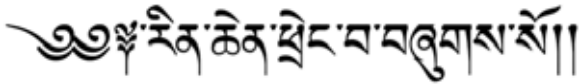


Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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

27 September 2011

As we have already set the motivation with the refuge and bodhicitta prayer that we have just recited, we will engage in the meditation. [meditation]

We can now set the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of all sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose, I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well.

We have come to the fourth chapter in the text, 'Royal Policy'.

CHAPTER 4: ADVICE TO TRAIN IN FLAWLESS POLICY

The Tibetan term *ka-na ma-to-wa me-pa* translated here as *flawless*, literally means 'the absence of which cannot be expressed', which is non-virtue. Hence the chapter title refers to training in the opposite of non-virtue, which is virtue. The Tibetan word carries the connotation of the gravity of the effects of non-virtue, which is such that they cannot be expressed adequately. The main point of the heading is that the chapter presents advice in how to train in virtue.

The four main categories of the chapter are

- A. Transition
- B. Extensive exposition of flawless policy
- C. Summation
- D. Advice to become a monastic if unable to learn the special royal ways

A. TRANSITION

The first category has three subdivisions:

1. Because most do not dare to chide a monarch but give praise, it is fitting to listen to a good explanation
2. Instruction to listen to helpful words in accordance with Buddha's advice

This relates to the first subdivision, in that even though it may be unpleasant to hear, it is fitting to mention the Buddha's advice, as it is helpful.

3. Actual exhortation to listen to words helpful to oneself and others

It is good for us to take note of these headings. as they are presented in a very systematic and ordered way. Furthermore the headings in themselves contain profound explanations. In fact, they present an insight into the essential meaning of the verses. Thus, it is appropriate for us to pay attention to the meaning of the headings themselves.

1. BECAUSE MOST DO NOT DARE TO CHIDE A MONARCH BUT GIVE PRAISE, IT IS FITTING TO LISTEN TO A GOOD EXPLANATION

Even though the advice being presented here is explicitly directed to the king, it implicitly applies to all of us who find it hard to accept criticism. Most people would just praise a king, and so it is fitting that he is given sound advice, in spite of it being hard to chide a monarch.

The first verse of the root text reads:

301. *Monarchs who do what is against the practices
And senseless are mostly praised
By their citizens, for it is hard to know
What will or will not be tolerated.
Hence it is hard to know
What is useful or not [to say].*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary simply adds a few extra points to help clarify the meaning of the verses:

Even when *monarchs do what is against the practices and engage in senseless behaviour, they are mostly praised by their ministers and citizens who do not dare to criticise, for it is hard to know what will or will not be tolerated by the king. Hence it is hard to know what is useful or not to say.*

When *ministers and citizens* see the king engaging in some inappropriate *behaviour*, they do not dare to criticise the king out of fear of offending him and the repercussions it may have on oneself. As explained here specifically, *it is hard to know what will or will not be tolerated by the king*. If the king is reproached because he has done something wrong, it is hard to know whether the king will accept that reproach and see it as a fault. Thus, most would rather praise the king than criticise him. At an explicit level this is quite easy to understand, however we really need to take this to heart at a personal level.

We should follow this advice on a personal level, particularly in our relationships with others. Even in a committed relationship we find it hard to draw the other's attention to something that seems inappropriate. That is because we do not know whether they will be able to tolerate it if we reproach them. We fear that they might become upset and angry, and often we do not find the courage to actually say something, or point out their faults.

If we are not too sure whether the other will tolerate what we point out then it may be fitting not to mention it to them, because if it is going to end up in an argument and cause anger, then that will be very unpleasant. When there is bickering and arguments and so forth the relationship becomes uncomfortable, so one needs to be very tactful, and consider whether it is appropriate to draw their attention to the fault, and whether it is the right time. If one does not know whether the other will tolerate it, it may be best not to mention something, so as to avoid confrontation and anger. The main point here is to be mindful about when it is appropriate to mention a criticism.

302. *If useful but unpleasant words
Are hard to speak to anyone else,
What could I, a monk, say to you,
A King who is a lord of the great earth?*

As Gyaltsab Je further clarifies the meaning in his commentary:

When falsely praising others if they engage in senseless behaviour, it is because even if it is *useful but unpleasant*, then those words are hard to speak to anyone else. Hence what could I, a monk, say to you, a king who is a lord of the great earth?

Even when ordinary people are *engaging in senseless inappropriate behaviour*, it is *hard to speak unpleasant salutary words*, even though they are *useful*. That being the case, Nagarjuna is saying, "How could I a simple monk approach you, a king, a mighty one, with unpleasant words?" The main point that Nagarjuna is presenting here is how it is difficult to use words that are unpleasant to hear, even though they may be helpful. If that is hard for anyone in general, then how could a monk such as himself, (indicating a simple monk who depends on alms like a beggar, and who is in a lowly position) reproach a king, who as mentioned here, is *the lord of the great earth*, implying that he is the ruler of so many people on earth. Addressing the king in this way also shows Nagarjuna's great modesty and humility.

