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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་གྱི་རི་རྒྱུ་བཟུང་བའི་གསུང་མཛོད།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga  
Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

22 June 2010

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Let us generate a positive motivation to engage in the meditation practice.

*[meditation]*

We have already generated a positive motivation, but to strengthen our positive intent for receiving the teachings, we can generate the following motivation: 'For the sake of all sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I will listen to the Mahayana teachings and put it into practice well'.

Generating such a motivation, where the very intent of listening to the teachings and engaging in the practice in order to benefit all sentient beings, will secure one's practice to actually become an aid to benefit others. Because the very motivation is free from mere self-interest and aimed at the benefit of other sentient beings, the practice that we engage in actually becomes very meaningful. If, in our regular practice, we were to spend a few minutes just focusing on that motivation itself, we will definitely derive some sense of purpose, meaning and fulfilment; we will gain a real sense of joy in our hearts. To that extent we can definitely see the benefit of the motivation.

## 2.1.2.3.1.3. Liberation through realising the meaning of non-duality

The meaning of this outline is that liberation is obtained by following the middle way; the path or the view that is free from both extremes.

50. *Having thus seen that effects arise  
From causes, one asserts what appears  
In the conventions of the world  
And does not accept nihilism*
51. *One who asserts, just as it is, cessation  
That does not arise from conventions  
Does not pass into (a view of) existence.  
Thereby one not relying on duality is  
liberated*

As explained in Gyaltsab Je's commentary, these verses are refutations to the objections posed by the lower Buddhist schools. One must understand how the objections are raised and how they are refuted. The lower Buddhist schools say that if the Prasangika school presents cause and effect as non-inherently existents then that would imply the complete annihilation of cause and effect. In response to that, as indicated in these verses, the Prasangika say, 'As we do not assert the annihilation of cause and effect we do not hold a view of nihilism.

'We do not adhere to a nihilistic view because an effect arising from causes is established by the valid cognition that asserts conventionality. We firmly establish cause and effect through the example of a seed producing a sprout.' The main point of the Prasangika is that while

cause and effect lack even an atom of inherent existence, they definitely do not lack existence altogether. That is because cause and effect can be asserted conventionally by a valid cognition that establishes conventional existence. Any ordinary person can establish the truth of a sprout being produced from a seed; one does not need to use much reasoning or logic to understand that! The fact that an effect is produced by a cause is established through convention, and thus it is merely labelled or imputed by conception.

Furthermore, as Gyaltsab's commentary explains, while the Prasangika refute the inherent existence of cause and effect, they are not denying the actual existence of cause and effect. Thus, they say, 'We don't adhere to the view of nihilism. Furthermore, we do not adhere to the view of eternalism either, because although we refute the inherent establishment of cause and effect, we do not negate the mere conceptual establishment of cause and effect. Cause and effect do exist but they do not exist inherently, thus we do not adhere to the view of eternalism. What we do adhere to is a view that is free from both extremes, a view of non-duality. And it is only by relying on this view that one is liberated.'

Having gone over the explanation, the meaning of words of the verses should become clearer.

### 2.1.2.3.1.4. Illustrative example

The three subdivisions of this category are:

- 2.1.2.3.1.4.1. Example for realising and not realising the reality of things
- 2.1.2.3.1.4.2. Refuting inherently existent aggregates
- 2.1.2.3.1.4.3. No liberation from cyclic existence if views of existence and non-existence are not abandoned

2.1.2.3.1.4.1. *Example for realising and not realising the reality of things*

52. *A form seen from a distance  
Is seen clearly by those nearby.  
If a mirage were water,  
Why is water not seen by those nearby?*
53. *The way this world is seen  
As real by those afar  
Is not so seen by those nearby  
For whom it is signless like a mirage.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary, if a mirage was actually water there, then the perception of water would not alter with distance. In other words, if the mirage was in fact water, then someone close by would also see it as water. Indeed, any physical form that cannot be seen clearly from a distance will be much clearer when you come closer to it.

Just like a person who sees a mirage from a distance and believes that there is water, an ordinary being who is far from seeing emptiness will view the world as being inherently or ultimately established. A person who perceives a mirage and doesn't realise that it is a mirage, believes that there is water in the distance (even though there is no water there). Likewise an ordinary being who does not see ultimate reality, sees things as being inherently established. Just as something can be seen clearly when we are close to the object, so too if things did exist inherently then they would have to be seen as such when observed closely. However when arya beings,

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who have the direct realisation of emptiness, perceive phenomena, they perceive phenomena as lacking any inherent existence. If phenomena were to be inherently established, then the arya beings would have to see them in that way. But arya beings do not see any phenomena as being inherently established.

This explanation should be quite clear. However, the illustration indicates that a person seeing a mirage believes that there is water in the distance, because they don't realise that it is mirage. They do not understand that they are seeing a mirage, and for that reason when they see water they believe that there is in fact water there. Using that analogy, when ordinary beings who have not yet gained the realisation of emptiness, perceive phenomena, they perceive phenomena to be ultimately or inherently established. That is because they do not have the understanding of emptiness, and therefore they lack the knowledge of how things actually exist.

Referring back to the analogy, just as someone who is close to an object would see the object very clearly, an arya being who is single-pointedly focused on emptiness, perceives the ultimate reality of that phenomenon. As such, for that noble being in meditative equipoise, let alone an appearance of an inherent object, there is not even the appearance of any conventional existence. As mentioned in previous sessions, the only thing that appears to the wisdom of an arya being in meditative equipoise that is focused on emptiness is emptiness itself. Thus as mentioned in Gyalsab's commentary, for that arya being there is no appearance whatsoever of any distinction of male or female, good or bad, nor the distinction of any other kind of conventional phenomena. That is because they are focused single-pointedly on the ultimate reality of phenomena, which is emptiness, and thus they only perceive emptiness.

Just like someone who does not see any water when they come close to where they saw a mirage, an arya being who is in meditative equipoise focussing single-pointedly on emptiness does not see any truly existent phenomena. If there was water there then you would have to see it when you came closer to it, but the fact is when you come closer to a mirage you cannot see any water. Likewise if conventional phenomena were to be established as existing truly, ultimately or inherently, then the wisdom realising emptiness of an arya being in meditative equipoise would have to perceive it. But, as explained in the teachings, which I have presented many times before, for any arya being in meditative equipoise on emptiness, there are no other perceptions or appearances apart from emptiness itself.

To re-emphasise this point that I have mentioned many times before, for the wisdom realising emptiness of an arya being in meditative equipoise all three dualistic appearances completely subside, i.e. there is no perception of true existence, there is no perception of any conventional phenomena and there is no perception of object and subject being separate. Therefore none of the three modes of dualistic appearance are present for the wisdom realising emptiness of an arya being in meditative equipoise. That is because the only thing perceived by that arya being's meditative wisdom is emptiness itself.

As mentioned previously, conventional phenomena do not appear to an arya being in meditative equipoise, due to their single pointed focus and complete absorption in emptiness itself. Of course to fully understand how that perception actually works, one would have to gain the actual realisation of emptiness oneself, so I could not assume that you have the full understanding. Nevertheless, as I have explained it over a hundred times before, I expect you to at least have the understanding about the manner of how emptiness is realised, and how gaining the realisation of emptiness is essential. A proper basic understanding will lead you to the point of gaining the unmistakable and profound understanding of emptiness when meditating on emptiness.

As I also emphasise regularly, when we engage in meditation practice, it is important that we try to overcome the notion that the object of our focus is something that is completely separate from our own mind that is perceiving it. Meditation practice will be more effective if we try to adopt an affinity with unifying the subject and object, and generate the sense of the mind focusing on the object and the object itself as one. This also brings to light the point which was emphasised in the mahamudra teaching, where the subject and object have to be seen as being one and inseparable. Familiarity with this meditation practice prepares us for gaining the actual realisation of emptiness, where one is actually free from the duality of seeing object and subject as being separate. In order to gain that actual realisation one needs prepare through the regular practice of meditation now.

I have also explained that at every level in meditation practice, one should go beyond focusing on the actual external physical object. The focal object is not to be a physical object but rather a mental image of that object. Initially one may conceptualise a mental image and focus on that, and gradually one will gain the sense of object and subject being inseparable.

Also, even though the sadhana on deity-yoga presents the self-generation by visualising oneself as the deity, we beginners may not actually be able to do that easily. To maintain a focus on oneself as the actual deity, getting a clear image and generating divine pride within oneself, is rather difficult. Therefore it seems more fitting to focus on a mental image of the deity within one's own heart and familiarise ourselves with that mental image; gradually developing the unity of the deity within one's own heart and oneself. That seems to be the practical method for developing divine pride.

