

Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on the *Heart Sutra and Stages of the Path* (the Six Perfections)

Root text: *The Heart of Wisdom Sutra* by Shakyamuni Buddha, translation Gelong Thubten Tsultrim (George Churinoff). Extracted from *Essential Buddhist Prayers: An FPMT Prayer Book, Volume 1*. Copyright: FPMT, Inc. 2008.

Lesson 4

4 July 2013

How the five Mahayana paths are condensed in *The Heart of Perfection of Wisdom* mantra. Importance of realising emptiness. Developing heartfelt faith in the Buddha. The four seals and the four tenet systems. Benefits of receiving teachings and reflecting on emptiness.

Question: How do the bodhisattva superiors on the Mahayana path of seeing and the Mahayana path of meditation accumulate merit when they are in post-meditative equipoise?

Answer: There are many ways in which these bodhisattvas go about accumulating the collection of merit. Recall our previous discussion on the qualities these bodhisattva superiors possess. Let us take the example of the bodhisattva superiors on the first ground called “Very Joyful.” These bodhisattvas are able to travel, in an instant, to a hundred buddha pure lands, and also emit a hundred emanations instantly.

The purpose of travelling to the pure lands is to listen to teachings from the buddhas there. They work for the welfare of sentient beings with their hundred emanations.

These are the various ways that they accumulate merit. Of course these bodhisattvas also engage in the practices of the perfections, such as the perfection of generosity, the perfection of ethics, the perfection of patience, the perfection of joyous perseverance and so forth.

It is said that the bodhisattva superiors on the first ground make numberless very strong and powerful aspirational prayers. It is said that these numberless prayers are condensed into the *Prayer of Samantabhadra*, commonly known as the *King of Prayers*. So when we recite and make aspirations using the *King of Prayers*, it is very powerful, precisely because this prayer contains the essence of all the numberless prayers made by the bodhisattvas.

If you were to condense the *King of Prayers* further, you have the two verses that we recite when we make dedications, i.e., the verse that starts, “Just as the brave Manjushri and Samantabhadra too,/Realise things as they are ...”

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I have given you a rough explanation of the Mahayana paths and grounds over the last three lessons.

Most of you are aware that in *The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, there is the mantra, TADYATHA GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA. Because now you have some idea of the Mahayana paths and grounds, we can look at how the five Mahayana paths are explained in and condensed in this mantra.

### **PATH OF ACCUMULATION AND PATH OF PREPARATION**

In the mantra, TADYATHA GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA, there are two *gates*. *Gate* means “go” so the two *gates* mean “go and go”:

- The first *gate* means to go to the path of accumulation.
- The second *gate* means to go to the path of preparation.

So the first two *gates* collectively mean that one has to enter and train in the path of accumulation and the path of preparation.

When you already have some idea of what is entailed in the path of accumulation and the path of preparation, does it not make more sense when I say that these two *gates* mean to train in the path of accumulation and the path of preparation? In order to fully appreciate these first two *gates*, you have to have some idea of exactly what happens on the path of accumulation, what qualities are acquired and so forth. Similarly when you are told that you should go to the path of preparation, it will not make any sense unless you have some idea of what a path of preparation involves, what kind of training is required, what qualities are attained and so forth.

In one of the previous lessons, I had explained briefly how and when the transition from the path of accumulation to the path of preparation is made. What is the boundary between these two paths? Generally speaking, one has to attain the special concentration that is a union of calm abiding and special insight but this is not enough. Just achieving such a special concentration does not necessarily mean that one is on the path of preparation. However when one generates a special concentration that is a union of calm abiding and special insight focussing on emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality, that is when the bodhisattva makes the transition from the path of accumulation to the path of preparation. It is very specific.

You may remember that the Mahayana path of accumulation is divided into three:

1. the Mahayana small path of accumulation
2. the Mahayana medium path of accumulation
3. the Mahayana great path of accumulation

The bodhisattvas engage in learning, hearing and reflection and work very hard at their practice. What is their main goal when they are on the Mahayana small and medium paths of accumulation? At this time, the bodhisattvas are using every available means to generate the wisdom realising emptiness. When the bodhisattvas are on the Mahayana great path of accumulation, they have already realised emptiness and they achieve the meditative serenity or calm abiding focussing on emptiness. When they achieve the concentration that is a union of calm abiding and special insight focussing on emptiness, these bodhisattvas make the transition from the Mahayana great path of accumulation to the Mahayana path of preparation.

