Vast Dedication

Vast dedication — Directing all accumulated merit toward enlightenment and the welfare of every sentient being. Dedication gives virtue its highest Mahayana purpose and protects it from being wasted or narrowed to temporary aims.

All merit
- Merit of this practice
- Merit of past, present and future
- Merit created by oneself and others
- Merit of ordinary beings, bodhisattvas and buddhas
- Every virtue, however small
- Merit dedicated without attachment or self-importance

Those connected with me
- Parents and family
- Friends and companions
- Teachers and spiritual friends
- Dharma brothers and sisters
- Students and practitioners
- Benefactors, volunteers and supporters
- Colleagues, neighbours and community
- Those who requested prayers
- Those who depend upon me
- Those whose kindness I remember
- Those whose kindness I have overlooked

Those affected by my actions
- Those I have harmed
- Those I may have harmed unknowingly
- Those I have neglected
- Those I have misled or disappointed
- Those whose trust I have broken
- Those to whom I owe apology or restitution
- Those who have harmed me
- Those toward whom I feel anger or resentment
- Those with whom I have difficult karmic connections
- May harm be repaired and karmic debts purified

Those presently suffering
- The sick and injured
- People in physical pain
- People experiencing mental illness or distress
- The frightened, lonely and grieving
- The dying
- Those who have recently died
- Those facing an uncertain rebirth
- The hungry and thirsty
- Those without shelter
- Refugees and displaced people
- Prisoners and those deprived of freedom
- Victims of violence, abuse and exploitation
- Those experiencing discrimination or exclusion
- Those affected by war, famine and disaster
- Those suffering without anyone knowing
- Those unable to ask for help

Those creating suffering
- Those overcome by anger and hatred
- Those ruled by attachment and greed
- Those acting through ignorance
- Those committing violence
- Those exploiting or oppressing others
- Those spreading hatred and division
- Those killing and causing harm ‘because the can’
- Those killing and causing harm because they do not recognise sentience in other beings
- Those creating causes of terrible future suffering
- Leaders making harmful decisions
- May their afflictions cease
- May they recognise consequences
- May they develop compassion and wisdom
- May they stop harming themselves and others

People working for others
- Spiritual teachers
- Dharma translators and publishers
- Monastics and retreatants

- Carers and family caregivers
- Doctors, nurses and health workers
- Counsellors and chaplains
- Emergency and rescue workers
- Peacemakers and mediators
- Humanitarian workers
- Ethical leaders and public servants
- Teachers and researchers
- Environmental protectors
- Those serving quietly without recognition
- May their beneficial work succeed
- May their obstacles be removed
- May they remain healthy and courageous

All forms of life
- Human beings
- Animals
- Insects and tiny creatures
- Beings of the land, water and air
- Beings visible and invisible
- Beings in peaceful and terrifying circumstances
- Beings of every realm of samsara
- Hell beings
- Hungry ghosts
- Animals
- Human beings
- Asuras
- Devas
- Beings in intermediate states
- Every sentient being without exception

Freedom from immediate suffering
- May fear cease
- May illness be healed
- May pain be relieved
- May hunger and thirst end
- May everyone have shelter and safety
- May captives be freed
- May the grieving find comfort

- May the lonely find companionship
- May the confused find clarity
- May the discouraged find hope
- May the dying be free from fear
- May the deceased obtain a fortunate rebirth

Freedom from causes of suffering
- May destructive karma be purified
- May karmic obscurations be removed
- May ignorance diminish
- May attachment be overcome
- May anger and hatred cease
- May jealousy become rejoicing
- May pride become humility
- May greed become generosity
- May indifference become compassion
- May wrong views be dispelled
- May harmful habits lose their power
- May beings cease creating causes of lower rebirth

Favourable worldly conditions
- Peace between peoples and nations
- Ethical and compassionate government
- Justice without hatred
- Reconciliation after conflict
- Freedom from war and violence
- Freedom from famine and poverty
- Access to food, clean water and shelter
- Access to medicine and care
- Safe families and communities
- Wise use of wealth and resources
- Social harmony and mutual respect
- Protection of vulnerable beings
- Responsible care for the natural world

Environmental wellbeing
- Healing of damaged ecosystems
- Purification of air, water and soil
- Protection of forests, oceans and wildlife

- Relief from environmental disasters
- Balanced seasons and beneficial rainfall
- Responsible responses to climate change
- Reduced harm to animals and habitats
- Wisdom concerning collective consumption
- Harmony between human activity and the natural world