Of course at the beginner's level in the generation stage, we are focussing on a conceptualised mental image. In reference to the generation stage practice, Kirti's commentary on tantra explains that the focus of a meditation on the deity is initially based upon a conceptualised mental image. Therefore we need to focus on a conceptual image and as we progress further we will gain more clarity.

The practice of generating oneself as a deity and focusing on that in one's meditation is the ultimate method for developing concentration. One may question whether a concentration developed by focusing on a conceptualised image is a proper technique. However, for example, when one is meditating to overcome attachment, one of

the prescribed meditations is to see the surrounding area as being filled with skeletons. That image is actually conjured by our conception and bears no relation to reality, as the surrounding area is of course not filled with skeletons.

But imagining the surrounding area being filled with skeletons is specifically prescribed as one of the objects for developing mental stabilisation or concentration, and therefore is not a wrong consciousness. It is clear that it is a mental image with which one develops an affinity, and which is a very effective perception to overcome the delusions in one's mind, specifically attachment. Thus it is prescribed as an object for developing concentration. One needs to understand that just because an object is a conceptualised image it doesn't necessarily mean that it is invalid.

#### 2.1.2.3.1.4.2. Refuting inherently existent aggregates

54. *Just as a mirage is seemingly water  
But not water and does not in fact exist (as  
water),  
So the aggregates are seemingly a self  
But not a self and do not exist in fact.*

As explained in Gyaltsab Je's commentary, just as the water in a mirage is seemingly water and when investigated is found not to be water, so too the aggregates are not inherently existent. Although they appear to be like an inherently established self, they are in fact not a self.

This explanation is quite clear. In the mirage analogy, although there appears to be water, it can be established that in reality there is no water to be found. Likewise even though the aggregates appear to be established inherently, in reality the aggregates lack any inherent existence.

On another level, just as non-existent water is perceived to exist in a mirage, likewise for ordinary beings, who have not gained even the conceptual understanding of emptiness, there is an appearance of inherent existence, and an adherence to the belief of inherently established phenomena.

#### 2.1.2.3.1.4.3. No liberation from cyclic existence if views of existence and non-existence are not abandoned

The first of the verses corresponding to this outline reads:

55. *Having thought a mirage to be water  
And then having gone there,  
Someone would just be stupid to surmise,  
"That water does not exist"*

Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary that having perceived a mirage, and believing that there is water there, when some people actually go to the site where they thought there was water, they start thinking, 'There is no water here now. So where is the water that I saw before?' Thinking in that way would be definitely considered to be foolish, because there was no water to begin with. It is not as if the water seen from a distance has now disappeared. So, thinking that it has actually disappeared would be quite foolish.

Just as with this analogy, perceiving our contaminated aggregates as having inherent existence previously, but lacking it when analysed, would be a mind of ignorance.

It would be a clear sign of being ignorant about ultimate reality or suchness. Liberation from cyclic existence is not possible for anyone who is ignorant about ultimate reality.

The point being made here is that when one identifies the object of negation of any phenomena, one is not negating something that exists. Rather, the object of negation is non-existent and has never existed previously. That has to be understood.

The next verse relates to the point of seeing things as existing either inherently or not existing at all:

56. *One who conceives of the mirage-like world  
That it does or does not exist  
Is consequently ignorant.  
When there is ignorance, one is not liberated*

Here one needs to understand that the text is emphasising this point again and again, which is that without the realisation of emptiness one cannot obtain any of the states of liberation, i.e. without the realisation of emptiness neither the hearer's and solitary realiser's self liberation nor the state of enlightenment can be achieved. Thus, even hearers and solitary realisers need to gain the realisation of emptiness in order to obtain liberation.

It is also good to relate the perception of inherent existence by ordinary beings to our own perceptions. When we perceive, for example, a very close friend, we have this total conviction that this individual exists from their own side. We apprehend this very vivid appearance of the friend as existing entirely from its own side. This is true for anything that we actually relate to. There is this natural perception and apprehension of all phenomena as being inherently established, and existing from their own side.

We could say that while Melbourne lacks rain, there is no lack of the rain of delusion within oneself, particularly the perception of inherent existence. We may not have sufficient conducive conditions, but we have plenty of conditions that are not conducive for us. The point to understand is that all our difficulties and problems arise because of having too many conditions that are not conducive for us, namely the perceptions of inherent existence.

That misperception and misapprehension that we have of things and events as being inherently existent, or inherently established, causes delusions such as attachment and anger to arise strongly within ourselves. As soon as we relate to a friend and the qualities that we attribute to them as being inherently existent, the stronger they appear to be from their own side. The stronger the exaggeration of those qualities and attributes in our mind, the stronger the attachment that we have for them. Of course as ordinary beings we are not able to really stop the appearance of inherent existence, but what we can do is to remind ourselves that even though they appear to be inherently established or existent, the fact remains that the attributes and qualities don't exist from their own side. Whatever attributes one sees in a friend, they are not inherently established. By thinking in that way the level of attachment towards the friend will naturally reduce.

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Likewise in relation to those that one feels little bit hostile towards, if one sees that their faults so forth do not exist inherently, even though they appear to be inherently existent, that notion then will also reduce anger towards that person. In this way we can see that the conceptual understanding of, not mention the actual realisation of, emptiness will definitely help to reduce strong negative emotions, such as attachment and anger. To that extent it definitely can benefit our life. I regularly emphasise that it is important to think about this point.

As we study the text, and its explanation of emptiness, it is important to remind ourselves why emptiness is such an important topic, and how it actually serves as the means to overcome the delusions. As the teachings mention, the direct perception of emptiness is the direct antidote for overcoming all delusions. So if one begins to relate that to our own perceptions, and see how through changing that perception actually helps to reduce attachment or anger, then we can begin to see how actual realisation of emptiness serves as an antidote for overcoming all delusions.

A point to really establish and understand is that the attractive attributes of an object do exist, so one does not deny the actual existence of those attractive attributes. Rather, what one is refuting is the exaggerated attractive attributes of the object that one perceives. Thus attractive attributes do exist, but the exaggerated perception of those attributes does not exist. This is a very, very important point to distinguish and understand.

Attachment arises in relation to the exaggerated attractive attributes that one places upon the object. So when one gets around to the understanding that the exaggerated attributes that one perceives, which cause attachment to arise, do not in fact exist, then that understanding will definitely reduce attachment to the object. In relation to the understanding of emptiness, one relates to the object as lacking inherently established attractive attributes. There are relative or conventional attractive attributes, but ultimately they don't exist inherently.

If one can actually apply an antidote to overcome seeing the object as being overly attractive, then that level of practice would be really incredible way to deal with overcoming attachment.

Just as the appealing exaggerated attractive attributes of an object do not exist inherently, so too the unattractive attributes of an object that one feels hostile towards do not exist inherently. What appear to be exceedingly unattractive attributes do not exist in the way that they appear to exist.

When we see how it is faulty perception that causes the delusion to arise, and that this faulty perception is based upon the actual grasping at an inherently existent self, then we can see the truth in the statement that all forms of delusions arise from the root delusion of grasping at the conception of a self.

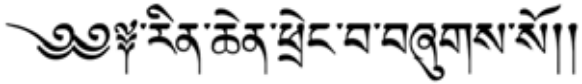
In attempting to overcome attachment to an object, what one is attempting to oppose is the attractiveness that is superimposed by incorrect attention. That is what one has to oppose, and in that way one actually can overcome attachment to the object.

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Edited Version*

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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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With the motivation of the refuge and bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited, we can do the meditation practice. (*meditation*)

It would be highly beneficial to incorporate some time for meditation into your daily life, just as we have attempted to do just now. The approach to the practice is to take it slowly, and then you will definitely enjoy the fruit. If one attempts to push too hard, that's when the wind disease called *lung* can arise, [i.e. mental fatigue and stress-related illness.]

## 2.1.2.3.2. Absence of the fallacy of thereby falling to the view of annihilation

This heading relates to refuting the **objection raised by the lower Buddhist schools**<sup>1</sup> where they say to the Prasangika, 'As you don't accept inherent existence, then that implies that you have fallen to the view of annihilation'. The refutation comes under three subdivisions

2.1.2.3.2.1. Necessity of realising non-duality to attain liberation

2.1.2.3.2.2. Flinging the absurd consequence that a realisation of what is free of the extreme views existence and non-existence

2.1.2.3.2.3. Absence of the fault of annihilation in realising the non-conceptual

### 2.1.2.3.2.1. Necessity of realising non-duality to attain liberation

The point made in this heading is that in order to attain liberation one needs to adopt the view that is free from both extremes—the extreme of existence or eternalism, and the extreme of non-existence or nihilism. The view that is free of both extremes is the view held by the highest Buddhist school; the Prasangika-Madhyamika [i.e. the Consequentialist-Middle Way] School.