What enables the bodhisattvas on the Mahayana great path of accumulation to make the transition to the Mahayana path of preparation? It is not bodhicitta but their wisdom realising emptiness. It is the gradual strengthening of their wisdom realising emptiness, in terms of its depth, profundity and clarity, i.e., the improvement in the quality of the mind. As the quality of their wisdom realising emptiness increases, this is how they move from one milestone to the next.

In essence this is what the bodhisattvas do on the Mahayana path of accumulation and the Mahayana path of preparation. There is the practice of the six perfections but essentially they are developing their understanding and realisation of emptiness. It is the strengthening of that wisdom realising emptiness that enables them to move higher and higher up on the path.

As I mentioned before, when the bodhisattvas on the Mahayana path of preparation are able to start doing something about their apprehension of true existence, they are able to start harming their ignorance. The bodhisattvas on the Mahayana path of preparation acquire the ability to harm their manifest conception of true existence.

The great Lama Tsongkhapa said in his *Three Principles of the Path* that, “Without the wisdom realising ultimate reality,/Even though you have generated renunciation and the mind of enlightenment/ You cannot cut the root cause of circling.” Lama Tsongkhapa said that even if you have bodhicitta but you do not possess the wisdom realising emptiness, you cannot start to damage your ignorance, the root cause of samsara. Therefore the wisdom realising emptiness is of utmost importance as this wisdom is the only antidote to the afflictions.

There are five different Mahayana paths. Why are there these different paths? In a way these different paths highlight the positive development of the wisdom realising emptiness, the progress of that particular mind as it improves in quality and strength and so forth. Therefore there are these different paths.

The purpose of trying to actualise and travel to the end of these paths is to destroy the afflictions in our minds. In order to do that, we must have an antidote that is powerful enough to overcome and destroy the afflictions. The only antidote that can cut and destroy ignorance is the wisdom realising emptiness.

## **PATH OF SEEING**

Going back to the mantra, after *gate gate* is *paragate*. *Para* means the other side and refers here to the path of seeing. So *paragate* means to go over to the path of seeing.

The bodhisattvas on the Mahayana path of accumulation and the Mahayana path of preparation are bodhisattvas but they are ordinary bodhisattvas. They are still ordinary beings. Once the bodhisattvas enter the path of seeing, henceforth they are superiors so *paragate* is the demarcation between an ordinary being and a superior. There is a huge difference between being an ordinary being and a superior. Here an ordinary being is crossing over, going beyond the realm of an ordinary being and becoming superiors. You could say it is the demarcation between the transcendental and the worldly.

On the four stages of the Mahayana path of preparation, the ordinary bodhisattvas meditate on emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality, in order to overcome the manifest conception of true existence. They overcome the manifest conception of true existence with their wisdom realising emptiness but their wisdoms are still conceptual consciousnesses, i.e., they realise emptiness only via the meaning generality of emptiness.

As the bodhisattvas progress on the Mahayana path of preparation, the object of emptiness becomes clearer and clearer. When a bodhisattva gains a clear appearance of emptiness, i.e. when he perceives the object, emptiness, directly for the first time without the need for a mental image of emptiness, that bodhisattva enters the Mahayana path of seeing.

This is how the bodhisattvas make the transition from the Mahayana path of preparation to the Mahayana path of seeing. This transition is again made based on the development of their wisdom realising emptiness. The transition is not made based on the strength of their bodhicitta. In this case the mind realising emptiness transforms from a conceptual realisation of emptiness into a direct perception of emptiness. It is only at this point in time that the bodhisattvas acquire, for the very first time in their entire existence, an actual antidote that is strong enough to directly counteract the afflictions.

What are the abandonments of this wisdom directly perceiving emptiness? In the last lesson, you will remember that we talked a little about the Mahayana path of seeing abandonments and the Mahayana path of meditation abandonments. Of the two, it is the Mahayana path of seeing abandonments that are destroyed first. When the bodhisattvas realise emptiness directly for the first time, their wisdom directly perceiving emptiness act as the actual antidote to the Mahayana path of seeing abandonments.

What are the Mahayana *path of seeing* abandonments? They are the intellectually acquired afflictions together with their seeds. These are destroyed or abandoned by the uninterrupted path of the Mahayana path of seeing. Although at this time the intellectually acquired afflictions, together with their seeds, are destroyed by the uninterrupted path of the Mahayana path of seeing, these intellectually acquired afflictions are not the root of samsara.

