

The Lecture Notes of Chapter One of the Vimalakirti Sutra

by Khenpo Sodargye's translation team

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Lecture 1

A Few Words before the Teaching

a. Taking Notes

Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche encourages students to take notes during the teaching. In fact, memorizing the teachings by heart would be best, especially if you can memorize the content as well as the meaning, but taking notes is encouraged. Some say that writing directly on a sutra is not respectful, but many Tibetan Buddhism masters took notes directly onto their texts. In fact, annotating in a respectful manner, on the margins of the sutra, is fairly useful. It can help with comparing content and meaning in a clear and more helpful way.

b. Time and Schedule

Khenpo urges us to be punctual and to attach great importance to attending his live teachings. When it comes to catching a train, an airplane, or attending a meeting, most people would be very prompt. So why is it that some people only turn up halfway through a Dharma class? Therefore, in your mind you should attach great importance to the Dharma classes, and add them to your schedule. This way you can gain the greatest benefits.

c. Suggestions to the Western Students

Khenpo is aware that people from other parts of the world want to study this sutra. Therefore English and Japanese simultaneous interpretations are offered to help them. Although the number is rather small compared to the Chinese audience, it is still meaningful to provide such an opportunity for them to follow the teaching. As Khenpo said, “On the one hand, it is an auspicious start; on the other hand, even if there are just a few people who are able to follow the teachings, it is my great pleasure to help them understand and further realize this profound wisdom which originated from the ancient East.”

Khenpo particularly reminds the western audience that the Vimalakirti Sutra carries the profound Buddhist philosophy from the ancient East. Thus some of the messages in the teachings could sound abruptly shocking to westerners, especially in the 21st century. For example, the teachings in Buddhism are quite different to the commonly held beliefs of individualism that pervade in the West. Therefore, Khenpo suggests that the audience keep an

open heart and an open mind while studying this sutra, so as to take the ancient teaching into their hearts and to reflect deeply on it. This is how Buddhist philosophy can benefit students, no matter what their ethnic, cultural background or language. Otherwise, if one only holds a critical mind from the perspective of western thought and fails to accept the teaching in an inclusive manner, no matter whether one is a scholar or a practitioner, then the study of the sutra may not necessarily bring one great benefits.

Actually, this suggestion is not just for westerners. Different beings have different mindsets, preferences, propensities and capacities. So their interest and their focus on the *Vimalakirti Sutra* could also be different. But all in all, an open and inclusive mind is crucial during the learning process.

Which Version Are We Going to Use

There are currently various translations of this sutra in English, French, Russian, German, Hungarian, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, and Manchurian. Although lost for centuries, in 1999, a version in the original Sanskrit was recovered amongst the Chinese government's Potala collection in Tibet.

The Tibetan translation has two known versions, one of which is found in the Kangyur Canon, translated from original Sanskrit around the early 8th or 9th century, and the other being the Tun-Huang version found in the early 20th century.

Historically speaking, Han Chinese had extraordinary faith in the Vimalakirti Sutra, and because it was highly emphasized in Han Buddhism, the Vimalakirti Sutra has been translated from the original version seven times throughout history, the first being produced in 188 CE by the Kuṣāṇa monk Lokakṣema. Today, only three versions are still in existence:

- Fóshuō Wéimójié Jīng (佛說維摩詰經) – translated by Zhi Qian in 223-228 CE
- Wéimójié Suǒshuō Jīng (維摩詰所說經) – translated by Kumārajīva in 406 CE
- Shuō Wúgòuchēng Jīng (說無垢稱經) – translated by Xuanzang in 650 CE

Earlier translations have been done by Lokakṣema (188 CE), Dharmarakṣa (308 CE), Upaśūnya (545 CE), and Jñānagupta (591 CE). Of the three remaining renditions, Kumarajīva's has traditionally been the most popular.

In the English language, there have been more than four versions translated. Some were translated from the Chinese version by Kumarajiva, and others were translated from the Tibetan version in the Kangyur Canon. Most Japanese versions are based on Kumarajiva's version.

This time Khenpo Sodargye will give the oral transmission of the *Vimalakirti Sutra* by reading its Tibetan version from the Kangyur Canon. And since he teaches in Chinese, Kumarajiva's translation is chosen as the main text for Chinese students. For English speakers, John McRae's translation from Kumarajiva's version is recommended.

When comparing the Chinese and Tibetan versions, Khenpo found that Xuanzang's translation is much closer to the Tibetan version. Nevertheless, Khenpo still decided to use Kumarajiva's translation to give the teaching. The reasons are twofold. Firstly, Kumarajiva's version is full of incredible blessings. Of course it does not mean that Xuanzang's version does not have blessings, but Khenpo himself feels a strong connection to Kumarajiva's version. Secondly, Kumarajiva's translations such as the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Lotus Sutra*, as well as the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, have all gained extreme popularity with Han Chinese throughout history. Both ordained and lay practitioners have great faith in his translations.

What Benefits Will the Teaching Bring to You?

More than 1,500 years after Kumarajiva translated the *Vimalakirti Sutra* into Chinese, the sutra had a great impact on various aspects of Han Chinese culture and art including sculpture, painting, drama, and so on. Knowing that it has greatly impacted people's lives, we should spend time to get to know the profound meanings behind this sutra.

Unlike the *Diamond Sutra* or *Condensed Prajnaparamita*, which contains lots of profound philosophies that might appear abstract to people without much Buddhist theoretical background, or the *Sutra of one Hundred Karmas* and the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*, which mainly focus on interesting stories but lack theories and logic, the *Vimalakirti Sutra* is a combination of both vivid stories and profound theoretical teachings that can counteract mental afflictions in our mind. If one can understand this sutra in great detail, one will definitely gain much benefit for taming the mind.

Back on May 9, 2017, Khenpo Sodargye announced that if the circumstances were favorable, he would like to give teachings on the *Vimalakirti Sutra* in the following year, because he

believes that in this day and age this sutra can greatly benefit modern people in the following four ways:

- a) To lay practitioners, the *Vimalakirti Sutra* provides instructions for transforming pain and afflictions on the spiritual path. In this modern age, more than 90% of Buddhists or lovers of Buddhism are lay people. This sutra specifically talks about being a lay practitioner, how to tame one's mind and cope with one's mental afflictions, and furthermore, how to achieve enlightenment.
- b) The *Vimalakirti Sutra* is a rare sutra which combines the profound teachings in both Sutrayana and Tantrayana. It is indeed a sutra that contains pinnacle teachings according to Tantrayana, some of which are very similar to the pointing-out instructions in Dzogchen, such as "if your mind is pure, the land is pure" and "affliction is bodhi". Moreover, unlike any Tantrayana teachings, the study of this sutra does not require the completion of five hundred thousand preliminary practices, nor a specific empowerment from a certain guru, which makes it accessible to an even larger audience.
- c) The *Vimalakirti Sutra* is a great pith-instruction book which demonstrates super power as a direct antidote to mental afflictions. This is especially needed in the modern society, where people have many mental afflictions deriving from desire, technology, chores, and so on. The wisdom and instructions in this sutra can be of great benefit to modern people's life, work, and spiritual practice.
- d) During the teaching, Khenpo Sodargye offers you the precious and pure oral transmission of this sutra. In Buddhism, both in Sutrayana and Tantrayana, oral transmission is always emphasized. Without the oral transmission of a text, one is not allowed to teach it to others. But once you receive the oral transmission of this sutra, you are able to pass it on to those who are interested, hence making sure that this sutra can be taught widely in the future. Khenpo believes that given its powerful blessings and unique pith instructions, no matter which perspective, theoretical studies or personal practice one has, the teaching and the study of this sutra will greatly benefit numerous beings.

Before starting the teaching Khenpo made a prayer to all buddhas, bodhisattvas, and lineage masters as well as Dharma protectors and Devas who protects the Dharma, to grant blessings and to ensure that the teaching will be thoroughly transmitted and taught, and that everyone attending this course will successfully complete the teaching as well as receive the entire transmission.

Khenpo also prayed to all buddhas and bodhisattvas to grant blessings to every student, so that not only can everyone understand the theoretical teachings in this sutra, but also achieve certain level of realization of its profound meaning and be able to truly transform afflictions into wisdom.

Nowadays practitioners need bigger hearts and deeper wisdom, and this sutra exactly provides efficient instructions on how to accomplish that aim. Most of our afflictions arise due to a narrow and clinging mind; when the mind is in a clinging, anxious or depressing state, it becomes fragile. Some practitioners are too “tight”, causing their practice and even their interpersonal relations to deteriorate. The fundamental reason behind this is a lack of deepening of study and practice. Therefore, Khenpo sincerely hopes that this sutra can bring practical and genuine benefits to everyone.

Khenpo’s Expectations for Those Who Follow the Teaching

Usually every Monday and Tuesday class begins at 7:30pm, and lasts for two hours, including the chanting before and after class. Khenpo Sodargye strongly encourages the audience to remain for the whole class for the two hours. As tens of thousands of practitioners will be chanting the prayers and making aspirations all together, those who understand the law of causality can imagine how immeasurable is the merit generated by such collective group practice.

In 1987 when His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was still alive, there was no internet at Larung Gar and only around 1,000 people were present during his teachings. Yet, His Holiness cherished group chanting a lot, saying that if all the audience chants the *King of Aspiration Prayers* together once, everyone is able to accumulate a thousand times the merit. Later, in 1996, when His Holiness composed the *Song of Victory*, there were around 5,000 to 6,000 monastic students. So His Holiness said, “Even if you don’t understand my teaching, just by chanting the *King of Aspiration Prayers* together with the whole sangha, you are able to accumulate immeasurable merit.”

Due to the influence of His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, as well as to his strong faith in Mahayana teaching, Khenpo Sodargye places great importance on chanting. Consequently, he encourages everyone to complete the chanting before and after class.

For those who don't have time to participate in the chanting, receiving the full live teaching, which takes about one hour, is highly encouraged. The formal teaching starts at 8pm, and is the most "juicy" part of the meal so to speak. As Khenpo pointed out, westerners and urban audiences who may not be interested in chanting or who do not have enough time should at least try their best to attend his live teaching.

Again for those who are very busy with other commitments, you should at least receive the oral transmission offered during the live streaming. The transmission only takes about ten to fifteen minutes. After the chanting, at 8pm, Khenpo will begin by giving the oral transmission in Tibetan. If you want to get the transmission, you must attend the live streaming. Later on, you may find your own time to receive the oral teaching by following the video recording, which will be available on Khenpo's Facebook page.

No matter if you watch the teaching live or via delayed recording, Khenpo wishes that those who decide to join the class and follow the study of this sutra, should persevere from the beginning to the end, to start well and end well. These are the expectations that Khenpo has toward all the students.

Lecture 2

What You Need to Do Before and After the Teaching

a. A Proper Attitude for Receiving the Teaching

Khenpo Sodargye and his team put a lot of effort into the preparation of this course on the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. Since the announcement was made last year, many people were interested and registered for this course. Given that tens of thousands of people from all over the world show interest in studying this sutra, Khenpo pointed out that the Dharma is not drama. In fact, while you may feel an immediate impact when watching a play, Dharma teaching doesn't promise you the same immediate thrill. In order to enjoy the delicacy of the Dharma, persistence is the key.

If we read the biographies and stories of the Masters of the past, we may notice that they made listening and practicing the Dharma a priority in their lives. They are perfect examples for us to learn from. It is important to prioritize the Dharma in our life, because this is the only way that we can benefit from it.

Therefore, Khenpo wishes everyone to keep a stable mindset and to make a strong determination to complete the study of this sutra, which may take a couple of years. One may make a quick decision to register for this course, maybe just out of curiosity. However, once getting started, it is necessary for everyone to seriously follow the teachings and consider it as a precious opportunity to improve oneself. If you feel that the teaching is some kind of entertainment that you may enjoy only during your leisure time, your study will hardly bring you any change.

Khenpo hopes that after a couple of lectures, that audience attendance will remain stable. After the opening part of this sutra, many essential instructions for transforming afflictions will be taught in great detail. So it is important to keep on listening to this course with a proper attitude and persistence. Only in this way can one receive great benefits from Dharma teachings.

Of course these suggestions do not mean that Khenpo himself has strong attachment to every listener, nor does he want to convert everybody into being his disciple. In this modern age which is occupied by all kinds of information, everybody needs an open space to make their own choice. It is impossible to limit anyone's freedom and force them to do something. So

Khenpo fully understand modern people's mindset; however, for those who take the study and practice of the Dharma seriously, these suggestions are truly meaningful in helping them stay on the Dharma path and make spiritual progress.

b. What Prayers Are We Chanting?

In this lecture, Khenpo Sodargye kindly gave a brief introduction of the prayers being chanted before and after class, so that people can have a general idea of their incredible merit and develop a deeper faith in practicing them.

The first one is the *Multiplying Mantra*, as taught by Venerable Atisha. This mantra, when chanted only once, can multiply whatever prayers you make by 10,000,000 times.

The second one is the *Verses of the Eight Noble Auspicious Ones*. It invokes the power of goodness exemplified by buddhas and bodhisattvas. It can overcome any harm or obstacles. As it says in the colophon of the prayer:

If you recite this upon waking, all the tasks of the day will be accomplished. If you recite it when going to sleep, it will bring you good dreams. If you recite it when entering battle, it will bring total victory. If you recite it at the outset of a project, all aims and wishes will be fulfilled. If you recite it continually, you will enjoy a long life, glory, renown, prosperity, auspiciousness, abundant happiness and positivity, and the fulfilment of all wishes; all your misdeeds and obscurations will be purified, and you will achieve the higher realms and liberation. This was declared by the sublime victorious one himself.

The third one is the liturgy of making offerings including the *Clouds of Offering Mantra*. The mantra is not only recited for receiving blessings, but it also has the power of multiplying the offerings. By reciting this mantra each buddha receives skies of offerings.

The fourth one is the *Seven Limb Prayer* in the *King of Aspiration Prayers* and the Bodhisattva vows, which are required as a daily practice for every Mahayana practitioner.

The fifth is *Wang Du*, which is chanted three times. Khenpo feels its blessing to be incredible. Therefore, last year he called people to chant it ten thousand times and prepared a red bead for everyone who finished the recitation on time. The red bead is blessed by all the Sangha members and by Khenpo himself. Such a small red bead may look ordinary. However, it has gathered the merits of billions of recitations, thus the energy that it contains is incredible.

Then it is followed by the *Seven-line Prayer to Guru Rinpoche* and the *Prayer Which is the Source of All True Realization*. The latter one arose from the lake of the mind of Ju Mipham Rinpoche at the age of 52. Once Khenpo Sodargye said that although there are many prayers of Guru Rinpoche that can dispel obscurations, this prayer is extraordinarily powerful.

The seventh one is the *Treasury of Blessings—A Practice of Buddha Shakyamuni*. This liturgy was chosen after Khenpo finished the translation of *The Extensive Biography of Buddha Shakyamuni*, in 2002. Back then, Khenpo had increasingly developed strong faith in and devotion to the Buddha, and thought, “Wouldn’t it be great if every Buddhist could supplicate to the Buddha before class?” Therefore, he added this liturgy to the current chanting as well.

Then comes the prayers to the Dharma protectors and His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche’s Guru Yoga. Finally, the last prayer is the *Praise to Manjushri – Glorious Wisdom’s Excellent Qualities*.

The chanting of all these prayers before the teaching takes about 30 minutes. Then after the actual teaching, we will dedicate all the merit by chanting the latter part of the *King of Aspiration Prayers*, which takes about 10 minutes.

For rather slack practitioners, simply participating in the chanting could help them finish their daily chanting practice. On all accounts, as long as time permits, one should schedule 2 hours to fully complete both the teaching and the chanting.

For people who don’t make a point of chanting prayers, the chants may feel quite lengthy, but for those who have faith in the vajra speech, forty minutes of chanting is not at all lengthy, because the merit being gathered is truly incredible.

c. Use of a Prayer Wheel During the Chanting

Khenpo uses a large prayer wheel when chanting before and after class. However, not many people outside the shrine hall know about this, as this scene is not usually broadcasted. The particular prayer wheel used by Khenpo was wielded by a great master during the culture revolution and contains *The Great Liberation Sutra* and Mani mantra in it.

Some western practitioners also use prayer wheels at the request of their teachers, but some don’t understand the meaning behind using prayer wheels. In fact, the benefits of using prayer

wheels is immeasurable, and is taught in many sutras, shastras and tantras, some of which are translated into English.

Briefly speaking, turning a prayer wheel creates extensive merit and purifies negative karma and obscurations. A prayer wheel provides great blessings so that one can remain physically and mentally healthy and never be apart from the Three Jewels. It has tremendous power to eliminate the self-cherishing mind that keeps us from cultivating compassion and from realizing perfect bodhichitta. When put one beside a person's deathbed pillow, a prayer wheel can protect even people with deep karmic hindrances from being reborn in the three lower realms.

In principle, turning a prayer wheel that contains 100 million mani mantras would accumulate as much merit as having verbally recited 100 million mani mantra. In those few seconds, you can perform a powerful purification and accumulate a great deal of merit. Before his passing into parinirvana, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche specifically gave some instructions and advice to his students. Using prayer wheels was one of his pieces of advice. It is in his book *Always Remember* that His Holiness once said:

The money you spend to buy a prayer wheel will reap infinite virtue that is inexhaustible. That is why their purchase is not an insignificant endeavor. It is an affordable and perfectly practical way to accumulate great merit, so procure one and spin it diligently!

Avoid spinning a prayer wheel that is not held straight up. Avoid leaving it on a bed or stepping over it. Always keep it in a clean place. These prayer wheels are actually the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara himself, so please bear this in mind.

So as Buddhist practitioners, we should use prayer wheels as part of our daily practice.

Who is Vimalakirti?

a. The Way of Naming a Sutra

Giving a scriptural text a name is of profound significance. As is mentioned in the *Lankavatara Sutra*:

Without names,

*the world is utterly wrapped in the cloud of confusion.
Therefore, thanks to the skillful means of the Buddha,
different names were given to each phenomenon.*

There are specific ways to name a scriptural text, such as by the name of the people, by the place, by the time, by a metaphor, by content or by the amount of verses.

An example of naming by the place of the teaching is the *Lankavatara Sutra*, because the Buddha taught this sutra at a specific place called Lankavatara. An example of naming by the name of the people is the *Sutra Requested by the Bodhisattva Maitreya*. Examples of naming by a metaphor are the *Lotus Sutra*, and the *Diamond Sutra*, which are named by a metaphor that conveys the meaning of the text. An example of naming by content is the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis*. An example of naming by the amount of verses is *Prajnaparamita Sutra in 100,000 Stanzas*, or *Prajnaparamita Sutra in 8,000 Stanzas*. An example of naming by the time of a teaching is *Meeting the Father and the Son Sutra*. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* is named by the name of the main person in this sutra.

The full name of the *Vimalakirti Sutra* is *Vimalakirti Nirdesha Sutra*. *Vimalakirti* is the name of a lay practitioner who was quite an incredible figure in Buddha's time, and was the main person to give the teachings in this sutra. Within his name, *Vilmala* means stainless or undefiled, and *kirti* means named or famed as. The word *Nirdesha* means instruction, advice or teaching.

b. Who is Vimalakirti?

Vimalakirti appears as a lay practitioner, and in the 12th chapter of this sutra, the Buddha Shakyamuni says that Vimalakirti came from the Immovable Buddha land called Wondrous Joy. According to other sutras, Vimalakirti is the manifestation of an ancient buddha named Jinsu Buddha.

The unfathomable manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas are beyond our limited way of thinking. Therefore we should try to go beyond our cocoon like mentality, and beyond our habitual tendencies of trying to fathom the unfathomable with our limited mind. Otherwise it is just like a blind man trying to describe an elephant. Similarly, if we use our dualistic conceptual mind to fathom the profound Dharma teachings, the true meaning cannot be revealed due to our conceptual and afflictive obscurations.

According to the *Mahavaipulya Mahasamghata Sutra*, in an easterly direction, past numerous buddha lands, there is a buddha land called Immeasurable and a Buddha called Five Qualities. A bodhisattva named Sun of Secret Bodhisattva also resides there, and they have seen many Bodhisattvas heading to the west. Thus he curiously asks the Buddha: “Why are all the Bodhisattvas heading to the west?”

The Buddha answers: “There is a world called Saha to the west where Shakyamuni Buddha is turning the wheel of dharma, thus many Bodhisattvas went to the west to listen to the Dharma teachings. I shall give you a Dharani mantra so that you can go there and use it to make auspicious connections to the sentient beings in the Saha world.”

Sun of Secret Bodhisattva refuses the offer and replies: “I’ve heard that the Saha world is impure and chaotic, that it is a place of degeneration, and I’d rather not go.”

The Buddha then says: “I’ve heard of a lay practitioner named Vimalakirti who resides in the Saha world, whose body is no other than your own. If this is so, why you are afraid of going?”

Then Sun of Secret Bodhisattva admitted this was true in silence and went to the Saha world with the Dharani mantra given by the Buddha.

c. Something Beyond Ordinary Thinking

It is hard for ordinary beings like us to imagine the behaviors of buddhas and bodhisattvas who can transform from one to many and from many to one. Just as in Je Tsongkapa’s biography, where some describe that his manifested body resides in Mount Wutai. While others say he is turning the wheel of dharma in Tushita Heaven, among many other statements.

These type of descriptions are difficult for people with conceptual mind to understand, thus in some cases doubts and even criticisms arise. Actually everything is possible, so please do not hastily reject new ideas. Especially when our knowledge is limited and our mind is obscured. We don’t have a comprehensive knowledge of our vast universe, the macro world, and nor do we even know so much about the micro world.

We may get carried away by our own intelligence sometimes, but at other times, we may feel utterly ignorant. For example, we don’t even know what is happening in our own body, which we carry with us from birth all the way until we die. It is extremely difficult to describe all the structures within this body, and when we get sick, we have no idea what mechanism went

wrong in the body. If our wisdom is so limited when it comes to our own body, so limited that we can't use our wisdom to verify science, how can we use this limited wisdom to verify the limitless realizations of the buddhas and bodhisattvas?

Some scholars may feel no one can out-smart them, and that they know everything already. On the one hand it is good to have confidence, on the other hand, jumping to quick conclusions and denying what is unknown to the current conceptual mind simply does not work. Thus, with reference to the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, when you hear something that is hard to imagine, don't reject it right away. If you were to reject it, at least you should come up with valid reason, otherwise arriving at conclusions based on your doubts and ignorance could result in regrets.

d. The Merit of Listening to the Mahayana Sutra

Khenpo Sodargye intends to teach this sutra in a rather detailed style. When Master Chiyi of the Tiantai School taught *The Sutra on the White Lotus of Sublime Dharma*, he spent 3 months alone on explaining the word "sublime" in the title. Khenpo will not be as explicit, but he explained that, this is a rare opportunity to teach this sutra to so many people, he is pleased and grateful to all the volunteers who made this course possible and to the audience who attend this course, thus he is going to take his time to expand on the teachings, even if he ends up only teaching 4 verses in one class.

We should all be aware of the merit of listening to Mahayana teachings. *The Jewel Heaped Sutra* states: "If one offered seven treasures to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas in the ten directions, the merit would not be as great as listening to one four-line stanza of Mahayana teaching."

Now that we have been listening to more than one stanza of Mahayana teachings, Khenpo feels happy about the merit that we have all accumulated. Especially as we have all made aspirations for Bodhicitta, chanted prayers before class and dedicated the merit after class, all of which make this human existence valuable and meaningful. Even if our listening is not of one-pointed focus, the merit accumulated is still inexhaustible.

Who is Kumarajiva?

Kumarajiva is a great sage and an extraordinary translator in the Later Qin Dynasty. He is considered one of the four greatest translators in Han Buddhism, with the other three being Paramartha, Xuanzang and Amoghavajra. Of course there are many other translators who have made indelible contributions in history as well.

a. Kumarajiva's Life

Originally of Indian noble descent, Kumarajiva came from a family of distinction which had produced prime ministers for many generations. His grandfather was also supposed to have had a great reputation in the country. However, unlike his forefathers, Kumarajiva's father, named Kumarayana, was unmoved by fame or position. He left home and became a monk, crossed the Pamirs and arrived in Kucha, where he married the king's sagacious sister, Jivaka and produced Kumarajiva.

During her pregnancy, Jivaka's wisdom and compassion increased to an unusual extent. Just like when Ananda's mother was pregnant with Ananda, Jivaka suddenly understood many other languages and great compassion arose in her heart. In general, many auspicious signs were exhibited during her pregnancy.

After Kumarajiva was born, this young boy demonstrated many unusual signs such as the ability of memorizing upon seeing, and naturally having kindness and compassion. When Kumarajiva was 7 years old, Jivaka wanted to be ordained. At beginning Kumarayana did not agree at all, then it is said that with a firm renunciation in her mind, she went on a hunger strike for 7 days and 7 nights. When her life was hanging on a thread during her hunger strike, Kumarayana finally agreed to her request, thus she was ordained and left home with the young Kumarajiva.

Kumarajiva's mother and him travelled around Kashmir and many other places in ancient India and studied the Dharma with many Theravada and Mahayana teachers. When they were in India, Jivaka attained enlightenment and decided to stay in India. At first Kumarajiva wanted to stay with his mother, but through her wisdom, Jivaka foresaw that though there would be grave difficulties and many hard-to-endure obstacles for Kumarajiva himself, the Dharma could flourish if he was to go to China. After telling him so, Kumarajiva assertively chose to go to China, and said that he would plunge into an ocean of fire if that's what it takes to propagate the Dharma and benefit sentient beings.

At that time, Emperor Fujian of the Former Qin Dynasty knew of Kumarajiva's preeminent scholarship, so he sent a delegation to invite him to court in Changan. Nevertheless, on the way back Lüguang, the general sent to conquer Kucha and fetch Kumarajiva, heard that Emperor Fujian was killed and his kingship was taken by Yaochang. Taking advantage of the situation, he rebelled and declared himself the new king of Liangzhou in 386 A.D., and, subsequently, became known as the founder of the Later Liang Dynasty. Since then Lüguang had Kumarajiva captured and held in Liangzhou for nearly 18 years.