The verse relating to this outline is:

57. *A follower of non-existence goes to bad transmigrations,  
And a follower of existence goes to happy transmigrations.  
Through correct and true knowledge  
One does not rely on dualism and becomes liberated.*

The meaning of this verse is quite easy to understand. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, by denying the existence of cause and effect, beings will fall into bad transmigrations, i.e. lower rebirth. Denying the infallibility of cause and effect implies denying the fact by

engaging in virtuous karma one will experience positive results, and by engaging in negativity one will incur negative results. We need to relate this presentation to ourselves; making sure that we have a firm acceptance of the fact that creating positive deeds will create positive results, and engaging in negative deeds will create negative results. We need to be really mindful of this.

Adhering to the infallibility of karmic cause and effect is really important. In many teachings the previous masters have explained that conviction in the infallibility of karma is the most essential part of one's practice. Without a strong conviction in the infallibility of karma we will not be inclined to engage in virtue and shun negativity. Merely repeating the words 'we accept that by creating positive deeds one will accumulate positive results, and by engaging in negativity one will incur negative results', even with some degree of belief is not sufficient. Along with that belief we need to develop a firm conviction. When we have a strong conviction in karma, that indeed will prevent one from engaging in any negative deed and willingly adopt virtuous deeds.

Even if, through habituation or past negative imprints, we were to engage in a negative deed, we would not leave it idle. Rather, immediately afterwards, we will engage in a purification practice with a strong regret for having engaged in negative actions. Feeling regret is one of the primary opponent powers that allow us to actually purify negative karma. So, when someone with a strong conviction in karma finds themselves engaging in negativity, they will immediately feel regret, knowing that the negative deed will bring about negative consequences in the future. They will not remain idle but will engage in a purification practice right away. Without conviction in karma, we may not see the necessity for engaging in purification practice. Thus, it is really important to develop the conviction in karma.

The text is not referring to the denial of karma in general, but more specifically the denial of the cause and effect of karma. In the first line of verse 57, 'A follower of non-existence goes to bad transmigrations', 'non-existence' does not refer to actually denying the existence of karma but to the cause and effect characteristic of karma. In other words it refers to denying that by engaging in negativity one will incur negative results, and that by engaging in virtue one will incur positive results.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that the second line of the verse, 'And a follower of existence goes to happy transmigrations', refers to the fact that those who have cultivated a belief or conviction in cause and effect are those who hold the worldly or conventional right view, and through holding that view they will go to a happy transmigration or rebirth.

In this text Nagarjuna has given us a detailed explanation and very profound advice, thus it is essential that we try to integrate it into our own lives. Those who read and study the text will gain real benefit if they actually pay attention to the infallibility of karma, and try to develop a strong conviction in that. With such a conviction in karma then, in the event that we engage in some negativity, by recalling the weight of the negativity, we will immediately feel regret in our heart. The regret would be to the degree of not feeling comfortable going to bed

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<sup>1</sup> The lower Buddhist schools are also known as proponents of existence and Realists.

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without having done a purification practice. That is something that will definitely occur when you have a strong and firm conviction in karma.

When one has developed a strong conviction in karma, then even if one cannot completely avoid creating negativity, one will be aware of the severity of the consequences and thereby engage in purification practice. Of course, it is sometimes extremely difficult to completely avoid negativity in daily life. But with a strong conviction in the infallibility of karma, then in the event that we engage in some negativity, even if it is done unintentionally, we will develop a strong sense of regret and wish to purify that. Also it is good to remind oneself that in the event that one has somehow been involuntarily compelled or influenced by strong delusion to engage in some negativity, one should not feel too depressed about that, knowing that it can be purified. The one good quality of negativity is that it can be purified, so it is important to remind oneself of that and engage in purification practice when negativities are created.

However one must not use that understanding as an excuse to voluntarily engage in negativity, by thinking that it doesn't matter because it can be purified later. That would be improper and disrespectful to the understanding of karma. Being casual about negativity, thinking, 'Oh, it is OK if I create some negativity, because after all I can purify it', is the wrong attitude to adopt. Rather it is better to use one's understanding of karma to actually engage in purification practice for negativities created in the past, and to avoid further engaging in any form of negativity. In the event that one engages in negativity under the strong influence of delusions, one should not remain idle, rather one must engage in a purification practice, which will bring about a beneficial outcome.

Of course when individuals are completely oblivious to the facts about karma, there is nothing to compel them to engage in purification practices. But we do have faith in karma and its effects, we know that if we were to create negativity we must not leave it unpurified. We understand the need to engage in purification practice. And if we don't actually engage in the practice then what difference is there between us and someone who doesn't recognise negativity for what it is or doesn't know how to purify it? There would be no difference really. This clearly indicates that just knowing about karma is not sufficient if we don't actually adopt the practice of abiding by the law of karma in our life. We need to pay attention to this important point.

Having conviction in karma does not mean just being able to say 'by engaging in positive deeds one will incur positive results, and by engaging in negativity, one will incur negative consequences'. Being able to quote that doesn't necessarily mean that one has conviction in karma. To have conviction in karma means to have a very strong belief in its infallibility, having no doubt that by engaging in positive deeds one will incur positive results, and by engaging in negativity one will incur negative results.

An analogy of the difference between understanding karma and having a conviction in karma is, for example, the difference between having a casual companion and

having a companion in whom one has great trust. When one has great trust in a companion, one has the conviction that they will not mislead or betray you, and that one could entrust one's valuables to them, knowing that their honesty is infallible. Having conviction in karma and its effects, is like having trust in a companion's honesty.

The Tibetan term for karma and its effect is *le-dre* where each syllable has its own connotation. Even though it is quite simple, it is good to get an understanding of it. The syllable *le* means karma or actions, and *dre* is the effect, so jointly it means 'karma and its effects'. Thus when we say 'having conviction in karma and its effects' you will understand that with positive actions karma acts as a positive cause, and the effect will be a positive result of that. Whereas with negativity, karma refers to the negative actions that are the causes and the effects will be negative consequences. So when we refer to karma and its effects it is good to understand the full implication of what that entails.

When we refer to the combination of karma and its effects, it implies the cause and effect both of virtue and non-virtue. Whenever we talk about causes, the very word 'cause' tells us that it is a condition that produces something. Therefore when we refer to virtue as a cause, then we have to understand that means that it will produce a result. So what does it produce? It produces a positive effect. When we refer to negativity as a cause, then again there is the implication that it produces something? So what does it produce? It produces suffering or unpleasant consequences.

So at a personal level, the understanding of karma and effect implies that if one wishes for happiness then one needs to create the causes for happiness, which is virtue. And if one does not wish to experience unhappiness or any type of suffering then one needs to avoid the cause of suffering, which is negativity. That is how we need to apply our understanding of karma and its effects to our own life in order to obtain what we wish for, and avoid what we does not wish for.

Having not only an understanding but a conviction in karma, means that when unpleasant circumstances, such as sickness, occur, one will see that as an indication of the effect of karma ripening. Whenever one has some sort of disease, one will see that as a message that one is experiencing the consequences of negativity, and by seeing it in that light one has a sense of acceptance as well. Thus, we experience less distress and worries in our mind.

Likewise when things are going well and one has sense of joy and happiness, then that is another message: one is experiencing the positive effect of virtue that one has accumulated in the past. In the light of that understanding and conviction in karma, both good times and difficult times will not affect the core of one's being. Rather than causing doubts, one will be able to use difficult circumstances as means to enhance one's practice. In that way it becomes really meaningful. Otherwise, without a very firm conviction in karma, then the slightest external change can totally throw us off from our practice.

As one begins to develop that conviction in karma one will be able to engage in the great practices prescribed by the Kadampa masters, such as the mind training teaching. It is said that one will reach the stage of being glad when one experiences difficulties, and being wary when things are going too well. If one is not really familiar with the practices then being glad when things are not going well, and wary when things are going well may seem to be an absurd way of thinking. However, when one develops a good understanding of, and conviction in karma, one will be able to really embrace this practice. With a profound understanding of karma, one will know that any difficulties that one is experiencing are actually the result of previous karma, and that the negative karma is ripening and thus being used up. So of course one would be glad about that.

Normally, whenever we experience any difficulties in life our immediate reaction is to become upset and angry. So if we find ourselves becoming angry in a situation where there are difficulties, then that means that we have not really understood the implication of why are experiencing those difficulties, which in turn means that we don't accept the difficulties. Accepting difficulties comes from understanding karma; one sees that experiencing difficulty is not such a bad thing because it is the result of karma ripening, and one is actually using up the negative karmic imprints within oneself. Thus one would be glad and happy about experiencing those difficulties.