The third and final verse of this section reads:

**303. *But because of my affection for you
And from compassion for all beings,
I tell you without hesitation
That which is useful but unpleasant.***

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

However, because of my affection for you and from compassion for all beings, I tell you without hesitation that which is useful and beneficial, even if it is unpleasant.

Out of his *affection* for the king as well as *compassion for all other beings*, Nagarjuna explains, 'I tell you without hesitation'. The Tibetan word has the connotation of letting go of his personal concerns. Thus, Nagarjuna is saying that out the concern for the king and other beings he will speak these words because they are beneficial even though it is unpleasant to hear them. Here, Nagarjuna is explaining that there is no hint of self-interest in what he is about to tell the king, as it is for the sole benefit of the king and other beings.

2. INSTRUCTION TO LISTEN TO HELPFUL WORDS IN ACCORDANCE WITH BUDDHA'S ADVICE

**304. *The Supramundane Victor said that students
are to be told
The truth – gentle, meaningful, and salutary –
At the proper time and from compassion.
That is why you are being told all this.***

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

It is appropriate to relay this to you O King, because the Supramundane Victor said that students are to be told the truth – gentle, meaningful and salutary – at the proper time and from compassion. That is why you are being told all this.

As presented here very clearly to the king, the Buddha explained that one's students or disciples, who are eager to learn must be told the truth. The manner of giving the advice is that it has to be the *truth*; that it has to be presented with a *gentle* approach; that what is being relayed has to be *meaningful and salutary*. It has to be mentioned at an appropriate time and to protect others from danger; and most importantly that it must arise *from compassion*. Here compassion relates to the motivation for presenting whatever is to be said to the students. The

motivation has to be out of compassion, and this is the reason why Nagarjuna is presenting these words to the king.

As many of us here are actively engaged in teaching or sharing the Dharma with others, this advice is really important. What type of motivation and in what manner should the Dharma be shared? When any advice from the Dharma is to be shared with others, whether it is on a general level or at a personal level to disciples, then what is to be uttered has to be the truth, and be conveyed in as gentle a manner as possible. It must also be meaningful and salutary, and delivered at a proper time, which indicates that even though it may be the truth and have all the other qualities, if it is not an appropriate time, then one may need to hold back for the time being. Then, when it is an appropriate time, and with the attributes that have just been described and a motivation of compassion, the advice is presented. It is important to keep in mind that we need to take this advice from the Buddha as a personal instruction when we engage in the sharing of Dharma and so forth.

The main point here is that when whatever is being presented is intact with the qualities of being the truth, meaningful and salutary, and is gently presented at appropriate time and with the motivation of compassion then, even though it may be temporarily unpleasant to hear, it is fitting to speak those words. It may initially sound unpleasant but if one's motivation is one of compassion, which indicates that there is no hint of personal gain or any ulterior motive and is only for the sole benefit of the other, then it will serve the purpose of benefiting the other. As mentioned earlier, this advice is not limited to sharing the teachings in a formal way, but to any advice or any communication one has with others. This is a really useful and important point to bear in mind.

3. ACTUAL EXHORTATION TO LISTEN TO WORDS HELPFUL TO ONESELF AND OTHERS

**305. *O Steadfast One, when true words
Are spoken without belligerence,
They should be taken as fit to be heard,
Like water fit for bathing.***

Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning:

By addressing the king as *O Steadfast One*, Nagarjuna explains that wisdom endowed with joyous effort and concentration is steadfast and a distinctive feature of that is *when true words are spoken without belligerence*. Thus, *they should be taken as fit to be heard, like seasonal water that is fit for bathing*.

When wisdom is complemented with the qualities of *joyous effort and concentration* then it is *steadfast*, meaning that it is very firm and unshakeable. Ultimately we need to have the discriminating wisdom of knowing what is right and what is wrong, and that discriminating wisdom needs to be endowed with joyous effort and concentration. Then it becomes steadfast. The feature of a wisdom that is derived from joyous effort and concentration is that *true words are spoken without belligerence* or anger, and the words are *fit to be heard* because of the qualities they encompass. The analogy here is *seasonal water that is fit for bathing*, because of all the distinctive features it encompasses.

When we reflect back on the earlier points, we can see that there is an explicit sequence to giving advice or practising the Dharma. What we need to understand is that whatever virtue that we engage in, whether it is teaching others, or acquiring the qualities to incorporate into one's practice, the main point is that one needs to first have a good motivation, which is imbued with compassion.

Next, whatever practice we engage in needs to be endowed with joyous effort, which means that the practice is not done as if it is a chore, or with a heavy mind. Rather, when practices are engaged in with a joyous mind, voluntarily and through an understanding of their benefits, then they are fitting practices, and one does them with a happy mind. Thus there has to be joyous effort.

However if one's concentration is not so good, then one will not be able to derive the essence and full benefit of one's practice. Therefore concentration is essential.

Thus, one needs to complement joyous effort with concentration, then the wisdom that one ultimately gains from that is a sound discriminating wisdom that knows what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded. Then, when one engages in practices or as just explained, imparts advice or teachings to others, it will be without anger, without belligerence and will be beneficial. Thus, as the text says, *it is fit to be heard*.

