirvana, if they so wished. However, they forsake their own personal liberation and intentionally remain in samsara for many eons, to help benefit sentient beings. In a sense they are willing to forsake their own enlightenment for the benefit of other sentient beings.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama once said, it seems that the bodhisattvas on the sutric path have a more courageous mind than the bodhisattvas on the tantric path. The very intention of tantric practice is to obtain liberation and enlightenment in this very lifetime, whereas the bodhisattvas on the sutric path are not daunted by the prospect of remaining in samsara even for many eons.

So, through these explanations we can gain an understanding of why the particular term 'stainless' is given to the second ground, and it is good to relate to that.

The presentation of the rest of the grounds follows a similar format. First, the reason why the particular name is given is presented, followed by the qualities of that ground, and then the maturation results of the qualities.

3. The third ground is called **Luminous**.

The verse from the root text is:

*445. The third ground is called the Luminous  
Because the pacifying light of wisdom arises.  
The concentrations and clairvoyances are generated,  
And desire and hatred are completely extinguished.*

Again, you will recall that this ground was presented in very great detail in the *Madhyamakavatara*, along with dealing with qualms that were raised.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse:

*The third ground is called Luminous, because during the state of meditative equipoise, the firewood-like*

obscurations to omniscience are *pacified* by the *light of wisdom*. Furthermore due to the power of obtaining that, even during the state of post-meditative equipoise, one's body becomes luminous with a reddish-yellow, copper-like colour, like the colour of dawn....

On the third ground, during meditative equipoise, it dawns on the bodhisattva that they have the ability to overcome the obscurations to omniscience. This is a difficult point to comprehend, however as explained in the teachings an appearance of luminosity occurs in their mind, which is an indication that they have developed the unique capacity to overcome the obscurations to omniscience. Although they have not yet overcome the obscurations to omniscience, it dawns upon them that they have the capacity to do so. As a sign of the dawning of that capacity, there is an appearance of luminosity in their mind. As a result of that, *during the state of post-meditative equipoise the body itself becomes luminous with a reddish-yellow or copper-like colour, like the colour of dawn*. This explains why the third ground is called 'luminous'.

Then, as the commentary further explains:

... On this ground, *the four concentrations, four formlessness, four immeasurables and the five clairvoyances are generated. Also, desire, hatred and ignorance are completely extinguished.*

As clearly explained in the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings, there are particular qualities that are obtained on each ground. So on this ground, the qualities are generating the four concentrations and so forth.

The *five clairvoyances* are:

- the visual clairvoyance of the gods;
- the auditory clairvoyance of the gods;
- the clairvoyance of magical emanation;
- the clairvoyance of knowing the minds of others; and
- the clairvoyance of knowing former lives.

When it says that *desire, hatred and ignorance are completely extinguished*, it needs to be understood that the particular abandonments of desire, hatred and ignorance on this ground are completely extinguished. It this doesn't mean that the bodhisattvas on this ground have abandoned all desire, hatred and ignorance but rather those which are the particular abandonment on this ground.

The next verse covers the maturation of the qualities:

**446. Through the maturation of those [good qualities]  
They practise supremely the deeds of patience  
And become a great wise monarch of the gods.  
They put an end to desire.**

Gyaltsab Je's explanation reads:

*Through the maturation and result of those good qualities, they practise supremely the deeds of patience, as well as joyous effort and the fruit of that is that they become a great wise monarch of the gods. And because of their wisdom, they put an end to desire of the desire realm.*

Having covered the reason why the term 'luminous' is used, and the meaning of that term, next comes the qualities that are obtained and the particular defilements that are overcome. As it says here, bodhisattvas on this ground *become a great wise monarch of the gods*, referring to a particular realm called the gods free from combat. They also overcome the *desire of the desire realm* through *their wisdom*.

4. The fourth ground is called **Radiant**.

The verse from the root text reads:

**447. The fourth is called the Radiant  
Because the light of true wisdom arises.  
They cultivate supremely  
All the harmonies with enlightenment.**

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*The fourth is called the Radiant, because the light of true wisdom which surpasses the third ground arises here.*

Here, the term 'radiant' has the connotation of emitting an even stronger light than usual. As explained here *because the light of true wisdom which surpasses the third ground arises* at this point, the fourth ground is called *radiant*.

Gyaltsab Je' commentary continues:

*They cultivate supremely all thirty-seven harmonies with enlightenment, which are divided into seven categories such as the four close contemplations and so forth.*

We briefly mentioned the seven categories of the thirty-seven harmonies with enlightenment earlier this year<sup>1</sup>, and they are also explained in the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings<sup>2</sup>. The unique feature of this ground is said to be the ability to distinguish the very subtle aspects of the thirty-seven harmonies with enlightenment. There is a distinction between the thirty seven harmonies with enlightenment that are explained from the Prasangika point of view which is subtler, and the thirty-seven harmonies as explained in *Abhidharma*. The same distinction between gross and subtle also applies to the four noble truths and so forth.