Whereas when things are going well it is easy to develop attachment to that circumstance, which will actually further harm one's practice, as one's delusions will be increasing. So when things go well a practitioner becomes a little bit wary, and not get too excited and happy about that, because it can become a cause for attachment to arise. Through understanding this one will definitely embrace the practice of willingly taking on hardships and difficulties, and not intentionally try to seek out good situations. One will be wary of attachment and avoid seeking pleasant situations.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary, in verse 57 a *follower of non-existence* refers to an individual who denies karma and its effect. As a consequence, such a being will experience a *bad transmigration* or the lower rebirth. A *follower of existence* refers to someone who has the conviction in karma and its effects, an individual who adheres to the conventional or worldly right view has a *happy transmigration* or higher rebirth. However the follower of existence will still be reborn in samsara and thus will not be liberated from samsara. In other words, although adhering to a worldly right view results in a higher rebirth and being free from lower rebirths, one will still remain in samsara.

In relation to the second two lines 'Through correct and true knowledge, One does not rely on dualism and becomes liberated', Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that liberation is only possible for a being, such as arya, who adheres to the view that is free from the extremes of both eternalism and nihilism. That is because they fully understand the ultimate reality of all phenomena. Thus what is being indicated here is that it is only by being free from the dualistic view and adhering to the view that is

free from both extremes, the Middle Way view, one is able to actually obtain liberation, and be completely free from samsara.

To summarise, this verse explains that by merely developing a conviction in karma one will have a happy transmigration or happy rebirth, but will still remain in samsara. Someone who does not have a conviction in karma will create the causes to be reborn in a lower or unfortunate rebirth, referred to in the text as a bad transmigration. Although adhering to the understanding of karma with conviction will enable one to enjoy a higher rebirth, just holding onto that worldly right view is not sufficient to free one from samsara. In order to be free from samsara one needs to adopt the view that is free from both extremes, the view of non-duality. The reason why a noble being is able to free themselves from samsara is because they have developed the view which is free from duality.

#### **2.1.2.3.2.2. Flinging the absurd consequence that a realisation of what is free of the extreme views existence and non-existence**

58. *If through correct and true knowledge  
(Such wise persons) do not assert existence  
and non-existence  
And thereby (you think) that they follow  
non-existence  
Why should they not be followers of  
existence?*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, the Prasangika oppose the lower Buddhist schools' objection by posing a rhetorical question and using a line of reasoning that is similar to their reasoning. The Prasangika say, 'You say that we fall into the view of non-existence because we adhere to a view that sees the ultimate reality of all phenomena as denying their inherent existence. So according to you do we also hold the view of existence as well, as we do not assert the non-existence of karma and its effects?'

This refutation is clarified further in the next verse:

59. *If from refuting existence  
Non-existence would accrue to them,  
Why from refuting non-existence  
Would existence not accrue to them?*

As the commentary explains, if you say that *refuting inherent existence* implies that *non-existence would accrue* to the Prasangika, then similarly why would existence not accrue to them as well? It would have to accrue, because they *refute* the *non-existence* of cause and effect. Thus the refutation is made with the a line of reasoning to their objection.

The main point that the Prasangika make is, 'If you object to our view of non-inherent existence of phenomena by saying that it implies non-existence altogether, then according to you, I would be a proponent of *existence*, because I refute the non-existence of causes and its effects. Because I accept the existence of causes and its effects, I would be a proponent of existence according to you .

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### 2.1.2.3.2.3. Absence of the fault of annihilation in realising the non-conceptual

This verse refutes a similar objection:

60. *They implicitly have no nihilistic thesis  
And also have no nihilistic behaviour  
And due to relying on [the path to]  
enlightenment have no nihilistic thought.  
Hence how can they be regarded as nihilists?*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary, the **objection by the lower schools** that the Madhyamika adhere to a view of non-existence, or nihilism, is incorrect, because we Madhyamikas never deny the existence of karma and its effects.

The **refutation** is that the objection that the Madhyamikas are nihilists does not apply, 'because we do not deny the existence of karma and its effects. Not only do we not deny the existence of karma and its effects mentally, but verbally you will not find one word implying that we deny the existence of karma and its effects'.

A **further objection from the other schools** is, 'Even though you may not verbally deny the existence of karma and its effects, you seem to indicate by your behaviour that you do in fact deny the existence of karma and its effects'. So they are teasing the Madhyamika a bit.

The **refutation** of that objection is, 'In fact we overcome every adverse and unethical behaviour on the physical level'.

Yet **another objection** is, 'Your ethical behaviour is actually just a pretence in order to acquire fame and wealth from others, but in fact mentally you still adhere to the denial of karma and its effect'.

The **refutation** is, 'Your objection does not apply, because far from adhering to a mind that denies the existence of karma, we adhere to a path that leads one to ultimate state of enlightenment, and to that end we adhere to the infallibility of karma and its effects, which serves as a cause to achieve that ultimate state of enlightenment'.

As Gyaltsab's commentary then concludes, the meaning of these verses is that the objections by the other schools (such as the Vaibhashikas) arise because they hold onto karma and its effects as being inherently and truly existent. Thus, when the Madhyamikas present the view of karma and its effects as being completely empty of inherent existence, that is like a profound initiation for them. However they are not able to fully comprehend it.

### 2.1.2.3.3. Freedom from extremes as an uncommon feature of Buddhism

The next two verses present the views of the non-Buddhist schools. Those of you who have access to the texts that present some of the views of the non Buddhist schools would be familiar with them.<sup>2</sup> We can cover some of the views of the Samkhyas, Vaibhashikas, and the Jains in our next session. This was also explained in the teachings on tenets.<sup>3</sup>

*Transcribed from tape by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
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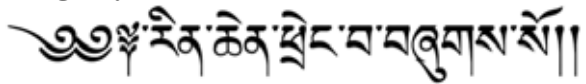
<sup>2</sup> See for example *Cutting Through Appearances*, pp. 155-170, *Meditation on Emptiness* pp. 317-333

<sup>3</sup> The teachings on tenets given in 2000 are available on the all editions of the CD, *Teachings from Tara Institute*. The topic was also taught in 1985 and 1986.



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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

6 July 2010

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With a good motivation we can engage in the practice of meditation. Maybe you could make a roster so that those of you who feel comfortable in doing so can take it in turns to lead the prayers. This is a good way to train for someone to lead when the usual chant leader is not around.

As I regularly mention, when one goes to a puja (for example a Guru Puja or a Tara Puja) one should go with the intention of learning how to lead it as well. In this way one can be ready in the event that one needs to lead a puja or even to do the practice oneself. In the past I asked Thubten Donyo to teach you the rituals and mudras of the Guru Puja. Also, during a visit to India I took a group to learn how to do the fire puja mandala drawing, which some of you, like Wayne, would know. It is good to retain that knowledge. I indicated then that when I returned I would test you, and to that effect you have studied and practised it.

Also, I have on many occasions taught you how to conduct the Tara Puja, including the chanting, and how to lay out the offerings as well as how to do the mudras. Likewise with the Guru Puja, I have taught you how to conduct the tsog offering, and how to receive the preta offerings and so forth, down to when and how to offer the tea. Also with the nyung nye retreat, on two occasions I had taught how to set up the altar, lay out offerings, and the practices and mudras of the nyung nye, as well how to visualise the six deities.

When we did practices for Lama Zopa Rinpoche's long life, which included the eight Mahayana precepts, I taught you what the eight Mahayana precepts entail, the motivation that we need to generate and how to take them.

The way I taught these practices was not just by pointing them out to you, but rather by doing the practice together with you. So I have taught them on a level that would be an experiential transmission. It will be good for those who learnt it at that time to continue with the practice, so that you do not forget what you have learnt and so that you can also pass on that knowledge. What I am also implying is that because I have already taught you these practices many times before, I am not really inclined to go over them again now.

In relation to the lam rim meditation, I taught you on quite a few occasions how to combine the *Jor-cho* practice with visualising the stages of the path.

The main point here is that you need to actually use what you have been taught for your practice. In relation to the meditation practice that we are about to do, it is important to really try to implement the meaning of the words, by incorporating it into your practice. Try to really

think about how to generate love and compassion within oneself, rather than thinking about how others need to practice love and compassion. There is an expression in Tibetan [and indeed in English] that one should not engage in practices as if one is blowing a horn, i.e. the mouth of a trumpet faces outwards and thus the sound travels outward. With practices, however, one should focus them inward rather than outwards, which means applying the practice to oneself.

So in this case, the manner of meditating on love and compassion is to generate it within one's own mind. Love and compassion is one of those objects of meditation where one actually generates it within one's own mind, in contrast to other meditation practices where one focuses on a separate object. These are also points that I have previously mentioned.

