

Transcript of the teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on the Six Perfections at Amitabha Buddhist Centre

Lesson 1

7 March 2019

Meditation on Shakyamuni Buddha. Perfection of generosity: Clinging to the object. Opening the heart. The sincere motivation. Need for wisdom. Types of generosity. Practising generosity with the six perfections. (This class was conducted in English by Khen Rinpoche).

MEDITATION ON SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

First, let us do a short meditation for ten minutes.

Try to keep your back straight. Breathe normally and focus your mind on your breath for a few minutes. Breathe in and out. Relax your mind, relax your body and watch your breath. Do this for a few minutes.

Now, set your motivation. "I am going to do this meditation and I am going to listen to this talk to benefit myself and to benefit many sentient beings."

Now, in front of you, about two to three meters away, visualize a beautiful golden throne. On top of the throne, there is a beautiful lotus radiating light. On top of the lotus, visualize a sun disc. Then on top of that, visualize the moon disc. Shakyamuni Buddha is sitting on top of the moon disc. His right hand is in the earth-touching mudra and his left hand is in the meditative posture, holding an alms bowl. You can meditate and visualize that (Shakyamuni Buddha) is made of light.

First mantra recitation

Next, visualize that from Shakyamuni Buddha golden light radiates out and enters into you, purifying all your physical pain, mental suffering and any disturbing thoughts that you may have. These are all totally purified. Your entire body is filled with golden light. With this visualization, recite the Shakyamuni Buddha mantra five times. Chant the mantra and at the same time, do this visualization.

TADYATHA OM MUNE MUNE MAHA MUNEYE SVAHA

Now Shakyamuni Buddha, who was sitting in front of you, comes to the top of your head to face the same direction as you. Shakyamuni Buddha dissolves into light. This light then dissolves into you and blesses your mental continuum.

Second mantra recitation

You can visualize your mind and Shakyamuni Buddha's mind becoming one. Slowly, you yourself become like Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. From your heart, light radiates in all the directions. At the tip of each ray of light, you can visualize Guru Shakyamuni Buddha radiating golden light that enters each and every sentient being, purifying all their physical pain and mental sufferings. They are totally purified. Their bodies are

filled with golden light. Then Guru Shakyamuni Buddha dissolves into light and that light dissolves into each and every sentient being. Then visualize all sentient beings becoming like Shakyamuni Buddha. Visualize that and recite Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra five times.

TADYATHA OM MUNE MUNE MAHA MUNEYE SVAHA

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## PERFECTION OF GENEROSITY

(This series of talks) is about the six perfections. Today I will talk about the first perfection, generosity, for about an hour.

It is important to practise generosity. As children, when we were young, our parents taught us how to be generous. They taught us to share with others or to give (things) to others. From a young age, they try to teach us generosity and how to be a generous person because if we are generous, that means we will feel happier. The whole idea is that.

When you look at young children—those who are one, two or three years old—even those who are one year old, they hold on to their things very tightly and won't let go. Whether they like it or not, they hold very tightly to the object and cannot let go. When they are older, around three or four years old and are able to talk and recognize things, depending on the child, some of them will say, "This is mine!" They hold on to the object so much. Even when their parents ask them to share the object with others, they are not able to share. They will cry instead. It is very interesting!

But some children are not like that. They find it easy to let go. Even at three to four years old, they find it easy to share when their parent ask them to share with others. For some children, it is very easy to let go. They don't feel any difficulty at all. They don't cry when they have to share with others whereas some children will cry when they have to share with others.

You look at these two children. Who is happier? Clearly, you can see that the child who can share with others is generally a happier child.

Children who are not able to share their things with others are unhappy. They cry at the slightest thing. We can see that the parents had tried to teach them since they were young. But for the child, it is not easy letting go. When they grow up to be a teenager, their grasping mind becomes even stronger than before. It is extremely difficult for them to share with others things that belong to them.

### *Clinging to the object*

Most of us are like that. We cling so hard to the object and cannot let it go, thinking, "This is mine!" We hold on to the object so much with such strong attachment to the object. Even if you have enough (for yourself), still you cannot share with others because of holding on to the object too much. It makes your mind very tight. Because

of your clinging to the object, if anything should happen to the object, then you become very miserable. So, it is extremely clear that when you cling too much and when anything happens to the object, you will suffer.