Eventually in 401 A.D., following the defeat of Lüguang's armies, Kumarajiva was brought back to Changan at the edict of the Later Qin Emperor, Yaoxing, the son of Yaochang. At that time, Kumarajiva was already 58 years old. Upon arrival in the capital of the new state, he immediately engaged himself in translation projects. During the 11 years between then and his death, he translated more than 300 volumes of sutras and shastras. The current Caotang Temple in Xi'an was one of the places where he did his translation, and today there is a stupa there containing the relics of Kumarajiva.

b. Kumarajiva's Translation Style

Kumarajiva's translation style is renowned for its beauty of diction, and conciseness of content. Because he didn't follow the literal translation style, many people questioned the correctness of his translation. Facing these controversies, Kumarajiva publically vowed that: "If what I've translated is correct and in accord with the genuine meaning of the Dharma, may my tongue remain unburnt after the cremation of my body." Miraculously, after his cremation, his tongue was preserved, despite this being the softest part of the human body. Such was the power of his vajra speech.

So it is not surprising that many of Kumarajiva's translations of seminal Mahayana texts have often remained the most popular to the present day, which include the *Diamond Sutra*, *Lotus Sutra*, *Amitabha Sutra*, Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika* and *Dvadashanikaya Shastra*, Aryadeva's *Shatashastra* and so on. His translations have become the most fundamental and essential texts for all the eight major schools of Han Buddhism, such as Pureland School, Chan School, Tiantai School and Huayan School.

Some scholars also consider that Kumarajiva's translations of the *Lotus Sutra* and *Diamond Sutra* laid a firm foundation for the Chan School in China, before Bodhidharma came from India and formally transmitted Chan Buddhism to China. During the time of Bodhidharma's

arrival, the Han Chinese were not strangers to the concepts of emptiness and prajnaparamita, which made them more accepting of Bodhidharma's teaching. From this perspective, the flourishing of Chan Buddhism in China cannot be separated from the aspiration and efforts of Kumarajiva and his translations.

When Khenpo Sodargye was looking at the different versions, he felt that although Xuangzang's translation align very well with the Tibetan translation, nevertheless he chose Kumarajiva's translation because of its excellent readability and the special transmission of the blessings that it carries with it.

Kumarajiva stands out in the crowd of translators due to his unusual aspirations and blessings. From a literary perspective, some translators may have similar translations, but from a spiritual perspective, due to the difference in aspirations and the strength of blessings, some translations slowly disappear after the passing of the translator, while others flourish around the world.

Having heard so much about the merit of the Vimalakirti Sutra and its translation, now that we have this precious opportunity to study this amazing sutra, shouldn't we be joyous and study with great faith?

c. Some Academic Issues

Some scholars nowadays consider Kamalasila to be the same person as Kumarajiva but Khenpo Rinpoche disagrees with this opinion. The reasons are firstly, the timeline of their birth and death doesn't correspond; secondly, in history Kamalasila had great debates with Heshang Moheya, whose opinion was actually quite close to Bodhidharma's Chan ideas. So this opinion is not supported by either historical facts or academic perspectives.

Western scholars often place much emphasis on historical facts, and this is a good point that we as dharma teachers should learn from. As Khenpo said, "I visited university professors of Buddhism and their classes many times, and I always notice that they place much emphasis on the biographies and the related histories when they try to understand a certain great Buddhist master."

Being Buddhists, before the actual studying of a sutra or a shastra, we should get to know the background of the author and the translator, not only from an academic point of view but also from a Buddhist perspective. For example, before going to the real text of the Vimalakirti Sutra, we should start off by getting to know its translator, Kumarajiva. From the Buddhist point of

view, emphasis should be placed on his study and practice of the Dharma, his personal realization, his qualities and aspirations during his life, as well as his influence after his death, including whether there were relics left, so that students can develop strong faith in his works. From an academic point of view, the emphasis should be placed on his birth and death, the social, cultural and historical context during the time, as well as the contributions he made to the whole of society during his life. All of the information from these two perspectives is quite indispensable for dharma practitioners to gain a good understanding of this great translator.

When & Where the Teaching Takes Place?

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was in the garden of Amrapali near Vaisali, in the company of a great congregation of eight thousand bhiksus.

There were thirty-two thousand bodhisattvas, ...

a. Thus Have I Heard

The first chapter of the Vimalakirti Sutra is titled Buddha Land, with the main theme of “pure mind, pure land”. All the Buddhist sutras start with **Thus have I heard**, which means the following words are exactly what the hearer, **I, have heard** in front of the Buddha, and here “**I**” refers to Ananda.

1) The Meaning of Thus Have I Heard

In the Nirvana Sutra, Ananda asked the Buddha, “Buddha, you have spoken many sutras. When we compile them, with what words should they begin?” The Buddha answered that all sutras spoken by the Buddha should begin with the words, “**Thus have I heard**”, and then followed by when and where the teaching took place. It means that the Dharma which is **Thus** can be believed, and the hearer personally **heard** it. The Buddha also gave Ananda permission that at the end of a sutra, he may include the praises given by humans, non-human beings, devas and others.

The Phrase “Thus have I heard” may appear simple, yet the implication is rather profound. When Ananda, Mahakashyapa and Upali compiled the tripitakas of the Buddha, it was with their Dharani of unforgetting that they were able to transcribe all the teaching of the Buddha

so precisely. So “Thus have I heard” refers to the high accuracy of the words, rather than a vague and approximate record.

The Commentary on the *Vimalakirti Sutra* composed by Master Sengzhao, one of Kumarajiva’s main disciples, includes Kumarajiva’s comments that, if there were not the phrase “Thus have I heard”, people might think that this text was not actually taught by the Buddha, and that its compiler may have added his own thoughts to the text. As a result, this could cause doubt about the reliability of the sutra, and introduce disagreement or even conflict among the followers.

2) A Well-Established Tradition to Maintain the Pure Transmission of the Teaching

In fact, it is not unique in Buddhist sutras. For example, this is also the method used in Confucianism. Texts such as *Analects of Confucius and Classics of Filial Piety* also start with the words “Confucius says”, which means that the teachings of Confucius were well documented by his disciples after his passing. The situation was probably quite similar 2,500 years ago, that is, after a certain great sage died, his followers started to compile his teaching into scriptures.

In Buddhism, this tradition is very well preserved and the pure transmission of the Dharma teaching remains to this day. For example, once Khenpo Sodargye told his students: “His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche gave the Vajrayana teachings in this way, thus I am following the same way to give the teachings. This is what I have heard in front of my guru, therefore I am transmitting the same teaching to everyone, to make sure that there are no personal and individual conceptual thoughts being added to the teaching.”

The lessons here are, whenever we are transcribing commentary or class notes onto paper, we need to make sure we are transcribing “what I have heard”. That being said, some additions and omissions are also needed, because oral teachings and written teachings are quite different. Oral teachings commentate to various conditions, such as the audience, the environment and general atmosphere. It is also more relaxed and can have more repetition. However, when it comes to a written format, the style needs to be more concise, because the written word will continue on for generations to come.

Though we have the recording technology, it is still necessary to transcribe the oral teachings into written transcripts. In terms of transcribing, Khenpo said, “On one hand, I am very grateful

to the transcribers who have organized my teachings into written transcripts; on the other hand, I will not be pleased if serious additions have been made which have twisted the original meaning of the teachings. In this case it will have lost the essence of making written copies based on the teacher's intent." Therefore, it is quite crucial to stick to the teacher's intent and understand the real meaning of each word. Nevertheless, we shall be grateful to the work that the volunteers put into the transcripts, as it is quite time consuming.

For some great masters, their teachings are transcribed only after they have passed away; while for others, their teachings are organized into a very good written format while they are still alive. If the teachings of great masters, Khenpos or Khenmos can bring benefit to many people, it's better to make them available in written format and in many different languages. Otherwise when a great master passes away, it is hard for the disciples to collect and document the related materials.

When His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was alive, he was very selective about transcribing his oral teachings, because he taught in a relaxed fashion. Since His Holiness is now no longer with us, his disciples have had to search everywhere for his precious teachings. A little while ago, Khenpo Sodargye got some teaching videos of His Holiness which he cherishes as treasures. However, to transcribe these recorded teachings could be very difficult, as there is no one to go to for clarification on the content anymore.

b. When & Where the Teaching Takes Place?

The following are the five perfections of the teachings, i.e., when and where the teaching takes place, who is giving the teaching, who is receiving the teaching, and what is the teaching.

At one time indicates that there is no specific date recorded in sutras, which may appear rather vague, almost as if Ananda didn't remember the exact date and time. In fact, it has quite a significant meaning, as the Buddha taught different sentient beings according to their unique capacities and perceptions, such as devas, nagas or humans, so the sense of time is different for them all.

From a scientific point of view, different planets and stars also have different times, due to their rotation and revolution. Even on the same planet, for example, this Earth, different places also have different time zones. Albert Einstein used to say, "Time and space are modes by which we think and not conditions in which we live." It is not easy to understand by our

ordinary thought, but indeed it is much closer to the true reality. Therefore, the term “at one time” is quite a good phrase to convey such subtlety.

Vaisali was a city in present-day Bihar, India, and now an archaeological site. It used to be one of the six largest cities in ancient India. It is near Vaisali that Ananda passed into nirvana, and today the Ananda Stupa is still well preserved. Khenpo went to the site years ago one afternoon, and he felt the city to be rather small. But according to historical literature it used to be a beautiful and prosperous city. Buddha Shakyamuni gave many teachings in Visalia, including The Medicine Buddha Sutra and some other Vajrayana teachings.

Amrapali is the name of a royal concubine of the King Bimbisara, who was born from an Amrapali tree in a garden, so later that garden was called the garden of Amrapali, or Ambapali vana, and was offered to Buddha Shakyamuni as his vihara (place to teach and practice).

An Amrapali tree is a mango tree. Indians really like mangos, they cook lots of food with mango, just like Chinese like potatoes. In *Letter to a Friend* by Nagajuna, the metaphor of mango is used to describe four types of practitioners, and as practitioners we should remember it often:

People are like mango fruits:

Unripe, but seemingly ripe;

Ripe, but seemingly unripe;

Unripe appearing unripe; and ripe appearing as ripe.

There are eight thousand bhiksus and thirty-two thousand bodhisattvas gathering together to receive the Buddha’s teaching. This part briefly tells us about the large assembly around the Buddha.

Lecture 3

The Three Styles of Teaching

There are many teaching methods in Tibetan Buddhism, most of which have come from one of the two lineage schools, either from Nalanda University or Vikramashila University in ancient India. The most often used methods are listed as follows:

a. Structural teaching, like a tiger leaping through ravines

Just like a tiger leaping through ravines without any difficulty, the structural teaching uses the most concise words to encapsulate the entire content of a text by following its textual outline.

Amid mountains or in forests, tigers can leap without any effort, from one tree top to another, from one hill to another in a short period of time. The structural teaching of a text is quite similar to this. Take the *Vimalakirti Sutra* as an example; some masters, from both the Tibetan tradition and the Han tradition, teach the entire sutra within only a few classes. With ‘the tiger leaping’ way of teaching, a few classes on the *Vimalakirti Sutra* is a legitimate way of teaching the Dharma.

Or it may be interpreted from another aspect. As a tiger’s step is unpredictable, it can leap from one place to another without a predestined direction, the same applies to our train of thoughts. It is best to follow a step-by-step method, where a good link of logic can be followed. However, being unpredictable could also be a modern style that people tend to enjoy as well, like some public speeches given by western speakers or scenes in a movie, where it suddenly cuts from one scene to another. Indeed, it’s not without a good reason that the speaker jumps from one topic to another. There are still some hidden meanings or intent that the speaker wants to express, although it might be too fast for general listeners to follow his or her thinking.

b. Detailed explanation, like a turtle’s movement

Such a method explains a given text word by word, and sentence by sentence, without any skipping anything. So it is a slow, step-by-step way of teaching, just as a turtle moves very slowly. By following this way, people can understand the subtle and hidden meanings of each word and each sentence.

There are people who don't understand the importance of this teaching method, and may feel the words are easy to understand, thus there is no point in repeating them. However, considering that all sentient beings have very different capacities, to some people, detailed explanations are very necessary and helpful. This is why many Indian masters composed shastras in such a detailed way.

Take Chandrakirti's *Clear Words* as an example. To explain "all conceptual constructs utterly subside" in the last verse of the 25th chapter of *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti elaborates on this topic from 3 or 4 different perspectives, such as what's the meaning of subside; does it subside of all conceptual constructs; what's the meaning of conceptual constructs? Another example is Garab Dorje's commentary on the *Tantra of Liberation by Wearing*, in which it explains the text word by word, such as fabrication means conceptual thoughts; extinguishing means elimination; and it is from its root that all graspings are eliminated. Sometimes people may feel the terms being explained are quite similar to those terms being used to explain them. But somehow, the 'turtle moving' way of teaching is necessary for many followers.

c. Summarization, like a snow lion

The snow lion is majestic, especially when it is standing on the top of a snow mountain, taking a bird's eye view over all the other animals. In a similar way, the teaching of summarization points out the essential meaning of every part of a given text, and how each of them cannot be refuted or replaced by any other similar statement.

Masters of the past taught the Dharma in the three styles that are listed above. If you knew these styles, you would be able to identify the particular style of teaching right away, and you won't be feeling lost or irritated by a distinctive style.

Qualities of Bodhisattvas

...recognized by the congregation.

All the bodhisattvas were well known by the assembly. Like the sun and the moon in the sky, the bodhisattvas brightened the world; or like the wisdom eye of all beings, they guided people

onto the path of liberation; and they were renowned in the world for their wisdom, compassion and great virtues.

In this sutra, there are only a few names of bodhisattvas mentioned, such as Manjushri, Avalokitesvara and so on. However, we should be aware that innumerable bodhisattvas manifested in this world back at the time of the Buddha, and also after Buddha's parinirvana. They continue to manifest in the present, and will continue to manifest in the future. All these bodhisattvas from the past, present and future are adorned by the qualities listed in the following descriptions.

Compared with the renown of bodhisattvas, the worldly people nowadays are renowned for their abilities of accumulating wealth, their good looks, their artistic skills and so on. In this era, general public values are so different that people with the great qualities mentioned here are probably not well known.

As Mahayana practitioners, since we all make the aspiration of bodhichitta, we should get to know the qualities of bodhisattvas, and further reflect upon ourselves to see what kind of qualities we have already obtained, and what kind of qualities we still lack. Surely, we can work now to obtain the qualities which are lacking.

The [bodhisattvas present] had all accomplished the original practices of great wisdom;

All the bodhisattvas had attained great wisdom, and their actions practiced were all virtues. **Great wisdom** here refers to the wisdom of the realization of emptiness. **Original practices** are the practices of six paramitas which are characterized by the altruistic actions of benefitting others. In other words, they had all accomplished wisdom and compassion, the wisdom of knowing the truth of all phenomena, and the compassion of practicing six paramitas to benefit others. These two are the main characteristics of a great bodhisattva. If one possesses these two characteristics, one can be called an authentic bodhisattva.

Another way to explain this is from the view, practice, action and fruition point of view: the view of the Mahayana is the wisdom of no-self; the action is to benefit others; the practice upon these two leads to the fruition of the perfect union of wisdom and compassion, or the accomplishment of the original practices of great wisdom.

were established by the numinous charisma of the buddhas;

The Bodhisattvas had already obtained the numinous charisma of the buddhas. Instead of “numinous charisma”, the word “blessings” was used in both the Tibetan translation and the Chinese translation by Xuanzang. Maybe the word “blessings” was not used in Chinese language in the time of Kumarajiva, but was more commonly used in Xuanzang’s time. For example, in Kumarajiva’s the *Lotus Sutra*, the similar term “numinous charisma” is used to express the meaning of blessing. Here, it means that the bodhisattvas were constantly empowered by the blessings of the buddhas in their body, speech and mind.

If bodhisattvas cannot be parted from buddhas’ blessings in order to benefit sentient beings, then each of us as followers should not be apart from the blessings of buddhas, bodhisattvas, lineage masters and root gurus either. So why is that? Through the manifestation of bodhisattvas, we can deduce that we Buddhists must rely on the blessings from lineage masters and root gurus. Otherwise, if the spiritual strength is missing, with a lack of power from the blessings, even if one’s wisdom and eloquence are impressive, the ability to benefit others will be weak.

In a short period of time, if some Buddhists start a Dharma center without making supplications to the lineage masters, the guru or the Three Jewels, Khenpo has concerns about the long-term development of such Buddhists as well as their Dharma activities. When we pray to Amitabha Buddha in order to take rebirth in Sukhavati, both the Buddha’s blessings and our own devotion must be present so that the result of being reborn in Sukhavati can come true. Similarly, if we have great devotion and constantly supplicate and visualize the lineage masters, buddhas, bodhisattvas and dharma protectors, the blessings will inevitably dissolve into our mind stream. When the blessings are completely bestowed, despite the lack of great personal capability, one can still easily accomplish many activities that benefit sentient beings. Khenpo believes these two: both strong devotions to the guru and the Three Jewels and the empowerment of blessings from them, together with the karmic connections from previous lives, are the key elements to give rise to the auspicious result of benefiting sentient beings.

Therefore, Khenpo Sodargye encourages us to make supplications frequently to buddhas and bodhisattvas. Do not remember them only when you are free or encounter some difficulties. Nor like some Buddhist scholars who only focus on academic study but neglect praying and supplicating. Instead, if those scholars could carry on their research together with genuine faith,

their academic study would also progress further. That is because Buddhism contains not just purely intellectual studies, but also profound experiential realizations, which transcends words but can only be experienced by one's own mind. Without genuine faith, the understandings of Buddhism can be just partial and superficial. You may be able to understand the outer or even the inner meanings of the Dharma, but definitely not the secret meanings of the Dharma, which can only be obtained through a genuine faith.

maintained the correct Dharma for the defense of the Dharma city;

From a literal point of view, the defense of the Dharma city means the bodhisattvas protect the dharma city of buddhas and bodhisattvas by upholding the correct dharma through listening, contemplating and meditating. Some commentaries explain the Dharma city as the true nature of all phenomena, which is from the perspective of the profundity of prajnaparamita, so the defense of the Dharma city means to abide in the true reality of phenomena.

Maintaining the correct Dharma includes the study and practice of the Dharma through listening, contemplating and meditating. We Buddhists must first study and practice the correct Dharma in this way, so that we are able to share the Dharma teaching with other living beings. Otherwise, if we ourselves do not even understand the profound meanings of the Dharma, how can we benefit others with the supreme Dharma?

So in terms of upholding the Dharma, one should engage in one's own study and practice of the Dharma; furthermore, if one has a good ability, it is better to set up dharma groups, establish dharma centers or clubs for college students or company employees. The merit of protecting and upholding the Dharma in this way is even more incredible. In the *Sutra of Ten Cakras of Earth Store* it is said that, "If in numerous eons, the wise are practicing diligently concentration, the merit and wisdom being generated are still not as great as protecting my teachings." Here "my teaching" refers to the Dharma taught by the Buddha Shakyamuni.

We should be aware that, upholding the Dharma is the responsibility of every Buddhist, not just the job of great masters or dharma teachers. In fact, as soon as you become a Buddhist, you have the responsibility to protect the Dharma. It is just like a newlywed, at the moment of wedding, you carry the responsibility for the new family. So you should not be narrow-minded and consider yourself as the reaper of dharma, and others as the protector and propagators of the Dharma.

Since we have personally tasted the wonderful flavor of the Dharma, it is quite natural to want to share what we have learned with others. The intention is not to have a bigger group or to attract many fans, it should be a genuine wish to help all beings achieve liberation from samsara. We must maintain such a pure intention no matter what kind of activities we are engaged in.

As Buddha Shakyamuni said in the *Nirvana Sutra*, on certain occasions if necessary, the Buddhist followers can hold a knife, swords and other weapons to protect the Dharma. The weapons are used only to overawe others, but not to kill others. The Buddha emphasized that protecting the Dharma is the essential discipline for Mahayana practitioners. However, when compared to other religions where killing others is allowed in order to protect their own religion, Buddhism advocates the protection at urgent times, but refrains from killing others.

made their names heard throughout the ten directions through their ability at the lion's roar;

As the king of animals, the sound of the lion's roar terrifies all the other animals. Similarly, as the essential philosophy of Buddhism, the teaching and the realization of emptiness by bodhisattvas can overthrow all the heterodox theories, because no other philosophers can defeat the teaching of the Middle Way in Buddhism. The sound of teaching on emptiness is all victorious, just like the lion's roar.

Khenpo Sodargye encourages us to study the philosophy of the Middle Way more extensively and deeply. The great treatises such as *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, *Four Hundred Verses on Middle Way*, and *Ornaments of the Middle Way* all contain precious teachings and profound instructions on the Middle Way. People with rather solid foundations in the studies of the Middle Way have no trouble to understand the other Dharma teachings, such as the karmic law, and thus develop a strong confidence and devotion to the Three Jewels. Since they fully understand the true reality of all phenomena, and through their understanding they attain a reliable guidance for their lives, no matter what kind of challenges or difficulties they encounter, they can always face them with full confidence and bravery. However, people without much understanding of the true reality of emptiness, could be quite timid when being questioned or challenged by others.

Through their ability at the lion's roar, the bodhisattvas' names were heard throughout the ten directions. Some bodhisattvas are indeed quite famous, well known in all six realms, including the hell and heaven realms, such as Avalokitesvara, Manjushri and so on. Unlike celebrities or

famous people who are only known in certain area or certain country, the bodhisattvas are well known in the ten directions thanks to their unusual aspirations and numinous power. This is still true in today's society. People with great merits of the three studies, i.e., discipline, concentration and wisdom, are well known by others and these powerful and excellent inner qualities can never be defeated by any kind of jealousy or bad intentions.

befriended and pacified people without being requested;

Without being requested, the bodhisattvas brought the fruition of comfort and happiness to all sentient beings. Worldly people only help others when begged to do so. On the contrary, these bodhisattvas voluntarily benefited others without being supplicated or reminded; they engaged in helping others willingly and readily at all times.

Of course under some circumstances there could be exceptions. For example, when the Buddha reached the profound and blissful state of awakening under the Bodhi tree, he remained for seven weeks in solitude without teaching because he felt no one would understand the depth of his realization. Then, the celestial gods Brahma and Indra came on three occasions to supplicate him to turn the wheel of the Dharma. Indeed, this is a manifestation of the Buddha's skillful means to remind people that the Dharma is precious and rare in this world. Living beings should deeply cherish it rather than being distracted and occupied by worldly concerns.

Back to us, if there is any opportunity to benefit others, we shouldn't wait to be asked, otherwise a good opportunity could be missed. With the sincere aspiration of bodhichitta in our mind, whenever there are proper conditions to help others, we should naturally extend a helping hand without any hesitation. This is the nature of bodhisattvas and because of this, they are called the friend, the spiritual teacher and the savior of all living beings.

Exalted the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) and were thus able to keep them from being cut off;

In the Chinese version of this sutra, exalt has the connotation of inheriting and spreading to flourish. So exalted the Three Jewels means to carry on the Three Jewels and to ensure their continuance and prosperity, making certain that they never vanish. A Buddhist should always carry on the activities of the Three Jewels, of which the most important is to benefit all sentient beings. This mission should never cease in the generations to come.

The Three Jewels are: the awakened one as the teacher (Buddha), the teachings of the awakened one as the philosophy and doctrine (Dharma), and the community who follows the teaching (Sangha). These three together can bring happiness and peace to all living beings.

As Mahayana practitioners, we are obliged to carry on the activities of the Three Jewels and make the teachings of the Dharma flourish in the world. During this process, there will inevitably be difficulties and obstacles. Khenpo encourages us to be brave, not to be defeated by fear and sadness. As in our journey of life, we stumble through obstacles as well. However, the difficulties do not lie in the obstacles, but in our hearts. So if we have a strong and brave heart, nothing can harm us, but if we are weak-hearted, unfavorable conditions will continuously arise.

subjugated the vengeful Maras and controlled those of the heterodox paths;

Subjugated the vengeful Maras means Bodhisattvas had subjugated the four Maras: the Mara of the destructive emotions, the Mara of the aggregates, the Mara of the Lord of Death, and the Mara of the sons of gods.

Having realized emptiness, bodhisattvas eliminated all mental afflictions such as greed, anger and ignorance, thus the Mara of the destructive emotions disappeared, which led to Bodhisattvas not being attached to the five aggregates. Then the Mara of the aggregates was eradicated, which in turn led to Bodhisattvas not being fearful of death, thus the Mara of the Lord of Death was destroyed. The Mara of the sons of gods refers to one of the desire realm gods named “Controlling Others’ Emanations”. Without fear of death, this Mara naturally lost his power in front of these bodhisattvas.

Therefore, subjugating the Maras doesn’t mean destroying the armies of the outer Maras by holding all kinds of weapons. It rather refers to subduing our mental afflictions and the Mara of our own mind stemming from self-clinging, which brings harm to both oneself and others.

Controlled those of the heterodox paths means to subdue all tirthikas who follow the heterodox paths. In ancient India, there were 96 kinds of tirthikas such as Vaisheshika and Samkhya. Today, the heterodox paths mainly refer to eternalism and nihilism, or the extreme views of existence and non-existence.

Nihilism refers to the belief that everything is short-lived and naturally comes into being. From that logic, the present world is originated from itself without causes and conditions. This is absolutely a wrong view. According to the principle of dependent arising, sentient beings have past and future lives, all phenomena depend on causes and conditions.

Eternalism refers to the conviction that everything, including the creator, is permanent. However, whether being analyzed from a Buddhist perspective or from the scientific point of view, this view can't be justified and will bring countless faults.

In a nutshell, other than eternalism and nihilism, any school whose view neither aligns with logic nor with the natural law, can be referred to as heterodox. In the course of seeking truth, we do not need to serve and respect any school which is not in accordance with the truth. This is the spirit of the Buddhist philosophy. Some people narrow-mindedly deem any non-Buddhist school automatically as tirthika, which is irrational.

were entirely purified and had forever transcended the impediments (i.e., afflictions);

Here impediments refer to five hindrances and ten fetters. "Hindrance" means being concealed and obscured by mental afflictions, which impairs one's ability to take action and make progress. The five hindrances, namely sensory desire or greed, ill-will or aversion, sloth-and-laziness, restlessness-and-worry and doubt, are seen as the five major mind-related forces that hinder our ability to become concentrated.