Personally, I regularly check my own mannerisms and thoughts, and if there is any danger, I remind myself, 'Geshe Doga, be careful, be careful'. This is actually an essential instruction. If there is any danger of lapsing from virtue and engaging in negativity, then the warning bells should ring, and you should say to yourself, 'Be careful, be careful, there is danger of falling into negativity'.

By practising in that way one can become more alert, which will help to prevent you from engaging in negativity and danger. Whereas when you engage in virtue, then just as you would pat someone on the back, or stroke a cat, you can pat oneself thinking, 'OK, I have done some good, I have done well today', and in this way encourage yourself in the practice. This is the way to take personal responsibility in one's practice.

Even though I can't claim that I am very good at it, I do try my utmost to use whatever knowledge I gain from the Dharma to subdue my mind. In whatever way I can, I make a serious attempt to subdue my mind; this seems to help me on a personal level.

The ultimate reason for the Buddha's teachings is to provide us with the means to combat the delusions and subdue the mind. The Buddha didn't give the teachings merely to display his knowledge and show off what he knew. The renowned Kadampa masters of the past, such as Geshe Potowa, mentioned very clearly that the teachings have served their purpose when they become a means to subdue the mind.

Along those lines, one needs to really contemplate every aspect of the teachings as the means to overcome, or at least minimise, attachment and anger within oneself; this is the key to subduing one's mind. It is not as if we can leave anger and attachment on one side while we try to practice on the other. It will not be very beneficial if we engage in some formal practice leaving attachment and anger as they are without making any attempt to overcome them.

Rather, the practice we do needs to become the antidote to overcome the negative states of mind within oneself. In that way it serves its purpose, because it transforms one's own mind. If we try to subdue someone else's mind and find that it doesn't work, that is because the practice needs to be done on a personal level first. We need to

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focus on subduing our own mind, and then we will have the means to benefit others.

Some older students have been very honest, and confided in me that after many years of studying and trying to engage in practice, they are finally getting some sense of what refuge really means. This shows that it takes time, many years even, to really understand and implement it in one's life. It is also an indication that real understanding comes slowly. We may assume that we have understood something, but until we see the transformation taking place in our own mind, we have not really incorporated the practice into our life. However if we do pay attention, and put some effort into thinking constantly about how the practice should serve to transform ourselves, then we will slowly begin to notice that there is definitely some real taste of the Dharma.

When we begin to see how the Buddha's teachings are the means to really transform oneself and develop a positive mind, and how that transformation is beginning to take place within ourselves, then we will gain a true sense of how the Buddha gave the teachings out of sheer love and compassion for ourselves and all other sentient beings. Compelled by love and compassion the Buddha gave the teachings for no other reason than to benefit oneself and other sentient beings. When we develop that understanding then we will have a genuine faith in the Buddha.

We cannot fake faith in the Buddha; rather, real faith arises when one sees that the intention behind the Buddha's teachings is to benefit others. When we understand the Buddha's love and compassion, then we will see the great value of love and compassion and the need to generate it within ourselves.

The point is that when we understand how the Buddha gave the teachings out of love and compassion, then we can see that his only intention was to benefit others.

By identifying with the Buddha's love and compassion in imparting his valuable instructions, we will be able to see how wonderful it would be if, out of sheer love and compassion, we could also impart whatever knowledge or wisdom we have for the sake of benefiting others; to do so without any sense of self-cherishing attitude or self-interest would be a wondrous act indeed. *[pause for meditation]*

In order to receive the teachings one generates the following motivation, 'For the benefit of all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So, for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well', just as has been indicated earlier.

### **2.1.2.3.3. Freedom from extremes as an uncommon feature of Buddhism**

In his teachings His Holiness the Dalai Lama emphasises the unique feature of Buddha's teaching, which is that it is free from both extremes.

**61. Ask the Samkhyas, the followers of Kanada,  
Nirgranthas,  
And the worldly proponents of a person and  
aggregates,  
Whether they propound  
What passes beyond "is" and "is not".**

**62. Thereby know that the ambrosia  
Of the Buddha's teaching is called profound,  
An exclusive doctrine passing  
Far beyond "is" and "is not".**

In his commentary, Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the second verse first. *The ambrosia of Buddha's teaching* that leads to the infinite state of enlightenment is the *doctrine* that is free from all mental fabrication, and free from all extremes. It is important to understand this uncommon feature of the Buddha's doctrine. In brief, the unique feature of the Buddha's doctrine that it is free from the extremes of both externalism and nihilism, in other words free from duality.

The essence of this verse is that the path that leads to liberation, the state of ambrosia (which implies a state of infinite bliss and happiness), is the middle way, which is free from duality or both extremes. This indicates that without relying on the middle way path, free from both extremes, there is no possibility of achieving the state of liberation. This middle way path that is free from both extremes is the unique path of the Buddha's teachings. Furthermore, as the commentary explains, there is no other unique Dharma apart from this middle way path.

Turning now to verse 61, most proponents within our own Buddhist system, as well as other non-Buddhist systems, assert either a substantially existent person, or substantially existent aggregates. Thus the whole world, the environment and all beings, are asserted with the fabrication of being substantially existent.

Those who don't assert a view that is free from mental fabrication, a view of the ultimate reality of phenomena, include the non-Buddhist Samkhyas, who are also known as the Kapilas as they follow a sage called Kapila. The Samkhyas assert that all objects of knowledge can be enumerated in 25 categories of phenomena. In the past I have also presented the views of the Samkhyas and the 25 categories of knowledge according to their system.<sup>1</sup>

Another group of non-Buddhist proponents are the Vaisheshikas who are also known as Baby Owls. This refers to the fact that they followed a seer who worshipped an owl as a manifestation of the Indian god Shiva (which is a false perception). In any case it is important not to confuse the Vaisheshikas with the Buddhist proponents called the Vaibhashikas.

The Vaisheshikas, also known as Particularists, are followers of the sage Kanada, who asserted that all objects of knowledge are fall into six categories. We covered these six categories of knowledge when we studied *Four Hundred Verses*.<sup>2</sup>

Another group of non-Buddhist proponents are the Nirgranthas, also known as the Jains. The literal translation of the Tibetan word for the Jains is 'naked ones'. Following a conference with the Jains His Holiness the Dalai Lama said that their views are actually quite profound. The Samkhyas are also known as having quite profound views. However, as Gyaltsab Je's commentary states, if you were to ask proponents of these systems

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically on 31 May 2005, and also 31 May 2004. See also *Cutting through Appearances*, pp. 158-167.

<sup>2</sup> See 17 July 2007.

whether phenomena are free from the extremes of existence or non-existence, none of them will be able to correctly explain how phenomena are actually free from both extremes.

As the root text explains,

61. *Ask the Samkhyas, the followers of Kanada,  
Nirgranthas,  
And the worldly proponents of a person and  
aggregates,  
Whether they propound  
What passes beyond "is" and "is not".*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains that these non-Buddhist schools, as well as some who claim to be proponents of the Middle Way, but adhere to the view that things are neither existent nor non-existent. This view was also explained in the Mahamudra teachings. In particular, some followers of Drukpa-Kagyü assert this view of neither existence nor non-existence. If you were to ask them, 'do things exist?' they would say that things are not existent, and if you were to say then, 'Well then, are things non-existent?' they would say they are not non-existent either. These views, which we have discussed in the past, fall short of the view of non-duality – the view that is free from both extremes.

Thus, by abandoning such views one comes to the point of understanding the view of non-duality, which is that while things lack inherent existence they do not lack conventional existence. As the commentary explains, in our (Prasangika) system one needs to definitely accept the existence of both samsara and nirvana, thus one must become knowledgeable in the two essentials: 1) gaining the understanding that while all phenomena lack inherent existence they are yet able to perform the functions of causes and effects, and 2) without gaining the wisdom that realises emptiness, it is not possible to obtain liberation. Thus the view of non-duality is the unique view of the Buddha's doctrine, which leads to liberation.

#### 2.1.2.3.4. Refuting inherently existent things

This is subdivided into four:

- 2.1.2.3.4.1. Refuting inherently existent going and coming
- 2.1.2.3.4.2. Refuting inherently existent production, staying, and disintegration as characteristics of products
- 2.1.2.3.4.3. Tangentially refuting the assertions of non-Buddhists
- 2.1.2.3.4.4. Refuting inherently existent moments

#### 2.1.2.3.4.1. Refuting inherently existent going and coming

This presentation is similar to that of the *Four Hundred Verses*, which I have covered in the past.<sup>3</sup>

It might seem that we are just endlessly repeating different ways of refuting inherent existence. However this is because we need to eliminate the doubt of any possibility of inherent existence. One needs to understand how things would exist if they were to exist inherently. When one is able to fully comprehend the absurdity of things existing inherently, then refuting inherent existence will be easier to grasp.