But if you are a person who can let go of the object easily, then when anything happens to the object, I think the pain is less. It is also easy and not difficult for you to share the object with others. Once you are able to share freely with others whatever you have, then your mind is much happier. You can see this for yourself. If you are able to share freely, it will make you happy. So, that makes the difference between being generous and not being generous.

When you are generous, your mind is much more open. When you are not generous, your mind is much more closed. You are very small-minded, thinking only about yourself and not thinking about others. So, when you are generous, that means you are opening your heart and your mind. That means you become a happier person.

#### *Opening the heart*

If you look deeply within, your unhappiness is due to not opening your heart. When your mind is closed and narrow, you only think about yourself. Everything is only about you. You become small-minded and narrow-minded. Then when a small problem arises, you cannot take it. Things become more difficult for you.

Therefore, practising generosity is one way of opening your heart. If you are generous, you share things with others. For example, a person is very thirsty. If you have a cup of water for yourself and you can see that the person needs water, the big question is whether you can share or not. If you are able to share your cup of water—even if it is only half a cup—immediately, you are able to bring temporary happiness to the other person. When you can give the cup of water sincerely to the person who is extremely thirsty, that person receives happiness from you. You reduce his thirst and give him happiness.

When sentient beings need help from us and if we are able to give that help, then the other person receives the benefit. At the same time, we are also able to benefit. Immediately, we feel happy in our own mind.

If you look deeply—drinking the cup of water by yourself or giving or sharing the cup of water with someone who really needs it—which option will bring more happiness to your mind? That is the question.

Generally speaking, if you are a compassionate person with some heart, you will share the cup of water with someone who really needs it more than yourself. You are able to relieve the thirst of the other party. Immediately, you can see that you are able to reduce his or her suffering and you will feel some kind of joy in your heart. Your mind will be extremely joyful. But if you were to just finish drinking the cup of water, comparing these two scenarios, the joy is much less.

That is just a small example. When you share with others or with a sincere heart, you give to others whatever they need, be it material things, clothes, shelter and so forth,

that can really bring happiness for others. Also at the same time, it brings happiness to yourself. So, this is the immediate benefit that you are able to see for yourself.

#### *The sincere motivation*

When you are offering material things or whatever to others, the sincere motivation is also important. If we give something with the hope of receiving something back in return, then that is not really helpful. That is not really perfect generosity.

When you give something to someone, that is still generosity. Even if you are an angry or very unpleasant person, the benefit is still there. When the other person receives your gift, regardless of your state of mind, it doesn't matter. When you give something, the other person receives it. Because of your generosity, in the future, you are able to receive wealth. But the problem arises when you hope to receive something back in return. That is not helpful. Because that is what you are wishing for, when you do not receive it, then your mind will be totally disturbed.

For example, when you give something with the expectation that the person will say, "Thank you," then it is very difficult. Of course if the person says, "Thank you," then that's OK. But if the person doesn't say that because he forgot or he doesn't know how to say it, then your mind is unhappy and totally disturbed. It has nothing to do with your giving. It is due to your expectations. When it doesn't happen, you don't have mental peace. So, that act of giving has somehow disturbed your mind.

When you give sincerely whatever you going to give, once you have given that thing, it doesn't belong to you anymore. That thing now belongs to the other person and it is no longer owned by you. So you cannot order that person to do this or that with it because it doesn't belong to you anymore. It belongs to the other person. However the person wants to use the thing, it is completely up to him or her.

#### *Need for wisdom*

Before giving, you also need to have wisdom. If the person is going to buy a dangerous thing, then it is not worthwhile to give it. So, we must have some wisdom to judge the situation. Once you give with wisdom, then how the person wants to use the object will depend entirely on that person as it belongs to him. The point is that once you have given something away, don't regret it. Sometimes after we give, then we feel, "Oh, I shouldn't have given that away," and regret arises in the mind. That is another difficult part. So, we should have some wisdom when we give. Once the object is given, we shouldn't have regret at the end.

Whatever it is, we should always rejoice. The texts mention *jin pay long choe*, i.e., by being generous, in the future, you will have wealth. No matter how you give, the karmic result is always there. You will receive the result in the future.

#### *Types of generosity*

There are different types of generosity:

- the gift of the teachings
- the gift of fearlessness
- material gifts

- the gift of love

In the lam-rim, there are the first three types. In other texts, there is also the gift of love. So there are these different types of generosity.