According to Abhidharma, "fetters" means that sentient beings are tightly bound, thus they cannot attain freedom and liberation from samsara. Here ten fetters refer to ten destructive emotions, which are shamelessness, recklessness, jealousy, miserliness, worry, laziness, restlessness, sloth, anger, and the concealing of one's own faults.

These Bodhisattvas were free of the five hindrances and ten fetters. As followers, we have not achieved their level yet, but we need to endeavor to keep our defilements in check. As ordinary beings, naturally we have faults and we need to strive to reduce them. We should not take for granted that once we take refuge in the Three Jewels, our mental afflictions will be uprooted straightaway. Some people are constantly worrying, "Oh, I still have negative emotions, what should I do?" This thought results in sadness, misery, despair, etc. An attitude like this is not necessary. We need to make steady efforts and then swiftly reach the destination.

maintained their minds always in peace and unhindered emancipation;

The bodhisattvas abided continuously in the true reality of all phenomena. Once realizing the true nature of all phenomena, the bodhisattvas were free from all kinds of hindrances and thus attain the ultimate liberation. In that case, they were able to maintain their mind in a constant state of peace.

Here emancipation refers to a sublime state of liberation that transcends conceptual thoughts. It means that when free from any attachment, the mind dwells in a spacious, luminous and easeful state, which can eradicate any obscuration without any hindrance. These bodhisattvas were endowed with this quality. At present, it is difficult for us to reach this state, but we need to make continuous efforts, which is the key to achieving this goal.

As Shantideva says in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, “Like a tree you should remain.” Also, “So come what may, I’ll not upset my cheerful happiness of mind.” We should not be swayed by any situation that we encounter. We should just maintain a calm and peaceful mind instead of being caught up in any circumstance. As ordinary beings, we can put this teaching into our daily practice.

were unailing in their mindfulness, concentration, dharani (i.e., memorization of the Dharma), and eloquence;

Bodhisattvas were endowed with sublime qualities, such as having constant mindfulness of their body, speech and mind; dwelling unceasingly in the concentration of the perfect union of emptiness and luminosity; memorizing words, meanings, and mantras incessantly, and having ceaseless eloquence.

The *Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom* and the commentary on *The Flower Garland Sutra* illustrate eloquence in seven different ways.

The first is direct eloquence, which means that one can answer any question in the most direct and simple manner.

The second is quick eloquence, which means that one can answer any question without any hesitation. Ordinary beings tend to stop for a while to think about the answer, while bodhisattvas always come up with the answer swiftly.

The third is eloquence according to different capacities and propensities. When answering a question, bodhisattvas are able to address the questioner's mentality and cultural background, and to give the answer based on when and where this question is asked. This is highly important. For example, if we answer a secular question from the point of view of emptiness, or use many Buddhist terms in front of a non-Buddhist, then the inquisitor will have no understanding of our response.

The fourth is unmistakable eloquence, which means that the answer is in accordance with the truth and the right logic, thus it is unmistakable.

The fifth is uninterrupted eloquence, which means that the answer is in a smooth and flowing manner, sparkling with witty remarks.

The sixth is eloquence from all different perspectives, which means that the answer has rich meanings, is profound, and is packed with extensive metaphors, scriptural and reasoning evidence.

The seventh is the most wonderful and melodious eloquence, which means that the way of answering entails five qualities: its meaning is clear and easy to understand; its sound can be heard from afar; its tone is like wonderful music; all beings love to hear it; and it is an unsurpassable answer.

were replete in charity, morality, forbearance, exertion, meditation, wisdom, and the power of skillful means; had attained the forbearance of the nonarising of dharmas and the nonattainment [of all things];

These bodhisattvas were endowed with the ten paramitas: generosity (charity), discipline (morality), patience (forbearance), diligence (exertion), meditative concentration (meditation), wisdom, skillful means, strength, aspiration prayers and primordial wisdom.

These bodhisattvas had attained the wisdom of emptiness and reached the state free of conceptual thoughts, thus they realized that there is nothing to attain.

were able to accord with [the truth] in turning the irreversible wheel [of the Dharma];

Based on Khenpo's teachings, this sentence should be understood as to "accord with the preference of beings" rather than to "accord with the truth". These bodhisattvas were able to

give proper teachings to different individuals according to their own capacity and propensity. In other words, they knew how to comply with others and to turn the Dharma wheel without any mistake and any rest.

Ordinary beings may share the Dharma teaching with others for certain periods of time, but their enthusiasm tends to ebb. On the contrary, bodhisattvas persevere to benefit living beings through turning the wheel of the Dharma and they will never give up this job.

Here Khenpo stresses the importance of turning the wheel of the Dharma, and encourages everybody to engage in such activities. Khenpo mentioned that he used to hold high expectations of someone for their ability to teach the Dharma, as they had outstanding eloquence, wisdom and altruistic mind. However, maybe due to their lack of merit, when their Dharma teaching activities came across difficulties, or when they felt tired, they just failed to keep moving forward. This is such a pity! Or in some worse cases, some Dharma teachers promote wrong views and make people blindly follow them because they are seemingly intelligent and smart, and because they have some background in Buddhist philosophy. This is quite dangerous both for themselves and for their followers.

understood well the characteristics of the dharmas and understood the capacities (lit., “roots”) of sentient beings;

These bodhisattvas had grasped the myriad characteristics of all phenomena, as illustrated in the *Abhidharmakosa*. Typically, the bodhisattvas fully understood the characteristics of all phenomena according to the three different yanas which are metaphorically represented as the sheep-chariot, the horse-chariot and the yak-chariot in the *Lotus Sutra*.

The bodhisattvas apprehended sentient being’s capacities and propensities. This ability is quite essential. Without a clear knowledge of sentient beings’ various capacities and propensities, it would be difficult to engage in even a simple task such as mediating a dispute between two persons. Besides giving the teachings of Sutrayana or Tantrayana, even when dealing with worldly matters, it is necessary to understand other’s propensities.

had attained fearlessness in sheltering the great congregations;

These bodhisattvas would not be influenced by the conceptual judgements of sentient beings, rather they were able to tame beings' wild minds through their wisdom of selflessness, and thus they were fearless.

Some commentaries elaborate on the fearlessness of bodhisattvas from four aspects: possessing the Dharani of memorizing thus no fear; knowing living beings' capacities thus no fear; being able to answer various questions thus no fear; being able to dispel various doubts thus no fear. Therefore, such fearlessness does not mean fighting with others by holding a weapon. Fearlessness rather comes from the realization of emptiness, the wisdom that leads us to the ultimate freedom. Khenpo emphasized that we can achieve similar fearlessness if we make continuous efforts to study and practice.

Lecture 4

Qualities of Bodhisattvas

cultivated their minds with merits and wisdom; were paramount in the adornment of their bodies with the [thirty-two primary] characteristics and [eighty subsidiary] marks; had dispensed with worldly adornments;

These bodhisattvas had accumulated boundless amounts of merits and wisdom. How do they accumulate merits? They do so by practicing good deeds in the phenomenal world. How do they accumulate wisdom? Wisdom is attained through understanding and realizing the ultimate truth of emptiness.

Adornment of merits and wisdom are the finest and the most beautiful of all, because their appearances are a manifestation of one's own mind. If you are kindhearted, people will regard you as a good person even if you are not particularly good looking, but if you act meanly, no matter how beautiful you may be, people will consider you as a bad person. These bodhisattvas' appearances were paramount in the world due to their compassion and wisdom. Our appearances are also a manifestation of karma from previous lives. Therefore, we should try to confess all non-virtuous deeds in past lives as well as our present life, promising not to commit bad deeds in order to maintain an appearance of beauty in all of our lives.

Khenpo hopes that all practitioners will adorn bodies and minds with merits and wisdom, as these adornments will take precedence over superficial and material adornments such as diamonds, agates, gold and turquoise. We will appear incredibly majestic if simply decorated with merits and wisdom even without any superficial decorations; however, if we are narrow-minded and full of contaminated thoughts, we will never appear majestic by decorating ourselves with material adornments. As the saying goes, a kind heart is the foundation of everything and everything is manifested by mind.

In *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, it is communicated as follows:

The hellish instrument to torture living things—

Who invented them for such intent?

Who has forged this burning iron ground;

Whence have all these demon-women sprung?

All are but the offspring of the sinful mind,

This the mighty Sage has said.

The hell realm, animal realm and hungry ghost realm are no more than manifestations of one's own mind. In the description of Iron Rod Mountain in the hell realm, it is said the women on that mountain are vicious and demon-like, but all of those horrific images come from the mind, being a projection of one's negative karma accumulated in previous lives. As the Buddha stated, the burning iron and women in hell realms are all manifestations of a negative mind. If we fail to purify all negativities in this life, it is likely that ugliness and fearfulness will be manifested in future lives.

In the material world, our mind creates images of the external environment as well as our own bodies. There are people who constantly complain about others, only seeing the shortcomings of others. Indeed, that is attributable to a mind that is not pure, only seeing thistles and thorns which constantly puncture their mind and body. Another type of person practices pure perception all the time, seeing everyone as meritorious bodhisattvas and the world as a pure buddha land. People who practice pure perception can get along well with everyone and anyone. Even if thrown in prison and slapped by others, they will still be grateful because those adversities help them to purify all past negativities.

In Christianity, they say that if you are slapped on one side of your face, then you should present the other side of your face for the next slap. It is the same in Buddhism, but some practitioners' mindsets are not so inclined, because even before an attack, they are already prepared with weapon in-hand.

All in all, the environment is closely correlated to our mind. For a good practitioner with a tamed mind, he or she will be able to perceive the most beautiful place even in the worst environment. For this kind of practitioner, worldly adornments are not necessary. Of course, this does not mean that Buddhists cannot dress up. You don't have to give up all your accessories and beautiful clothes and offer them to the Three Jewels.

Some practitioners tend to think in extremes. They give up all of their expensive accessories and clothes after taking refuge, believing that they need to abandon all of their worldly possessions. Some give up modern technology, like laptops or cell phones, and isolate themselves from society. Wearing ragged clothes, eating leftovers, and looking rather ill, how

can such Buddhists be accepted by society? The majority of people cannot see what is happening in their own mind. Even if your perceptions are the same as enlightened beings such as Shantideva or Chandrakirti, without proper appearance and behavior, it's hard to blend-in. Moreover, this kind of improper behavior may lead to a negative impression of Buddhism, making others wary.

Therefore, we need to behave in the middle way, being more accommodating to the mentality of all sentient beings. More importantly, one should abandon arrogance and pride when wearing adornment, just like Bodhisattvas who adorn themselves only for the sake of other beings, as was said in Ju Mipham Rinpoche's *The Just King*.

were known above and beyond even Mount Sumeru.

The reputations of these great bodhisattvas were well-known in all three realms and went far beyond Mount Sumeru. Even in the hell realm, some of their names can still be heard, names such as Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, and Mahasthamaprapta, being much more well-known than celebrities and head of states in the ordinary world.

Through the skillful means of using their reputations, bodhisattvas and many great masters can bring many benefits to all sentient beings. Even though these sentient beings have never met the bodhisattvas or enlightened masters, once they hear their names, immeasurable merits and benefits would naturally arise in their minds. For example, just by hearing the name of Thogme Zampo or Patrul Rinpoche, a seed of bodhichitta can be planted in their minds.

were firmly resolute in faith like Vajra (i.e., diamond);

The faith of these great bodhisattvas were firmly resolute, like a diamond that cannot be destroyed. In the Tibetan version, it is the faith in the Three Jewels. In the Xuanzang's translation, it is the faith in Buddha and the Dharma, and the Sangha is not mentioned. In this version, it is not specified. Nevertheless, the object of faith is to the Three Jewels, the Four Noble Truths, and the law of causality. This kind of faith should be based on wisdom, otherwise it is simply superstition, quite shifty and not beneficial to oneself or others.

It is quite a pity if practitioners lack genuine faith endowed with wisdom. As it is said in the *Uttaratantra Shastra*, it is only by relying upon faith that one can realize the ultimate truth. And it is said in *The Extensive Commentary on Sutra of Mahayana's Four Dharmas*, for those

with faith, that realization is achievable if they probe deep into the Dharma; and for those without faith, little benefit will be gained even if they can perfectly understand the literal meaning of the Dharma.

The study of Buddhism is completely different from that of worldly knowledge. For the latter case, as long as you understand content and meaning, you can consider yourself as a professional and it has nothing to do with faith. However, in order to gain wisdom in Buddhism, you have to develop genuine faith and the intellectual meaning is simply not enough. In fact, it is not just in Buddhism, but in all other religions as well, that the difference lies in the object of faith.

Once you have firm and resolute faith like a diamond, the merits are immeasurable. In *The Great Compassion Sutra*, it is said that if one generates confidence in the Buddha, even for a moment, that person has already accumulated immeasurable merits which will never be exhausted in kalpas to come.

As Khenpo suggested before, when traveling around or taking a trip, you should take a small buddha statue with you as an object on which you can pray and take refuge. Whenever you see a buddha statue, a stupa, a supreme sutra, or a great master, you should fold your hands and say “Gya sem cho”, meaning “I take refuge”. These kinds of practices, having been completed with sincere devotion, will bring you incredible merit. If possible, you can also offer lamps and water, make prostrations, or chant mantras in front of Thangkas or statues of the Three Jewels. If you can continue to do these in your daily life, the faith will gradually become stable and stronger, eventually becoming as solid as a diamond.

Faith is one of the seven treasures of the noble ones, so don't lose that precious treasure of yours. In Gampopa's *Precious Garland of Supreme Path*, there are ten regrettable things and Khenpo believes that losing faith could be the eleventh. Having said that, we must strengthen our faith through day to day practice and, in the long run, it will definitely become more solid and resolute.

illuminated the Dharma jewel everywhere and rained down the sweet dew [of the Dharma];

The bodhisattvas could dispel all sentient beings' darkness of ignorance by illuminating the Dharma jewel and showing them the path towards the brightness of liberation. It is through the

light of wisdom that the bodhisattvas were able to brighten the minds of sentient beings and bring them the ultimate benefit. Even if there is only one great master, as long as that master keeps teaching them the Dharma, all sentient beings receiving that teaching will benefit.

For example, Khenpo said that he visited a small monastery in Barkam in 1986 and got to know a master who had been secretly teaching the Dharma for many years, going back to the 1970s, a period when Dharma teaching was not allowed. As a result, he noticed that the local people cultivated great wisdom and strong faith. A few years ago, this master passed away, seemingly without any fame or glory. In fact, there are many people who do not possess great fame or high position in society, but their actions are indeed those of bodhisattvas, bringing incredible benefit to others.

The importance of spreading the Dharma can be illustrated by another metaphor. Once the sweet dew of the Dharma has rained down into the droughty hearts of sentient beings, their minds will be moistened and the sprouts of liberation will start to grow. As it is said in *The Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*, if the seed of a grain is not moistened by raindrops, it will not sprout; and, similarly, if one didn't receive the rain of the Dharma, there is no way for the seed of liberation to sprout out of one's own mind.

Therefore, as Buddhist practitioners, we should cherish every opportunity to receive Dharma teachings, especially those profound teachings of emptiness and luminosity in Sutrayana and Tantrayana which are able to completely destroy the solid attachments caused by our deluded minds. Meanwhile, Khenpo encourages both monastic and lay practitioners to constantly rain down the Dharma dew whenever given the chance, this being the best way to help others to be free from afflictions and suffering, achieving liberation from samsara.

were paramount in the subtleties of the host of [spoken] sounds;

These bodhisattvas used different sounds and languages to expound the profound Dharma to all living beings of the six realms. These **subtleties** indicate that the bodhisattvas were skillful in disseminating the profound and detailed teaching, ensuring that the sound of their voice was beautiful and pleasant. Their teachings possessed such melodious sounds that all sentient beings, from far and wide, were strongly attracted, never feeling bored or tired when listening to the teaching. Meanwhile, their teachings contained the true reality of all phenomena and powerful antidotes to their mental afflictions, both of which directly touched their hearts and made them feel better. Therefore, the teachings of bodhisattvas cannot be mimicked by

ordinary beings, even if the ordinary beings repeat the language word for word, the effects are completely different.

The bodhisattvas knew how to communicate with different beings from all six realms. In the human world, they could speak to different people by using their own language. As followers, it is necessary for us to spread the Dharma by teaching in different languages when possible. Communicating with people by using their language is always the most effective and beneficial way to communicate. People feel more comfortable and find it easier to open their hearts and accept the teaching. Therefore, those who have talents in languages are highly encouraged to deepen their understanding of the Dharma teachings, translating them into the languages in which they are proficient. During the teaching, Khenpo also made it clear that he aspires, in his next life, to be fluent in many different languages in order to teach the Dharma more effectively.

profoundly entered into conditioned generation to eliminate the false views; were without any residual influence of the two extremes of being and nonbeing;

In this passage, **conditioned generation** refers to the principle of dependent arising. Through their realization of dependent arising, bodhisattvas eliminated the wrong views of existence and non-existence, as well as all of the related habitual tendencies. Without the attachment to these two extremes, existence and non-existence, or **being and nonbeing**, all the other wrong views were completely eradicated, so bodhisattvas **were without any residual influence of the two extremes**.

The principle of dependent arising is the primary tenet of Buddhism. In the *Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*, Nagarjuna paid homage to the Buddha by saying that, “I reverently bow to Guatama who, out of compassion, has taught the true doctrine in order to relinquish all views.” This homage indicates the two main features of Buddhism, compassion and wisdom. The Buddha had attained the profound wisdom due to his realization of the true nature of all phenomena and, out of his great compassion, he had taught the true reality to all living beings in order to relinquish their wrong views.

So if someone asks you, “What makes Buddhism different from other religions?” You can reply to them the words spoken above by Nagarjuna. The majestic and beautiful appearance of the Buddha is not the most unique thing in Buddhism. The main difference between Buddhism and other spiritual traditions lies in the view, the view of emptiness as well as in its realization,

followed by unbiased and pervasive compassion. These are the significant characteristics of Buddhism.

preached the Dharma without fear like the lion's roar;

Among Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities, bodhisattvas preach the Dharma, especially the teaching of emptiness, without any fear, like a lion among other wild animals. The reason is that the view of emptiness is the ultimate truth of all phenomena and cannot be refuted by any other thought. So, as Buddhists, we never try to praise ourselves or put down others, but we should have confidence in this understanding by realizing that emptiness can dispel any fear in any circumstance.

Many people have asked Khenpo, "Aren't you afraid to tour around all these prestigious universities? You don't really know much about their studies, right?" Khenpo has said, "I'm not that arrogant, I do know a little about high technology, but I have been studying Mahayana Buddhism for so many years and am confident that I can answer any question they might have." Indeed, Mahayana practitioners who have attained a certain level of realization of the concept of emptiness are able to give teachings in any environment and to any community without fear.

preached with reverberations like thunder;

The teaching of bodhisattvas rolled forth like spring thunder and awakened all the deluded beings. When the Tibetan nomads hear the first spring thunder, they hope that calves will be born soon in order to have fresh ghee and milk. Spring is usually the hardest season for nomad families as their provisions for winter are almost gone and there is a period of temporary shortages. This is also true for farmers because they harvest their crops in autumn and their provisions have also dwindled. So, people living on the Tibetan plateau usually take the spring thunder as an auspicious sign of hope.

For the same reason, when living beings hear the thunder of the Dharma teachings of emptiness or of great compassion, they are awakened from the deep sleep of ignorance and the seed of enlightenment is ready to sprout. This is the powerful blessings of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

were without measure and beyond measurement;

Some historical masters have explained this sentence in the following way: because bodhisattvas have abided by the Dharmadhatu, the true reality, they have transcended all

conceptual thought, therefore they were **without measure**. And because they were not confined by any worldly principles or rules, they were **beyond measurement**. So **without measure** indicates their realization of the ultimate truth and **beyond measurement** indicates that their freedom is beyond any worldly confinement.

According to the Tibetan version, this sentence is translated as the bodhisattvas have surpassed all phenomena that can and cannot be measured. Those which can be measured are color, size, weight, etc. and that which cannot be measured is the real nature of emptiness. The realization of the bodhisattvas has transcended them both.

were like ocean captains who had collected the many Dharma jewels;

The Dharma jewels are the jewels of wisdom and the merits bodhisattvas had accumulated. Just like an experienced ship's captain who is familiar with the route and can take merchants on a journey in search for jewels, bodhisattvas precisely understand the jewels of the deep and vast Dharma and are experienced in how to put them into practice.

If we want to rely upon a teacher, we should look for those with great merits and wisdom. If the teacher doesn't have merits and wisdom, it is difficult for his followers to accumulate such qualities. Or, in an even worse case, followers may be misguided onto a wrong path that creates even more negative karma.

Many masters sought the Dharma jewels through diligent study and practice throughout their lives. In only a few cases were they able to easily recover the Dharma jewels just upon hearing them due to the practice in previous lives. As young Buddhists in this modern age, you should cherish every opportunity to diligently study and practice the Dharma, putting all of your efforts into extensively and deeply studying and reflecting on the Dharma. Only in this way, when growing old, will you have collected abundant Dharma jewels in your mind.

comprehended the profound and wondrous meanings of the Dharmas;

As it is said in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*:

They distinguish all phenomena, they do not grasp them;

They know all dharma, their minds are free from any attachment.

It is in this way that bodhisattvas comprehend the profound and wondrous meanings of the Dharma.

Nowadays, some scholars are really good at giving speeches, yet their mind is still contaminated with their own attachments, holding wrong views and slandering others. They like to criticize the sutra as being fake, or that a person is not genuine, or that a dharma teaching is not right. If they are skilled in debate, they may guide many people in the wrong direction. Therefore, we need to be very careful. Having eloquence while lacking wisdom or having wisdom while lacking eloquence are not the qualities of a wise person. A wise person must have both wisdom and eloquence.

understood well the past tendencies and [current] mental processes of sentient beings;

These bodhisattvas understand past and future life trajectories of living beings in the cyclic existence of samsara. All living beings are trapped in samsara just like bees trapped in a bottle. In this huge bottle of samsara, sometimes beings are in the three higher realms and sometimes the three lower realms. Today they may return to be humans, tomorrow animals, and the day after tomorrow gods. While in their human form, they could become westerners or easterners. If we could understand our previous lives, we would be shocked and exasperated by the meaninglessness of samsara, generating a strong renunciation of suffering.

Without a determination to renounce samsara, it would be impossible to have both bodhichitta and the wisdom of non-dualism arising in our mind. Even worse, we may lack the right view of the law of karma. So, the practice of renunciation is the foundation for the study and practice of the Dharma. Without this view, enlightenment, or benefiting all sentient beings, results in empty words. As Nagarjuna says in his *Letter to a Friend*,

*If higher birth and freedom is your quest,
You must become accustomed to right views.
Those who practice good with inverse views
Will yet experience terrible results.*

Here, *inverse views* denotes wrong views that may deny the blessings of the Three Jewels, karmic law, and conventional or ultimate truth. His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche used to criticize those who had wrong views, so all of his disciples were afraid, reflecting upon themselves: “Do I have any wrong views? Is His holiness talking about me?” For ordained

monks and nuns, holding wrong views may suggest having already broken the vows. According to Abhidharmakosa, virtues can be continued only after wrong views are dispelled and right view are renewed.

approached the unparalleled autonomous wisdom of the Buddha, the ten powers, [the four] fearlessnesses, and all the eighteen exclusive [attributes of the Buddha]; had closed all the doorways of the evil destinations but were born in the five destinations in order to manifest their bodies there;

Unparalleled autonomous wisdom belong to all buddhas and the Tibetan version refers to the empowerment of autonomous wisdom. Those bodhisattvas were very similar to the buddhas in terms of the wisdom, the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses, and all the eighteen exclusive attributes, having closed all doorways to the three lower realms. Those who have already reached the stage of acceptance on the path of joining will no longer fall into the three lower realms. The realization level of those 32,000 bodhisattvas are much higher than the stage of acceptance, so it is impossible for them to fall into the lower realms any longer. However, they could still choose to take birth in all six realms in order to benefit different living beings. Sometimes, people refer to the six realms as five realms because the demi-god realm can be included into the god realm.

were great medicine kings who were good at healing the various illnesses; provided medicine according to the illness and caused it to be taken;

What methods did these bodhisattvas use to benefit sentient beings? They manifested their bodies in different realms, acting as great medicine kings who were very good at healing various illnesses. They knew the causes of various illnesses, provided proper medicine in different situations, and ensured that living beings take the right medicine and be cured. In the *Avatamsaka sutra*, it is said: “with immeasurable wisdom, they appear in different forms of body that accord with different sentient beings’ capacity, to liberate all the beings in the realms of cyclic existence.” Also in Aryadeva’s *Four Hundred Verses of the Middle Way*, it goes as follows:

*Just as for an experienced physician
A sickness that cannot be cured is rare
Once Bodhisattvas have found their strength
Those they cannot train are extremely few.*

On the contrary, nowadays it is quite commonly seen that some diseases are very hard to cure, especially when complicated operations are required. Khenpo heard that someone who had the same operation that he had a few years ago had eventually passed away. Before Khenpo's operation, the doctor came and told him in private, "You need to be prepared because there is a chance of failure in this operation because there is a large blood vessel right beside the tumor and during the operation, you may be in great danger." Upon hearing this, Khenpo described feeling quite calm and without fear. While he realized that it might be the last time he saw the morning sunlight, he did not tell this to anyone. Actually, everyone should be prepared for all possibilities in life, since the nature of life is impermanence.

For those bodhisattvas, there were very few beings that could not be helped. While the majority of beings could benefit, exceptions still exist. There were those people who not only rejected the Dharma teachings, but even slandered or defamed the bodhisattvas. This was likely due to vicious aspirations in previous lives.

Given this situation, especially in these modern times of the Internet, whenever we hear this kind of statement, we had better not believe it right away without observing through our own wisdom. Otherwise, it would be troublesome to believe in all of the slanderous gossips flowing over the internet. His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche used to say, "Language is like a hammer in an ironsmith's hand. The ironsmith can use it to forge iron into a sickle, an axe, etc. Similarly, language is like a tool that can be used to slander or to show respect, just based on the speaker's intention rather than on true fact." Therefore, it is crucial to cautiously distinguish different words with wisdom, particularly in this modern age.

were accomplished in all the immeasurable merits; had ornamented and purified all the immeasurable buddha lands; unfailingly used what they saw and heard for the benefit [of others]; and never squandered away their endeavors. Thus, were they entirely replete in all merits.