Precious human rebirth
- Freedom from lower rebirth
- A precious human life
- All freedoms and endowments
- Healthy faculties suitable for practice
- Material conditions sufficient for Dharma
- Faith, intelligence and compassion
- Conscientiousness and ethical discipline
- Freedom to study and practise
- A long life used meaningfully
- Death with a peaceful and virtuous mind

Meeting the Dharma
- Encounter with authentic teachings
- Meeting qualified Mahayana teachers
- Recognising the teacher's qualities
- Confidence in refuge and karma
- Correct understanding of the path
- Freedom from sectarianism and wrong views
- Opportunity to hear, study and contemplate
- Conditions for meditation and retreat
- Ability to retain and practise teachings
- Courage to apply Dharma during difficulties
- Never being separated from Dharma in future lives

The teachers and lineage
- Long lives of qualified teachers
- Fulfilment of their holy wishes
- Removal of obstacles to their activities
- Harmony between teachers and students
- Preservation of authentic lineages
- Flourishing of study, practice and realisation

- Availability of accurate translations
- Support for monasteries and Dharma centres
- Emergence of realised practitioners
- Continuation of pure transmission
- Swift return of departed teachers
- Recognition and support of authentic successors

The Golden Light Sutra
- Preservation of the sutra
- Accurate translation and publication
- Availability in many languages
- Continuation of oral transmissions
- Qualified explanations and commentaries
- Respectful recitation and study
- Correct understanding of its purpose
- Protection from distortion and misuse
- Practice joined with ethics, compassion and wisdom
- Benefit for every place in which it is read
- Relief of conflict, illness and environmental disturbance
- Endurance of Dharma for future generations

Progress along the path
- Devotion to the spiritual teacher
- Appreciation of the precious human life
- Awareness of death and impermanence
- Refuge in the Three Jewels
- Certainty regarding karma
- Renunciation of samsara
- Equanimity toward all beings
- Recognition of every being’s kindness
- Great love
- Great compassion
- Universal responsibility
- Bodhicitta
- Joyful bodhisattva conduct
- Completion of the six perfections
- Progress through the five paths and ten grounds

Ethical discipline
- Abandonment of the ten nonvirtues
- Protection of life
- Generosity and respect for property
- Responsible sexual conduct
- Truthful speech
- Speech that creates harmony
- Gentle and beneficial speech
- Meaningful speech
- Contentment
- Benevolent intention
- Correct understanding
- Restoration of damaged relationships
- Courage to apologise and repair harm
- Stability in vows and commitments

Meditation and wisdom
- Mindfulness and introspective awareness
- Freedom from distraction
- Calm abiding
- Special insight
- Understanding of dependent arising
- Understanding of the two truths
- Realisation of the emptiness of self
- Realisation of the emptiness of phenomena
- Freedom from eternalism
- Freedom from nihilism
- Union of calm abiding and special insight
- Direct nonconceptual realisation of emptiness
- Complete union of compassion and wisdom

Purification
- Purification of body, speech and mind
- Purification of broken vows and commitments
- Purification of harm to the Three Jewels
- Purification of harm to teachers and spiritual friends
- Purification of harm to sentient beings
- Purification of remembered actions
- Purification of forgotten actions

- Purification of actions done, encouraged or rejoiced in
- Purification of individual karma
- Purification of collective karma
- Purification of obstacles to study
- Purification of obstacles to meditation
- Purification of obstacles to bodhicitta
- Purification of obstacles to realising emptiness
- Purification of obstacles to benefiting beings

Merit and favourable conditions
- Accumulation of vast merit
- Rejoicing in every being's virtue
- Increase of generosity, ethics and patience
- Conditions for joyful effort
- Conditions for concentration and wisdom
- Success of virtuous projects
- Removal of inner and outer obstacles
- Resources used for Dharma and sentient beings
- Every ordinary activity transformed into the path
- Merit protected from anger and wrong views
- Merit never exhausted until enlightenment

Liberation and enlightenment
- Freedom from lower realms
- Freedom from samsara
- Cessation of afflictive obscurations
- Cessation of cognitive obscurations
- Attainment of arhatship for those seeking it
- Attainment of bodhisattva realisations
- Completion of the two accumulations
- Completion of all qualities of method and wisdom
- Attainment of the enlightened bodies of a buddha
- Perfect knowledge of beings' needs
- Effortless ability to benefit
- Complete buddhahood for every sentient being