*The definition of a Middle Way school is a Buddhist Mahayana proponent who does not assert true existence even nominally.* There are two Middle Way schools i.e. the Prasangika or Consequentialist Middle Way school and the Svatantrika or Inference-Validator Middle Way school. Neither of these schools accept true existence, so what is essential to understand here, as I have clarified many times before, is the difference between the two.

According to the Prasangika, 'inherent existence', 'true existence', 'independent existence' and 'existing by way of its own characteristic', all mean the same thing. Thus, they assert that all phenomena equally lack inherent existence, true existence, as well as independent existence and phenomena do not exist by way of their own characteristics. Whereas according to the Svatantrika, while things lack true existence they do. However, assert that things do exist inherently, and exist by way of their own characteristics. It is good to gain a clear understanding of this distinction.

If one can reflect upon that distinction in relation to the meaning of these verses then one will gain a greater understanding. If I were to ask you, 'What is the difference between the Svatantrika Middle Way school and the Prasangika Middle Way school?', then you should be able to readily answer that question.

The verse relating to this is:

63. *How could the world exist in fact,  
With a nature passed beyond the three times,  
Not going when disintegrating, not coming,  
And not staying even for an instant?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains this with a syllogism:

Take the subject 'worldly existence': it cannot exist ultimately, because if it were to exist ultimately then it would have to exist ultimately in either of the three times.

There is also the implication that it would have to exist in the three times permanently. The syllogism is pointing out that if something were to exist then there is no other way for it to exist other than in one of the three times, either in the past, the present or in the future. So the reason why things lack inherent existence is because if they did exist inherently then they would have to exist inherently in any of the three times.

Further on in his commentary, Gyaltsab Je adds to the reason why they do not ultimately exist: When things disintegrate, they don't go anywhere, when they are produced they are not produced from anywhere, and when they stay or remain they do not remain even for a second (as inherent existents). Thus things cannot be found to exist inherently in any of the three times. The commentary explains that the word 'how' in the verse carries the implication that while things do not exist inherently, they nevertheless do exist nominally. Thus the full implication is that while all things in worldly existence could not exist inherently in any one of the three times, their nominal or conventional existence can not be denied.

The next verse is also relevant to this outline:

64. *Because the coming, going, and staying  
Of the world and nirvana do not exist  
As (their own) reality, what difference  
Is there in fact between the two?*

<sup>3</sup> See 18 September 2007 and 25 September 2007.

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Gyaltsab Je's explanation is actually very close to the actual words of the verse itself. Having presented all phenomena in the worldly existence as lacking inherent existence in either of three times, the doubt may arise that maybe the phenomena in nirvana actually exist inherently. In response to that this verse states that all things in the *world* (worldly existence) as well as in *nirvana* equally lack any inherent existence. The rhetorical question '*what difference is there...between the two?*' implies that there is no difference whatsoever. The reason, as Gyaltsab explains, is because both equally lack inherent existence in the *coming*, *going* and *staying*. This is referring to the fact that all phenomena equally lack inherent existence in every instance of the three times—the past, present and future.

#### **2.1.2.3.4.2. Refuting inherently existent production, staying, and disintegration as characteristics of products**

As has been explained previously to the older students, but to refresh your memory and to help the newer students, all products equally have the characteristic that its existence is based upon its production, remaining and disintegration. All products have these characteristics in common—that they are produced, they remain and then disintegrate.

Here we need to understand that while something may seem to remain for a long time, it actually remains only momentarily, which is the characteristic of impermanence. How do we resolve this apparent contradiction? We combine the understanding of things remaining with an understanding of its characteristics of impermanence, which is that the very next moment after something is produced it begins to disintegrate. However short it may be, there is a moment just after it is produced where it remains, but in the very next moment it disintegrates. Thus, every product that comes into existence has the characteristic of production, staying and disintegrating.

The point to be understood here is that refuting the inherent existence of products refers to refuting the inherent existence of production, staying and disintegration. The reason why the production of a product lacks inherent existence is because if things were to be produced inherently then they would have to lack causes. The very term 'inherent existence' implies that something exists from its own side without having to depend on anything else. Thus if there were inherent production then that would imply that it does not depend on prior causes and conditions. But because production does have to depend on causes and conditions, it therefore cannot exist inherently.

Just as production lacks inherent existence because it depends on earlier causes and conditions, staying also lacks inherent existence because for anything to remain it has to depend on production; without being produced it could not stay, thus staying or remaining is dependent on production. Likewise for anything to disintegrate it has to depend on the characteristic of staying. There cannot be disintegration of something which has not stayed or remained earlier. So what is being indicated here is the interdependent-origination nature of products.

As Gyaltsab's commentary explains, production staying and disintegration cannot possibly exist inherently. What is being pointed out here is that as the staying characteristic of a product lacks inherent existence, so too production and disintegration also have to lack inherent existence. The point one needs to understand here is how the lack of inherent existence of production is the emptiness of production, the lack of inherent existence of staying is emptiness of staying, and the lack of inherent existence of disintegration is the emptiness of disintegration. That is how one understands the emptiness in each instance.

#### **2.1.2.3.4.3. Tangentially refuting the assertions of non-Buddhists**

This has two subdivisions:

2.1.2.3.4.3.1. Refuting the Vaisheshikas' assertion of permanent atoms

2.1.2.3.4.3.2. Refuting the Vaishnavas' assertion of a permanent person

These views have also been discussed in the past in some detail, possibly during Fedor's time. So referring back to those teachings and trying to refresh your memory on these points would be beneficial.

What I am trying to say here is that these points have been presented in our teachings on other texts. Now we find that even though it is a different text, these points have come up again. If one has some prior understanding, or even acquaintance, with the earlier explanations, then it becomes easier to relate to what is being presented here. So it is really worthwhile that we acquaint ourselves with this presentation. The Vaisheshikas' assert permanent atoms, which I did explain in quite detail previously, but we will give some explanation in the next session.

Of course I am not trying to boast about what I have presented in the past, but you should be able to see that the details from earlier presentations come up in many different texts. When I mentioned earlier that you should look at your notes, you will realise that you need to keep your notes so that you can refer to them again and again. It is good to remember that earlier presentations do come up in other texts.

*Transcribed from tape by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version*

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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇིག་རྟེན་ཆེན་མོ་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga  
Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

13 July 2010

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With a proper, good motivation we will engage in the practice of meditation.

It is not compulsory for everyone to lead the chanting, and of course the idea is to practice before you come. You may think you know the tune but without a bit of practice beforehand you may not get the tune exactly right. That is why we practice a lot in the monastery before we actually lead a puja. Some of you may have had a similar experience when you are teaching and you think, 'Oh, I am quite familiar with this topic' so you don't prepare properly. Then when you go to give the teaching it doesn't flow very well. So it seems that is really quite important to prepare for any activity that you engage in.

Another kind of preparation is to develop an appropriate awareness in order to prevent oneself from even the smallest misdeed. The classic analogy, which I have probably presented earlier, is that when you are too focussed on trying to protect yourself from a big dog in the distance, you neglect the small dog that is nearby, which might actually bite you. This analogy shows how we need to be mindful of preventing ourselves from committing even the smallest misdeeds. Through thinking 'Oh, a small misdeed is nothing to worry about', a minor misdeed can have very grave consequences in the future. Any lapse in mindfulness can actually harm us. That is why this analogy is used.

[meditation]

We can set our motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well'. The main purpose of the meditation practice which we did earlier is to develop love and compassion with the technique of giving and taking. This practice of giving and taking is actually a good way to remind oneself that the main purpose of developing love and compassion is that it will create a positive attitude that will be useful in every part of our lives, both now and in the future. That is something that we should keep in mind.

If one were to practise without love and compassion, then that would not be a unique Mahayana practice. One might be able to utter some words or conceptualise something in one's mind, but it will lack the essence. So it is essential that we pay attention to the importance of love and compassion, as that serves as the very foundation of the good qualities in one's mind. The more we attempt to develop love and compassion, the more it will bring us a real sense of joy and peace, and a sense of real comfort.

The students who attended the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings will recall that the opening line of the *Madhyamakavatara* explains how love and compassion is important in the beginning, the middle and the end. It is important to really bring this to mind and incorporate that understanding at the beginning of every practice, such as listening to a teaching.

## 2.1.2.3.4.3. Tangentially refuting the assertions of non-Buddhists

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.2.3.4.3.1. Refuting the Vaisheshikas' assertion of permanent atoms

2.1.2.3.4.3.2. Refuting the Vaishnavas' assertion of a permanent person

2.1.2.3.4.3.1. Refuting the Vaisheshikas' assertion of permanent atoms

The refutation the Vaisheshikas' assertion is covered in the next two verses. Verse 66 reads:

66. *If always changing,  
How are things non-momentary?  
If not changing,  
How can they be altered in fact?*

In his commentary, Gyaltsab Je explains that the Vaisheshikas say that all the earlier refutations were based on the acceptance that things have momentarily changes, and thus the refutations are based on time, i.e. the past, present and future. The faults explained in the refutations arise from accepting that things are inherently existent. 'However', say the Vaisheshikas, 'In our system those faults will not occur, because we assert subtle atoms as being inherently permanent'. To that our Prasangika system poses these two questions: Do things have momentary change? and Do they lack momentary change?