The root of samsara is the innate afflictions. From our previous studies, we know that the root of samsara consists of both the apprehension of the self of persons and the apprehension of the self of phenomena. Whether it is an apprehension of a self of persons or an apprehension of the self of phenomena, it is the innate form of these two apprehensions that constitute the root of samsara.

The uninterrupted path of Mahayana path of seeing destroys the intellectually acquired afflictions. Only after that does the work of destroying the innate afflictions start. It is the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness that is the direct antidote to both the intellectually acquired afflictions and the innate afflictions. It is the same wisdom. In terms of the object that is realised by this wisdom, it is the same object. It is not as if the wisdom realising emptiness that acts as an antidote to the innate afflictions will

entail a higher realisation of emptiness. It is not like that. The object, emptiness, that is realised by this wisdom is the same.

But there is a difference in terms of the collection of merit that accompanies this wisdom. Commensurate with the strength of the accumulation of merit that accompanies this wisdom, this wisdom would be stronger. It realises the same object, emptiness, but in terms of its strength, it is stronger.

After abandoning the intellectually acquired afflictions, the bodhisattva accumulates merit again. When the bodhisattva's accumulation of merit is powerful enough to enable his wisdom directly perceiving emptiness to act as a direct antidote to the innate afflictions, the bodhisattva achieves the first ground uninterrupted path of the path of meditation that is the direct antidote to the first level of the innate afflictions.

How is the transition made from the path of seeing to the path of meditation? The transition is made when the bodhisattva's wisdom directly perceiving emptiness becomes powerful enough to act as the direct antidote to the innate afflictions.

### **PATH OF MEDITATION**

Next is *parasamgate*. *Sam* means perfectly or thoroughly, i.e., *parasamgate* means to thoroughly or perfectly go beyond. *Parasamgate* shows the path of meditation. It is saying, "From the path of seeing, go over to the path of meditation."

From *paragate*, one makes the transition to *parasamgate*, i.e., it means crossing over from the path of seeing to the path of meditation. What does this show? This shows that the bodhisattvas have to move on. They have already realised emptiness, i.e. the truth, directly. One could say that there is nothing else to realise again as they have realised emptiness directly already, but the bodhisattvas do not just stop there. The bodhisattvas are asked to move on to the path of meditation.

What happens on the path of meditation? As the name *path of meditation* suggests, they are meditating on the emptiness that they have already ascertained. "To meditate" in Tibetan has the connotation of familiarising the mind with an object. So the bodhisattvas on the path of meditation are familiarising their minds with what they have ascertained already.

Based on the chart of the paths and grounds,<sup>1</sup> how many uninterrupted paths are there? On the Mahayana path of meditation, there are ten uninterrupted paths and each of these ten uninterrupted paths are meditations on emptiness.

After abandoning the intellectually acquired afflictions, the bodhisattvas again meditate on emptiness. They familiarise themselves with what they have realised already in order to counteract and destroy the innate afflictions. They destroy the innate afflictions with their meditation on emptiness, i.e., their direct perception of

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to chart on *The Five Mahayana Paths* that can be downloaded from <http://www.fpmtabc.org/download/teaching/geshe-chonyi/bp/heartsutra/Handout/>.

emptiness. As shown in the chart, there are many uninterrupted paths. All the uninterrupted paths up to the end of the seventh ground are uninterrupted paths of the path of meditation on emptiness. These meditations of emptiness are done in order to destroy the innate afflictions.

When the innate afflictions together with their seeds are destroyed, the bodhisattvas simultaneously achieve the eighth ground. Once they enter the eighth ground, the bodhisattvas have no more afflictions as the seeds of the afflictions have also been destroyed. But there are still some obscurations left over that must be removed. These are the knowledge obscurations that prevent them from being omniscient.

On the eighth, ninth and tenth grounds, they continue their meditation and familiarisation with emptiness in order to destroy the knowledge obscurations.

So you can see that there is much to do on the path of meditation whereas the Mahayana path of seeing is relatively short.

*Khen Rinpoche: Look at the chart. You can see that the path of seeing is very short. The Mahayana path of meditation has so many (uninterrupted paths).*

The chart is a representation of what happens on the path. Based on the chart, can you see that it is implying that the innate afflictions are much more difficult to overcome than the intellectually acquired afflictions? The intellectually acquired afflictions are abandoned by just one uninterrupted path on the Mahayana path of seeing. One uninterrupted path does the job in one go; the entire collection of intellectually acquired afflictions together with its seeds are destroyed in one go. There is also only one path of release.