This means that one recognises advice that comes with these qualities as being advice that will be beneficial for both the recipient and the one who is presenting it. On a wider scale, implementing that advice will be of benefit for others. So it is fit to be heard because it is a beneficial advice. If we slowly and gradually implement this into our life, we will definitely progress.

The next verse reads:

**306. Realise that I am telling you
What is useful here and otherwise.
Act on it so as to help
Yourself and also others**

As Gyalsab Je explains in his commentary:

O King, *realise that I am telling you what is useful and valuable here in this life, and otherwise in the next life. Act on it so as to help yourself and also others.*

Then Gyalsab Je provides another way of interpreting the meaning of the words *here* and *otherwise*.

Here can also be interpreted to mean the benefit of stabilising your dominion, and *otherwise* to mean the benefit of spreading the Dharma.

Nagarjuna is saying "the advice that I am giving to you, O King, is to be understood as useful and valuable in this life, and in future lives". Thus it is extremely valuable advice because it has the temporary benefit of improving one's behaviour and so forth in this life, and also benefitting future lives. As the commentary explains, the advice can also benefit the king's citizens, as well as having the benefit of spreading the Dharma. Thus the advice being given to the king is beneficial all round.

The line *Act on it so as to help yourself and also others*, incorporates the main point of the advice, which is that when it benefits oneself it also has direct benefit for

others, and so it is fitting to act upon it. This point has been emphasised again and again in the teachings, where we are advised about how to engage in activities of benefiting other sentient beings. The recurring point, emphasised again and again is to engage in activities, whether they are verbal or physical, that always serve to benefit other sentient beings.

The real message that we need to derive from the text is to try to cultivate the mind of wishing to benefit others, which means lessening the grip of the self-cherishing mind. The direct opponent of the wish to benefit others is the mind that cherishes and is only interested in oneself. Thus, in order to generate the mind of wishing to benefit others, we need to release that grip of the self-centred mind. That is the essential practice; if we assume that we can find some high level practice somewhere else, we are completely missing the point.

We will not be able derive any essence from any other practice or teachings if we underestimate the point being emphasised here, which is the need to develop compassion and a good heart, loving kindness and the wish to benefit others. This is really the basis of all other practices, and this point is emphasised again and again. We need to really take this to heart and dedicate ourselves to that end, dedicating whatever we engage in to the benefit of others, thinking, "May it be of benefit for others. May it become a means to be of service to benefit others".

If we keep that in mind and remind ourselves of it again and again then we are actually putting into practice the advice that is given here. And this becomes our main practice. We need not feel that we are missing out on some other high level of practice if we are actually implementing what is being presented here in our daily life. If we can actually do that then we can be satisfied that we are practising appropriately. Too often we might think that we need to find some other high level practice or even another teaching. But where could we find another teaching that is greater than the Buddha's teachings, which emphasise the benefits of cultivating love and compassion and kindness for others. This is what we need to keep in our hearts.

B. EXTENSIVE EXPOSITION OF FLAWLESS POLICY

This section has three main subdivisions:

1. Royal policies
2. Instruction in non-degeneration and development
3. Achieving liberation and not forsaking the scriptures of the Great Vehicle

1. ROYAL POLICIES

This section is subdivided into five.

- 1.1. Increasing giving
- 1.2. Founding temples
- 1.3. Maintaining what was established earlier
- 1.4. Providing even for those who do not seek it
- 1.5. Way of appointing ministers

1.1. Increasing giving

This subdivision is covered in two verses, the first of which is:

**307. If you do not make contributions of the wealth
Obtained from former giving to the needy,**

*Through your ingratitude and attachment
You will not obtain wealth in the future.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

If you do not make contributions of wealth such as food and clothing, obtained from former giving in past lives, to the needy; ...

The heading *Increasing giving* indicates that one may be engaged in some form of giving right now but it may not be sufficient, and so one may actually have to increase one's level of giving. What is being explained here is that we have obtained the wealth, food and clothing that we have now from *former giving in past lives*, so it is fitting now to present that wealth to the *needy*.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues

...through your ingratitude and attachment, you will not obtain wealth in the future; thus it is appropriate to be generous now.

Here we (the king and ourselves) are being exhorted to engage in the acts of generosity, being mindful of the fact that what one has now, such as clothing, food and so forth, is none other than a result of one's generosity in the past.

It would be *ingratitude* to be hesitant about give to the needy now, because what one has obtained now is in fact a gift from those beggars and so forth who initiated our act of giving in the past. So it is due to the kindness of those beggars in the past that one has wealth now. Even though we may feel, "Oh, I worked to achieve this wealth", in reality it is due to none other than the kindness of the beggars in the past that we have wealth now. Our present wealth, such as food and clothing and shelter and so forth, is the result of generosity in the past, and one could not have engaged in the act of generosity without there being beggars. Therefore it is actually through the kindness of the beggars in the past that one has obtained wealth now, thus it would be ingratitude if one didn't give to the needy now.