The Prasangika say that if the first is accepted, i.e. that there is momentary change, then how could the subtlest atom not be transitory? How could it change from moment to moment and at the same time be a permanent phenomenon? It cannot, because it changes momentarily. This is refers to the first two lines of the verse, 'If always changing, How are things non-momentary?' The Prasangika objection is, 'If you say that the subtlest atom changes momentarily then that contradicts your assertion that the subtlest atom is permanent. If there is momentary change then that ends up as constant change, and something that changes constantly cannot be permanent'.

The second half of verse 66 presents the response to the second question, i.e. do they lack momentary change? The objection raised by the Prasangika is that if things don't change momentarily then they could not change at all, thus the natural occurrence of change, such as from youth to old age and so forth would not be possible. If there were to be permanence on a momentary level then there could be no change over a long period of time, which goes against the obvious natural changes over time.

The main point is that the Vaisheshikas assert that the subtlest atom of a functional thing is permanent. To refute this our own Prasangika system poses this question: Does the subtlest atom change on a momentary basis or not? If it changes on a momentary basis then you could not call it a permanent thing because it does change, which counters the assertion that there can be a functional thing that is permanent. However, if functional things do not change momentarily, then there could be no change on any other level.

Hence, as the last two lines of verse 66 state, 'If not changing, How can they be altered in fact?' This means that if things were based on permanent subtle atoms which do not change, then how could the change such as from youth to old age and so forth occur. This is how the Vaisheshikas' assertion is refuted.

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So the assertion of the Vaisheshika is reduced to absurdity in both cases. In the first case, if subtlest atom does change momentarily then their assertion that it is a permanent thing is absurd, because if it is permanent then that implies that it does not change. Therefore asserting that the subtlest atom or any functional thing is a permanent thing is absurd.

In the second case, i.e. that subtlest atom does not change momentarily, the absurdity is that this goes against nature. The obvious natural transformation from young child, to youth, to old age could not occur if there was no change. So this absurdity is based on the obvious changes that do take place. Therefore the main point in refuting the Vaisheshika assertion is to establish our own Prasangika point of view that all functional things, even at the subtlest atomic level, are impermanent, with momentary changes taking place at every instant.

When presented with these two views—the Vaisheshikas' assertion that the subtlest atom is permanent, and our own system's presentation that the subtlest atom is impermanent—can you comprehend how the subtlest atom isn't permanent? If someone were to claim that functional things are permanent then we need to be able to present logical reasons showing why a clock, for example, cannot be permanent. That is the main thing that we need to understand.

In relation to these two different views, the perception that apprehends the subtlest atom as being permanent would be a mistaken or faulty perception, and whereas the perception that apprehends the subtlest atom as being impermanent is a valid perception. One needs able to make this distinction between these two modes of perception of phenomena.

Nagarjuna clarified this distinction between faulty perceptions and valid perceptions. When we see how Nagarjuna presented these very clear distinctions then we can develop a genuine admiration for Nagarjuna's work, and an appreciation of his kindness in working so hard to make his presentation so very clear, through his use of logical reasons.

Without the logical reasons that Nagarjuna presented we would not be able refute someone who comes up with the assertion that the subtlest atoms are permanent. Without having a reason to contradict that view we might actually end up actually accepting and agreeing with that view! So the reasoning presented by Nagarjuna gives us a very sound basis with which to refute that sort of distorted view.

Thus the correct view and the valid perception is gaining the understanding that is necessary to perceive the subtlest atom as being impermanent, which means that it has the nature of being transitory, changing from moment to moment. When we develop that valid, correct perception, we actually accumulate great merit. Just gaining the understanding of how subtlest atom is of a transitory nature, changing from moment to moment, is the basis for great virtue.

On a personal level, gaining the correct understanding and recognising the subtlest atom as being impermanent, and relating that to oneself, means understanding that as one is merely an accumulation of subtle atoms, one is therefore in the nature of being transitory, and thus one changes from moment to moment.

Reflecting upon one's own transitory nature rather than outer circumstances and atoms transforms one's mind, and therefore serves a great purpose. So much of our negative unhappy states of mind, our anger and attachment, are very much related to the external changes that we experience.

Without an understanding of how external phenomena are of a transitory nature we will experience great sorrow, or anger and negative states of mind, when these changes occur. However when one gains the understanding of the impermanence and transitory nature of both oneself and external phenomena, it will help to maintain equilibrium in one's mind. Then one will not be so affected by external changes.

In order to incorporate the teachings of this text into our practice and enhance our understanding of impermanence, it is essential that we combine it with the teachings of the Lam Rim, in particular the topic of death and impermanence. As the Lam Rim teachings explain, the fault of not engaging in the practice of Dharma rests with not recollecting the impermanent nature of both oneself and the surrounding events. So an understanding of death and impermanence is a really great impetus to practise the Dharma in order to accumulate more virtue.

On the surface the Lam Rim teaching may seem to be quite different to what is being presented here, however the two presentations really come down to the same thing. Although Lam Rim presentation focuses on transitory nature of oneself in relation to death, its basis is that things are actually of a transitory nature even at the subtlest level. Thus it is essential to really reflect again and again on the disadvantages or faults of not recollecting death and impermanence, and the great advantages or benefits of recollecting death and impermanence. Then we will find from our own experience that a lot of our attachment is really based on immediate goals and gratification of this life only, and because of that attachment to immediate gratification, we incur lot of negativities. If we were reflect upon our own impending death, then that will definitely reduce strong attachment to this life and its worldly activities.

Verse 66 is a refutation of the assertion of the non-Buddhist Vaisheshikas that subtlest atoms are permanent. But it is not enough to just leave it as a logical refutation. Rather we need to actually incorporate that understanding in our practice in order to reduce negativity and engage in virtue. The understanding gained from studying the text has then served its real purpose. That is the main point I am emphasising.

Turning now to the second verse of this subdivision:

**67. *Do they become momentary  
Through partial or complete disintegration?  
Because an inequality is not apprehended,  
This momentariness cannot be admitted  
either way.***

Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary that if, out of the fear of the consequences following from the objections raised in verse 66, the Vaisheshikas were to assert that there is a natural momentary change, then the question that arises is: 'Earlier, you asserted that that things are permanent but their states are impermanent, so therefore does that apply to all aspects of a thing or only one part, or some parts of it?'

More fully the question put to the Vaisheshikas is: 'In asserting that things are permanent but their states are impermanent, is it only one aspect of the thing that changes or do all the aspects of the thing change? Basically, do you say something is impermanent because one part of it is disintegrating, or is it impermanent because all parts of the thing are disintegrating? Both alternatives defy logic and are therefore absurd'.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the objection to their assertion in this way: it is absurd to assert that only one part of a thing disintegrates but that other parts don't change at all. What is being indicated is that the Vaisheshikas' are not able to posit momentary change in the continuum of a thing, because they consider change as being the complete disintegration of the object. Their view is more in accordance with an ordinary person seeing change when something breaks or completely disintegrates and ceases to exist. Thus, the basis on which the Vaisheshika assert change is that if something changes, then it completely disintegrates and no longer exists, which of course is an absurdity. So the point being presented here is that the Vaisheshikas are unable to comprehend the momentary change of phenomena. They are unable to accept that from the very next moment a functional thing is produced, momentary change begins to take place.

2.1.2.3.4.3.2. *Refuting the Vaishnavas' assertion of a permanent person*

68. *If momentary, then it becomes entirely non-existent;*

*Hence how could it be old?*

*Also if non-momentary, it is constant;*

*Hence how could it be old?*

As Gyaltsab's commentary explains, the Vaishnavas say 'The earlier objections to the assertions of the Vaisheshikas do not apply to me, because I assert that a person is entirely permanent from the beginning, through the middle, and to the end. Thus a person is permanent and already old from the very beginning'. This refers to the objection that was raised in response to the Vaisheshika assertion that a permanent thing can have a state of impermanence. The Vaishnavas are saying, 'We don't make that assertion, so your objections don't apply to us'.

The question that arises from that is this: Is a person a functional thing or not? If it is a functional thing then that implies that the person is subject to momentary change and is thus impermanent. And if it is momentary and impermanent then the very next moment after it is produced it will have to begin to disintegrate.