These bodhisattvas had inconceivable merits, ornamenting and purifying all of the immeasurable buddha lands. If ordinary beings were able to see the bodies of these bodhisattvas, hear their voices, receive their teachings and so on, they would receive great benefit. Even if these bodhisattvas passed away, if we are able to follow their teachings, there would be no difference even without seeing them in person. For example, whenever Khenpo Sodargye reads Longchenpa's *Seven Treasures*, he feels that it is just the same as directly

hearing Longchenpa's voice and receiving the teaching from him. Briefly speaking, thanks to the amazingly and powerfully unfailing and inexhaustible aspirations of these bodhisattvas, anyone who sees them, hears them, recalls them, or makes a connection with them, will definitely receive immeasurable benefit.

The virtues of these bodhisattvas are incomparable. In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, it is said: "to expound their virtues for countless eons would hardly amount to a drop in the sea of their merits." Indeed, the bodhisattvas' virtues cannot be easily imagined, even if we could count all of the drops in the sea, we could not count all of their merits. As Khenpo said during his teaching, "For those masters whom I have followed, some are still alive and others have passed away, but their merits are beyond our ordinary thinking. Their virtuous qualities and their compassionate dharma activities are much more vast than space and deeper than any ocean."

We may say that space and the ocean are immeasurable, but the benefits that all realized masters have brought to sentient beings are even more immeasurable. From life to life, those enlightened masters have been dedicating themselves to the liberation of sentient beings from ignorance and suffering. The Dharma jewels they have left for sentient beings, as well as the dharma activities they practiced in this world, are hard for ordinary beings to fathom. Khenpo encourages us to memorize this stanza for reminding us of the masters' incredible merits and kindness. As Jigme Lingpa says in his *Treasury of Precious Qualities*, "For those great masters, no matter how little or random their actions may seem, we definitely should not regard them as simple or superficial. They must contain very deep and limitless meaning, being beyond the meaning of words to describe."

Through the accumulation of merits and wisdom since before the beginning of time, these bodhisattvas have possessed many qualities in their bodies, speech, and mind. Thus, they were **entirely replete in all merits**. They could have manifested, at will, in different bodily forms in front of different types of beings, guiding them onto the path of liberation.

The Names of Bodhisattvas

Their names were Equivalent Contemplation Bodhisattva, Inequivalent Contemplation Bodhisattva, Equivalent-Inequivalent Contemplation Bodhisattva, Autonomy of Meditation King Bodhisattva, Autonomous Dharma King Bodhisattva, Dharma

Characteristic Bodhisattva, Radiance Characteristic Bodhisattva, Radiance Ornament Bodhisattva, Great Ornament Bodhisattva, Accumulation of Jewels Bodhisattva, Accumulation of Eloquence Bodhisattva, Jewel Hand Bodhisattva, Jewel Seal Hand Bodhisattva, Constantly Raised Hand Bodhisattva, Constantly Lowered Hand Bodhisattva, Constantly Lamenting Bodhisattva, Roots of Joy Bodhisattva, Joy King Bodhisattva, Eloquent Sound Bodhisattva, Store of Space Bodhisattva, Holding the Jewel Torch Bodhisattva, Jewel Courage Bodhisattva, Jewel Vision Bodhisattva, Indra’s Net Bodhisattva, Illumination Net Bodhisattva, Unconditional Contemplation Bodhisattva, Accumulation of Wisdom Bodhisattva, Excellent Jewel Bodhisattva, Heavenly King Bodhisattva, Destroyer of Māra Bodhisattva, Lightning-like Virtue Bodhisattva, Autonomous King Bodhisattva, Ornament of the Characteristics of Merit Bodhisattva, Lion’s Roar Bodhisattva, Sound of Thunder Bodhisattva, Sound Striking the Mountains Bodhisattva, Fragrant Elephant Bodhisattva, White Fragrant Elephant Bodhisattva, Constant Exertion Bodhisattva, Unresting Bodhisattva, Wondrous Birth Bodhisattva, Flower Ornament Bodhisattva, Contemplates the Sounds of the World (Avalokiteśvara) Bodhisattva, Attains Great Strength Bodhisattva, Brahmā’s Net Bodhisattva, Jewel Staff Bodhisattva, Undefeated Bodhisattva, Ornamented Earth Bodhisattva, Golden Crest Bodhisattva, Pearl Crest Bodhisattva, Maitreya Bodhisattva, Mañjuśrī Dharma Prince Bodhisattva—there were thirty-two thousand such as these.

Constantly Raised Hand Bodhisattva does not mean that the bodhisattva always keeps his hand up, but means that the bodhisattva stretches out his hand to call upon sentient beings to engage in virtuous deeds. **Constantly Lowered Hand Bodhisattva** indicates that the bodhisattva constantly gave Dharma teachings in a state of loving kindness. On the other hand, **Constantly Lamenting Bodhisattva** was empathetic and constantly contemplating on the suffering of sentient beings. In the Tibetan version, there is also a **Constant Laughing Bodhisattva** and an **Arrival of Aspiration Bodhisattva**.

Kumarajiva stated in his commentary that these names follow a sequence of the state of their realization, from lowest to highest. Perhaps they are listed in such a way because in this world, Maitreya, Avalokitesvara and Manjushri are more relevant to us, so they are listed at the end. All of these bodhisattva names have incredible merits and whenever we hear their names, we are greatly blessed by them.

An Amazing Story of Manjushri

Praying to Manjushri is extremely important for our dharma practice. In the *Manjushri Parinirvana Sutra*, it is said that just by listening to the name of Manjushri, one could eliminate all negativities accumulated over 1.2 billion eons. Also, people who hear the name of Manjushri or see his image will not take rebirth in the three lower realms for hundreds of thousands of eons. Since Manjushri's name has such incredible merit, we should more diligently chant his mantra: Om A Ra Pa Ca Na Dhih. Below is a story of Manjushri from the *The Jewel Casket Sutra*.

Once during a rainy season retreat, Manjushri didn't stay with the Sangha but spent the entire three months in three different places. For instance, he spent one month with an assembly of queens and retinues at King Salgyal's palace. When Manjushri returned to the Sangha on the last day of his retreat, all of the other members were quite upset, especially Mahakashyapa, the enforcer of the Sangha. When Mahakashyapa sounded the gong to call the entire assembly together, his intention was to expel Manjushri from the Sangha. The Buddha, knowing Mahakashyapa's intention, informed Manjushri and exhorted him to reveal the power of his qualities.

Then Manjushri illuminated the world with his numinous powers, numerous buddha lands from all ten directions were seen by everyone. In each Buddha land, there was one Manjushri and one Mahakashyapa who was sounding a gong. Buddha then asked Mahakashyapa: "Out of all the Manjushris in all of the buddha lands, which one are you going to expel? Are you expelling all of them or just this one?"

Mahakashyapa felt remorse and wanted to throw the gong away, but was unable to do so and the gong continued to sound in all of the buddha lands. Mahakashyapa then asked the Buddha for forgiveness, admitting that Manjushri's realizations were beyond his conception. The Buddha told him that during these three months, Manjushri had taught five hundred children, five hundred women, and five hundred prostitutes, all who had achieved, and would, henceforth, never lose enlightenment.

Everyone, including Mahakashyapa, were astounded, asking Manjushri how he had accomplished such a feat. Manjushri replied: "I used many skillful means to teach them. I played games with the children; I used money with the poor; I demonstrated good deeds to

some; I revealed my powers to others; I terrified some with faces of fear; and I consoled others with visages of love. Why did I do so? You should know that people are different, so I had to tame them, connecting with them in many different ways. Their minds had to mature so I could eventually benefit them with the Dharma.”

Lecture 5

Importance of Patience and Perseverance

It has been more than one month since we started to study the Vimalakirti Sutra. In the very beginning, some might have decided to have a taste of this sutra out of sheer curiosity. After a period of time however, they may have given up already. Especially for those who have not formed the habit of studying the Dharma in a step-by-step manner, they may think listening to the Dharma in such a long horizon is too difficult.

On the other hand, some Buddhists are admirably diligent. Even at 3 or 4am in their local time, they would attend the teaching on time and never miss even one single class. This takes great exertion. For the audience from different countries, there may exist a conflict between Khenpo's live teaching schedule and their normal schedule. Khenpo can only choose this hour of the day to give teaching for the convenience of the majority. Therefore, those who cannot listen to the livestream due to their work, family duties, or other issues, can try to catch up with the teaching on the following day.

Indeed, patience is essential in studying the Dharma. One can never delve into the profound meanings of the Dharma without true patience. Some mistakenly believe that being a Buddhist only indicates to receive certain blessings or empowerments, to follow some simple rituals, or to practice sitting meditation. Indeed, all these external appearances do not necessarily convey the essential spirit of Buddhism. It is only through the systematic study of Dharma that one can grasp the essence of Buddhism. Normally one needs to study over a dozen sutras and shastras to gain a good understanding of Buddhist philosophy.

During the course of study, some may make progress quickly while others may not. Nevertheless, as long as one persists in the systematic study of the Dharma in the long run, one will find gradual changes in one's mind. Even if there were no obvious effects, at the very least, the seed of liberation will be planted in one's storehouse consciousness. As it is said in a sutra, once you hear the Dharma teaching, the seed of liberation is forever planted, and when there are proper conditions, this seed will for sure give rise to the fruit. So the merit of listening to the Dharma, even only once, cannot be exhausted. Anyone who believes in the law of causality will understand this point.

Therefore, we need persevering determination in the learning of the Dharma. Without such attitude, we can never attain success. If you learn a little Dharma once a while but cannot persist, in similar situations in the future you will be hardly able to complete anything that you've started. Eventually you will find yourself stuck in those situations and will be incapable of carrying anything through. So it's better to commit yourself in the process of learning the Dharma and to keep your promise until the end. With this determination and commitment, you can put more pressure on your study, to make sure you will successfully complete it.

Speaking of commitment, some western scholars and practitioners would take a long time to make a commitment at the beginning. But once they made the commitment, they won't change any more. For example, some professors that Khenpo met in western universities have been studying Tibetan Buddhism over decades, and this perseverance is very admirable. As we study the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, it is a good opportunity to observe our mind, whether it is steady or rather shifting. Just like Nagarjuna said in his *Letter to a Friend*,

*Understand your thoughts to be like figures drawn
On water, sandy soil, or carved in stone.
Of these, for tainted thoughts the first's the best,
While when you long for Dharma, it's the last.*

The superior commitment is like the inscription on stone, very firm and unable to fall off. The middle one is like the words on sandy soil, which can be preserved for a period of time if there is no strong wind. The inferior one is like the ripple pattern on water, which rises, falls and disappears quickly. When studying a text or conducting research on a particular area, we can observe what level of commitment we have, and furthermore, how to make it more stable. It is crucial to have a strong determination in the course of studying the Dharma.

There are people who are constantly changing like a leaf blown in the wind, flying here, swaying there and then disappearing somewhere else. They can seldom stick to a study or practice with persistence. As human beings, we must maintain certain principles, and have long-term plans for our practice as well as for our lives. Through the study of the Dharma, we should be able to tame our restless mind and to develop stable mentalities. Otherwise we will get lost in this mundane world where so many people are drowning in chaos and confusion, and desperately needing a lamp of wisdom more than ever. Therefore it is of great significance to study the Mahayana teaching, so as to make our human existence meaningful and to enable

us to stay on the path towards a bright future. We should really cherish this opportunity from the depth of our hearts.

The Other Audiences of the Dharma Assembly

There were also ten thousand Brahma heavenly kings, Sikhin and others, who descended from the other worlds of four continents to proceed to where the Buddha was in order to hear the Dharma. There were also twelve thousand heavenly emperors (i.e., Indras), who also came from the other worlds of four continents to sit in this assembly, ...

In Sanskrit, **Sikhin** means topknot, an appellation to call the Brahma heavenly kings. There are ten thousand Brahma heavenly kings who descended from the other worlds to attend the Dharma assembly. There are also twelve thousand Indras or heavenly emperors, coming to this assembly to listen to the Buddha's teaching.

In terms of the audience coming to this assembly, this paragraph mentions two groups of gods. According to the Buddhist cosmology, the entire universe of a buddha land is composed of billions of small worlds that are centered by Mount Sumeru and surrounded mainly by four great continents in the ocean. In the text, **Brahma heavenly kings** are mentioned to represent all the gods from the heavenly realms above Mount Sumeru, and **heavenly emperors** to represent all the gods from the heavenly realms based on Mount Sumeru.

... and the other awesomely powerful gods (devas), dragons (nagas), yaksas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, and mahoragas, who all came to sit in the assembly. The bhiksus (monks), bhiksunis (nuns), upasakas (laymen), and upasikas (laywomen) [also] came together to sit in the assembly.

There are also other types of living beings present in the Dharma assembly. **Powerful gods**, or **devas**, refer to heavenly beings from other realms, rather than the two groups of gods mentioned above.

Dragons, or **nagas**, may live in the sky, on the earth or underneath the earth, and they all have supernatural powers.

Yaksas are demons floating in the space, and some of them are on duty at the gate of heaven palace. It is said that those Dharma practitioners who did not maintain pure precepts would likely be reborn as Yaksas in their future lives.

Gandharvas are the gods of music, as they are proficient in music. They have very gentle and soft hearts and are very compassionate to others.

Asuras are semi-gods, and also called “No drinking of alcohol”, indicating they do not drink alcohol. They are very aggressive and belligerent, and often fight with gods. The male asuras are quite ugly, whereas the female are really beautiful.

Garudas are the golden-winged birds, and can take birth from womb, moisture, or egg, or just by spontaneous transformation. In many sutras, tantras, or termas, there are different descriptions of garudas. Some of them are Dharma protectors, some of them are enlightened beings, while some of them are ordinary beings and often bring harm or sickness to other beings.

Kimnaras resemble human bodies but are non-humans, as they have horns on their heads. And they also have beautiful voices.

Mahoragas are snake forms that move on their stomach, but can also transform into different shapes and images.

Above are eight kinds of nonhuman beings, who exist in all the six realms as gods, semi-gods, or animals. All of them came to sit in the assembly to listen to the Buddha’s teaching. Beside them, there are also **monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen**, i.e., the four groups of the Buddha’s disciples, sitting in the assembly. All of these beings paid reverence to the Buddha and were happy to see the Buddha and be in his presence.

At that time the Buddha explained the Dharma for the congregation of immeasurable hundreds of thousands surrounding and revering him. He was like [Mount] Sumeru, the king of mountains, rising high above the ocean. Peacefully seated on the many-jeweled lion seat, he towered over the great congregation of all those who had come there.

In the presence of the Buddha, an immeasurable amount of beings, including heavenly beings, non-human beings and human beings, as well as bodhisattvas and arhats, were all gathering together and listening to the Buddha with full reverence and great joy. In fact, can you imagine

that scene? It's quite grand! Buddha was like the majestic Mount Sumeru, being seated immovably above the ocean of disciples. From his many-jeweled lion seat, the Buddha was radiating brilliant lights over the great congregation. The bodhisattvas, gods and other beings can also radiate lights, but their lights are just like the light of fireflies or distant stars when compared to the Buddha's, which are like a brilliant full moon in an autumn night that makes all the other lights rather dim. So in such a large assembly, the Buddha is the most majestic of all.

Can You Believe This Grand Scene?

Some might feel that the existence of heavenly and non-human beings is only based on religious superstition. Regardless of religious beliefs, there are so many phenomena that cannot be perceived by ordinary beings' sensory faculty. If one does not acknowledge those phenomena that are beyond one's ordinary perception, it only indicates this person has a blind faith in him or herself. When we study the Dharma, we should keep an open mind about those mysterious things beyond our ordinary life or beyond our habitual thoughts. We should not be so materialistic in terms of what we can or cannot perceive. Only by opening up our mind are we able to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenal world.

For example, chanting mantras, making smoke offerings, or even turning prayer wheels brings great benefits to tormented hungry ghosts or non-human beings whom we cannot perceive. Also when we are heavily sick, or in the middle of a nightmare, sometimes it can be very obvious for us to feel the presence of some ghost or spirit. One more example is that in some places where car accidents happened frequently, there are always ghosts or non-human beings lingering around.

Talking about the audience present in a Dharma assembly, in fact, it is not just the assembly held by the Buddha that all the gods and non-human beings would attend to receive the teaching. Whenever there's a Dharma assembly held by a great master, those beings would also come. Khenpo Sodargye recalled the early years at Larung Gar. In 1985, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche said in a Dharma assembly, "We now have a big sangha of more than 300 persons." But in Khenpo Sodargye's mind, there were much less than 300 persons, and he wondered why His Holiness would speak this way. Later on, in an another Dharma assembly, His Holiness told everyone that whenever counting the number of participants of a

Dharma assembly, the number should be increased since there are other types of beings like nagas or gods present.

For people with transcendental powers, they can perceive these beings with their divine eyes. But ordinary people like us should understand this fact based on scriptural authority and referential reasoning. That is why in most Dharma assemblies, there are some required rituals to make offerings to the Dharma protectors and other deities.

The Offering of Jewel Accumulation

At that time there was an elder's son in the city of Vaisali named Jewel Accumulation. He and five hundred other elders' sons proceeded to where the Buddha was, holding canopies made of the seven treasures. Reverencing [the Buddha's] feet with their heads, they all simultaneously offered their canopies to the Buddha.

Here **elder** means a noble man who is of great virtue and wisdom. The son of this noble man is called **Jewel Accumulation** or Ratnakuta. He is also the main character of the *Maharatnakuta Sutra* and other Mahayana sutras. Ratnakuta is said to be the manifestation of a great bodhisattva, and also a good friend of Vimalakirti. They often accompanied each other to attend the Buddha's teachings. This time since Vimalakirti was sick at home, Ratnakuta came to the assembly along with five hundred other elders' sons.

Each of these five hundred elders' sons held one canopy made of the seven treasures. They first bowed in obeisance to the Buddha's feet with their heads and then offered their canopies to the Buddha. A canopy looks similar to a large umbrella. It is one of the eight auspicious objects in Buddhism. According to the *Sutra of Different Karmic Rewards*, it is said that offering canopies to the Buddha brings ten different rewards, such as having a peaceful mind without mental afflictions, gaining good reputation and being respected by others and so on.

In fact, one needs a lot of merits to have the opportunity of seeing the Buddha himself and making offerings directly to him. As Khenpo said, every time he reads this kind of description in sutras, he cannot help but thinking how wonderful it would be if he were able to receive the teaching directly from the Buddha and to hear his voice in person. Even if he were to take only the form of an ant in front of the Buddha, it would still be a rare opportunity that could only happen with great merits.

Although we currently don't have the opportunity to see the real Buddha, at least we can make offerings in front of the statues of the Buddha, and the merit we accumulate in this way is also immense. According to the tradition of Han Buddhism, people would hold canopies and trail behind a great master, in such a way to show great respect to the master. For us, we can put a canopy with proper size on the top a Buddha statue, such as Buddha Shakyamuni or Padmasambhava. By doing so we can accumulate great merit. For those who receive respect, who have good reputation and who enjoy peaceful mentality, it is very possible that they made such kind of offering to the Buddha in their previous lives. On the other hand, those who are often neglected by others, probably also cheated, despised or bullied others out of arrogance in their previous lives.

The Buddha's numinous charisma made the jewel-laden canopies all turn into a single canopy, which covered the entire trimegachiliocosm, yet allowing all the characteristics of the breadth and length of this world to appear within it. Also, all the trimegachiliocosm's Mount Sumerus, Snowy Mountains, Mucilinda Mountains, Mahāmucilinda Mountains, Fragrant Mountains, Jewel Mountains, Golden Mountains, Black Mountains, Iron Ring Mountains, and Great Iron Ring Mountains; the oceans, rivers, streams, and springs; the suns, moons, and stars; the palaces of the gods, the palaces of the dragons, and the palaces of the honored gods—all these appeared within that jewel-laden canopy.

Those who are familiar with Abhidharmakosa probably have a clear picture of such a scene. The transcendental power of the Buddha is inconceivable by our ordinary imagination. Take VR technology as an example. This technology is so common today, but was hardly conceivable years ago. The same goes with the Buddha's numinous power. It is hard for us to make assumptions of the Buddha's ability based on our limited experience.

Kumarajiva stated that the manifestation of Buddha's power served two purposes. The first is to demonstrate the profound wisdom of the Buddha, since such numinous power comes from the enlightened wisdom. The second is to indicate that a small virtuous deed can bring about incredibly great and rare fruition.

Also, the buddhas of the ten directions, as well as the buddhas' preaching of the Dharma, also appeared in that jewel-laden canopy. At that time the entire great congregation observed the numinous power of the Buddha and exclaimed in praise of its unprecedented

[quality]. They held their palms together and revered the Buddha, gazing up at his revered countenance without interruption.

Not only the innumerable worlds, but also buddhas and bodhisattvas of ten directions, as well as their preaching of the Dharma appeared within one giant jewel-laden canopy. By doing so, the Buddha inspired the bodhisattvas to build their own pure lands, and showed them a direction of how to build pure land. Actually, many sutras begin with such auspicious demonstration, that is, before the teaching, the Buddha showed buddha lands of the ten directions to the assembly through his miraculous power.

When the Buddha had such miraculous demonstration, all the gods, nagas, human and non-human beings, as well as bodhisattvas, joined their hands together and revered the Buddha. They gazed upon his revered face without any interruption, and praised him with beautiful verses in different languages.

The Importance of Making Offerings to the Buddha

The elder's son Ratnakuta made offering to the Buddha with his body, speech and mind. In term of his body, he, along with 500 young men, offered the jewel-laden canopy to the Buddha. In terms of his speech, he proclaimed the verses below as a praise to the Buddha. And in term of his mind, he constantly had pure faith in the Buddha. Or from the aspect of what offering he made to the Buddha, we can say that the jewel-laden canopy is the offering of material, and the praise to the Buddha is the offering of the Dharma.

Making offerings to the Buddha or the Three Jewels is an important daily practice. With our bodies, we can make prostrations, offer water, flowers, incense and so on in front of the Buddha. With our speech, we can chant liturgies or scriptures, typically those that compliment the Buddha. With our minds, we can compose songs or poems in praise of the Buddha, or make an aspiration to do so when we have good abilities.

In Tibetan Buddhism there are many great masters who composed a lot of poems of praises for buddhas and bodhisattvas. For example, Mipham Rinpoche, Je Tsongkhapa, Longchenpa, Jigme Lingpa, Patrul Rinpoche composed great volumes of praising verses to buddhas and bodhisattvas. Khenpo also mentioned that, about 30 years ago when he accompanied His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche to visit Mount Wutai, he wrote a poem in praise of

Manjushri, and nobody knew about it. Last year, 2017, when he visited Mount Wutai again, he translated it into Chinese and shared it with all his Chinese students.

So in order to accumulate virtuous provisions from life to life, it is quite necessary to fully use this precious human body to conduct such virtuous deeds. If the author is not famous, the writing may not be widely known. Yet, it's still very good to recite some famous verses composed by great masters, as a way of accumulating merits for oneself.

Meanwhile, if you have good voice you can sing songs to praise the Buddha. This is a rather common tradition in both Tibetan and Han Buddhism. In the *Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*, it is said,

*If one extols the merits of the Buddha,
Letting the Buddha's merits be widely known by all beings;
As a result, one will be able to
Enjoy the happiness of having great reputation.*

There are many verses of praises to the Buddha. In Han Buddhism, people often chant this very famous verse from the *Abhiskramana Sutra*:

*In the heavens above, in all that is below, nothing compares with the Buddha,
Through the worlds of the ten directions, he is matchless,
Of all I have seen in the world,
There is nothing at all that is like the Buddha.*

Also in *The Treasury of Blessings - A Practice of Buddha Shakyamuni*, a verse goes like:

*Like all the buddhas and their heirs - in the enlightened intention,
And in activity, aspiration, wisdom, love and capacity,
In these and all the ways unsurpassable wisdom manifests -
May I and every other being too come to be exactly as they are!*

These verses have incredible merits so we should chant them in our daily practice.

The Verses Proclaimed by Jewel Accumulation

At this the elder's son Jewel Accumulation proclaimed in verse before the Buddha:

Jewel Accumulation praised Buddha by chanting these verses below, which are not only beautiful in words but also profound in meanings.

**Your eyes are pure,
And as large as blue lotuses;
Your mind is pure, having mastered the concentrations.
Long have you accumulated pure action - you are immeasurably praiseworthy;
You have guided the congregation with serenity, and therefore we bow our heads to
you.**

This verse is to praise the Buddha's body, mind and the merits that he accumulated in previous lives.

As for the Buddha's body, it says the Buddha's eyes are pure, broad and long, just like the petals of a blue lotus from India. Some people also have beautiful eyes that are clear and bright. If you see the drawing of the Buddha, you'll notice the beautiful shape of the Buddha's eyes. Also the Buddha's eyes are neither fully open nor fully closed. Relating to sitting meditation, it may be easier for you to fully close your eyes to avoid distractions, but this is not really helpful for your practice. The best choice is to follow the Buddha's posture.

As for the Buddha's mind, the Buddha has already broken free from all afflictions, and reached the pure state of nirvana. The Buddha's concentration surpasses all the worldly meditations featured by clarity, bliss and absence of thought, and he is constantly abiding in the transcendental state of the highest realization.

Both the elegant body and the pure mind result from the Buddha's accumulation of merits through his body, speech, and mind in numerous previous lives through three incalculable eons. And thanks to his wisdom of serenity, i.e., the wisdom of pacifying all mental afflictions, the Buddha has guided infinite living beings onto the right path of nirvana. Therefore, we should bow our heads to the Buddha. As Buddhists, we should always recall the Buddha's magnificent appearance, pure mind, profound wisdom, as well as his great kindness to us.