Bring to mind that our present condition of having wealth and sufficient means is due to the kindness of others in the past. Because they have allowed us to engage in acts of generosity in the past, we have wealth and sufficient means now, so it is fitting to engage in acts of generosity now, so as to secure one's own future. Thinking in that way becomes an impetus to engage in the act of giving. Not only does it actually benefit others but it also secures our own well-being in the future. So it is fitting and appropriate to be generous now.

In simple terms what is being explicitly explained to the king (and ourselves) is that there is no point in being conceited and pompous about your wealth now, when in fact it is only result of your generous acts in the past. Nor is there any point in being miserly and having strong attachment to possessions now — it is far better to be generous and give to the needy and share with others. This is really profound advice.

Everything in relation to our current well-being is a result of acts in our previous lives. So we can be grateful that whoever we were in our past lives engaged in positive, virtuous deeds. Being grateful to that continuum of our past existence for our good fortune now is a reminder that if we don't continuously engage in virtuous deeds

now, such as generosity and so forth, then we will not there will be nothing left for our future lifetimes. So appreciating and feeling grateful for the good deeds done by our former existence can also be a reminder to continuously engage in good deeds now, in order to secure our future well being.

Ultimately this is an impetus to encourage us, and to show us many different ways to engage in virtue, to engage in Dharma practice. That is really the main point.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

ཨ་མ་རྒྱལ་པོ་ལྷོ་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

4 October 2010

As we have generated our motivation along the lines of the refuge and bodhicitta prayer that we have just recited, we can engage in the practice of meditation now.

[meditation]

You can set your motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the purpose of benefiting all sentient beings by liberating them from all suffering and leading them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

Setting a good motivation for whatever we do is essential for a positive outcome. The teachings always stress that we need to have a motivation that is of a special and pure intention before we engage in any practice. This is to ensure that the practice itself becomes meaningful and focused towards an appropriate end. Indeed, when we have a good motivation that is imbued with kindness and a genuine concern for others, then whatever we do will be meaningful and worthwhile.

In the study of the Dharma we particularly need to ensure that our study and practice becomes a means to overcome the delusions in our mind, such as pride, envy, sense of competitiveness and so forth. We first study the Dharma then practise it, in order to work towards the end of subduing the mind by overcoming the delusions. Otherwise, if we don't pay careful attention, the opposite may occur, where the more we study and gain knowledge, the more we become proud and pompous. We may also become competitive or jealous of others who are studying and practising. If this occurs then it is a clear sign that one has not been mindful of one's motivation, and that the whole purpose of one's practice and study has not been carefully considered. Our practice needs to be the means to subdue the mind, not to increase the delusions. Therefore we need to be really mindful and try to ensure that we carry that positive attitude into our daily life.

In order to subdue the mind the Buddha taught methods to overcome negative states of mind, so we need to identify the negative states of mind such as pride, envy and so forth. If they are not harmful then there would have been no reason for the Buddha to have prescribed antidotes for overcoming these negative states of mind. So we need to really recognise these states of mind as being detrimental to our wellbeing.

1. ROYAL POLICIES

1.1. Increasing giving

Of the two verses under this heading we have covered the first, and the second is:

308. *Here in the world workers do not carry
Provisions for a journey unpaid,
But lowly beggars, without payment, carry
to your future life
[What you give them] multiplied a hundred
times.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Here in the world workers do not carry provisions for a journey unpaid, but lowly beggars, who ask you for food, clothing and so forth, without payment carry the effects to your future life, i.e. what you give them plus the interest, multiplied a hundred times. Thus, it is appropriate to appreciate beggars and to take great pleasure in practising generosity.

There is nothing obscure about this, as it is quite clearly explained and therefore easy to understand. Normal workers, porters and so forth depend on payment for carrying your load. However when you give beggars even meagre provisions such as food and clothing, or some other minor thing, they help to carry the effects of your generosity multiplied a hundred times over into your future life, without any payment. Here a hundred times is not meant to be an exact figure, but an indication that the effect of generosity is greatly multiplied in future lifetimes.

The main point here is that even with minor acts of generosity, giving meagre food and clothing and so forth, to a beggar in this life, the positive effect of that is that those beggars will help you gain positive effects in a future lifetime. Even though it is without payment and you don't ask them to do so, the beggar provides the condition for you to experience the positive effect of that generous deed a hundred times over in your future lifetime. So the conclusion is that it is appropriate to appreciate beggars and to take great pleasure in practising generosity with them.

Sometimes we might become a bit annoyed when we encounter beggars, and even if we do give something we might give it out of annoyance. At worst we might end up not giving them anything. What is being indicated here is that we need not feel annoyed with beggars if we see that they provide the potential for us to accrue extensive benefits for the future. Thus, one should give to beggars with a great sense of gratitude and joy in one's mind. This is really profound advice.

An analogy is that if you were to give someone a watch knowing that you will receive a hundred watches in return, then you would be very glad to give your watch away. Far from being an act that deprives one of wealth and so forth, generosity is actually a cause for wealth to increase. Of course, there may be no immediate results, but with faith in karma then there will definitely be positive results in a future lifetime.