As discussed before, the innate afflictions are divided into nine levels. Then there are the knowledge obscurations that are divided into three levels. In order to overcome the afflictive obscurations and their seeds, so many uninterrupted paths are needed, all the way up to the end of the seventh ground. So many uninterrupted paths are needed to destroy just the innate afflictions together with the seeds. After that, another three uninterrupted paths are needed in order to overcome the imprints of these afflictions.

### **PATH OF NO MORE LEARNING**

*Bodhi* means enlightenment. *Svaha* in general means to establish or literally, to plant the base. Here it means to achieve enlightenment. *Bodhi* here shows the Mahayana path of no more learning.

This mantra TADYATHA GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA is like a very short or condensed version of *The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*

| TADYATHA GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA |                       |                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| GATE GATE                                           | <i>Gate</i> means go. | 1 <sup>st</sup> <i>gate</i> : To go on the Mahayana path of accumulation.<br>2 <sup>nd</sup> <i>gate</i> : To go on the Mahayana path of preparation. |

| TADYATHA GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA |                                                                                                 |                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PARAGATE                                            | <i>Para</i> means the other side.<br><i>Paragate</i> means to go to the other side.             | To go on the Mahayana path of seeing.                                                                     |
| PARASAMGATE                                         | <i>Sam</i> means perfectly or thoroughly so<br><i>parasamgate</i> means to go perfectly beyond. | Go perfectly to the other shore, the Mahayana path of meditation.                                         |
| BODHI                                               | Enlightenment.                                                                                  | Go perfectly to the Mahayana path of no more learning, i.e., be firmly established in full enlightenment. |
| SVAHA                                               | To establish or literally to plant the base.                                                    |                                                                                                           |

Sometimes when we perform certain rituals and there is the need to recite *The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, when there is a lack of time, it is said that just reciting the mantra is sufficient. When you think about the meaning of the mantra and when you have an idea of the paths and grounds, although the mantra itself is very short, the meaning encompassed by this mantra is great. There are so many things that one can think about when reciting the mantra.

### IMPORTANCE OF REALISING EMPTINESS

For whom is this presentation of the mode of progress through the various paths and grounds intended? It is spoken or intended for those who are desiring liberation.

*Khen Rinpoche: This means it is not for us. I am joking.*

The presentation of the paths and grounds are meant for those who have a heartfelt desire for liberation and real happiness. For such individuals, an understanding of the paths and grounds is essential and indispensable.

We mentioned before that the Buddhadharmas are twofold:

1. scriptural Dharma
2. realisational Dharma

Realisational Dharma is the key because, within the realisational Dharma, there are so many practices and realisations that one can perform and achieve. The most important of these is understanding the view of reality, i.e., the realisation of emptiness, especially for someone who is wholeheartedly seeking permanent peace and happiness, i.e., liberation. Understanding the ultimate nature of reality, the realisation of emptiness, is indispensable for such a person. When you think about it, the teachings on emptiness, especially the view of emptiness, are the heart essence of the entire teachings of the Buddha. The view of emptiness is the heart of the entire Buddhadharmas.

In order to truly understand and fully appreciate this from the heart, you have to know how important the view of emptiness is. We have been talking about the paths and grounds and how an individual moves from one milestone to the next on the way to enlightenment. The whole purpose of practising and traversing the paths is to counteract and destroy the cause of suffering, the afflictions or destructive emotions.

When you look at the different milestones, when do the transitions occur? The transitions happen when the realisation of the ultimate nature of reality develops

and progresses. That is how the transition is made. From this you can see the importance of the view of emptiness. It is indispensable for, without it, there is nothing we can do to counteract our afflictions. Therefore it is said in many of the great treatises, for the reasons that I had stated, the correct view of the ultimate nature of reality, emptiness, is the very heart or the essence of the entire Buddhadharma.

From your own side, it is important that you gain an understanding and the conviction in your heart of how important it is to have the correct view of emptiness and how holy and precious such a view is. It is also important that you gain the conviction and desire in your heart to want to understand and actualise this view.

In order to actualise this realisation Dharma, the correct view of reality that is the heart essence of the entire Buddhadharma, you have to depend on the Great Treatises, the valid texts that show you how to develop the view. So you have to depend on the scriptural Dharma. In order to realise the realisation Dharma, you have to depend on the scriptural Dharma. Among the many categories of scriptural Dharma, those great treatises and texts that show the unmistakable meaning of emptiness are the best of all scriptural Dharma.