Ultimate dedication
- May this merit become a cause of enlightenment
- May it never ripen merely as samsaric success

- May it be joined inseparably with bodhicitta
- May it be sealed by wisdom understanding emptiness
- May the dedicator, merit and recipients be seen as dependently arisen
- May no being be excluded
- May the benefit continue until samsara is emptied
- May all beings swiftly attain complete awakening
- May I become capable of leading them there
- May every virtue fulfil the enlightened wishes of the gurus and buddhas

Merit

> I need very clear statements of what merit is, what are its practices and how it differs from a field of merit. My confusion is tied up with merit being accumulated by some action. It is then dedicated. Merit sounds very much like a bank account.

The “bank account” impression is understandable, because Buddhist texts speak of accumulating, increasing, protecting and dedicating merit. But merit is not a transferable spiritual substance or a quantity stored somewhere.

Merit is the beneficial karmic potential created when a wholesome intention is expressed through virtuous action. It helps produce favourable inner and outer conditions for happiness, Dharma practice and awakening.

A better image is a **seed and its growing conditions**, not money in an account.

1. What merit is

When we act with generosity, compassion, ethical restraint or reverence, several things happen:

- wholesome tendencies become stronger;
- self-centred habits become weaker;
- the mind becomes more receptive and spacious;
- beneficial relationships and circumstances are supported;
- causes are created for future happiness and spiritual development.

“Merit” is the name given to this positive causal potential. It is not an invisible object added to the mind.

The merit created by an action depends upon such factors as:

- our motivation;
- the nature of the action;
- the person or object toward whom it is directed;
- the care with which it is performed;

- whether we rejoice in it or later regret it;
- how it is dedicated.

2. What merit practices are

Merit practices are virtuous actions that establish favourable causes. They include:

- generosity and service;
- protecting life;
- ethical conduct;
- patience and forgiveness;
- helping those who suffer;
- making offerings;
- prostration and homage;
- reading or reciting Dharma;
- supporting teachers, translations and Dharma communities;
- confession and ethical repair;
- rejoicing in our own and others' virtue;
- requesting teachers to remain and teach;
- generating compassion and bodhicitta;
- dedicating virtue toward awakening.

These practices create merit because they train the mind away from greed, hatred and ignorance and toward generosity, compassion and wisdom.

3. What the field of merit is

The **field of merit is not merit itself**. It is the persons or sacred objects in relation to whom virtuous actions are performed.

The metaphor is agricultural:

- the **field** is the object or recipient;
- the **seed** is the virtuous intention and action;
- the **harvest** is the beneficial result.

The visualised field of merit may include:

- the spiritual teacher and lineage gurus;
- buddhas and bodhisattvas;
- Dharma teachings;
- the Sangha;
- other realised beings.

Sentient beings are also described as a field of merit because generosity, patience, protection and compassion toward them provide indispensable opportunities to practise the bodhisattva path.

Thus:

> **Merit is the beneficial potential created by virtue; the field of merit is the basis or recipient in relation to whom that virtue is practised.**

4. What dedicating merit means

Dedication does not mean withdrawing merit from an account and transferring it to someone else.

It means **directing the purpose of the virtuous action**:

> May the beneficial potential of this action contribute to the relief, liberation and enlightenment of all beings.

Dedication shapes the direction in which the virtue is intended to mature. Instead of seeking only a pleasant worldly result, we connect the action with:

- continued access to Dharma;
- purification and realisation;
- the welfare of others;
- complete enlightenment.

When we dedicate merit to someone who is sick or suffering, we are not necessarily handing them a measurable quantity. We are including them within our virtuous intention, making aspirations for their welfare, and establishing causes directed toward their benefit. Buddhist traditions also accept karmic relationships and effects that cannot be reduced to ordinary material mechanisms.

5. Why merit and wisdom are both needed

Merit creates supportive conditions, but merit alone does not uproot ignorance. Wisdom realising emptiness addresses that root.

- **Merit** makes the mind and circumstances suitable for the path.
- **Wisdom** correctly understands how the self and phenomena exist.
- **Bodhicitta** directs both toward enlightenment for all beings.

The concise formulation for your map could be:

> **Merit is the beneficial karmic potential created by virtuous intention and action; merit practices cultivate that potential, the field of merit provides a powerful basis for its creation, and dedication directs it toward the welfare and enlightenment of all beings.**