**We see the Great Sage use numinous transformations
To manifest the immeasurable lands throughout the ten directions,**

**Within which the Buddhas preach the Dharma,
And we thus can see and hear them all!**

This verse is to praise the Buddha's miraculous powers. Through his powers, the Buddha makes such numinous transformations that the whole assembly can see immeasurable buddha lands of the ten directions. In every buddha land, the assembly can witness a buddha teaching the profound Dharma. Not only can people see such magnificent scenes, but they can also hear all those teachings. These amazing transformations definitely cannot be done by any worldly person. It is only due to the Buddha's infinite power.

Nowadays many people really believe in miraculous powers. Given any demonstration of a certain person's miraculous power, they would immediately put trust in that person. In Buddhism however, the miraculous transformation is not the most important attribute, as other religions can also perform miracles. It is the authentic Dharma taught by the Buddha that is the most important aspect of Buddhism. However, in order to attract some beings and ease their mind, or enhance their faith in the Buddhadharma, it is also necessary to demonstrate such numinous transformations now and then.

**The Dharma power of the Dharma King surpasses all other beings,
And you always give the wealth of Dharma to all.
Well do you discriminate the characteristics of the dharmas and remain unmoved
within the cardinal principle.
You have already achieved autonomy with regard to the dharmas, and therefore we
bow our heads to you as Dharma King.**

Here the Buddha is called the Dharma king because he has already attained the autonomy with regard to all phenomena, just like a king who has power over everything. The Buddha surpasses all other beings by his Dharma power, so he constantly gives the wealth of Dharma to all living beings.

What is the wealth of Dharma? On the conventional level, the Buddha is able to clearly discriminate the characteristics of all phenomena, such as general characteristics, self-characteristics, the classifications of all phenomena, etc. With his wisdom that knows the multiplicity of phenomena, everything can be known exactly as it is. For example, if you look into the Buddha's teachings related to psychology, you will be surprised by its accuracy and clarity.

On the ultimate level, with his wisdom that knows the nature of all phenomena, the Buddha remains unmoved within the cardinal principle of the one great truth, i.e., the ultimate truth of emptiness. Here **unmoved** indicates that the ultimate truth of emptiness is unchangeable. No matter if one achieves Buddhahood or not, the true nature of all phenomena always remains as emptiness.

Through turning the Dharma wheel, the Buddha has clearly expounded the conventional and ultimate truths to all beings. Therefore, we know that the Buddha has completely attained autonomy with regard to all phenomena. Thus, Jewel Accumulation pays homage in the most respectful way to the Buddha as Dharma king.

Although the Buddha possesses many incredible qualities, such as a magnificent appearance, the power of miraculous transformations, and so on, he guides living beings mainly through giving the Dharma teaching. As Lama Tsongkhapa said in his Lamrim,

*Sages do not wash away sins with water,
They do not clear away beings' suffering with their hands,
They do not transfer their own knowledge to others;
They liberate by teaching the truth of reality.*

This verse is quite influential in Tibetan Buddhism, and often quoted by many scholars in Tibet. It emphasizes the importance of the Dharma teaching, which is the very fundamental way to benefit sentient beings. As Buddhists, we should also follow the same way to benefit others. Given different situations, sometimes we can share the teachings related to the conventional truth, and sometimes give the teachings of the ultimate truth. If we are not capable of directly teaching the Dharma, we can still support the qualified Dharma teacher to do so, and this kind of contribution is very meaningful.

All in all, the essence of Buddhism is to teach and educate people. Buddhism is not a theology which is only based on rituals and simply relies on some divine beings' power to eliminate people's sickness and sufferings. If it were really that simple, it would be great. However, the phenomenal world doesn't operate in such a way. So viewing Buddhism as an education is very important.

**You explain that the dharmas are neither extant nor non-extant,
Although the dharmas are generated from causes and conditions;**

**That they are without self, without creation, without experiencer,
Although good and evil karma is also not extinguished.**

So what is the teaching that the Buddha taught? The Buddha explained that all phenomena are neither existing nor non-existing, and people should not fall into the extreme of existence or the extreme of non-existence. Ultimately speaking, everything is free from conceptual elaborations; and relatively speaking, everything can dependently arise from causes and conditions. So in true reality, there is no self, no creation, and no experiencer: there is only good and bad karma which governs the appearance of everything and will not be extinguished until one achieves Buddhahood. The ultimate truth of emptiness and the conventional truth of appearance are the essential teachings of Buddhism. It is said in *The Introduction to Middle Way*,

*So too all things, though empty,
Strongly manifest within their very emptiness.
And since inherent nature is in neither truth,
Phenomena are neither nothing nor unchanging entities.*

This is how we should understand the fundamental view of Buddhism. Similarly, in Daoxuan's *The Way of Purifying the Mind and View*, a verse goes like

*Although there is no self and no phenomena,
Virtues and non-virtues still exist.
There are unbearable sufferings in samsara,
And the cycles of life and death in the six realms are endless.*

Ultimately speaking, there is no intrinsic existence of self and phenomena; however, the manifestation of virtues and non-virtues do exist. The immense sufferings in samsara are unbearable, and the cycles of life and death will continue without any interruption. It is only after one achieves enlightenment that he or she will abide in the empty nature of these manifestations and be no longer bounded by them.

This state of enlightenment is well described in a poem: "The six realms vividly appear in a dream, yet nothing really exists after awakening." In the delusional dream of samsara, everything appears to be real and existent. However, once you wake up, everything in the dream is nowhere to be found.

**Initially, under the bodhi tree you forcefully subjugated Mara,
Attaining extinction, like sweet dew, and achieving enlightenment.
Without any intention in mind and without experiencing any process,
You thoroughly vanquished the heterodox paths.**

This verse mainly praises the realization of the Buddha, which belongs to the twelve deeds of the Buddha. The Buddha subjugated mara through his ten powers under the bodhi tree, and thus achieved enlightenment and attained the sweet dew of nirvana. The Buddha vanquished the heterodoxy not through armaments or missiles. Rather, the Buddha first vanquished and subjugate the self, and then all the external maras were naturally subjugated. This is the most nonviolent and compassionate way of subjugation.

In Tibetan and in Xuanzang's translations, instead of **vanquished the heterodox paths**, it is "beyond heterodoxy's understanding". The Buddha's enlightenment is free from feelings, thoughts, and mental processes such as grasping. There is no creator to determine everything. Some philosophy schools believe that there has to be a creator to govern everything. For them, they cannot understand this profound realization of no intention, no experiences and no mental processes.

Traditionally speaking, Tibetan Buddhism put great importance on the teaching of twelve deeds of the Buddha. Even for people without extensive knowledge on sutras and shastras, they are very familiar with these twelve deeds. Usually on the last day of three-month summer retreat, it is required to teach the twelve deeds of the Buddha all night long. So Khenpo encourages everyone to study well this topic, which is a basic requirement of being a Buddhist. Khenpo once taught the twelve deeds of the Buddha at Yale University, and there's an auspicious coincidence since it was right on the day of Buddha Shakyamuni's descent from Tushita Heaven.

**With three turnings of the wheel of the Dharma in the chiliocosm,
The wheel is fundamentally always pure.
The achievement of enlightenment by gods and humans attests to this,
And the Three Jewels are thus manifest in the world.**

After the Buddha attained enlightenment, he turned the Dharma wheel three times: during the first turning he taught the Four Noble Truth, during the second turning he taught emptiness,

and during the third turning he taught the buddha nature. However, from the ultimate point of view, there was no Dharma being taught, and there was no teacher who taught the Dharma.

As the Buddha said in many sutras, from the day he achieved enlightenment to the day he passed into parinirvana, he did not teach even one word, and the so-called teaching was merely the manifestation in front of sentient beings. Thus the nature of the Dharma wheel is fundamentally always pure, undefiled by dualist thought. But within the manifestation of turning the Dharma wheel, by relying upon the Dharma teachings, human beings and celestial beings achieved enlightenment.

After the Buddha turned the first Dharma wheel in Deer Park, five bhikshus and eighty-thousand devas were all enlightened. During the second turning of the Dharma wheel at Vulture Peak Mountain, numerous Bodhisattvas reached the path of seeing. And the same goes with the third turning of the Dharma wheel that took place in Vaishali and other places. Thus through the turning of the Dharma wheel, the Three Jewels appeared in this world.

**With this wondrous Dharma you save sentient beings,
Who after experiencing it never regress from permanent serenity.
As the Great Medicine King who saves us from old age, illness, and death,
You should be worshiped as a Dharma sea whose virtues are boundless.**

The Buddha saves sentient beings through his wondrous Dharma. Whoever has experienced the Dharma and achieved enlightenment would never regress to an ordinary being. Rather, he or she constantly remains in the luminous wisdom of non-dualism, and pacifies all mental afflictions and conceptual elaborations. In such a way, the Buddha has saved numerous living beings from old age, illness and death. Therefore, unlike those ordinary doctors who can only cure physical illness, but not the illness of ignorance deeply rooted in ordinary beings' mind, the Buddha is called the Great Medicine King. So one should worship the Buddha as a Dharma sea whose virtues are boundless.

Here Jewel Accumulation praised the Buddha from the aspect of being the medicine king of the world. In the *Avatamsaka Sutra* it says:

*Knowing well all the causes and antidotes of sentient beings' sickness,
The enlightened being dispels their doubts and eradicates their ignorance.*

The Buddha knows well about the illnesses of sentient beings, which is the truth of suffering. He also knows the causes of their illnesses, which is the truth of the cause of suffering. Furthermore, he knows the antidotes of their illnesses, as well as the final state of the eradication of their illness, which are the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the cessation of suffering, respectively. So the Buddha is able to dispel the deluded beings' doubts and ignorance and to guide them towards liberation. Through this verse, we can see that the Buddha is completely different from all the other saviors in the world.

The Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truth, on the principle of dependent arising and emptiness, and on the twelve links of dependent origination are the most fundamental teachings in Buddhism. They are also the unsurpassable knowledge in this world. As Buddhists, we must at least understand these teachings. On the contrary, if one neither has any understanding or realization on emptiness, nor has any conviction on the karmic law of causes and effects, there's no point of being a Buddhist. Khenpo mentioned that he may point out others' faults from time to time, and it's important that we reflect upon these teachings during our daily practice.

Lecture 6

At the beginning of the teaching, Khenpo said that he was so delighted that many people have the great merit to receive the Dharma teaching. For a well-endowed human existence, eight freedoms are expounded in Buddhist philosophy, while Longchenpa elaborated the other sixteen factors that leave no opportunity for the Dharma study and practice in his *Wish Fulfilling Treasury*. As worldly beings, we're subject to different undesirable causes and conditions, such as lack of persistence and enthusiasm, and it's fairly easy for us to end up not being able to listen to and practice the Dharma. Considering either internal or external factors, it is very rare and precious for us to have the chance to study the Dharma like we are enjoying now. Thus, before serious illness or other undesirable situations incapacitate us, we must all strive to create favorable causes and conditions for listening to the Dharma, for ourselves and others.

The *Vimalakirti Sutra* is a renowned classic in Tibetan Buddhism and a great deal of research literature has been published in various languages. For these reasons, Khenpo would like to take his time to teach on this sutra. In his view, imparting the sutra is not about accumulating numbers, hurrying to finish one and start another. In the process of listening to the teachings, audiences might come across difficulty to comprehend contents, so Khenpo will tell less worldly stories, rather he will expound on this sutra from the point of view of Buddhist philosophy, focusing on explaining its meaning from the perspective of Mahayana Buddhism.

For the present teaching, Khenpo will refer to different versions of translation, with main emphasis on the Tibetan and Kumarajiva's version. He encourages audiences to look up the Chinese and English translations and study them well. For general audience, Khenpo considers it is irresponsible to only listen to the teachings without preview and review of the teachings. Personally when receiving the teaching, Khenpo would read the text a couple of times in advance. Similar to when giving the teaching, he will also read the related commentaries and notes as much as he can. Dharma is too profound for us to grasp if we handle it haphazardly.

The Verses Proclaimed by Jewel Accumulation

**Immovable before abuse and praise, like [Mount] Sumeru,
You are equally compassionate to those who are good or not.**

Your mental processes are universally same, like space-

Who could hear of Jewel Among Human without becoming devoted [to you]?

This verse praises the Buddha from the perspective of praise and abuse. The Buddha is not affected by any praise or defamation. In Xuanzang's translation, it is stated as "not swayed by eight worldly dharmas" instead of **immovable before abuse and praise**. Worldly people are easily influenced by the eight worldly concerns—gain and loss, happiness and suffering, fame and insignificance, and praise and blame. The Buddha, like Mount Sumeru, is unshakable by honor, scorn, or whatnots.

In the past, when five hundred Brahmins slandered the Buddha with various lies, the Buddha was so utterly imperturbable by insults such that the Brahmins developed great faith in him. They then praised the Buddha expansively, but the Buddha again maintained the same steadfast composure.

Unfortunately, we ordinary beings don't react the same way. Khenpo considers himself well "tempered" in this respect. For instance, the other day when he was told about someone's criticisms on him, instead of getting upset, Khenpo answered calmly: "Brilliant, many thanks to him!" Khenpo has always maintained such a grateful attitude toward those who are at odds with him, as he mentioned, he may have even more gratitude to these people than to those who made offerings to him. "This doesn't necessarily mean that I have eradicated mental afflictions at the root," Khenpo explained, "but rather that others' scolding or criticism is the best opportunity for my mental exercise, whereby I can strengthen my muscle of positive qualities!"

The second line says that the Buddha benefits everyone without bias, regardless if they are kind-hearted persons or depraved ones indulging in negative deeds. Zhi Qian's translation goes as, "You are equally compassionate to all, whether they uphold the precepts or violate them." Normally, we look up to those who keep pure precepts while disparage those who breach precepts; however, the Buddha treats both groups with equal love.

Whether in meditative or post-meditative state, the Buddha is always poised in equanimity; his mind is like the sky transcending praise and criticism, good and bad. Upon hearing about the Buddha, the **Jewel Among Human**, who would not honor and give respectable assent?

Even in our ordinary world, the quality of staying unruffled by acclamation and abuse is also highly regarded. The *Dhammapada* says: “Just as Mount Sumeru is not shaken by the storm, even so the wise are not affected by praise or blame.”

Ashvaghosha’s *Buddhacarita* told the story that Devadatta tried to assassinate the Buddha, and once he rolled a boulder down a hill aiming at the Buddha. However, the Buddha still received Devadatta with great empathy, in the same way he would extend to his only son Rahula who reverently stood by the Buddha ready to serve. The Buddha was seeing no difference like between a poisonous plant and the sandalwood tree. So the verse goes as:

*Devadatta angrily hurls a rock at the Buddha,
While Rahula attends in front of him,
He sees them both with the eye of mercy,
Like treating poison and sandalwood equally.*

Nonetheless, Khenpo points out that such impartiality is an exalted state attained only by Buddha’s realization. For ordinary people, it is frustrating that some neither feel gratitude towards others’ kindness and offerings, nor feel ashamed upon others’ complaint. This indifference state is not the same as Buddha’s impartial state of realization.

**Now we offer the World-honored One this subtle canopy
Within which is manifested to us the trimegachilocosm,
Including the palaces in which the gods and dragons abide,
As well as the gandharvas and yaksas.**

**We see all that transpires in the world
As He of the Ten Powers compassionately manifests these transformations.
The congregation has observed this rare event and all exclaimed in praise of the
Buddha,
And now we bow our heads to the Honored One of the triple world.**

Jewel Accumulation and his retinues made offerings of five hundred canopies to the Buddha. By the Buddha’s mighty blessing, these canopies instantly turned into one, beneath which the entire universe appeared, including palaces where gods, dragons, and spirits resided, and there were humans and nonhumans of gandharas, yaksas and all other beings. The Buddhas of the ten directions who were expounding the Dharma too were visible within the canopy.

The Buddha makes manifest these miraculous transformations by his ten exclusive powers out of compassion towards sentient beings. Although the offering of a canopy is not a big deal for these elders' sons, such a small cause brings about the magnificent and transcendental results. This exactly accords with the principle of dependent arising. All beings, including human and non-humans alike, witnessed Buddha's miraculous display out of his ten powers; they perceived these rare events and praised Buddha unceasingly.

This is the state beyond ordinary beings' imagination. When reading a depiction like this in the sutra, we think it's unbelievable due to not seeing it ourselves, thus we become skeptical. However, modern high tech is also equipped with similar inconceivable powers.

For instance, decades ago it would take a long time to deliver a mail between the United States and China, and to converse by phone was not easy, let alone live video chat. However, nowadays these are no longer big deals. More recently, there have been reports on developing supersonic aircraft, under-water bullet train, and the possibility of colonizing the Mars. All such feats were unimaginable in the past. We, as modern citizens, have witnessed many technological achievements made possible by innovators, which is in the same vein when we read that during the Buddha's time, due to the merits of the disciples and the Buddha's blessing powers, a small offering of canopies was rendered a supra-mundane transformation in which the three thousand worlds were revealed.

As everything depends on causes and conditions, if we become endowed with Buddha's ten powers and compassions, we can enable countless sentient beings to attain enlightenment. Oppositely with an inclination of violence, we will bring terror, fear, and anxiety to this world. Not only countries, but also individuals, families, and personal health will be affected.

**[You,] the Great Sage and Dharma King, are the refuge to the congregation,
Who purify their minds in contemplating [you], the buddha, all of them in ecstasy.
They each see the World-honored One in front of himself,
Through the [eighteen] exclusive attributes of [the Buddha's] numinous power.**

The whole assembly took refuge in the Buddha, the Great Sage and the King of the Dharma. There is none who did not rejoice. Whether in front of the Buddha on that occasion or at the present time, anyone who contemplates the Buddha's body with a pure mind will be joyful, and there will be the Buddha present in front of them. Despite Buddha's passing into parinirvana, his blessing and illusory body will manifest before sentient beings forever. This is

due to Buddha's omniscient capacity, which even Shravakas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Bodhisattvas are not endowed. For example, the *King of Samadhi Sutra* states: "Those who, while walking, sitting, standing, or sleeping, recollect the moon-like Buddha, will always be in Buddha's presence."

A Chan master in Song Dynasty wrote: "A thousand lakes and rivers there are, a thousand moons' reflections appear therein; ten thousand cloudless miles there are, ten thousand miles of open sky there are." Originally, this poem denotes that every sentient being has Buddha nature, which will come to the fore when obscurations are eliminated; and obscurations are like clouds in the sky, which can be cleared away and leave the sky-like Buddha nature to appear. In the context of this teaching, this verse can be explained in the way that the Buddha will appear to every sentient being who has faith in him, just like the moon reflected on all the water surfaces on the earth.

Guru Rinpoche also teaches: "For all men and women with faith in me, I, Padmasambhava, have never departed. I sleep beside their door. For me there is no such thing as death; before each person with faith, there is a Padmasambhava." This again stresses the importance of supplicating to enlightened beings with faith, devotion and yearning.

Khenpo reminds us that as Buddhists, we shall forever be grateful to Buddha Shakyamuni for his kindness in caring for us with surpassing compassion. We aspire to practice regularly the sadhana *The Treasury of Blessings -- A Practice of Buddha Shakyamuni*, which, thanks to Khenpo, is included in the *Larung Liturgy of Daily Practices*. Khenpo himself often chants a stanza from it before giving teachings:

With your great compassion, you embraced this turbulent and degenerate world,

And made five hundred mighty aspirations.

You are as exalted as the white lotus; whoever hears your name shall never return to samsara

—

Most compassionate teacher, to you I pay homage!

Also, Khenpo reminds us that when traveling, we should remember to bring a small Buddha's statue with us, which will be the object of our veneration whenever we go. By entreating to Buddha Shakyamuni, Guru Rinpoche, or other deities with one-pointed concentration and reverence, we will experience blessings and deepen our Dharma practice. If we treat Dharma study as an academic research without the essential ingredient of faith, the fundamental and

ultimate meanings of Dharma will elude us. Compared to mere academic approach, arousing faith in our Dharma study will beget many more benefits, including the sharpening of our wisdom. This is something we must deliberate on carefully, as implicit in it are the Buddha's numinous powers.

**The Buddha explains the Dharma with one sound,
And sentient beings each attain understanding according to their capacity,
Each one says the World-Honored One is speaking his own language,
Through the exclusive attribute of [the Buddha's] numinous power.**

The Buddha explains the Dharma with one sound, all beings understand according to their own lineage, saying the Buddha speaks their own languages. This is due to the Buddha's unshared numinous power.

In modern day international conferences, as we know, simultaneous interpretation in different languages is provided such that people from different parts of the world using English, French, Spanish, Indian, Mongolian etc., can all understand the speakers. The same happened in the grand assembly described in this sutra, except that no simultaneous translators were present. The Buddha expounded the Dharma in Sanskrit; however, beings of various origins heard the teaching in their own languages.

Why is that? It is because the wisdom for beings to understand language is always present in them, in the emptiness of Dharmadhatu, or the ground of indivisible union of emptiness and luminosity. We all have this innate ability to grasp all languages, otherwise there will be no way for us to learn to talk from an early age. However, so far we don't have the merits to fully master this ability; the Buddha, on the other hand, is spontaneously proficient in all worldly languages by virtue of having realized the profound indivisibility of appearance and emptiness. Thus the Buddha can render all beings' comprehension of his teaching according to their kinds.

**The Buddha preaches the Dharma with one sound,
And sentient beings each understand accordingly,
Everyone accepts and practices it, and receives its benefit,
Through the exclusive attribute of [the Buddha's] numinous power.**

The Buddha preaches the Dharma in one sound, all beings understand it according to their own capacity, mental propensity, and lineage. They all undertake the Buddhas's practices and

acquire profit thereby. For instance, people who have affinity for Vinaya will attain the wisdom of Vinaya; while those enjoy giving will achieve the wisdom of generosity.

Some commentaries interpret that when the Buddha himself is present among different beings, his body can appear in different forms to various sentient beings and they in turn receive corresponding benefits. For example, humans perceive the Buddha as a golden image and feel inspired. To heavenly beings, the Buddha appears in the same form like them; and to animals, he assumes the forms of animals. In short, through various sounds and forms, the Buddha benefits all living beings. Particularly by giving the Dharma teaching, the Buddha brings genuine welfare to sentient beings and dispels their sufferings.

**The Buddha preaches the Dharma with one sound,
But some are afraid and some joyous.
Some generate revulsion [to the world of suffering] or eliminate their doubts,
Through the exclusive attribute of [the Buddha's] numinous power.**

The Buddha expounds the Dharma with one sound; but to some it brings fear, and to others delight and joy. For instance, previously some people might have no particular fear towards samsara. After hearing the Buddha's teaching on its miseries, however, they instantly experience terror. To experience a reaction from the teaching is important, Khenpo says, otherwise, it's not that good if you are like a stone incapable of responding with joy, sorrow, or dread. Listening to the Dharma while spacing out will bring no effect on your mind.

In a teaching when the sufferings of three lower realms are expounded, you shall take in the description so much so that your hairs stand on ends, and you think, "Gosh, I need to practice Dharma diligently, otherwise, what if I am reborn in these horrible realms?" When the merit of the three upper realms and liberation is explained, you shall generate a sense of joy: "Wow, I'm so fortunate to come across the Dharma and the path to liberation!" When hearing the defects of samsara, you shall resolve: "I will not cling to the samsara anymore, I need to foster renunciation from now on", and overcome your strong attachment to samsara.. Some people, with all kinds of confusion, lack the firmly held understanding of the worldly and transcendental truths. In this case, they shall eradicate their doubts through hearing the Dharma as quickly as possible.

The Dharma can be taught by bodhisattvas, arhats, or ordinary people, but it is the Buddha alone who is replete with the transcendent powers that bring relevant boons to all beings.

Khenpo recalls his days as a disciple under his root guru, H.H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. When Khenpo heard His Holiness's teaching on *The Extensive Biography of Shakyamuni Buddha*, he generated irreversible faith in the Buddha. When hearing the sufferings of samsara described in *Letter to a Friend*, he aroused strong aversion towards the cyclic existence. In the winter of 1985 when Khenpo freshly arrived at the academy, he received His Holiness's teaching on vinaya. He was so nervous about breaking the pure precepts that he would not even dare to walk as usual..

In all, Khenpo stresses that Dharma teachers are to be genuinely affected and moved by the teaching themselves before imparting it; the students, in turn, shall listen to the teaching with an open heart, and with no pretense to feel scared when meant to be, to have joy when situation calls, or to feel revulsion when must, and so on. Having this kind of resonance and communication during a teaching is important for it to be effective.

In the Tibetan version, this stanza differs slightly from the above, saying: "When the Buddha expounds Dharma, some sentient beings sow the seed of liberation, some attain realization, some dispel doubts." The variation might have come from different Sanskrit originals; we must respect different translation versions and refrain from making changes.

We bow our heads to Him of the Ten Powers and Great Exertion.

We bow our heads to Him Who Has Achieved Fearlessness.

We bow our heads to Him Residing in the Exclusive Attributes.

We bow our heads to the Great Guide of All.

The Buddha possesses the ten powers such as the power of knowing what is true and what's not, the power of knowing the work of karmic causality in all beings, and so on, which are elaborated in *The Introduction to the Middle Way* and *The Ornament of the Great Vehicle Sutra*. The words "great exertion" do not appear in the Xuanzang's and Tibetan versions.

The Buddha has attained four fearlessnesses of benefiting self and others -- fearlessness in asserting one's own perfect realization, fearlessness in asserting one's own perfect abandonment, fearlessness for the sake of others in revealing the path to liberation, and fearlessness for the sake of others in revealing potential hindrances on the path. So we bow our heads to the one who knows no fear.

The Buddha dwells in eighteen distinctive qualities, acquiring perfection in actions of body, speech, and mind. We bow to the one who fully manifests these exclusive attributes and who is the great guide of all beings!

We bow our heads to Him Who Can Eradicate the Fetters.

We bow our heads to Him Who Has Arrived the Other shore.

We bow our heads to Him Who Can Save [Beings in All] the Worlds,

We bow our heads to Him Who Has Eternally Transcended the Realm of Samsara.

Fetters are the mental chains that shackle all ordinary sentient beings to cyclic existence of pain and suffering. When arriving at the first bhumi, bodhisattvas successfully eradicate the three fetters of belief in a self, doubt, and attachment to rites and rituals. The Buddha, without mention, has cut the bondage of all fetters and arrived the other shore of the paramitas from generosity to prajna.