~ *Material gifts*

When we say, “material gifts,” there can be many physical things that we can give. But that is not necessarily the case because even if you don’t have anything, you can still practise generosity. Sometimes, when we think of generosity, we think we must have something to give. Otherwise, we cannot practise generosity. “I’m so poor so I cannot practise generosity.” But this is not true. Even if you don’t have anything, you can still practise generosity.

Generosity doesn’t mean only material things. It can be understood to mean, for example, when you see somebody walking on the road, you can give them help by holding their hand in case they need support. That is giving your time and effort to help someone. This can also be generosity.

For example, if people are rushing to enter the gumpa, you can step aside and say, “Please go ahead.” If you are able to give like that, that is also part of generosity. This is the giving of effort. Of course, it is not easy but if you are able to do that, that is part of the practice of generosity. Other examples of how you can practise generosity is giving your time or giving the victory to others.

What do Singaporeans enjoy most? Eating durians? Eating? Shopping? If you enjoy shopping or doing something you like very much, at that time, you can think, “May other sentient beings also have the same enjoyment.” Mentally, you can think in that way. That can be the practice of generosity. Some people enjoy eating delicious food. Sometimes, they make noise while eating. At that time, you can practise by thinking of how much you are enjoying (the food). Some people love to eat. They like food so much. When you enjoy so much, you can think, “May other sentient being also enjoy like me.” This can be the practice of generosity. So, there are many ways to practise generosity. It is not just limited to material things. Most of the time, we think generosity means we must give something. It is not necessarily so as generosity can be practised in many ways.

~ *The gift of teachings*

Another type of generosity is sincerely giving teachings to others. This also includes giving advice or answers or whatever the person needs. Even listening can also be generosity. Give your time and listen patiently to people’s problems. That can also be part of generosity. You are giving your time no matter how busy you are. You make time to listen to other people’s problems. That can be generosity.

~ *The gift of fearlessness*

An example of the gift of fearlessness is protecting animals. For human beings, when people are fighting, you can go and separate them nicely. That can be the gift of fearlessness. Sometimes, you see insects falling into the water bowls. Then you quickly help them to get out of the water. They are so afraid as they cherish their life the most

and are scared of dying. If you help them to be free from that, then that is the gift of fearlessness. Also, we can talk about the bird that is kept in the cage. It feels so much fear. It wants to get out. So, if you can free it from its cage, that can be the gift of fearlessness too. It can also be the practice of generosity.

*~The gift of love*

The gift of love is just wishing, “May this person be happy. May this person have every happiness.” Even a mere wishing thought, the gift of love is all about that. By sincerely thinking, “May this person have the cause of happiness,” that is the gift of love.

If one sincerely gives from the heart the gift of teachings, the gift of fearlessness, material gifts and the gift of love, one will be a very, very happy person, have a happy life, with less problems and have success in life. We can see that. Not only that. Other people will also take care of that person. So, that is the immediate benefit of generosity that you can see for yourself.

I think in one text by Lama Tsongkhapa, he mentioned:

Generosity is like the wish-fulfilling jewel for sentient beings.  
Generosity is the sharp weapon that cuts miserliness

If you are really a generous person who gives time, gives effort, gives advice, gives teachings, gives fearlessness, gives love and material things, then you become the wish-fulfilling jewel for other sentient beings because of your generosity. Whatever they wish for, they receive from you. For human beings and animals, they need material things like clothes, food and shelter. If you can offer these things, that is the only way we can bring happiness to those sentient beings at that level. So, it is very important to practise generosity. If you are able to give like that, then this will cut your miserliness.

The problem is miserliness. If you are so miserly because you cannot let go of the object, clinging on to it as I have mentioned before, immediately, there is no happiness. But how long can you hold on to the object? That is the question because one day, you will have to let it go. That is what Shantideva said. Whatever object you are unable to let go of, one day, it will disappear. Either the object or yourself, one has to disappear sooner or later.

Therefore, why not practise generosity? Make (your life) meaningful and useful as it will disappear sooner or later anyway. Before that happens, why don't you make it meaningful? That means why don't you practise generosity and make it meaningful.

So, the idea is whenever possible, practise charity. It will bring happiness in the future for oneself. For example, one will have all the resources. Buddha mentioned, “All wealth comes from the karma of giving charity. Collect virtuous karma by giving charity that brings wealth. Without that, wealth is not possible.”

It is important to know how to practise generosity. This means letting go of the object and reducing our attachment to it. With less attachment, it becomes easy to let go.