The first two lines of verse 68 posit this objection to the Vaishnavas' assertion: how could a permanent person be old from the beginning? Are they functional thing or not? If it is a functional thing then there is momentary change, and if there is momentary change then how can it be old before it even begins the process of momentary disintegration? That is the first objection.

The last two lines pose this objection: If something is a permanent thing that cannot change, then how can it actually also be considered as old? The very connotation of 'old' implies that it has changed from an earlier state to its present old state. So the absurdity being pointed out is if it something were to be permanent and unchanging, then it couldn't be considered as being old.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains that you could not possibly posit a permanent thing as being old, because permanence implies that something is exactly the same as it was previously. So it could not be considered old because no change has taken place.

The main objection to the Vaishnavas' assertion is that it is not possible for a person to be permanent and old. How could a person possibly be permanent and at the same time be old? So the objection points out the fundamental contradiction of their own assertion. Common sense alone

tells us that being old implies maturing over time, that there has been some change that has occurred over time. Even on our level we can understand the absurdity of the Vaishnavas' view.

To use a specific illustration, compare the person who was present in the morning and with the same person later on in the day. Has the later person become older than the person of the morning? If they have become older then that implies they cannot be permanent. If they were to be permanent then they could not become older, and they would have to be exactly the same, i.e. there could be absolutely no change from the person in the morning to the person in the evening.

#### 2.1.2.3.4.4. Refuting inherently existent moments

This has four subdivisions:

2.1.2.3.4.4.1. All moments as having parts

2.1.2.3.4.4.2. Refuting inherent existence of what has parts

2.1.2.3.4.4.3. Refuting inherently existent things through the reason of their not being one or many

2.1.2.3.4.4.4. Reason for not holding the world as having an end

2.1.2.3.4.4.1. *All moments as having parts*

Inherently existent moments are refuted when all moments, including the subtlest moment, are understood as having parts. In earlier teachings I explained the different Buddhist schools' views on partless particles. Within the four Buddhist schools, the Sautrantika and Vaibhashika systems assert partless particles and partless moments; but from the higher Buddhist schools' points of view, including our Prasangika system, all moments and particles have parts. When we begin to understand how each moment actually has parts, then it becomes easier for us to understand that there is not one moment that could exist inherently. One needs to incorporate that understanding in the refutation of inherent existence. We have also covered refuting inherent existence using the reason that they are neither one nor many.

Although we have covered the topic of the following verses in the past, nevertheless we will go through the explanation given in the text.

The relevant verse to this subdivision reads:

69. *Just as a moment has an end, so a beginning  
And a middle must be considered.*

*Thus due to this triple nature of a moment,  
There is no momentary abiding of the world.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, a moment is produced, it stays and disintegrates, and thus it is impermanent. However if you [who assert inherent existence] say 'A part of a moment does exist inherently', then *just* as you would accept *a moment having an end*, likewise you have to accept *a beginning and a middle* of a moment too, because partless things do not exist. Thus, all living things and the environment of the *world* cannot inherently *abide even for a moment*, because every part of its moments has *this triple nature of a moment*. In relation to the characteristics of all products, every moment has a production, staying and disintegrating. While accepting this, to say that a moment is inherently existent is contradictory.

The next session is discussion and the week after that will be the exam.

The Tibetan community has been asked to complete one hundred million recitations of the Tara Praises and the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra for the long life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Those of you who have the wish and time

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could contribute to this by doing 100,000 or whatever you can do. You can tell me how many you recite so we can forward it to the Tibetan Government for inclusion in the total. Of course if you do not have the time or inclination to do it, then that is fine.

*Question: Is it the long or condensed version of the Tara Praises?*

Normally it is the long version, but if you were to attempt to do 10,000 in one day then you would do the short version. The short 6-line praise to Tara came about when Tara appeared in a vision to Atisha, and advised him to do 10,000 Tara praises a day for his long life. Atisha wondered how he could manage to complete 10,000 Tara praises in one day, and so he asked Tara how he could achieve that. That is when Tara presented Atisha with the short version.

These practices are very meaningful for those who are able to do them. Doing practices for the long life of the guru is one of the best ways to work for one's own long life. When we do the practice we accumulate virtue and it is that accumulated virtue and merit that we dedicate to the long life of the guru which, because of our connection with him, will definitely benefit the guru's long life as well.

It is an incredibly great fortune to be actually able to see His Holiness in human form as a monk. Having this astonishing opportunity is of course due to our own merit. So engaging in the accumulation of further merit allows us to have a further opportunity to meet with the guru, and for the guru to remain and so forth.

There is a story about how, when many people lined up to see his Holiness, there was one Tibetan who later asked, 'Where was the Dalai Lama? I didn't see him'. Even though His Holiness had actually passed by, this man didn't have the fortune to see him. There are also stories about people going to Lhasa but not seeing the famous Jo-wo statue of Shakyamuni Buddha. The implication is that if one does not have the merit one will not be able to see it, even if it is actually present. Normally when I posit the view that one has the ability to see a great being according to one's merit, the other geshe debate that.

There is also the account of the great Indian master Asanga, who went into retreat for nine years specifically to accomplish the ability to have a vision of Maitreya. But after nine years he had not been able to see Maitreya. When he came out of the retreat he saw an old dog with a maggot infested wound. Asanga related how incredible compassion arose when he saw that maggot infested wound and he wanted to save the dog.

So he considered how he could remove the maggots. If he just removed them then the maggots would perish, so he was in a bit of a dilemma. With the great compassion he found the solution to save both the maggots and the dog, which was to cut off some of his own flesh from his leg and place the maggots on that flesh. To do this he used his tongue to lift the maggots off the wound. In this way the maggots would survive and the dog would be healed. As he did that he closed his eyes because it was such a disgusting task, and as he opened his eyes there was Maitreya in front of him. Asanga exclaimed, 'Finally you have come! Out of compassion for me, you have actually come!' Maitreya replied 'I was always present and near you!', indicating that it was due to the lack of a ripened mind that Asanga was not able to see him. It was Asanga's love and compassion that ripened his mind so that all obscurations to seeing Maitreya were removed.

Asanga was so excited that he wanted to share his vision of Maitreya with others, so he lifted Maitreya onto his back and walked around town saying, 'This wondrous thing has happened! Come and see Maitreya'. But people thought he was crazy because all they saw on his back was the dog. The point of the story is that when we do our normal practices we can assume that the buddhas are definitely present. The only reason we don't see them is because of our obscurations. But even though we are not able to see the buddhas directly, we will definitely benefit if we acknowledge that they are present when we do our practice.

This also relates to taking refuge. Regardless of whether one is able to clearly envision the objects of refuge or not, by virtue of the mere fact of taking refuge, the Three Jewels are definitely present. There is no need to doubt whether the objects of refuge, the Three Jewels, are present.

*Transcribed from tape by Su Lan Foo  
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Edited Version*

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**DISCUSSION****Block 4****20 July 2010**Week: 1 (22 June 2010)

1. Explain the view that the Prasangika don't adhere to and the view that they do adhere to. [4]
2. What does the illustration of the mirage indicate and how is the mirage used as an analogy? [4]
3. What way of thinking will naturally reduce the level of attachment towards friends and also reduce the level of anger in relation to those that one feels a bit hostile towards? [4]

Week: 2 (29 June 2010)

4. Explain the difference between understanding karma and having a conviction in karma. Give an analogy. [4]
5. At a personal level what does the understanding of karma and its effect imply? [4]
6. "As one begins to develop that conviction in karma one will be able to engage in the great practices prescribed by the Kadampa masters, such as mind training teaching." Elaborate. [4]

Week: 3 (06 July 2010)

7. What do most the proponents within our own Buddhist systems well as other non-Buddhist? Systems assert? [2]
8. Give the definition of a middle way school. [3]
9. Give Gyaltsab Je's syllogism (subject, predicate and reason) explaining verse 63. [3]
10. Explain the interdependent-origination nature of products. [4]

Week: 4 (13 July 2010)

11. The faults explained in the refutations arise from accepting that things are inherently existent. 'However', say the Vaisheshika, 'In our system those faults will not occur, because we assert subtle atoms as being inherently permanent.' To that our Prasangika poses two questions.
  - a) What are the two questions?
  - b) How is the assertion of the Vaisheshika reduced to absurdity in both cases?

# Exam

Name:

Block: 4

Week: 6 (27 July 2010)

Mark:

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2. What does the illustration of the mirage indicate and how is the mirage used as an analogy? [4]

3. What way of thinking will naturally reduce the level of attachment towards friends and also reduce the level of anger in relation to those that one feels a bit hostile towards? [4]

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5. At a personal level what does the understanding of karma and its effect imply? [4]

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a) What are the two questions?

b) How is the assertion of the Vaisheshika reduced to absurdity in both cases?