Having attained enlightenment himself, the Buddha is able to liberate countless sentient beings. Some tirthika achievers may temporarily feel free from impediments, yet they will regress later on and plunge right back into cyclic existence. But the Buddha has eliminated the subtlest cognitive obscurations and forever left behind the rounds of birth and death. With all these qualities possessed by the Buddha, we bow our head to him!

You understand the past and future characteristic of sentient beings,

And well have you attained emancipation with regard to the dharmas,

Unattached to the world, like the lotus flower growing out of the mud,

You always enter well into the practice of empty serenity (i.e., nirvana).

You have attained the characteristics of the dharmas without hindrance,

And we bow our heads to Him Who Relies On Nothing, Like Space.

The Buddha knows very well the comings and goings of sentient beings in samsara and how they are forever trapped in it due to their ignorance. The Buddha himself has entered and dwelled in samsara also, yet he is free from it and attains emancipation with regard to all phenomena. He is not tainted by samsara, like the lotus growing out of the mud, unsullied, as described in the verse: “Just like the lotus flower to which mud and water cannot cling, or sun and moon that course unhindered through the sky.” Why? The reason is that Buddha has completely realized emptiness and always entered well into the practice of empty serenity. The

Buddha has no obscurations, as described in the *Heart Sutra*: “Since their minds are unobscured, they have no fear. Transcending all forms of misconception, they reach nirvana.”

In the Tibetan and in Xuanzang’s translations, there are two sentences preceding the last one: “Fulfilling sentient beings’ wishes and having no wishes, his miraculous power is inconceivable.” The Buddha can fulfill sentient beings’ wishes, but he has no wishes, because he has attained ultimate realization. The Buddha can probe the depths of everything without hindrance, and who, like space, relies on nothing. So his miraculous power is beyond the reach of ordinary beings, thus Jewel Accumulations pays homage to the Buddha.

Some may wonder why it is necessary to praise the Buddha, since he is unmoved by praise and blame, and transcends any worldly concerns. Indeed, it is a meaningful practice for us followers to perfect our accumulation of merits. Meanwhile, upon hearing the praises of the Buddha’s exclusive attributes, non-believers or people with doubts can gradually develop faith in the Buddha, and eventually embark on the path of liberation. Therefore, the great masters of the past composed many poems to compliment the Buddha, such as Je Tsongkapha’s *In Praise of Dependent Arising*, Ashvaghosha’s *Buddhacarita* and so on. *Buddhacarita* describes an epic life of the Buddha in 28 chapters, from his birth until his entry into nirvana, as well as how his relics were distributed worldwide. Till today, it is an important poem for people to study the life and acts of Buddha Shakayamuni.

Bodhisattva Jewel Accumulation Asked Buddha a Question

When the elders’s son Jewel Accumulation finished speaking this verse, he addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, these five hundred elder’s sons have all generated the intention to achieve anuttara samyak-sambodhi (complete, perfect enlightenment). We wish to hear of the purity of the countries of Buddha. Would the World-Honored One please explain for the Bodhisattvas the practices by which a land is purified?”

After uttering the verses, Jewel Accumulation addressed the Buddha that the five hundred elder’s sons had set their minds on seeking the supreme, perfect enlightenment. They wanted to hear about the magnificence of buddha land and begged the Buddha to explain the practices carried out by bodhisattvas in purifying their lands.

The Buddha said, “Excellent, Jewel Accumulation! You’re able to inquire on behalf of the Bodhisattvas regarding the practice by which the Tathagata purified his land. Listen clearly, listen clearly, and consider this well. I will explain it for you.” At this Jewel Accumulation and the five hundred elder’s sons listened as instructed.

Upon this request, the Buddha gave his approval to Jewel Accumulation, saying that for the sake of bodhisattvas he had asked a good question about buddha land and the cultivation of it.

Listen clearly, listen clearly is an emphatic reminder for audiences to pay full attention, thus representing the wisdom of hearing. **Consider this well** means to ponder it over, thus entailing the wisdom of contemplation. The word **consider** in the Chinese version has an additional character that means “be mindful”, which signify the wisdom of meditation and practice. The phrase “listen clearly, listen clearly, and consider this well” appear quite often in the sutra, prompting us to exercise the three wisdom tools of listening, reflection and meditation when we study the Dharma, and to incorporate it into our daily lives.

Hearing this, Jewel Accumulation along with the five hundred elder’s sons, gods, and all others were in great joy and listened with respectful attention to what the Buddha had to say.

The Buddha said, “Jewel Accumulation, the categories of sentient beings are the bodhisattvas’ buddha lands. Why is this? Bodhisattvas acquire the buddha lands according to the sentient beings they convert. They acquire the buddha lands according to the sentient beings they discipline. They acquire the buddha lands according to what country sentient beings need to enter into buddha wisdom. They acquire the buddha lands according to what country sentient beings need to generate roots [for becoming] bodhisattvas.

The Buddha then explained a unique way of cultivating buddha land that takes into account of the sentient beings to be tamed. Such an approach differs from that of Amitabha Buddha and Medicine Buddha who first established their pure lands according to their forty-eight vows or twelve vows, respectively, and then invoke sentient beings to come over to their lands. What the Buddha is revealing here, instead, is quite similar to the Vajrayana approach in which the main focus of cultivating a buddha land is sentient beings. In other words, it is in responding to sentient beings’ categories and propensities that a buddha land comes into being. We must pay attention to these differences.

The Buddha told Jewel Accumulation, “The categories of sentient beings are the bodhisattvas’ buddha lands.” It means that when the bodhisattvas establish their own buddha lands, they must consider sentient beings’ preferences and wishes. In the Tibetan and in Xuanzang’s versions, **the categories of sentient** is interpreted as “the lands of sentient beings”, meaning the lands of sentient beings are in themselves bodhisattvas’ buddha lands. Why is it so? There are four reasons:

First, bodhisattvas acquire the buddha lands according to the sentient beings they convert. It is by converting various beings to the teachings that the bodhisattvas acquire that buddha land. If sentient beings favor the practice of generosity, the buddha land for them will be adorned with seven jewels. If sentient beings have perfected discipline, then there will be no thorns in the buddha land, and so on. **Acquire the buddha lands** denotes to cultivate, to embrace, or to create buddha lands in the future.

Second, bodhisattvas acquire the buddha lands according to the sentient beings they discipline. Bodhisattvas are adept in employing skillful means to teach sentient beings, whether by way of the six paramitas or by manifesting themselves in majestic or modest forms. To the extent that sentient beings become disciplined in their desire, anger and ignorance, to that extent bodhisattvas appear to them.

Third, bodhisattvas acquire the buddha lands according to what country sentient beings need to enter into buddha wisdom. According to their inclinations, sentient beings in their future will enter a certain buddha land and attain buddha wisdom. For instance, if people have practiced the four conducive causes of rebirth in Sukhavati, they will be born there after death and thereby attain buddha wisdom. By knowing what country sentient beings need to enter into buddha wisdom, the bodhisattvas establish their buddha lands.

The last reason, bodhisattvas acquire the buddha lands according to what country sentient beings need to generate roots for becoming bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas cultivate buddha land according to the country where sentient beings will be reborn, in which they will grow their bodhisattva root. The root of bodhisattvas, known also as the “sacred root”, includes the wisdom of non-duality, the five faculties of faith, mindfulness, etc., as well as the sublime root of never falling back from the path to enlightenment. By knowing what country sentient beings need to generate roots for becoming bodhisattvas, the bodhisattvas establish their buddha lands.

Why is this? Because bodhisattvas' acquisition of the pure countries is entirely for the benefit of sentient beings. It's like a man who wants to build a palace on empty land who is [able to build it] according to his wish without hindrance. He would never be able to build it in space. Bodhisattvas are like this. In order to accomplish the [salvation of] sentient beings, they vow to acquire the buddha countries. The vow to acquire a buddha land is not done in empty space!

Bodhisattvas' acquisition of the pure countries is entirely due to their having brought benefit to living beings. This is a crucial point. If sentient beings could not derive benefit from the buddha land, the bodhisattvas would not set their mind to build it in the first place.

Here is an example: Suppose a man wants to build a mansion on a plot of open land. Having the support of the ground, he will be able to build it according to his wish without hindrance. But, if he tries to build the mansion in space, the empty air, he's bound to fail. Bodhisattvas are like this. If their acquisition of buddha land is to accomplish the salvation of sentient beings, their job is workable, like constructing a building on empty land. On the contrary, if their motivation is not an altruistic one, success is totally out of question, as futile as planting flowers in the air or building mansions on frozen lakes.

Therefore, the vow to acquire a buddha land is not done in empty space, but rather based on the needs of sentient beings. For us followers, we must also have the same consideration for our dharma activities. For example, if we want to start an organization to help others, we do need a clear idea of what this organization is mainly for, and then how to fulfil this purpose. Some dharma practitioners may think that the best situation for them is to find a retreat place in solitude and keep meditating, so as to avoid all kinds of social activities and engagement with others. Indeed, this thought has no difference with the idea of building a house in the empty sky. Mahayana practitioners should endeavor to help living beings by all means and to make the proper aspirations based on others' needs.

Lecture 7

Before teaching the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, Khenpo mentioned about two things.

First, as it is the World Book Day today, reading should be more and more emphasized in modern people's daily life. In such an age of entertainment, everyone is indulged in a myriad of videos and audios, and seldom spends time reading the meaningful and valuable books. So it is quite necessary for schools and different social groups to organize reading activities and to encourage people to study and enrich themselves with valuable knowledge. More and more wonderful books should be published and well-studied by different communities. It is of vital importance for everyone to dispel the darkness of one's ignorance through learning and studying.

Regarding this course, Khenpo hopes that our wisdom will be enhanced through studying the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. During the study, it is essential for us to read some relative reference books written by great masters of the past as well as by contemporary scholars. Meanwhile, we should record our feelings and experience during the study. If we can write an article about our reflections on this sutra after finishing the study of each chapter, we should be able to deepen our understanding and stabilize what we have learned from this sutra. Such kind of study will be greatly meaningful. Although this is not a mandatory requirement, Khenpo thinks that it is quite necessary.

Now each of us has the opportunity of studying, contemplating and meditating on the Mahayana teachings. This will make a significant change to us, not only in this life, but also in our future lives. We should always think about this, and cherish this rare and precious opportunity with great joy from the bottom of our hearts.

Second, Buddhists in the 21st century should have some unique features to adapt to this new era. Traditional Buddhists in the past mainly focused on performing rituals, chanting scriptures and liturgies, and holding Dharma assemblies. They had been practicing the Buddha's teachings in doing so and the Buddhist tradition had been very well maintained in this fashion. However, now as we are stepping into a century of globalization, different cultures are mixed and embraced by people from all over the world. Being surrounded in such an environment of information explosion, everyone has the access to a flood of information. So as Buddhists, our priority is to fully understand the essence of Buddhist teachings and to prevent us from getting

lost in this information age. To achieve this end, we must listen, reflect and meditate on the Dharma in a systematic manner.

In the past, Buddhists were more pious and steady. For example, if one chose to chant Amitabha's name, he chanted it for his whole life; if one chose to practice Zen meditation, he practiced it for his whole life. Now the circumstance has changed, and it becomes more important for us to know the reasons behind these practices, either meditating or chanting Amitabha's name. If we know nothing about the Buddhist philosophy, we might lose a determined faith in our spiritual path when questioned by others, and even take the risk of being abandoned by the society. Therefore, as Buddhists, not only we must inherit all traditional rituals and performances from the past; more importantly, we need to keep pace with modern times and learn forever.

Khenpo said that some Buddhists he knew of, especially some lay people, have been very assiduous for decades of years. One day, a wise person told him, "Wow, some of your students are very good at study." Indeed, their manners of study, discussion, writing and practices are quite admirable. Khenpo hopes that Buddhists should not only understand the traditional culture, but also enrich their knowledge in line with modern society. If Buddhists can keep studying earnestly, they will be able to connect the Buddhist teachings with the development of modern technology, so that Buddhism will never be misunderstood as outmoded or even be abandoned.

Khenpo said that he was an ignorant and innocent shepherd boy before 16 years old. At that time, he usually went to the mountain with his prayer wheel and mala, and spent the whole day under the blue sky with the squirrels, marmots and yaks. He didn't study well at school, which was his biggest regret. In fact, the learning environment at that time was so poor that Khenpo could barely learn Tibetan, not to mention Chinese and English. Therefore, he spent the childhood playing balls and fighting, which was quite a pity because childhood is very precious. He admires students who can attend school at a young age and meet responsible teachers, and wonders how grateful if he could attend school at the age of six or seven, then he should have finished the middle school study at the right age. But such is life!

However, since Khenpo's ordination in 1985, he has been dedicated to the Dharma study and practice, and has been deeply touched by the unfathomable and boundless nature of Buddhism. The more he studies, the more achievements and experience he gets, which bestows him with

endless strength and energy. Khenpo says that he is not advertising Buddhism, or trying to convert someone into Buddhism, but feels compelled to share his personal experience to everyone. All his words are genuinely from his heart and he will stick with his words in front of anyone. This genuine feeling is so strong that he really hopes all of us will keep on studying and practicing the Dharma for our whole life.

All in all, Khenpo thinks that it is quite meaningful for Buddhists to love reading and learning, and to diligently study, practice and benefit other beings throughout life.

Bodhisattva Jewel Accumulation Asked Buddha a Question

When the elders’s son Jewel Accumulation finished speaking this verse, he addressed the Buddha: “World-Honored One, these five hundred elder’s sons have all generated the intention to achieve anuttara samyak-sambodhi (complete, perfect enlightenment). We wish to hear of the purity of the countries of Buddha. Would the World-Honored One please explain for the Bodhisattvas the practices by which a land is purified?”

After uttering the verses, Jewel Accumulation addressed the Buddha that the five hundred elder’s sons had set their minds on seeking the supreme, perfect enlightenment. They wanted to hear about the magnificence of buddha land and begged the Buddha to explain the practices carried out by bodhisattvas in purifying their lands.

The Buddha said, “Excellent, Jewel Accumulation! You’re able to inquire on behalf of the Bodhisattvas regarding the practice by which the Tathagata purified his land. Listen clearly, listen clearly, and consider this well. I will explain it for you.” At this Jewel Accumulation and the five hundred elder’s sons listened as instructed.

Upon this request, the Buddha gave his approval to Jewel Accumulation, saying that for the sake of bodhisattvas he had asked a good question about buddha land and the cultivation of it.

Listen clearly, listen clearly is a kind reminder for audiences to pay full attention, representing the wisdom of hearing. **Consider this well** means to ponder it over, entailing the wisdom of contemplation. The word **consider** in the Chinese version has an additional character that means “be mindful”, which signify the wisdom of meditation and practice. The phrase “listen clearly, listen clearly, and consider this well” appear quite often in the sutra, prompting us to

exercise the three wisdom tools of listening, reflection and meditation when we study the Dharma, and to incorporate it into our daily lives.

Hearing this, Jewel Accumulation along with the five hundred elder's sons, gods, and all others were in great joy and listened with respectful attention to what the Buddha had to say.

The Buddha said, “Jewel Accumulation, the categories of sentient beings are the bodhisattvas’ buddha lands. Why is this? Bodhisattvas acquire the buddha lands according to the sentient beings they convert. They acquire the buddha lands according to the sentient beings they discipline. They acquire the buddha lands according to what country sentient beings need to enter into buddha wisdom. They acquire the buddha lands according to what country sentient beings need to generate roots [for becoming] bodhisattvas.

The Buddha then explained a unique way of cultivating buddha land that takes into account of the sentient beings to be tamed. Such an approach differs from that of Amitabha Buddha and Medicine Buddha who first established their pure lands according to their forty-eight vows or twelve vows, respectively, and then invoke sentient beings to come over to their lands. What the Buddha is revealing here, instead, is quite similar to the Vajrayana approach in which the main focus of cultivating a buddha land is sentient beings. In other words, it is in responding to sentient beings’ categories and propensities that a buddha land comes into being. We must pay attention to these differences.

The Buddha told Jewel Accumulation, “The categories of sentient beings are the bodhisattvas’ buddha lands.” It means that when the bodhisattvas establish their own buddha lands, they must consider sentient beings’ preferences and wishes. In the Tibetan and in Xuanzang’s versions, **the categories of sentient** is interpreted as “the lands of sentient beings”, meaning the lands of sentient beings are in themselves bodhisattvas’ buddha lands. Why is it so? There are four reasons:

First, bodhisattvas acquire the buddha lands according to the sentient beings they convert. It is by converting various beings to the teachings that the bodhisattvas acquire that buddha land. If sentient beings favor the practice of generosity, the buddha land for them will be adorned with seven jewels. If sentient beings have perfected discipline, then there will be no thorns in the buddha land, and so on. **Acquire the buddha lands** denotes to cultivate, to embrace, or to create buddha lands in the future.

Second, bodhisattvas acquire the buddha lands according to the sentient beings they discipline. Bodhisattvas are adept in employing skillful means to teach sentient beings, whether by way of the six paramitas or by manifesting themselves in majestic or modest forms. To the extent that sentient beings become disciplined in their desire, anger and ignorance, to that extent bodhisattvas appear to them.

Third, bodhisattvas acquire the buddha lands according to what country sentient beings need to enter into buddha wisdom. According to their inclinations, sentient beings in their future will enter a certain buddha land and attain buddha wisdom. For instance, if people have practiced the four conducive causes of rebirth in Sukhavati, they will be born there after death and thereby attain buddha wisdom. By knowing what country sentient beings need in order to enter into buddha wisdom, the bodhisattvas establish their buddha lands.

The last reason, bodhisattvas acquire the buddha lands according to what country sentient beings need to generate roots for becoming bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas cultivate buddha land according to the country where sentient beings will be reborn, in which they will grow their bodhisattva root. The root of bodhisattvas, known also as the “sacred root”, includes the wisdom of non-duality, the five faculties of faith, mindfulness, etc., as well as the sublime root of never falling back from the path to enlightenment. By knowing what country sentient beings need to generate roots for becoming bodhisattvas, the bodhisattvas establish their buddha lands.

Why is this? Because bodhisattvas’ acquisition of the pure countries is entirely for the benefit of sentient beings. It’s like a man who wants to build a palace on empty land who is [able to build it] according to his wish without hindrance. He would never be able to build it in space. Bodhisattvas are like this. In order to accomplish the [salvation of] sentient beings, they vow to acquire the buddha countries. The vow to acquire a buddha land is not done in empty space!

Bodhisattvas’ acquisition of the pure countries is entirely due to their having brought benefit to living beings. This is a crucial point. If sentient beings could not derive benefit from the buddha land, the bodhisattvas would not set their mind to build it in the first place.

Here is an example: Suppose a man wants to build a palace on a plot of open land. Having the support of the ground, he will be able to build it according to his wish without hindrance. But, if he tries to build a palace in space, the empty air, he’s bound to fail. Bodhisattvas are like this. If their acquisition of buddha land is to accomplish the salvation of sentient beings, their job is

workable, like constructing a building on empty land. On the contrary, if their motivation is not an altruistic one, success is totally out of question, as futile as planting flowers in the air or building mansions on frozen lakes.

Therefore, the vow to acquire a buddha land is not done in empty space, but rather based on the needs of sentient beings. For us followers, we must also have the same consideration for our dharma activities. For example, if we want to start an organization to help others, we need a clear idea of what this organization is mainly for, and then how to fulfil this purpose. Some dharma practitioners may think that the best situation for them is to find a retreat place in solitude and keep meditating, so as to avoid all kinds of social activities and engagement with others. Indeed, this thought has no difference with the idea of building a house in the empty sky. Mahayana practitioners should endeavor to help living beings by all means and to make the proper aspirations based on others' needs.

What is a Buddha land?

Jewel Accumulation, you should understand that sincerity is the bodhisattva's pure land—when the bodhisattva attains buddhahood, it is sentient beings who do not flatter [and lie] that come be born in his country.

Now we are talking about the main theme of “pure mind, pure land”. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, a pure land cannot be built in empty sky, but must have a foundation. Just as one will design a yoga studio or coffee shop based on its customers' needs, the bodhisattva will also design his future land based on sentient beings' needs. So how will be a bodhisattva's pure land like? And how will a bodhisattva's pure land attract other beings? In fact, it is through Dharma practice to build a pure land and satisfy other beings' needs.

Dharma practice plays a crucial role in this regard. Even in this ordinary world, good practitioners see everywhere as pure land. When they go to the cities, they feel the urban environment is nice and everyone looks like a bodhisattva. When they go to a solitary place, they will also be joyous, “Wow! Lama Chen! What a pleasant place for meditation!” Therefore, in their eyes, everyone and everything is wonderful. On the contrary, bad practitioners see others as their competitors or enemies, ugly witches or ferocious demons. Wherever they go,

they feel that the place is scary and full of thorns. Thus, one's feeling is quite related to his or her Dharma practice.

According to the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, a pure land is manifested by a sentient being's pure mind, which is quite close to the tantric teachings, such as the self-manifested pure land illustrated in *the Guhyagarbha Tantra*. They are similar, but not exactly the same. In both cases, we should know that a pure land is only a manifestation, otherwise, a truly existent pure land is contradictory to the conventional valid cognition of pure vision.

Here the sutra tells us that when a bodhisattva attains buddhahood, sincere sentient beings who are not hypocritical or dishonest will go to his pure land. Because this bodhisattva has practiced sincerity at his casual stage, he will certainly attract sincere beings to come to his pure land. For example, the supreme and stately pure land of Buddha Amitabha is closely related to his aspirations made in his previous life when he was a great bodhisattva. As such, if one practices sincerity now, in the future sentient beings who don't flatter or lie will be born in one's pure land.

Here **sincerity** means no flattery, lie or hypocrisy. As explained in *Abhidharmakosa*, it is a mind devoid of flattery and lie. So it is a genuine and honest mind. In Ju Mipham Rinpoche's *The Words on the Mundane and Transmundane Codes*, there is a chapter specifically talking about sincerity, which is described as a pure mind without cunning, flattery and deceitfulness.

Some people think that they are straightforward, so they do not need to hide their greed and hatred, and they always point out others' faults directly. However, such behaviors do not show their sincerity, but show their lack of wisdom as they are too blunt. The wise won't speak out their thoughts all the time because they will observe if it is a proper occasion. Just as what Patrul Rinpoche said in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, sometimes you don't need to speak your mind, and sometimes you don't need to walk your talk. For instance, when some people feel angry, they cannot control their emotions and will say some harsh words like "I will hit you" or "I will kill you", but they won't really do that. Therefore, the so-called "straightforwardness" is not the "sincerity" mentioned in this text. Here, sincerity is integrity that a Dharma practitioner must have. As Zen Master Guishan Lingyou said,

*As a Dharma practitioner, one should have a mind
That is sincere without any hypocrisy,*

That is free from duplicity and unfrank obedience,

That is far from being cunning and deceitful.

This means that Dharma practitioners should have a righteous, honest and pure mind, and they are not double-dealers. Such sincere sentient beings could be reborn in pure land. From the other perspective, if you make aspirations to be sincere, when you attain buddhahood you will have a pure land of sincerity.

This is the first kind of mind. According to Master Sengzhao's commentary, this sincerity is the very root and the foundation for a profound mind.

A profound mind is the bodhisattva's pure land—when the bodhisattva attains buddhahood, it is sentient beings who are complete in merit that come to be born in his country.

In Tibetan version, **a profound mind** is called confident faith, which is steadfast and cannot be changed by others easily. A profound mind is not a simple, shallow and unstable state of mind, neither just a lip-service. It is a firm and one-pointed mind to carry on all virtuous deeds, and abstain from all non-virtuous deeds, and it is the bodhisattva's pure land. Because a bodhisattva has such a profound mind, when he attains buddhahood, he will naturally be endowed with infinite qualities and possess the complete collections of merits and sublime wisdom.

In *The Treasury of Good Advice* by Sakya Pandita, it is taught,

A fool's knowledge shows on the surface,

But a wise person's knowledge is hidden within.

A straw floats on top of water,

A jewel sinks even when placed on the surface.

People with little wisdom tend to show off all they know, just like a straw floating on top of water. But people with profound knowledge usually hide their merits and wisdom deeply. When it is necessary, the wise will give an eloquent speech; when it is not, they will not show off their knowledge.

Thus, as a Dharma practitioner, one should first have sincerity, and then cultivate a profound mind, which is a steadfast confident faith. As. This approach itself is indeed a gradual path of Dharma practice.

The mind of bodhi is the bodhisattva's pure land—when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings of the Mahayana come to be born in his country.

Based on sincerity and a profound mind, one should generate the supreme bodhichitta. As we all know, if one aspires to develop bodhichitta, one makes the determination to attain buddhahood in order to guide all sentient beings toward enlightenment. The mind of bodhi is a bodhisattva's pure land. When the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, his pure land will have no Hinayana but all Mahayana Buddhists. Just as in Buddha Amitabha's pure land, everyone is a bodhisattva with altruistic intention, and there are no beings of lower realms, no beings with wrong views, and no Shravakas or Pratyekabuddhas.

So if we can arouse the supreme bodhichitta now, it is our Bodhimanda, site of enlightenment. We usually say that "sincerity is a Bodhimanda", which has a profound meaning. Without a systematic study, many people only have a literal understanding of this instruction. Only through studying, contemplating and meditating on the Dharma will they know how matchless are the merits and benefits generated from practicing prajnaparamita or from cultivating the unsurpassable bodhichitta.

Whenever Khenpo gives a teaching, he will remind us to generate bodhichitta. He didn't elaborate on the content of bodhichitta in this lecture, because the definition, merits, benefits, and types of bodhichitta are well illustrated in many Mahayana sutras and commentaries. This text here emphasizes that the cultivation of bodhichitta will lead to the Mahayana enlightenment.

It is the systematic approach of Mahayana Buddhism to gradually develop these three types of mind, i.e. sincerity, profound mind and bodhichitta. First of all, we should have an honest personality without flattery or cunning; based on this, we should develop confident faith; and then generate the supreme bodhichitta according to the Mahayana teachings. This is the basic requirement for each Buddhist.

Charity is the bodhisattva's pure land—all sentient beings capable of renunciation come to be born in his country.