As will be indicated in the following verses, it is far better to invest one's wealth by being generous with it in order to secure a good future lifetime. The following verses are explicitly directed to the king, but as personal advice for ourselves we need to understand that whatever we may have now, it will be of no use at the time of death and beyond. In other words, if we don't utilise our wealth in an appropriate way now, then we will be impoverished

both in this lifetime and will fail to secure good conditions for our future lifetime, which would be a great pity. If one is suffering from poor conditions in this life and fails to engage in acts of generosity then one will be impoverished in the next lifetime as well.

Not only is the act of giving appreciated by others, but in some cultures it is known to be an actual means to gain more wealth. There is Chinese saying that if you give one Yuan away, you will receive a hundred in return. So they engage in the act of generosity, albeit with a temporary worldly concern of gaining more wealth in this life.

When we engage in the act of generosity, our intention should not be one of concern merely for this lifetime, but with a focus on the benefit for a future lifetime. To give with this attitude will ensure the practice is free from the stains of a temporary worldly concern. It is a good investment for our future life, as we need the stable conditions to practise the Dharma. When we have the good conditions then we can practice without worries. Being impoverished and lacking sufficient means is not comfortable, so it is worthwhile to consider our future lifetime as well.

The heading 'increasing giving' relates to the fact that since the good conditions we enjoy in this lifetime are a result of having been generous in the past, we need to increase our giving now, in order to secure our future lifetimes. This understanding will help us to actually engage in the act of generosity.

1.2. Founding temples

This heading is subdivided into three:

1.2.1. Training in exalted thoughts and deeds

1.2.2. Establishing good foundations¹

1.2.3. Special achievement

1.2.1. Training in exalted thoughts and deeds

The relevant verse is:

**309. *Always be of exalted mind
And take delight in exalted deeds.
From exalted actions arise
All effects that are exalted.***

As Gyalsab Je explains in his commentary:

Always be of exalted mind with the wish to benefit others, *and take delight in exalted and extensive deeds.* *From exalted actions* that are the cause, *arise all effects that are exalted.*

All the effects that arise from exalted actions are exalted. This point is quite straightforward and not very obscure either. One always needs to be mindful of having an *exalted mind*, which is the *wish to benefit others*. With that mind as a motivation one will naturally *take delight in exalted and extensive deeds* that actually benefit others. Therefore, as explained here, *from exalted actions that are the cause, all the effects that naturally arise will be exalted effects.*

As I regularly emphasise, we need to have a good intention in whatever we do. Whether in our practice or in dealing with others, we should always try to maintain a good intention, and have a kind, considerate and compassionate attitude. When we secure that as our basis

then whatever deeds we engage in, in relation to dealing with others and so forth, it will be virtuous deeds bearing good fruit. We really need to be mindful about that.

One of the points being presented here is that if one wishes for exalted effects, then one needs to engage in the cause which is exalted deeds. In other words, without creating an exalted action as a cause, one cannot expect to experience an exalted effect as a result. An exalted action encompasses a good motivation of benefiting others, as well as the actual deed that is beneficial for others. Generosity is explicitly being presented here, however there are many other good deeds that are of benefit for others.

When deeds of generosity and so forth are complemented with the genuine and unique attitude of compassion and kindness then, due to the accompanying exalted state of mind that is the motivation, the deeds naturally become exalted deeds, and thus they bring about positive exalted effects. This clearly points out the cause and effect sequence of positive actions leading to positive effects, which is based on the karmic consequences. This is something we need to bear in mind.

There are two main components to any action that we undertake: the thought and the action. It is this combination of thought and the action that determines whether the deeds are positive or negative ones. If it is a positive thought, an altruistic state of mind, then the deed that accompanies that positive state of mind will naturally be a positive action. Whereas if the thought is influenced by a state of mind such as pride or greed and hatred and so forth, then the actions that follow will also be negative actions, and the deeds will be negative deeds. In this way we can understand that everything that we do, positive or negative is encompassed in these two main points – thoughts and actions.

I don't know about you, but I find this a very powerful and essential instruction. If one finds that one's mind is influenced by negative state such as anger, it is best not to utter anything, or engage in any physical action. Through experience we might have noticed the consequences of saying something when our mind is influenced by anger. What kind of words come out? We all know that they will not be pleasant ones. Likewise when our mind is influenced by intense anger, our physical actions are not very appropriate, and rather than being constructive actions, they become destructive ones.

When we begin to understand this, then the truth of this advice will be very evident – when the mind is influenced by intense anger, it is better not to say or do anything. That is the way to prevent further negativity and non-virtue from being created. So, this is really very profound advice.

We know from our own experience that a negative state of mind influences our speech and actions in a negative way. Although this is a very obvious fact, we might not really pay heed to this advice and just think, 'Oh yeah, I've heard that before'. Some new students, who have not really studied Buddhism very much, have confided that they find this point to be very meaningful, worthwhile and practical advice. Some older students, on the other hand, might be a bit complacent, thinking, 'Oh yeah, I

¹ Translated in the text as 'Achieving the four good qualities'.

have heard that before'. We can become complacent if we feel that this advice doesn't apply to us personally.