Based on your personal learning and reflection, when you come to understand for yourself how your afflictions are the main cause of all your misery, among all the afflictions, you will see that it is the ego-grasping—the incorrect sense of the “I”—that is the source of all your afflictions. All your suffering and problems come from that.

### **DEVELOPING HEARTFELT FAITH IN THE BUDDHA**

Seeing how that is the case, then you will see how the understanding of dependent origination (or dependent arising) will enable you to destroy the root of all your past, present and future misery. When you connect these two points, then definitely you will gain a very different kind of appreciation for the Teacher, the Founder. In this case, it was Buddha Shakyamuni who taught the view of dependent origination. You will be able to see for yourself how your object of refuge, in this case, the Buddha, is so different and in a class of his own. You can see this for yourself. Then you develop a heartfelt faith in and appreciation for the Buddha.

From the discussion so far, you can see that it is not easy to develop the personal conviction in your own object of refuge. We are Buddhists and we consider the Buddha to be our object of refuge. But to be able to generate this personal conviction that the Buddha is in a class of his own, you really have to develop the conviction in his teachings, especially in all the topics that we have talked about—the afflictions and especially our ego-grasping is the root of all our problems and how only his teachings on dependent origination can destroy the root of all our suffering. Only when you see that will you start to have an appreciation of how great the Buddha is. Otherwise it is difficult.

For many people, when they think of the Buddha, they think that he does not have much power. In the traditional Indian context, people think that he is not as powerful



as Brahma and Shiva. In our own context, we like to pray to the worldly gods, thinking they are more powerful.

This is a sign of our lack of understanding. You have to think clearly when you compare the Buddha to other objects of refuge to whom you turn to solve your problems. There are two ways of solving a problem:

1. getting to the root of the problem and eliminating it once and for all
2. simply addressing the symptoms without addressing the root cause of the problem.

By relying on worldly gods, they may help you temporarily but they cannot solve the problem. Therefore we have to discover for ourselves how our ignorance is the root of all our problems and how it is only the teachings of the Buddha on the ultimate nature of reality, emptiness—especially his teachings on dependent origination—that are the only antidotes to destroy the root of our suffering. When we see this and put these two together, we will begin to realise that the Buddha is extremely precious and special and that he is completely in a class of his own. Only then will we have a deep appreciation and a very different kind of faith and trust in the Buddha.

Therefore in order to develop this conviction and faith, it is very important to educate ourselves, to learn. This is one of the reasons why I always encourage and try to persuade all of you to study and learn. This is the point. You really have to learn.

We must have faith in a particular object or goal before we can aspire to achieve it. It is only with a strong aspiration to reach that goal will that translate into effort. When we put in the effort, we will achieve our goal. Sustained effort can only come from a stable aspiration. Stable aspiration cannot arise without stable faith.

There are many different kinds of faith. The faith that we are talking about here is the faith that arises from understanding. Now do you see the point? In order to have this kind of faith, we have to investigate, study and learn. What you are doing here now is the supporting condition for you to move towards generating the real faith that will then help you to stabilise your aspiration. This in turn will translate into stable effort, its result.

We are very fortunate indeed to even have this opportunity to hear and to reflect on the teachings of the Buddha. Even if we do not achieve any realisations, just having an opportunity to learn and to have some understanding of these teachings is our great good fortune.

There will come a day when we will be able to develop real faith and trust in the Buddha, a trust that comes from understanding his teachings. This is one of the ways that we make our human existence meaningful. Therefore we should try to make sure that whatever we do here—educating ourselves through learning and through reflection—becomes the supporting cause for us to move closer and closer towards generating this stable and unshakeable faith and conviction.

Many past great masters had said that, of all the Dharma understandings that an individual can achieve, the highest understanding is the understanding of dependent

origination. The heart of all the realisational Dharma is the mind realising emptiness. The best of the scriptural Dharma is the great treatises and the teachings that show the meaning of dependent origination that point to emptiness. Based on these scriptural Dharma, when we gain the correct understanding of emptiness, our understanding will be the highest Dharma knowledge that we can achieve.

If you remember our past discussions on the four Buddhist tenets, all four Buddhist tenets are equivocal in saying that permanent peace and happiness, i.e., liberation from samsara, can only be attained when an individual realises selflessness. The four Buddhist tenets differ as to what constitutes the view of emptiness but they all agree that, without realising selflessness, it is not possible to progress on the path to liberation. In fact, the modes of progress on the path to liberation primarily express the realisation of selflessness.