Charity, or generosity, is the bodhisattva's pure land. This statement is a little bit different from some common teachings in the Sutrayana tradition. People may feel it difficult to understand why generosity is a pure land. But in fact, the practice of generosity will create one's own pure land. When one attains buddhahood, all sentient beings who do not experience stinginess will come to be born in his pure land.

As a Tibetan saying goes, pull out one hair from the nostril, tears will come out from the eyes. This is to describe how some people are too reluctant to give out things. For example, after the meal, the one who has to pay the bill for others would feel very sad. Khenpo joked that when a generous person attains buddhahood, he would be surrounded by generous people and everyone would fight over to pay the bill. So if you practice generosity, either the giving of material things or of the Dharma, when you achieve buddhahood, all the attendees in your pure land will be generous.

As Master Ji Zang said in his commentary on the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, when one attains buddhahood, all beings who have received his giving will be able to take birth in his buddha land. For instance, if one benefits 500 persons by giving them material goods, with such karmic connection, these 500 persons will take birth in one's Buddha land in the future. The same applies to the giving of the Dharma. There is a story in *The Sutra of One Hundred Karma Stories*: At his causal stage, Buddha Shakyamuni once offered his body to five yaksas. When he attained buddhahood, the five yaksas were reborn as five Brahmins, and later became the first five Bhikshus in the Buddha's sangha. Therefore, the practice of generosity will serve as an auspicious cause for one's attainment of buddhahood and cultivation of pure land in the future.

In fact, the practice of generosity is marvelous as it will bring happiness to each sentient being. It is said in Nagarjuna's *Mahaprajna Paramita Sastra* that the act of giving, no matter how big or small, will make beings happy, including animals and enemies. So sometimes the act of generosity is the best practice. Sentient beings will be very glad to receive our generosity, although some of them might not want to repay our kindness for the moment.

Khenpo said that one day when he wanted to throw away some stuff in his house, a lama said to him, "Please give them to me, and I will give out to others. They will for sure be happy." Khenpo didn't think those things were useful, but the lama insisted, "It doesn't matter. They must be useful for some people." Therefore, some stuff may be useless to one person, yet be appreciated by another for its direct or indirect usefulness. So it is better for us to practice generosity, then in the future generous beings will be born in our country. Otherwise, it would be terrible to have a pure land full of misers.

Morality is the bodhisattva's pure land—when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings who have fulfilled their vows to practice the path of the ten types of good come to be born in his country.

When a bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings who have practiced the path of the ten virtues and therefore whose aspirations can be fulfilled will come to be born in his Buddha land. According to Master Sengzhao, although there are many precepts in the bodhisattva vows, all of these precepts can be included in the path of ten virtuous deeds. Since it is not easy to observe pure precepts in every aspect, for those who have perfectly practiced the path of ten virtues, their aspirations can be consequently fulfilled.

The practice of ten virtues is not only a Buddhist doctrine, but also common ethics and a code of conduct of all human beings. No country in this world will accept the ten unvirtuous deeds, i.e., killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, harsh speech, sowing discord, idle gossip, covetousness, wishing harm on others and wrong views. Each country will have similar regulations to forbid such behaviors.

The Buddha's teachings are universally applicable. No matter if one is a Buddhist or not, and no matter if one observes the discipline or not, anyone who takes unwholesome actions will sow negative karmic seeds in his mind. On the contrary, anyone who practices the ten virtues will naturally receive large benefits in his life. Therefore, it is vital for us to observe pure precepts, and the practice of ten virtues is the foundation of it. In the text, the higher discipline of bodhisattva vows and Vajrayana vows are not mentioned. Only the cultivation of the ten virtues is emphasized. Those whose wishes can be fulfilled through such an auspicious cause will come to be born in a Bodhisattva's buddha land.

Forbearance is the bodhisattva's pure land—when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings who have ornamented themselves with the thirty-two marks [of a buddha] come to be born in his country.

It's important for us to practice forbearance, or patience, which will bring us good appearance in all lifetimes. In Chandrakirti's *Introduction to the Middle Way*, it says that patience brings one good look, which will make people adore him or her. In contrast, those who have never cultivated patience will be ugly and disliked by others. Although appearance is just a conditioned phenomenon without any inherent nature, it has been valued by people throughout the ages. Anyone who looks beautiful or handsome is generally more appreciated in this world. But in some cases, these people tend to be arrogant and not aware of their own ignorance.

In fact, a good appearance is a manifestation of one's mind. People usually say that one's appearance is related to one's mind. There is story illustrative of this: A painter wanted to paint a religious scene representing an angel and a devil. He went out to look for models. Before long, he found a ten-year-old boy who looked very sweet, pure, and beautiful. He asked him to be his model and successfully painted him as an angel. Then he started to look for a model for

the devil, but couldn't find a proper one for ten years. Eventually he found an extremely ugly and terrible-looking man in a bar and asked him to be his model. Then he painting him as a devil. But later he found out that these two models were actually the same person! The boy looked like an angel when he was 10 years old. However, afterwards he became addicted to alcohol and gambling, and did a lot of negative deeds, so finally he became a useless vagrant. His misdeeds made him look like an ugly demon.

Not sure how true this story is, but Buddhism says that everything is created by the mind. Indeed, on the one hand, if one is kind-hearted and always helps others, he will be beloved by people even despite his unpleasant looks. On the other hand, if one looks good but is vicious, everyone will be afraid of him and leave him alone, which may even make him perceive himself as a demon. So even for the sake of appearance, it is meaningful for us to practice forbearance.

Common people all want to be good-looking, healthy and long-lived. However, without the practice of forbearance, it is impossible to achieve these goals either in this life or the next. In Shantideva's *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, it goes as follows:

For patience in samsara brings such things

As beauty, health, and good renown.

Its fruit is great longevity,

The vast contentment of a universal king.

It means that if one practices patience in all lifetimes, one gains beauty, health, longevity and good reputation. Like a universal king, one can effortlessly obtain plenty of wealth and spontaneously get many other advantages in one's present life. Many people want these badly. A short-tempered one might say, "You'd better not make me angry, which is very bad for my health and will make me die quickly." Although we can be quick at putting the blame on others, the root cause of our problems is our own mind. In reality, it is one's bad temper that makes one sick and die quickly.

Exertion is the bodhisattva's pure land—when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings who have energetically cultivated all the [types of] merit come to be born in his country.

Exertion is the source of all the merits. Wherever there is exertion, there is a bodhisattva's pure land. When a bodhisattva becomes a buddha, a retinue with the same quality of exertion will come to his buddha land.

Different people have different qualities, which is true among both dharma practitioners and ordinary people. Some teachers are surrounded by indolent students, and have to scold them, “Why are you guys so lazy and sleep late?” Some teachers may even cry, “How come I am so unlucky that the naughtiest students of the school are in my class? They are so lazy, ugly and stupid....”

In fact, the external environment is a manifestation of one’s own mind. If you didn’t practice exertion well in previous lifetimes, now your followers will manifest in the same way. Similarly, as an entrepreneur, the ability of your subordinates is also related to yourself. You could observe and think about what kind of employees you have. If they are good, then you can give half of the credit to them and half to you because it is your merit of exertion that enables you to attract a retinue with the same quality.

Many sutras and shastras say that exertion has a direct impact on our virtuous behaviors. As stated in *The Six Paramita Sutra that Embraces the Essentials of Mahayana*,

*Like the wind is to the fire,
which makes the flames grow;
So is diligence to positive deeds,
enhancing our virtuous merits.*

A single spark can grow into raging flames with the help of blowing wind. Likewise, merits can grow rapidly by undertaking positive actions diligently, no matter how small the actions are. Therefore, if one is not smart but diligent, his flames of wisdom will be sparked in a short time and then keep blazing. On the contrary, if one is too lazy, then no matter how smart he thinks himself is, he wouldn’t be able to make any real progress in the worldly or unworldly affairs.

As dharma practitioners, we should avoid indolence and cultivate diligence to fully utilize our short and precious human life. To fully qualify our practice as the paramita of transcendent diligence is difficult, but we should have some basic requirements for ourselves. Khenpo suggests us to keep doing something virtuous every day, then step by step we will be diligent. Pressure helps sometimes. For example, no matter how busy or tired, many dharma friends persist in attending the live teaching. Khenpo said that he especially admired people in different time zones who always tried their best to attend on time. If some of them really couldn’t attend

the class, they would make up the teaching the next day. Such kind of exertion is really worthy of admiration.

If we don't have such kind of exertion, we would not spend much time on studying, reflecting and meditating on the Dharma, just like those ignorant and playful children who, without the supervision of teachers and parents, would indulge themselves in play and even fail to finish the primary school in the end. Khenpo once posted on his Weibo: Ordinary people are like naughty and ignorant children who, without the guidance of spiritual teachers, would just be hooked on the five sensory stimulants and have no intention to learn and acquire the transcendent knowledge. However, if one keeps on practicing exertion, he will cultivate it as a habit and eventually never lose it. As one knows well the impermanence of this short life and also sees the suffering in samsara, he will try his best to practice virtues and diligently benefit sentient beings.

Meditation is the bodhisattva's pure land—when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings who control their minds and keep them undisturbed come to be born in his country.

In Tibetan, in Xuanzang's, as well as in Zhiqian's translation, **control their minds and keep them undisturbed** is interpreted as “mindfulness and vigilance”. That is to say, people who enter samadhi with mindfulness and vigilance will be born in this pure land.

Actually controlling one's mind and keeping it undisturbed convey the same meaning as mindfulness and vigilance. It doesn't mean doing nothing at all or only engaging in sitting meditation. Rather, it means staying focused on whatever you are doing. If we have a disturbed mind, we can hardly do anything successfully. Therefore, if you are chanting mantras, you should be focused on chanting mantras; if you are listening to the teaching, you should be focused on the teaching; if you are working, you should be focused on what you are doing. All in all, you should concentrate on whatever you are doing. People who lack concentration, mindfulness and vigilance usually can't follow up on what they are doing because they are easily distracted or disturbed, and in the end they can hardly accomplish anything at all.

Everyone should know what needs to do in this life and then do it with mindfulness and vigilance. For example, if you are giving or receiving a teaching, you should do it properly from beginning to end. Sometimes you might not understand what is taught, yet you should remind yourself, “These instructions are derived from the real wisdom of the Buddha, so I must

listen one-pointedly.” Khenpo said that sometimes he felt some books of worldly knowledge were difficult to understand because of the cultural difference, yet he still persisted in reading them through since they were valuable in some regards.

So we should examine our minds with mindfulness and vigilance, otherwise no job can be well finished with a distracted mind. With the advanced information technology, multitasking becomes more and more usual in our daily life. People can check social media, watch TV, make phone calls and send text messages in the meantime, but their efficiency is getting lower because of their distracted and unconcentrated mind. In fact, only by doing one thing at a time with full attention can one finish the work efficiently and successfully.

There are many teachings in regard to mindfulness and vigilance from the past great masters. For example, one instruction says that, lift your foot only when the other foot has already planted firmly on the ground; and it is unwise to do many things all at once and to fail to complete anything in the end. Nowadays, different approaches of meditation are very well accepted by the majority of people, either with or without a religious background. It is quite necessary for modern people to cultivate an ability of concentration to prevent them from being disturbed by all different things.

So no matter what you are working on, since you are not forced by others and it is your own choice, you should do the job carefully and attentively. This is quite important. Many people describe themselves as earnest, but this might not be true if they can turn inward to reflect on themselves.

Wisdom is the bodhisattva’s pure land—when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings who [have achieved] correct concentration come to be born in his country.

Here **correct concentration** refers to prajna, which is the wisdom of the realization of emptiness, not what is commonly referred to as being smart or knowledgeable. According to Master Kuiji’s commentary on the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, there are sentient beings with correct concentration, sentient beings with wrong concentration and sentient beings with uncertain concentration. Those who have realized the emptiness of person and phenomena, or who follow the right view of emptiness, are called the ones with correct concentration, and they will be born in the pure land.

As stated in *The Mirror that Reflects Our Mind*, without prajna as a guide, the other five perfections are just like a blind person who cannot transcend the dreadful ocean of samsara. For example, without prajna, the wealth as a reward of practicing generosity will soon be depleted; although one can take rebirth in the three higher realms, the fruit of such retribution will be exhausted soon; although the practice of patience will make one look good in the next few lifetimes, it will not last forever; the practice of diligence will generate many merits in one's current and future lives, but they will exhaust eventually anyway; by practicing meditative concentration, one can well control his mind, but without prajna, it is only a worldly samadhi that leads to the rebirth in form or formless realm.

Therefore, only when one realizes the nature of mind, his merits will take hold of prajna and won't disappear before he attains buddhahood. Just like a wasteful person who will run out of money soon, if he could save it in the bank with high interests, his wealth won't be completely consumed. *The Mirror that Reflects Our Mind* also says, "For any virtuous activities which are to be done without applying the wisdom of emptiness, they are tainted by clinging, and would never lead to the unconditioned fruition of enlightenment."

If we don't have the wisdom of emptiness, while wandering in the samsara and changing our physical bodies, those nice identities and merits tainted by ego-clinging will disappear after a certain time. It is just like when we shoot an arrow, eventually the arrow will fall because there is no strength in it any more. If this arrow could be driven by some special force, it would continue to fly very far. By the same token, the merits generated by practicing generosity and so on belong to the collection of merits and can't last long. But if these merits can be rooted in prajna, they will not be depleted before one attains buddhahood.

Therefore, it is important for us to apply the paramita of wisdom to every virtuous deed, and then the merits accumulated will last forever. This is why many great masters keep emphasizing the importance of practicing prajnaparamita. Without it, the other five paramitas and the ten thousand performances of a bodhisattva will lose their essence.

The four unlimited states of mind are the bodhisattva's pure land—when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings who have developed sympathy, compassion, joy, and equanimity come to be born in his pure land.

As we know, the practice of the Four Immeasurables is the pre-condition for cultivating bodhichitta. Currently at Larung Gar, many classes are practicing the Four Immeasurables.

Khenpo suggests to read *A Guide to the Words of My Perfect Teacher* by Khenpo Ngakchung, which has very detailed instructions on how to practice and has great power of blessings towards the practitioners. Khenpo didn't go into details on how to practice the Four Immeasurables in this teaching, as it is familiar to most students.

The four means of attraction are the bodhisattva's pure land—when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings who have been attracted through his emancipation come to be born in his country.

The four means of attraction are being generous, having a pleasant language, teaching each individual according to that person's needs, and acting in conformity with what is taught. They are the bodhisattva's pure land and when the bodhisattva attains buddhahood, sentient beings who benefited through these four means will come to the pure land. There is a very explicit explanation about these in *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras* by Maitreya.

During the teaching, Khenpo apologized for his fast speed of speech today because he had many things to handle after the class. He even didn't take a break to drink water and as a consequence the interpreters might have fallen behind. Khenpo said that he used to perform simultaneous interpretation for His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, and when H.H. talked too fast, he would hardly have time to take a breath. So he totally understands how hard it is to do simultaneous interpretation.

Both the six paramitas and the four means of attraction contain the practice of generosity. The difference is that the practice of generosity in the six paramitas is to eliminate the suffering of sentient beings, such as hunger and thirst, while the generosity in the four means of attractions will not only wipe out the pain but also intend to attract sentient beings and place them on the right path to liberation.

Pleasant language implies affectionate and gentle speech, but it doesn't mean to use sweet words only. Sometimes pleasant language could be harsh but helpful. Therefore, a speech can be called pleasant language as long as it can benefit sentient beings and tame their minds.

The remaining two means are benefiting beings according to their needs and acting in conformity with what is taught. If whatever you do is driven by an altruistic mind, people will recognize it. Acting in conformity with what is taught requires you to be the role model yourself. If you want others to follow what you preach, you need to act accordingly. For

example, if a teacher wants his students to study hard while he enjoys himself in the pub every day, the students certainly will not listen to him. On the contrary, if the teacher himself is very hard-working and diligent, the students will naturally follow suit. Especially for practitioners who have made the aspiration to benefit others, their activities of altruism are closely related to their own behaviors. Khenpo always believes that one needs to devote oneself to a real activity instead of talking only.

Of course, even lip service is better than nothing, to say the least. Khenpo said that he once joked with another Khenpo, “You always talk about your good ideas but seldom put them into practice.” This Khenpo answered, “It will be worse if I don’t even think or speak about them.” Then Khenpo said to him, “You might be right, but what’s more important is to take real actions.” For example, if one feels pity for a beggar at heart, and the other only orally expresses such feeling, but neither of them gives the beggar any money, how can they relieve the beggar’s suffering? In the practice of six paramitas and four means of attraction, what is more important is to engage in altruistic actions in person. No matter how small the things are, we should do them by ourselves and be more diligent. Khenpo thinks that many dharma friends at Larung Gar have a nice personality. They don’t have strong arrogance and don’t put on airs, and they are willing to do things by themselves. This is a good atmosphere.

If you have tried but cannot make it, you should explain directly that you are not able to do it. That is also fine. But some people are not like this. Although they have agreed superficially, they don’t really want to help others at heart, so they tend to postpone all the actions. This is not the style of a true dharma practitioner. All in all, it’s not enough just to think or talk, we need to deliver.

Skillful means are the Bodhisattva's pure land—when the Bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings whose skillful means are without hindrance regarding all the dharmas come to be born in his country.

Skillful means are the bodhisattva’s pure land. Anything done with skillful means will have a wonderful result. When one achieves buddhahood, he will apply skillful means to do all kinds of things. For the part “sentient beings whose skillful means are without hindrance”, both the Tibetan and Xuanzang’s version translated it as “sentient beings who are good at observation”. The meanings are kind of similar. Sentient beings who have skillful means are for sure good at observation, and as a result, they will come to be born in the pure land. Or, if you have skillful

means and are good at observation, then when you attain buddhahood, bodhisattvas with the same qualities will come to your buddha land. So it is essential for us to apply skillful means and be observant at present.

In Master Kuiji's commentary on the Vimalakirti Sutra, he said skillful means also include dedication and relief. Dedication of merits is a good skillful means to benefit sentient beings. Relief means eliminating the suffering of all sentient beings and rescuing them from disasters. Life-release and poverty relief can be good examples in this regard.

From the worldly perspective, if one has skillful means and is observant, he will accomplish the task easily and smoothly; if one doesn't have such abilities, he will find it difficult to accomplish anything. The same is true with the Dharma practices. If one can develop bodhicitta and apply the three noble principles to whatever he does, then even if the action is insignificant, the fruit will be immeasurable. Without skillful means, however, things sometimes can't be done successfully.

Even a thought of the mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum" will bring magnificent merits. Khenpo said that he often chanted "Om Mani Padme Hum" when he was a little boy. He also wrote the mantra on hands and trees and carved it on stones. According to many sutras and shastras, immeasurable merits could be brought by seeing or hearing this mantra. Thus, spreading this mantra by using modern technology such as videos and audios could bring lots of benefits. Even if others do not believe in the merits, simply seeing it or even a glimpse of it could still be beneficial. You can share this mantra with your friends through your social media. Khenpo said that if someone looked for him on Wechat when he was occupied, he would send a coffee icon to that person no matter if the person likes coffee or not. However, it would be more meaningful to send over the mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum" because it could plant a virtuous seed in the mind of whoever sees it.

So we need to have these skillful means. Just as the merit of aspiring for bodhicitta is immeasurable, the benefit of having skillful means is also immeasurable. In Buddhism and especially in Tantrayana, there are plenty of supreme skillful means. As stated in *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*, wisdom without skillful means is bondage, just as skillful means without wisdom is bondage. This is how important skillful means is.

The thirty-seven factors of enlightenment are the bodhisattva's pure land— when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings who [have accomplished the]

foundations of mindfulness, correct exertions, numinous capabilities, faculties, powers, and the noble path come to be born in his country.

The thirty-seven factors of enlightenment could be presented in seven groups:

1. When one reaches the lesser path of accumulation, one attains the four applications of mindfulness.
2. When one reaches the intermediate path of accumulation, one attains the four right exertions.
3. When one reaches the greater path of accumulation, one attains the four bases of miraculous powers.
4. When one reaches the stage of warmth and stage of summit of the path of joining, one attains the five powers.
5. When one reaches the stage of acceptance and the stage of supreme attribute, one attains the five strengths.
6. When one reaches the first bhumi, one attains the seven elements for enlightenment.
7. When one reaches the second to the tenth bhumi, one attains the noble eightfold path.

According to *The Gateway to Knowledge* by Mipham Rinpoche, the definitions of thirty-seven factors of enlightenment are slightly different between Mahayana and Theravada. Taking for example the four applications of mindfulness, a Theravada practitioner would observe his own body, feeling, and mental activities, whereas a Mahayana practitioner's objective includes all beings. Another example is that, according to Theravada Buddhism, the concept of suffering, emptiness and selflessness is considered as the ultimate truth, but in Mahayana, these are considered dreamlike on the level of conventional truth and in the ultimate truth, even the concepts of suffering, emptiness and selflessness do not exist.

Khenpo wonders if we have read *The Gateway to Knowledge* or not. It seems that the characters in the Chinese version are too small so the book is thin. The English version is a collection of four volumes, which was translated long time ago, but if no one reads it, the translation will be meaningless. Only by teaching and studying it will people know the value of this book.

In Han and Tibetan Buddhism, many sutras and shastras were just put on the bookshelves after they were translated. It is such a pity that no one studies them! When Khenpo visited some universities in the western countries, he found that they have lots of books in English such as *Ornament of the Middle Way*, *Uttaratantra Shastra*, and Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*, etc.

But when he asked the professors how the general meaning was taught in those books, they only answered in an unclear way. Indeed, if one can study and thoroughly understand these commentaries, one will find immeasurable value in them.

The attitude of rededication [of merit] is the bodhisattva's pure land — when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, he attains a country that is complete in all [forms of] merit.

Dedication of merits is really important. When one achieves buddhahood, the practice of dedication during one's causal stage makes his Buddha land possess all forms of merit. As *The Avatamsaka Sutra* states,

*The aspirations of a Bodhisattvas pervade everywhere,
Just as the principle of truth penetrates everything.
The minds of Bodhisattvas concern all, no matter they can see or not,
Bodhisattvas dedicate their whole merits for all sentient beings' benefit.*

With the bodhisattva's dedication of merits, they can benefit the sentient beings that they have seen or haven't seen. This is why we chant *Samantabhadra's King of Aspiration Prayers* at the end of each class as a means to benefit all sentient beings that we can see or can't see.

Explaining how to eliminate the eight difficult realms [where the Buddha and Dharma are unknown] is the bodhisattva's pure land—when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, his country is without the three evil destinations and eight difficult realms.

The eight difficult realms refer to the eight states without freedom to practice the Dharma. When the bodhisattva attains buddhahood, his pure land will not have such places as the three lower realms, or the eight difficult realms. The three lower realms are actually contained in the eight difficult realms, as what is taught in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*,

*Being born in the hells, in the preta realm,
As an animal, a long-lived god or a barbarian,
Having wrong views, being born when there is no Buddha,
Or being born deaf and mute; these are the eight states without freedom.*

Maintaining one’s own practice of the precepts without reviling the deficiencies of others is the bodhisattva's pure land—when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, his country is without the names (i.e., without even the words) ‘violation’ and ‘prohibition’.

Observing precepts without speaking about others’ faults is the bodhisattva’s pure land. When the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, even the words “violation” and “prohibition” will not be heard in his pure land. **Violation** and **prohibition** mean breaking the precepts. We need to observe our own precepts, and meanwhile we should not talk about others’ deficiencies. Some people who keep precepts are arrogant and always like to point out that others fail to keep pure precepts. In fact, unless you are in the managerial positions that you sometimes have to point out others’ problems, ordinary people have better not to make such kind of comments, and then your future buddha land will have even no such word as violation or prohibition. If you talk about others’ faults every day and can’t observe pure precepts yourself, you should be worried about your future land.

The ten goods are the bodhisattva’s pure land—when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings whose lifespans are not interrupted, who are very wealthy, who are chaste, whose words are truthful, who always use gentle language, who do not isolate themselves from their subordinates and who are good at resolving disputes, whose words are always beneficial, who are not jealous, who are not prone to anger, and who have correct views— [all these types of sentient beings] come to be born in his country.

The ten virtues are the bodhisattva’s pure land. The text here talks about the reward of each virtue. No interruption of life span and gaining longevity are the fruition of renouncing killing; wealth is the fruition of no stealing and renouncing taking what is not given; chastity is the fruition of no sexual misconduct; truthful words is the fruition of renouncing lying; gentle language is the fruition of abandoning harsh speech; being not isolated from subordinates and being good at resolving disputes are the fruition of giving up sowing discord at their causal stage; that whose words are always beneficial to others is the fruition of renouncing worthless chatter; no jealousy is the fruition of renouncing covetousness, as most time jealousy is generated by greed; no anger is the fruition of no hatred and giving up wishing harm on others; having correct views is the fruition of putting an end to wrong views. People with the above qualities will be born in the bodhisattva’s pure land.

Lecture 8

Before the teaching, Khenpo reminds the audience to generate supreme bodhichitta and listen to the teachings attentively with a joyful mind while letting go of various mental afflictions and impure thoughts.

During the study, we may find this teaching differs somewhat from our usual way of thinking and understanding; in that case, Khenpo encourages us to look up commentaries of past masters. Khenpo himself has not had the time to read them all, but he is immensely impressed by the few he has read. He finds that especially Master Kuiji and Master Sengzhao have hit their points precisely onto the message of this sutra.

Khenpo's teaching is not fully extensive and because of that, as Khenpo mentioned, he is afraid that he would not finish the teaching in several years. On the other hand, he will not quickly finish the teachings in just a few lectures, like a tiger leaping off a cliff. He would like to elaborate each paragraph of the sutra in some detail. In this way, the audience should be able to gain a better understanding of the deep meaning delivered in this sutra.

In terms of the attitude of listening to the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, some may approach it from the perspective of personal practice. They will find ample glimpses of primordial purity in this sutra, which is the essence of Vajrayana teaching. Also, they will see how Buddha Shakyamuni expounds the creed of "all phenomena are pure" in a sutrayana setting. On the other hand, audiences from universities or research institutes may take an academic approach. For them, Khenpo's teaching provides comparisons of three Chinese translations (by Kumarajiva, Xuanzang and Zhiqian Liu) along with the Tibetan version. Also a Japanese version translated from the Sanskrit version is referred to as another support. Khenpo hopes all these will serve as helpful referential aids.