The next verse relates to the maturation of the good qualities of this ground:

**448. Through the maturation of those [good qualities]  
They become monarchs of the gods in [the heaven] Without Combat.  
They are skilled in quelling the arising of the view  
That the transitory collection [is inherently existent I and mine].**

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Through the maturation of those good qualities they become monarchs of the gods in the heaven Without Combat. They are skilled in quelling the innate subtle arising of the view that the transitory collection is an inherently existent 'I' and 'mine', and the gross which is that it is a self-sufficiently and independently existent 'I'.*

It has to be understood that *quelling the innate subtle arising of the view* refers to the complete abandonment of the innate view of the transitory collection at this level. Also, though not specifically mentioned here, other teachings indicate that the perfection of joyous effort is surpassed on this ground.

5. The fifth, is called Extremely Difficult to Overcome and the relevant verse reads:

**449. The fifth is called the Extremely Difficult to Overcome  
Because all evil ones find it extremely hard to conquer them.  
They become skilled in knowing  
The subtle meanings of the noble truths and so forth.**

<sup>1</sup> See the teachings of 8 May 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See the teachings of 5 October 2004.

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*The fifth is called the Extremely Difficult to Overcome because, even if all the demons of the Devaputra are not able to conquer them, then it is not to mention that all evil ones, such as the obedient slaves of the demons, will find it extremely hard to conquer them.*

Bodhisattvas are beyond the domination of the demons such as the *demons of the Devaputra*. Some find it hard to understand that demons can exist, however there are many who have had experiences with non-human entities. So it is possible there are some entities that can harm us and the term 'demon' is used to indicate a malicious harm that is inflicted upon others. In any case, the *demons of the Devaputra*, also known as the son of the gods, are said to hinder a lot of the practices. The main point here is that if the *demons of the Devaputra* themselves are not able to conquer the bodhisattva on this ground, then there is no need to mention that all the evil ones, such as the obedient slaves of that demon, will find it extremely hard to conquer them. Thus this ground is called 'extremely hard to conquer'.

The commentary continues:

*They become skilled in knowing the gross and subtle meanings of the four noble truths and so forth. In the sutra of the Ten Grounds it has been explained that they will become skilled in knowing the subtle meanings of all objects of knowledge, such as the two truths and so forth.*

The gross and subtle meanings of the four noble truths were explained previously<sup>3</sup>.

The next verse explains the maturation of the qualities:

*450. Through the maturation of those [good qualities]  
They become monarchs of the gods abiding in the Joyous Land,  
They overcome the foundations of all formers  
Afflictive emotions and views.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Through the maturation of those good qualities they become monarchs of the gods abiding in the joyous land. The results on this ground are, they overcome the foundations of all afflictive emotions and views of inner and outer formers.*

The joyous land indicated here does not refer to the joyous land known as Tushita, but to the joyous land that is one of the six realms of the desire gods.

The next point is that they *overcome the foundations of all afflictive emotions and views of inner and outer formers*. This refers to the delusions as well as the views relating to the inner and outer formers.

While it is not specifically indicated here, the perfection of concentration is surpassed on this ground.

6. The sixth is called the Approaching, which is presented in this verse:

*451. The sixth is called the Approaching  
Because they are approaching the good qualities of a buddha.  
Through familiarity with calm abiding and special insight  
They attain cessation and hence are advanced [in wisdom].*

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

*The sixth is called the Approaching, because they are approaching the good qualities of the Buddha's teachings on interdependent origination and all phenomena being like a reflection and so forth. As stated in the sutra, Compendium of all Dharmas, 'When the mind is in meditative equipoise the ultimate will be known just as it is'. On the fifth ground due to completing the perfection of concentration, the perfection of wisdom is also completed and thus through familiarity of the bodhisattvas' unique calm abiding and special insight. They attain cessation and hence are advanced in wisdom. In brief this means that their wisdom is advanced due to having obtained the cessation that enables them to focus directly on emptiness in meditative equipoise.*

Thus as indicated here, the perfection of wisdom is surpassed on this ground.

The next verse explains the maturation of the qualities:

*452. Through the maturation of those [good qualities]  
They become monarchs of the gods [in the land] of Liking Emanation.  
Hearers cannot surpass them.  
They pacify those with the pride of superiority.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates the verse:

*Through the maturation of those good qualities they become monarchs of the gods in the land of Liking Emanation. Hearers cannot surpass them and they pacify those with pride of superiority.*

Basically, as explained here, *they become monarchs of particular gods in the land of Liking Emanation*. Furthermore, the *hearers* and so forth *cannot surpass them* and reaching that state of ground enables them to naturally *pacify those with pride of superiority*.

Now we are up to the seventh ground, which we can leave for our next session.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright  
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<sup>3</sup> See teachings of 23 July 20102 and the supplement to the teaching of 20 July 2002.