There is less problem and one becomes happier. If you don't know how to let go, then it becomes a huge burden for yourself, especially at the time of death. It becomes extremely difficult because your mind is still clinging to the object and you cannot let it go. This becomes very difficult and challenging at the time of death. We are not free from death. It is extremely challenging at that time when one cannot let go. The death process will be difficult. In this way, it becomes problematic and dangerous as it will not be an easy death. So, that means there will not be a good rebirth. That means it will be difficult to have a higher rebirth if we were to die with so much miserliness. That is what the Buddha said. There are many different stories mentioned by the Buddha of how such people take rebirth when they are so miserly.

I think mainly this is to understand the practice of generosity.

We always dedicate our virtue collected in the past, present and future. Whatever merit we collect—the merit we collected in the past, present and future—we dedicate to others. That is one of the generousities. We always dedicate all the merit to other sentient beings. This is one of the very powerful practices.

Generosity is mainly practised mentally. You can visualize whatever you enjoy and dedicate it to others. Whatever merit you collect, you can dedicate for it to become the cause for other sentient beings to be happy. So, you can dedicate like that. Mentally, you can practise that.

Then slowly, you see some sentient being who needs help. You are able to give that help. Slowly, you start from giving small amounts of things. You practise that. Once you give like that, slowly over time, you will be able to do much more than before.

It is also mentioned that one is wealth, one is virtue and one is your own body. For us, our body and our life are the most precious things to us. We cannot let go of them. We cherish them so much. Compared to our life, it may be easier to let go of our wealth but it is most difficult to let go of our life. Giving charity is impossible for us. There is too much clinging to “me.” It may be easy to let go of “my” possessions but it is much more difficult to let go of “my” body. Because of our extremely strong attachment and clinging to our body, we cannot let go of it.

Starting from your virtue, you mentally dedicate that and then slowly, you start letting go of your possessions. At the deeper level, as mentioned in the lam-rim texts, the bodhisattvas who have achieved the first bhumi (or the first bodhisattva ground) are able to give the bodies away. When they achieve the first bodhisattva ground, they are able to give their bodies without difficulty. It is very easy for them to give their bodies. They feel so much joy just hearing the voice of a beggar asking for things. Even the hearers and arhats who generate great bliss when they are in a deep state do not experience that kind of extreme joy experienced by the bodhisattvas. So, there is no need to mention the amount of joy they experience when they have to give their bodies. Of course, there is even greater joy at that time.

When you achieve the high levels like the bodhisattva first ground, you don't have physical pain even if you had to cut (your body) to give it away. There is no physical

pain and there is also no mental pain. Therefore, it is not difficult for the bodhisattva to do that. Before that level, the ordinary bodhisattvas will still have physical pain but nevertheless, they are joyous and happy to give. This all comes from their practice. The bodhisattvas on the first bhumi practise generosity like that.

What I am saying here is that you should learn how to give your time to others. That is important. Give victory to others. Listening to people's difficulties, give advice and help and support others. All these are part of the practice of generosity.

Also, one of the practices of generosity is offering food to someone. Chandrakirti mentioned in one of his root texts, "When you are always practising giving, it is mentioned that along the way of your practice of giving, you will be able to meet buddhas or bodhisattvas." That is one way you will meet buddhas and bodhisattvas. You make the connection with this particular holy being. This bodhisattva or buddha will teach and guide you. Then slowly you will achieve enlightenment. This is one of the very encouraging advice for doing the practice of generosity. We never know where the buddhas and bodhisattvas are. So in your practice, if you were to give a cup of water sincerely to someone, if that someone is a buddha or bodhisattva, then you will collect so much merit. That is the idea. Then this particular buddha or bodhisattva will teach and guide you and be able to free you from the ocean of samsara sufferings. This is what Chandrakirti mentioned in one of his root texts.

#### *Practising generosity with the other perfections*

When you practise generosity, the six perfections can be practised within one practice of generosity. It is possible to practise all the six perfections at that time.