There is a Tibetan term which literally translates as 'blocked ears' which indicates feeling that the advice doesn't apply to oneself. I personally don't feel that my ears are blocked when I hear this advice. For me it still sounds very fresh and pungent. Those who experience blocked ears when they hear this instruction would be those who have done a bit of study, and who assume that they are at an advanced level of the teachings. With a feeling of pride they may think, 'Oh, this is simplistic advice, I know it already' and so their ears are blocked against accepting it as a personal instruction.

There is an analogy for how even profound advice may not be heard by someone who is propped up with pride. The analogy is, like a drop of water on a balloon, which never stays put but just rolls off. Also if a container is upright, water can be poured in and it will stay there, but if the container is upside down you can't fill it with water. A person without pride is able to accept and implement any personal instructions and sound advice, whereas the advice will not be received as personal instruction by someone who is propped up with pride. Another analogy often used in Tibet is that new grass begins to grow at the bottom of a hill and then slowly grows upwards. It never grows down from the top of the hill.

1.2.2. establishing good foundations

The verse relating to this is:

**310. Create foundations of doctrine, abodes
Of the Three Jewels—fraught with glory and
fame—
That lowly kings have not even
Conceived in their minds.**

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

Create foundations of doctrine that lowly kings have not even conceived or could ever fathom in their minds. By creating abodes and representations of the Three Jewels, you will be fraught with glory and fame. Thus engage in the practice.

The main point presented here is how to create the foundation; the very basis of the doctrine. It can also relate to creating representations of the Three Jewels as an object for others to develop faith and generate virtue. Thus the representation of the Three Jewels is related to the foundation of the doctrine. As mentioned here, by engaging in the noble act of creating the foundations of the doctrine, which previous kings may not have even conceived of doing, one's own fame and glory and so forth will definitely increase as a positive result of that.

1.2.3. Special achievement

The first verse relating to this heading is:

**311. O King, it is preferable not to create
Foundations of doctrine that do not stir
The hairs of wealthy kings
Because [those centres] will not become
famous even after your death.**

Gyaltsab Je's commentary does not make any additional comment beyond basically reiterating the verse. However there is another commentary which explains the term

foundations of doctrine as being that which represents the doctrine and which generates faith and so forth.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

O King, it is preferable not to create foundations of doctrine that do not stir the hairs of wealthy kings, who are of equal status or lower than yourself, because those centres will not become famous even after your death.

Another commentary explains that it is the deeds and so forth of those who do not have the proper intention will not be reputable, and thus not be considered as good deeds after their death. In other words their deeds have no worth.

Does not stir the hairs of wealthy kings has the connotation of not causing any emotion or feeling for other kings, i.e. the creation of foundations of doctrine will actually make wealthy kings angry and spiteful and so forth.

The next verse in this outline reads:

**312. Through your great exaltation use even all
your wealth
Such that the exalted become free from pride,
[The equal] become delighted,
And the inclinations of the lowly are
reversed.**

Gyaltsab Je's explanation in his commentary reads:

Through your great exaltation, construct temples and so forth. Use even all your wealth, such that the exalted kings become free of pride, the equal become delighted, and the inclinations i.e. thoughts of inability, of the lowly are reversed. 'Your great exaltation' can refer to quelling pride in kings who are more powerful.

This explanation is clear enough.

The following two verses are:

**313. Having let go of all possessions,
[At death] powerless you must go elsewhere,
But all that has been used for the doctrine
Precedes you [as good karma].**

**314. When all the possessions of a previous
monarch
Come under the control of the successor,
Of what use are they then to the former
monarch
For practice, happiness, or fame?**

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je states:

Without delay quickly engage in the practices for you will have to let go of all possessions, at death, powerless you must go elsewhere; but all that has been used for the doctrine, which is of sole benefit, precedes you as good karma. When all the possessions of a previous monarch come under the control of the successor, even if there is wealth left after death, of what use are they then to the former monarch, for practice, happiness or fame? In fact there is no use.

These verses are exhorting the king to engage in the practice of Dharma without delay, by reminding him of the imminent prospect of death, when all possessions, wealth and power have to be left behind. However, it is explained, the positive effects of karma and virtue gained from acts of generosity and so forth will precede you into the next life. To further exhort the king he is reminded

that at the time of death *all his possessions* and so forth will become the possessions of his *successor*.

Even if wealth does remain after death, it is of no use for practice because one cannot practice by being generous with it after death. Because the wealth is now under the control of the new monarch, it cannot be of any use for one's own happiness or fame. In saying *what use are they then to the former monarch, for practice, happiness or fame*, Nagarjuna is presenting a rhetorical question, and the obvious conclusion is that there is no use.

We need to take this as a personal advice. We need to bring to mind that it is good to try to use whatever wealth we have in a wise way, by being generous and so forth. Leaving a will seems to be a good practice but of course one is never sure whether one's wishes will be carried out. So it may be far better to use your wealth while you are still alive, rather than having to leave it for someone else to decide what to do with it. Nevertheless the idea of leaving a will is a good intention that tries to ensure that the wealth is put to a good use, as well as making preparation for one's death and so forth. In any case, the main thing is to use one's wealth and so forth in a wise way, for virtue.