How Should Bodhisattvas Cultivate Their Buddha Land?

Thus, Jewel Accumulation, according to his sincerity does the bodhisattva generate his practice. According to his generation of practice does he attain the profound mind. According to his profound mind does he discipline his intention. According to the disciplining of his intention does he practice in conformity with the teachings. According to his practice in conformance to the teachings is he able to rededicate merit.

The Buddha told Jewel Accumulation that a bodhisattva's mind is not deceptive, but rather is full of sincerity, and according to his sincerity will the bodhisattva engage in benefiting sentient beings with virtuous conduct.

A teaching of H.H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche says: "The profound and vast Dharma given by all buddhas and bodhisattvas in three times and ten directions can be subsumed in cultivating a kind heart and engaging in virtuous deeds. You fortunate ones, therefore, exert yourself in these practices!" This is a key instruction emphasizing both intention and conduct. If a person is kind, he will engage in virtuous acts, and because of his virtuous performance, he will attain a profound mind.

A profound mind is a mind full of unwavering and irreversible faith in the path. With unwavering faith in the path, the mind gets disciplined. Being disciplined means that the defilements of greed, aggression, and ignorance in the bodhisattva's mind have been suppressed, and the bodhisattva is steered toward virtuous deeds and no more negative actions will ensue. As a result, the disciplining of the bodhisattva's mind enables him to undertake and succeed in any task, however daunting it may be. Thus the bodhisattva can practice in conformity with the teachings of buddhas and spiritual teachers.

If the bodhisattva acts according to the teaching and engages in various beneficial activities under the guidance of bodhichitta, then he will dedicate all his merits to sentient beings and lead them toward enlightenment.

According to Master Kuiji's commentary, the content above is the progressive steps of mind training in Mahayana practice, which starts from cultivating good personalities to generating bodhichitta, and lastly to dedicating merits to sentient beings. This is what deemed to be the most wholesome endeavor in the world. The following part talks about Mahayana practice from the perspective of the results.

According to his rededication does he have skillful means. According to his skillful means does he make sentient beings accomplish liberation. According to his accomplishment of the liberation of sentient beings is his buddha land pure. According to the purity of the buddha land is his explanation of the Dharma pure. According to the purity of his explanation of the Dharma is his wisdom pure. According to the purity of his wisdom is his mind pure. According to the purity of his mind are all his merits pure.

Dedication of merit according to Mahayana's three noble principles is a skillful means, with which a person will not fall back again into cyclic existence. The three noble principles are, arousing bodhichitta in the beginning, doing the main practice without concepts in the middle, dedicating the merit in the end. As Longchenpa says, "These, together and complete, are the three vital supports for progressing on the path to liberation."

According to Kumarajiva, there are three categories of skillful means: first, arousing bodhicitta without grasping when one performs good deeds; second, not aiming for the realization of shravakas and pratyekabuddhas; third, taming the minds of sentient beings. With these three kinds of skillful means, one can help sentient beings accomplish liberation. Mainly, it is through giving the Dharma teaching, particularly six paramitas, that bodhisattvas lead sentient beings to accomplish liberation.

Accomplishing the liberation of sentient beings results in a pure buddha land. As we covered previously, each bodhisattva acquires his buddha land according to those sentient beings that he liberates. If those sentient beings' minds are purified, then the bodhisattva's buddha land is bound to be pure.

If the buddha land is pure, then certainly there is no meaningless chatter, idle talk, and deceptive conduct; hence the teachings are all pure. Since the teachings are free of contaminations such as the eight worldly concerns, every sentient being who receives the teaching will attain pure wisdom. Since wisdom arises from mind, with the pure wisdom, the mind must be pure.

All the worldly and spiritual qualities including the accumulation of wisdom and merits will be pure with a pure mind. All excellent qualities depend on the mind, and hence a pure mind will definitely lead to a pure land. The *Flower Adornment Sutra* says: "If the sentient being's mind is pure, he perceives the purity of the buddha land." A person with a pure mind will always see the external land as pure, no matter where he goes.

Concerning the latter part of this paragraph, Xuanzang's translation is a bit different from Kumarajiva's, in that it has additional contents such as "According to the purity of his wisdom is his discrimination pure. According to the purity of his discrimination is his conduct pure." Tibetan translation is similar to Kumarajiva's version in this part.

Pure Mind, Pure Land

Therefore, Jewel Accumulation, if a bodhisattva wishes to attain a pure land he should purify his mind. According to the purity of his mind is his buddha land pure!

Now we have the key point and we must bear it firmly in our minds! The main idea of what we expound all along, “a pure mind leads to a pure land”, is right here. It means that if a bodhisattva wishes to attain a pure land, he should purify his mind first, and then according to the purity of his mind is his buddha land pure.

This is also the origin of the motto “pure mind, pure land” of many Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Although they may talk impressively about it, but actually very few have comprehended its deep meaning.

Khenpo believes that in expounding the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the teacher would better have understood or practiced experientially the Vajrayana teaching of the primordial purity, such as Great Perfection or Mahamudra. Otherwise, without any clue of the tantric view, any explanation on the interplay of pure mind and pure land will probably miss the profundity implicit in the first chapter of this sutra. Khenpo encourages the audiences to pay close attention to this point with due diligence.

In Guhyagarbha Tantra, it teaches clearly and extensively on the doctrine of primordial purity. In his overview of the Guhyagarbha Tantra, *Essence of Clear Light*, Mipham Rinpoche expounds thoroughly the truth of primordial purity in the first chapter. There is a stanza often quoted by the lineage masters: “The five aggregates are renowned as the five perfect buddhas, and the five elements are the five female buddhas.” It states that the five aggregates—form, feeling, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness are the five buddhas, while the five elements—earth, water, fire, wind and space are the five female buddhas. The lineage masters such as Rongzom Pandita and Longchenpa expound it in penetrative detail, enabling us to see the pure counterpart of five aggregates and thus grasp easily the profound meaning of “a pure mind results in a pure land”.

Although sutrayana scriptures such as the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* also mention “affliction is bodhi itself”, “affliction is vajra relics itself”, or “affliction is wisdom itself”, and so on, but they give no detailed explanation. It is only in tantrayana teaching, such as in the seventeen-branch tantras, in Longchenpa’s *Seven Treasuries*, especially in *The Treasury of Dharmadhatu*, as well as in other tantric pith instructions, that the principle of primordial purity of Great Perfection is elucidated. These accounts don’t stop at the theoretical level only, but

advance further to offer essential instructions that naturally render tantric practitioners a clear grasp of what is truly meant by “affliction is bodhi itself”, and that a pure mind perceives a pure realm.

In order to acquire a pure land, the mind has to be purified first; only will a pure mind result in a pure land. Traditionally, there have been a number of legends and historical examples illustrating that when one’s mind is pure, one then perceives all appearances in the world as pure.

In 1987, when leading a pilgrimage to Wutai Mountain, H.H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche promised that every pilgrim would come across Manjushri there. Khenpo himself also read in both Chinese and Tibetan the prophecies that Manjushri dwells at Wutai Mountain and will appear to visitors, whether as a beggar, a farmer, or whatnots. As it turned out, when the group on their way encountered peasants working in the rice field, it struck Khenpo and others that each peasant was actually the manifestation of Manjushri. Until these days, Khenpo still feels this kind of awe, which attests how strongly a wise advice can empower a budding faith. Precisely because Khenpo set off his pilgrimage with a pure aspiration, he continues to perceive purely some peasants as Manjushri, even long after returning from Wutai Mountain.

For an ordinary being, such an experience happens only once in a blue moon, however, this is exactly where we need to train, which is the very practice of transforming perceived objects into purity by pure perception. Otherwise, should Manjushri himself really appear to us, we might fail to recognize him.

There is a story about the Stupa of Manjushri’s Hair at Wutai Mountain. In Northern Wei Dynasty, a temple called Dafu Vulture Temple at Wutai Mountain would offer vegetarian meals to all visitors without discrimination on the grounds of age, sex, or background in March of each year. One day a female beggar arrived with two kids and a dog for the meal. She told the receptionist monk: “I’m too poor to make offering to the temple, but I would be happy to offer a lock of my hair.” In ancient times, hair, being a part of body, was considered rather valuable. The monk was pleased to receive it. According to the temple’s rule, an animal was not entitled for offerings, however this monk gave this woman, her two kids, and the dog each a hearty serving.

Nevertheless, this woman, seeming not yet contented, said she had one more baby in her belly who should also get its portion. This instantly set the monk off, and he scolded this woman as

being too demanding and greedy. Suddenly the woman ascended into the air and appeared as Manjushri, and the dog turned into a lion. Manjushri rode on the lion, with two attendants who were transformed from the two kids standing by his sides.

The monk was gutted and bitterly regretted his actions. Then from the sky came the sound of Manjushri: “Ordinary beings try to treat everyone equally, yet their minds drift with the changes of external conditions; numerous bodies were abandoned in their previous lives, which one deserved their love and which one made them aversive?”

It means that sentient beings need to learn equality and not to be swayed by external circumstances. The body is impermanent and will be abandoned eventually, why harbor attachments and hatred toward it? Manjushri gave a lesson to the monk, saying that one should not be too stingy. If even a bowl of rice is hard to let go of, what else is there to practice? Out of repentance, the monk engraved the story and the stanza on a stone, built a stupa and interred it with the particular lock of hair.

While on the pilgrimage to Mountain Wutai, Khenpo found this small stupa and paid homage to it. When he was circumambulating it again and again, suddenly Khenpo found himself being able to memorize the *Praise to Noble Manjushri* and the *Aspiration of the Great Perfection of Manjushri*, which until then had eluded him. This obviously came from Manjushri’s great blessing power endowed in this Stupa of Manjushri’s Hair.

In July 2013, Khenpo was invited to give a talk on this very theme of “pure mind, pure land” at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. At that time, Khenpo illustrated it mainly from the academic perspective and used the teaching from the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. Certainly, this topic can also be elaborated from the angle of spiritual practitioners, which, Khenpo believes, will bring great benefit to actual practice.

We often talk about “cultivating a pure vision”. Its creed, actually, does not entail a deliberate effort to regard something that’s dirty itself as pure and clean. Otherwise, regardless of how hard one practices, it will end nowhere but pretenses. For example, if one is convinced of samsara as impure, yet feels compelled to see it as pure is like, according to Mipham Rinpoche’s *Beacon of Certainty*, to force oneself to perceive a bottle filled with vomit as unsoiled and spotless is utterly fooling oneself.

Pure vision can be established from sentient being's innate buddha nature, as well as from being's physical body and the four elements of material world. Cultivating a pure vision followed by integrating it into daily practice is the right approach. This is what Khenpo wishes the audience would subscribe to. He says, "Be steadfast in your Dharma study, and realize the profound meaning of 'pure mind, pure land', instead of keeping it merely as a saying. This is the natural state of all phenomena."

Shariputra's Doubt

At that time Shariputra was influenced by the Buddha's numinous charisma to have this thought: "If the bodhisattva's buddha land is pure according to the purity of the bodhisattva's mind, then when our World-honored One was a bodhisattva his mind must have been pure. Nevertheless, this buddha land is so impure!"

The Buddha knew what he was thinking and asked him, "What do you think? Although the blind do not see them, can the sun and moon be anything but pure?"

[Shariputra] answered, "No, World-honored One! This is the fault of the blind, not that of the sun and moon."

[The Buddha said], "Shariputra, it is through the transgressions of sentient beings that they do not see the purity of the Tathagata's (i.e., my) buddha land. This is not the Tathagata's fault! Shariputra, this land of mine is pure, but you do not see it."

Thereupon, Shariputra, influenced by the Buddha's numinous charisma, thought to himself: "If a buddha field is pure only to the degree that the mind of the bodhisattva is pure, now that the Saha world is not pure, does it imply that our Buddha, the World-honored One's mind was impure when he was training as a bodhisattva?"

This doubt seems pretty reasonable. The Buddha's mind must have been impure at his causal stage as a bodhisattva. Otherwise, how could his buddha land end up being so impure now? Indeed, the era we live now has been called a degenerate era since the Buddha's time, and the world in general has been dirty and chaotic.

The Buddha knew Shariputra's mind and used an analogy to prompt Shariputra's reasoning: Is there something wrong with the sun and moon when a blind man can't see them? Could it be said that the sun and moon are to blame? Or rather it's the blind man's fault?"

Of course, it is the blind man's fault. Then the Buddha said: "In the same way, because of their negative karma, living beings do not see the splendid majesty of my pure land. It is not my fault. My land has always been pure and magnificent, but ordinary beings do not see it that way." Impeded by their narrow faculties, shravakas and pratyekabuddhas like Shariputra are also spiritually blind and fail to perceive the world as it truly is.

Conch Crest Brahma King's Answer

At that time Conch Crest Brahma King said to Shariputra, "Do not think thus, saying that this buddha land is not pure. Why? I have witnessed the purity of Shakyamuni's buddha land. It is like the heavenly palace of Isvara."

Shariputra said, "As I observe this land, it is hills and hollows, brambles and gravel, and rocks and mountains—all filled with defilements."

While the Buddha and Shariputra were conversing, a deva called Conch Crest Brahma King who was at the assembly came up to them. As Khenpo explained, "Conch Crest Brahma King", read as Tsangpa Ralpa Chen in Tibetan, means a Brahma with a tuft of hair on his head resembling a conch. In the *Essence of Clear Light* it was translated as "Crest Brahma"; Xuanzang also had a similar translation and Zhi Qian translated it as "Brahmin with braided hair".

Conch Crest Brahma King told Shariputra: "You should not think and say that this land is impure. Indeed, as I observe, this land of Buddha Shakyamuni is as pure as the heavenly palace of Isvara." The heavenly palace of Isvara refers to the heaven of controlling others' emanations. This heaven is the most refined state in which one can be reborn within the desire realm. Although still a tainted world and the abode of the Demon King Mara, gods in this realm enjoy pleasures created magically by other gods. Therefore, this heaven realm is a fitting analogy for Conch Crest Brahma King to describe Buddha Shakyamuni's pure realm.

If something is seen with one's own eyes, it is a valid cognition of direct perception, so how can it be invalidated? Both the Buddha and the Brahma King affirmed that this world is as pure as the heavenly palace of Isavara. However, Shariputra was still unconvinced, and said, "No way. As I observe this land, I see it full of hills, mountains, precipices, abysses, thorns, stones, dirt and filth, which are all contaminated by defilements." He described what we see about this world.

This part of text appears in Mipham Rinpoche's *Essence of Clear Light* as well. When trying to establish the tantric view of primordial purity, Mipham Rinpoche did so with the support of scriptural authority and logical analysis. Concerning the support of scriptural authority, he quoted this part from the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. Although *Essence of Clear Light* is a tantric treatise, it nonetheless quotes from sutrayana texts, such as the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. This is quite essential, which can dispel doubts on the rationality of tantrayana, since a fair number of Buddhists think that many tantric views run counter to the sutrayana teachings.

The fact of the matter is, anyone well-versed in both sutrayana and tantrayana will see, certain sutra teachings do require an interpretation from the tantric point of view, otherwise, their meaning will remain elusive. For instance, many sutra passages mention, "affliction is bodhi itself." But, why so? How can afflictions like desire, anger, and ignorance are bodhi? According to the view of sutrayana, afflictions need to be eradicated on the path of seeing and on the path of meditation. Earmarked as something to be uprooted, how can afflictions be turned into bodhi? Many questions like these will arise.

Therefore, Khenpo hopes that the audience will not reject tantrayana prematurely. Saying so isn't because Khenpo himself is a Vajrayana practitioner and thus is wary of personal attacks. Instead, it is for encouraging audiences to study Buddhist doctrines and to make careful comparisons between tantrayana and sutrayana. At times, a sutrayana teaching can be sufficiently explicated from its own view; at other times, however, it may call for a tantric way of explanation to render a thorough insight.

Unfortunately, today there are people who shun away from studying Buddhism properly yet are quick to criticize or even slander it. This is absurd. Khenpo asserts that to call oneself a Buddhist, one should work hard in learning scriptures and commentaries of both sutrayana and tantrayana. Some people tend to think being a Buddhist is about taking refuge only. That's not the case, far from it actually. In the case of learning a foreign language, be it English, Japanese,

or French, can its rules be mastered after attending one or two classes? Is that all it takes? As we know, language is a very sophisticated communication system. A superficial dabbling will never afford a good command of a new language. It usually takes a smart person a minimum of five or six years of effort to gain proficiency of it. In the same vein, any Buddhist worthy of the name should invest at least four or five years in systematic Dharma study. If a person is unwilling to go through such training, yet still vainly attempts to negate the tenet of sutrayana and tantrayana, it is a total joke. In Khenpo's opinion, it doesn't become qualified to make any criticism or assessment of certain Buddhist views until one has immersed themselves in Dharma education for five to ten years. Otherwise, airing critiques will be like what Tibetans say, "shooting arrows blindly toward the sky without aiming at the bull's eye." Any seasoned practitioner will not take random negations seriously and will not waste time and energy to be bothered by such views, since they are obviously an amateur's comments.

Conch Crest Brahma King said, "Sir, your mind has high and low because you are not relying on buddha wisdom. Hence you perceive this land as impure. Shariputra, the bodhisattva is universally same [in attitude] regarding all sentient beings. The purity of his profound mind relies on buddha wisdom and therefore is able to perceive the purity of this buddha land."

Conch Crest Brahma King said: "Venerable Shariputra, you're being judgmental, which obstructs you from seeing the world as pure." Whether one's perception is pure or not depends on one's mindset and the power of past actions. Compared with buddhas and bodhisattvas, shravakas and pratyekabuddhas have a lower level of realization. Not relying on buddha wisdom, they cannot perceive the world as pure.

Conch Crest Brahma King is a great bodhisattva of extraordinary accomplishment. He further told Shariputra that a bodhisattva is impartial towards all living beings who are all endowed with the same nature. Through practice, his mind can be purified and rest on buddha wisdom; then he will see clearly the purity of this world as a buddha land.

This state of primordial purity is also described in the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, a definitive and important sutrayana scripture. It says: "Sentient beings and worlds have the same nature, both hells and heavens are Pure Lands." All living beings and their environments are in the realm of dharmadhatu, thus in true reality, hells and heavens are not different from a pure buddha realm. By relying on buddha wisdom, this world is seen as fundamentally pure.

The Buddha's Evidence

At this the Buddha pointed to the earth with his toe, and instantly the trimegachiliocosm was as if ornamented with a hundred thousand jewels. It was like the Jewel Ornamentation land, with all its immeasurable merits, of Jewel Ornament Buddha.

The entire great assembly exclaimed at this unprecedented event, and they all saw themselves sitting on many-jeweled lotus flowers.

Thereupon, the Buddha pointed to the earth with his toe and blessed all present with radiant pure cognition. The three thousand-fold universe (the trimegachiliocosm) suddenly became pure and was as if ornamented with a hundred thousand jewels and precious gems. Everyone saw this Saha world immaculately pure just like the Jewel Ornamentation land, with all its immeasurable adornments and merits, of Jewel Ornament Buddha. They were all filled with wonder and praised this event which they had never seen or experienced before. Meanwhile, they saw themselves free from afflictions and sitting on many-jeweled lotus flowers.

Concerning this miraculous scene, Zhi Qian's translation describes it in general terms of a buddha land decorated with precious jewels. In Kumarajiva's version, Jewel Ornament Buddha's land is used as an analogy to elaborate the sublime qualities of this land.

Besides the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, a similar scenario is found in sutras like the *Nirvana Sutra*. Prior to expounding the *Nirvana Sutra*, the Buddha with his numinous power transformed the whole world into a glorious and immaculate land. The Buddha, on occasions deemed special, would confer blessings that empower being to abide in a state of pure mind, such that they can personally witness the natural purity of the world as it really is.

The Buddha told Shariputra, "You should now observe the purity of this buddha land."

Shariputra said, "So it is, World-honored One. Originally I did not see it; originally I did not hear it. Now the purity of the Buddha's country is entirely apparent."

Shariputra answered: "It is true. This world is primordially pure. However, I have never seen and heard of its imposing majesty until now, thanks to your miraculous power." Thus it all hinges on having a pure mind. Shariputra recognized that it was only through the Buddha's

blessing that his impure perception was transformed into a pure one, which revealed the nature of world as pure and majestic.

Khenpo hopes that the audience will contemplate repeatedly the dialogues covered in this chapter. He doesn't imagine their underlining meaning can be internalized by listening to an hour-long teaching alone; rather, it demands dedicated reflection and close scrutiny. Do not treat Buddhist scriptures as mundane novels that are tossed away after a casual reading. Khenpo urges us to continue to reflect on the above paragraphs for ten, twenty, or even forty years if we must, until their profound meaning is truly understood.

The Buddha said to Shariputra, “My buddha country is always pure, like this. It is only so as to save inferior persons here that I manifest it as a defiled and impure land. It is like the many-jeweled eating utensils used in common by the gods, the food in which is of different colors depending on their merits. Just so, Shariputra, if a person’s mind is pure he sees the merits and ornaments of this land.”

Here is the key point. The buddha land is always pure, and it is only for the sake of people with lesser capacity that the Buddha makes it appear defiled and impure. For example, heavenly beings all take their food from a precious vessel, yet the food each obtains takes different colors and tastes according to variations of the merits each has accumulated.

The Mahayana Sutra of Mind Contemplation states: “A pure mind leads to a pure world, and a dirty mind leads to a filthy world.” It is very true. In our daily life, what one perceives as beautiful or delightful can be seen as ugly or nauseating by others. It's all based on each individual's mental state and karmic propensity. Hoya, or wax plant, blooms pink scented flowers. Some enjoy its fragrance while others can't stand its overpowering odor and will never place it indoors. Some individuals think the tropical fruit durian is very delicious with sweet fragrance, whereas others find it smelly, as intensely disgusting as raw sewage.

Indeed, sentient beings' karma manifests in all shapes and sizes. An online video tells the story of a young man who once rescued an injured owl. After its recovery, the owl would return to its savior and bring along a prey, a dead mouse, as an offering. The young man appreciated the owl's gesture of repaying kindness, even though he never would partake what the owl considered as a delicacy. In the same token, the appearances in the world are labeled as clean or filthy according to the level of our perception. Through investigation, we will gradually

come to comprehend the fundamental principle, “A pure mind leads to a pure world, and a dirty mind leads to a filthy world.”

The story of Su Shi, a famous poet of Song Dynasty, and his friend the Chan Master Foyin is well known. One day, Su Shi bragged to his younger sister Su Xiaomei: “Today I won a contest with Master Foyin. After we sat in meditation together, I commented that Master Foyin looked like a pile of cow dung, whereas he said I looked like a stately buddha statue.” Su Xiaomei, a talented lady and a Dharma practitioner herself, told Su Shi: “Brother, you are totally defeated by the Master! It is because of his pure mind, Master Foyin perceived you like a stately buddha statue; while due to your impure mind, you regarded this great Chan Master as a pile of cow dung. You lost thoroughly!” On surface, this story appears as a dispute or witty exchanges, yet there are thoughts implicit in it to chew on.

Our self-nature can be likened to a “land”, and our self-esteem has a lot to do with our perception about this land. If we are upbeat and optimistic about ourselves, then when encountering afflictions, we can easily apply the motto “affliction is bodhi itself”, and thus bolster our courage and wisdom steadily. If we are constantly tormented by depression or sorrow, we’re nowhere near the state of “a pure mind leads to a pure world”.

When the Buddha manifested the purity of this country, the five hundred elders’ sons led by Jewel Accumulation all achieved forbearance of the nonarising of dharmas. Eighty-four thousand people all generated the intention to achieve anuttara samyaksambodhi.

The Buddha then withdrew his numinous powers, and the world returned to its former [appearance].

When the Buddha in this way revealed the marvelous purity of the land, the five hundred elders’ sons who accompanied Jewel Accumulation all achieved the forbearance of the nonarising of dharmas, reaching bhumi levels from the first to the eighth. Eighty-four thousand people set their mind to attain enlightenment. The Buddha then withdrew the supernatural power that he had exercised and the world returned to its former appearance.

According to Master Kuiji’s interpretation, the reason the Buddha did so is to let beings realize that it is only through Buddha’s blessing that they get to see the world as truly as it is. Nonetheless, it’s merely a glimpse. In order to secure a steadfast pure perception, they must exert in personal practice. This is a pivotal point. In other words, the Buddha rendered

temporary pure perception to Shariputra and others present so that they came to see the true reality of the world, which, after all, was a temporary experience facilitated by Buddha's powerful blessing. In order to attain the stable realization, sentient beings need to practice fervently.

The thirty-two thousand gods and humans who sought the shravaka vehicle understood that conditioned dharmas were all entirely impermanent and, distantly transcending sensory defilement, they attained purity of the Dharma eye.

Eight thousand bhiksus [achieved] nonexperiencing of the dharmas, their minds liberated by the elimination of the flaws.

At this time, thirty-two thousand gods and humans who wished to pursue the shravaka vehicle comprehended that all conditioned phenomena were impermanent. It is possible to gain enlightenment when the truth that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent is penetrated. There have been practitioners who focus on the practice of impermanence and attain realization instantly when the right conditions come together.

Distantly transcending sensory defilement means that they attach neither to external phenomena nor to an inner self, and that they eradicate completely the eighty-eight afflictive emotions and the obscurations to be dispelled at the path of seeing. Eventually, they attained purity of the Dharma eye, which stage is generally referred to as the fruition of stream-winner, i.e., the path of seeing in the shravaka vehicle.

Moreover, eight thousand monks **achieved nonexperiencing of the dharmas**, meaning that they successfully severed all attachments from "me" and "mine", eradicated entirely contaminated afflictions, and accomplished the fruition of arahant.

At the end of this chapter, we read that many beings attained liberation after listening to the Buddha's exposition. While rejoicing at their great feats, we shall always apply the view of "a pure mind leads to a pure world" to our daily dealings with the world. The content of this chapter parallels quite well with the tantrayana teaching of primordial purity. The *Vimalakirti Sutra*, even as a sutrayana scripture, nonetheless touches upon the tantric view of primordial purity from the aspect of the external world in this chapter, and will further address this topic in later chapters.