- For example, when you give or offer something to someone, you have to stop all the wrong motivations for doing so and generate a good motivation. When you stop your wrong motivations or expectations, then this can be the practice of morality (or ethics).
- When you want to give something to someone, sometimes, it is not easy. It can be a very difficult process. Maybe you have to travel a great distance or you may have problems seeing the person and so forth. When you have such hardships, be patient. When you practise generosity with patience, this is very, very helpful in encouraging you to continue your practice of generosity.
- When you give, you should have joy in the mind. That is joyous effort. You don't find it difficult and you have so much joy in giving. When you experience that, then giving will not be difficult. You will feel joyful. So, that can be the perfection of joyous effort while you give.
- Once you give, you can focus on the benefits of the gift. If you know of future lives, such as the happiness of your next life, what are the benefits you will receive? In that way, slowly, you will achieve full enlightenment. By practising generosity, you can achieve the happiness of the next life and happiness from life to life up to enlightenment. So, mainly by practising generosity, you collect so much merit. So, focus on that merit and dedicate single-pointedly. That is concentration.
- When you practise, you look at yourself who is the giver, the object that you want to give and the receiver as interdependent. For example, the three are not truly existent. They are interdependent because there is no (truly existent) receiver and no (truly existent) giver. They are always dependent on each other. There is no true



existence of the giver, the object and the receiver. So, by understanding everything to be like an illusion, that is the understanding of emptiness.

So even with a single practice of generosity, all these six perfections can be combined together like that. So even if you did one action of generosity, it becomes extremely powerful.

Of course, the motivation is important. When you practise generosity with the motivation to achieve liberation, then that becomes the cause for liberation. If you are practising generosity to achieve enlightenment, then that become the cause to achieve enlightenment. So, it all depends on your motivation. How powerful your practise can be also depends on your motivation.

Whatever you can manage to practise—visualizing giving our time or merit or in reality, giving something—then you practise that. If you live your entire life like this, then it becomes part of your life. Then there is no difficulty in giving someone a cup of tea. This is very, very good practice as it goes together. Simply just offering a cup of tea can be a very, very good practice. This is something we can all practise. The idea behind giving is not so much of whether the person needs it or doesn't need it. That is not the point. You collect the merit when you offer a cup of tea. Of course, the person can pay for the cup of tea. That is not a big question. But if you pay, you collect the merit of offering a cup of tea to others. You collect the merit.

This is something that all of us need to learn—helping others and offering to others. This is building the habit. If you are not building the habit, as I mentioned before, some child can give and some child cannot give. This is due to the kind of karma they have in the past. The person who is miserly cannot give even from the time he or she was young until the time of death, holding on so tightly to the object. Some children can give easily. This must be because in the past it was easy for them to let go. Otherwise, there is no reason why some person holds on to the object so much while some other person can let go of it so easily.

I think I have told this story before. Take my mother as an example. In one way, I could say that she is an extremely generous mother. A long time ago, while I was studying in Sera, I didn't have much money to buy things. So, I bought some loose tea and some salt because she lived in the mountains. When I went to visit her, I bought five or six packets of salt and five or six packets of loose tea. My parents lived in the mountains and I went to stay there for one month. I thought maybe those things can last for one year.

My mother lived in the jungle. There is nobody around. It takes at least 45 minutes to walk the distance to visit my mother. But surprisingly, many people come to visit her. As they bring something for her, my mother has to give something back. So whatever I brought, when someone came, she would give away one packet. The next day, when somebody came, she gave another packet and so on till the things were almost finishing.

I told my mother, "I brought these things for you hoping they can last for some time.

But before one month comes, almost everything is finished. You need to keep some for yourself." Then she said, "There are other people who need them more than me." So I had nothing to say. Because of that, I can say that she is very generous. Because of that, everybody likes her so much and praise her a lot. Everybody welcomes her. It is very interesting. Whoever comes to the house, immediately, she would serve them a cup of tea. She will even go without lunch. If she has something to eat, first, she will offer it to others. She is OK even if she doesn't get to eat. She doesn't feel any difficulty, thinking that she must have lunch. I see my own mother's example. She really gives and she doesn't feel any difficulty. There could be many examples like that.

Some people are very wealthy but nobody visits them at all. It is very sad. My parents are not wealthy at all. They are a very poor family and yet there are so many people coming to see them.

So, there is this huge difference. Even if they are so rich but they are alone in the house. Then of course, they will feel miserable when nobody comes. Even when somebody visits, they look down on them and shout at them, asking them why they come. They look down on poor people and they become very unpleasant. Then the poor people will not be happy and they themselves are not happy. That is what I see in life.