The fifth verse under this heading is:

**315. *Through using wealth there is happiness here in this life,
Through giving there is happiness in the future,
From wasting it without using or giving it away,
There is only misery. How could there be happiness?***

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Through using your wealth, since you would not need to worry about protecting it, there is happiness here in this life. Through giving there is happiness in the future. From wasting it, through natural disasters such as fire and so forth, without using it for oneself or giving it away, there is only misery. How could there be happiness?

If one has used one's *wealth* wisely there is *not* much *need to worry about protecting it*. And if you don't have too much wealth there is not much to protect so there will be less worry about that as well. By using your wealth wisely in providing help for others, you will enjoy the benefit of happiness in this life because you will be free from the worry of trying to protect that wealth and so forth. And if one actually engages in the act of being generous with one's wealth then there will be happiness in the future life.

If, by *not using wealth personally* or through generosity, that wealth is allowed to go to waste through natural disaster such as fire or theft and so forth, then *there is only misery*. In other words, if the wealth is lost through *natural disaster, fire and so forth*, one will not be able to use it oneself, which will be a waste. Likewise if one does not give it away, then the possessions and wealth will disappear. In that instance, the result will only be misery. The question *How could there be happiness?* indicates that there cannot be happiness.

We can definitely see many examples of people who experience great suffering when they lose all their wealth and money and so forth without having been able to use it for themselves or to give it away. I often joke that those who lost their wealth in the recession are now experiencing quite a bit of unhappiness, whereas those who didn't have money to lose in the recession are not sad because they didn't have anything to lose anyway. People who put their money into investments for the future have lost any possibility of using their wealth in the future.

Of course one must not misinterpret this to mean that we should not consider having wealth at all. Rather wealth needs to be used in a meaningful way. That is the main point. If one were not able to utilise wealth in a meaningful way then it would be a pity if it goes to waste.

It will be good to try to read the text periodically and try to derive the meaning from it. In that way you will benefit from studying it.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བུ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

11 October 2011

Maintaining the motivation of the refuge and bodhicitta prayer that we have just recited, we will now engage in the practice of meditation.

[meditation]

We set the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines: for the sake of all mother sentient beings, in order to free them from every suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself, so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well. We need to try to develop this positive attitude from the depths of our heart.

1.2.3. Special Achievement (cont.)

The last two verses under this heading read:

316. *Because of lack of power while dying,
You will be unable to make donations by way
of your ministers*

*Who will shamelessly lose affection for you
And will seek to please the new monarch.*

317. *Hence while in good health create foundations
of doctrine*

*Immediately with all your wealth,
For you are living amidst the causes of death
Like a lamp standing in a breeze.*

Although this very sound and pungent advice is explicitly directed to the king, we can also take it as personal advice for ourselves. The king is being reminded of the certainty of his approaching death. In effect we are being told that we should not be complacent, thinking that although practices are worthwhile we will probably do them next year, or the year after, or maybe the year after that. We procrastinate in this way, assuming that we can always do the practices later on. However for every moment that passes our death is that much closer.

The uncertainty of the time of death is explained with the analogy that it is *like a lamp standing in a breeze*. In the same way as a small flame is easily extinguished by a breeze, our approaching death can occur at any time. So, with that analogy, the king is exhorted to engage in the practices right now.

We should pay heed and take this as personal advice. Death is definitely approaching, thus we cannot neglect Dharma practice thinking that we will find the time later on. Rather, we should try to incorporate practice into our daily life.

At best that would mean leaving worldly affairs behind and placing the Dharma practice in the forefront. For an ordained monk or nun, of course that is an essential part of ones responsibility, as the very intention of taking ordination is so that one can be fully committed to engage in Dharma practice. Thus an ordained person is not encouraged to engage in many worldly affairs. However, that does not mean that it is not necessary for lay people to engage in Dharma practice as well.

In fact, if practising Dharma is understood to mean trying to acquaint one's mind with virtue, then that applies to everyone, in whatever activity they are engaged. Incorporating a virtuous mind into daily life can begin at the start of the day when one generates a compassionate attitude – a motivation of wishing to be of benefit and service for others. Whenever the opportunity arises during the day, it is worthwhile to spend some time recollecting the value of compassion and love, thus generating a virtuous state of mind. That is much better than allowing one's mind to be carried away with whimsical thoughts, becoming completely immersed in worldly affairs. Whenever we cultivate such a compassionate attitude within ourselves, we are practising the Dharma. As I regularly stress, Dharma practice really comes down to generating a compassionate loving attitude towards other sentient beings, and maintaining that attitude at all times.