### THE FOUR SEALS

All four Buddhist tenets accept the four seals that attest to a particular doctrine being the teachings of the Buddha. The four seals are:

1. All compounded phenomena are impermanent.
2. All contaminated phenomena are miserable (or in the nature of suffering).
3. All phenomena are empty and selfless.
4. Nirvana is peace.

When you look at the four seals, the third seal, “All phenomena are empty and selfless,” is extremely important because it is only on the basis of the third seal that you can have the fourth seal, “Nirvana is peace.”

How is peace achieved? Is peace possible? How is nirvana achieved? Is nirvana possible? The explanation of all of this is based on the understanding of the third seal, how all phenomena are empty and selfless.

We can relate the four seals to the four noble truths in this way:

| FOUR SEALS                                | FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| All compounded phenomena are impermanent. | True origins.     |
| All contaminated phenomena are miserable. | True suffering.   |
| All phenomena are empty and selfless.     | True paths.       |
| Nirvana is peace.                         | True cessations.  |

Without the understanding of how all phenomena are selfless, i.e., lacking a self, we are not going to have the nirvana that is peace. Therefore the realisation of selflessness is indispensable in achieving nirvana, liberation and enlightenment. Therefore all the four Buddhist tenets assert these four seals.

### THE FOUR TENET SYSTEMS

This means that all four Buddhist tenets assert all phenomena are empty and selfless. Having said that, all four Buddhist tenets have different opinions as to what that means. They all have different explanation of what exactly selflessness is, as you saw

in the previous module on tenets.

The explanation of emptiness by the CMWS is the most correct, most profound and the one that accords with reality. According to them, all phenomena are empty of existing inherently.

Having said that, it is quite natural that some people may ask, “Why do I have to study all this? Just tell me the essence of the view of the CMWS. Why give me so much information?”

Why are there these different presentations on selflessness? This is because there are differing views as to what constitutes the root of samsara. All the tenets agree that the grasping of the self is the root of samsara but there are different opinions as to what grasping at the self means. In short, there are four different views as to what constitutes the root of samsara. So when the four tenets propose a solution for this, there will be not just one solution but there will be four different solutions. This is the reason why there are four different presentations of what selflessness means.

The explanation of the CMWS of the root of samsara is the subtlest, clearest and most profound. Since their presentation of the root of our problems is so precise, so profound yet so subtle, they offer the best presentation on selflessness. Since they have identified the problem correctly, obviously the solution they propose on the view of selflessness is also the subtlest, most profound, most correct and most refined.

### **BENEFIT OF RECEIVING TEACHINGS AND REFLECTING ON EMPTINESS**

The teachings mention the great benefit of hearing the teachings on emptiness and reflecting on emptiness. *The Three Hundred Verses of the Perfection of Wisdom* gives an example of someone who makes offerings of the seven kinds of precious jewels. How extensive are these offerings? The seven precious jewels are enough to fill not only this universe, this galaxy but all of space. There is no need to talk about the amount of merit that one can accumulate from filling the entire existence with the seven kinds of precious jewels and then offering that to all the buddhas. But when this merit is compared to the merit of someone who takes a four-line verse from the sutra teachings on emptiness and teaches it to others, the merit of doing this is far greater compared to the earlier example.

In general, it is good and useful to remember the benefits of doing a particular thing. It motivates you. Based on this quotation, you can have some understanding of the merit that you accumulate simply by learning about emptiness and thinking about emptiness. It is far greater than filling up the entire world system with precious jewels.

You have to remember this. There will be students who, in the course of their studies, become bored and think, “What is the point of learning all this? Why am I doing this? Won't it be better if I do a hundred thousand prostrations or a hundred thousand mandala offerings to accumulate merit?”

However when you think about this particular quotation, there is no comparison with regard to the amount of merit you can accumulate. The Buddha does not lie. This is why when you ascertain for yourself the benefits and the merit that comes from learning and reflecting on selflessness then of course you will find your efforts at learning about and reflecting on emptiness to be worthwhile. You will realise that you are extremely lucky and fortunate. Then you will be able to rejoice.

When you have an overview of the importance of understanding and realising emptiness based on our earlier discussions—how the root of all our problems is ignorance and how the only antidote that can destroy ignorance is the mind realising emptiness that has to come from understanding dependent origination—then you will be able to appreciate the benefit that is mentioned in this sutra.

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