As I mentioned before, generosity is about opening your heart to others. If you practise generosity well, then you become a wish-fulfilling jewel for others. That brings happiness for yourself and brings happiness to others. So, you all need to practise, starting from the mental level and then going on to the physical level like giving advice, physically helping others and supporting others materially with whatever you can manage. This is a wonderful way to practise. This way, you will be happier in this life. Of course, you will then be happy from life to life and you will be able to achieve full enlightenment.

## **Q & A**

*Question:* Why is the practice of generosity on the first bodhisattva ground called the unsurpassable practice of generosity?

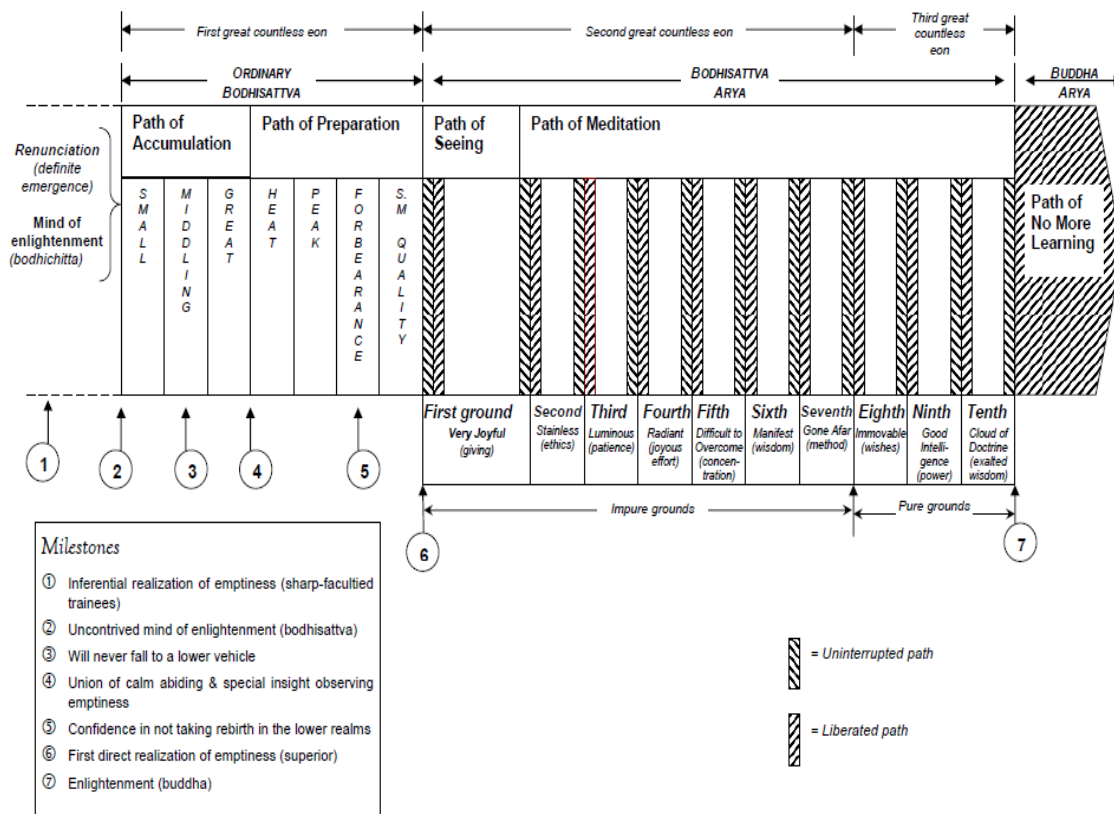
*Answer:* The arya bodhisattvas have ten bhumis. Normally, they are called the six perfections but if you expand them, they become the ten perfections. Each bhumi specializes in one particular perfection. So, the first bhumi specializes in the practice of generosity and at the second bhumi, the bodhisattva becomes more perfect in morality.

At the first bhumi, one is not totally perfect in morality. It is only the perfection of generosity on the first bhumi. Because they have the ultimate bodhicitta mind, they don't have physical and mental pain even if they were to give away their body. Because of having ultimate bodhicitta and being able to see emptiness directly, this becomes the highest unsurpassed generosity. I think that could be the reason.

*Question:* With regard to the four immeasurables, there is the wish for sentient beings to be free from suffering. Would that come under the giving of fearlessness?

Answer: Yes, that comes under the giving of fearlessness. Immeasurable equanimity also comes under the giving of fearlessness. So, in a way, we can subsume immeasurable equanimity and compassion under the gift of fearlessness.

### MAHAYANA GROUNDS AND PATHS



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