We all have the capacity to engage in a virtuous state of mind. When we look within ourselves we can all see that we have both virtuous states of mind as well as negative states of mind. When we come to recognise that our negative attitudes are harmful and detrimental to our own well-being, and virtuous states of mind are beneficial for ourselves as well as for others, then it would be absurd to willingly foster negative attitudes and engage in non-virtue. Who in their right mind would want to willingly adopt states of mind that are detrimental and harmful for their own well-being – unless you were completely insane? As we are able to distinguish between what is good and what is harmful for us, we need to discard the negative attitudes.

If one is intelligent and of sound mind then it is very obvious that the most useful path is to voluntarily choose to adopt attitudes and states of mind that are not only beneficial and useful now, but also beneficial for our future lives. Lama Tsongkapa mentioned that the positive effect of practising patience, for example, is that one will definitely experience an immediate benefit, as well as the positive results to be experienced in the next lifetime. From the moment that we begin to practise patience, we feel the definite and immediate benefit of being protected from the mind of anger.

We all know that whenever a negative state of mind arises it harms us. When negative states of mind such as anger arise we don't feel settled, and we don't feel calm or peaceful. Therefore adopting a positive state of mind that opposes anger will definitely be of benefit. So we really need to take the initiative to implement our practice into our everyday life.

As mentioned earlier, the best way to engage in the practice of Dharma is to consider the welfare of this life as being secondary, rather than of primary importance. When the attitude towards the benefit of this life become less important and the focus is on the welfare for our future life time, then our Dharma practice becomes more authentic.

But that does not mean that we completely neglect the welfare of this life. Rather, because our primary focus is the practice of Dharma, engaging in the activities for the welfare of this life is of secondary importance, and the benefit of that is that acquiring the wealth and so forth, which is necessary to sustain ourselves in this life, will not disturb our minds. As our primary focus is not based on mundane worldly success and so forth, the ups and downs of work and life will not affect us to the point of causing great sorrow and misery, overwhelming us with stress and depression and so forth. That is the practical benefit of adopting a lifestyle

where the focus of Dharma practice is on benefitting of our future life.

Of course, the direct recipient of Nagarjuna's advice is the king, but we need to see how this advice is also a personal instruction to ourselves. Indeed every aspect of this teaching has some relevance to improving our own daily life.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verses in this way:

If you resolve on giving near the time of death; because of lack of power while dying, you will be unable to make donations by way of your ministers, who are forgetful and will shamelessly lose affection for you and will seek to please the new monarch.

Here the king is being exhorted to engage in the practice of giving and so forth right now, while he still has full control over his wealth. We might find that, like a lot of people, we are complacently thinking, 'I am still fit now so I can make decisions about how to use my wealth for the benefit of others later, nearer to the time of my death. That is when I will make the necessary decisions and leave instructions about how my wealth is to be used'. Here, Nagarjuna is clearly explaining that at the time of death the king cannot be certain as to whether his wealth will be used in the right way for virtue, *because of his lack of power while he is dying.*

When you are in the process of dying your mind will not be capable of dealing with your wealth. So the king is reminded that at that time he will lose his power and that he *will not be able to make donation by way of his ministers.* That is because at the time of death, he cannot rely upon his ministers, *who are forgetful*, which indicates that because they are no longer within his sphere of authority, they will *shamelessly lose affection for him, and will seek to please the new monarch.* Knowing of his imminent death, the king's ministers will have no reason to serve or please him anymore, rather they will be seeking to please and serve the new monarch. So they will neglect the king's wishes. That is why you will not have the power to use your wealth to give to others when you are dying.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues to explain:

Hence while now you have the power and are in good health, create foundations of doctrine immediately with all wealth. Don't put it off thinking you will do it next year or the year after, for you are living amidst the causes of death like a lamp standing in a breeze.

This explains very clearly to the king that he must resolve to use his wealth right now, 'while you are in sound physical and mental *health* and therefore *have the power*, use your *wealth* to *create the foundation of doctrine*, i.e. for the purpose of the Dharma, and *not put it off.* Using it now means using it while you have the full power to do so; because at the time of death your ministers will not obey you, and will basically rob you of the power that you have now'.

Also emphasised here is that another reason to use one's wealth immediately is that you will be able to utilise it for the Dharma. The fact is that *you are living amidst the causes of death like a lamp standing in a breeze.* As mentioned previously, a small flame can be extinguished at any given moment by the slightest breeze. Likewise your life can cease at any moment. So the king is being exhorted to use his wealth to engage in the practice of giving.

Engaging in the practice of generosity when one is of sound mind is incredibly worthwhile, as it can secure a peaceful death. As mentioned in the teachings it is hard for a person who is excessively attached to their wealth to have a swift,

painless, peaceful and good death. Rather they will have a prolonged dying process, where it takes a long while for the breath to actually cease; their strong attachment means that they are not able to let go. Because the death process is more unpleasant the dying person will not have a peaceful state of mind. If one can be generous with one's remaining wealth when one is able to make clear decisions about how it is to be used, then at the time of death there will be a sense of contentment, knowing that whatever one has accumulated is to be used in a positive, virtuous way. Thus, being generous with one's wealth will secure a calm and peaceful death. So it is really worthwhile for us to consider this advice.

We need to definitely pay attention to this very obvious and practical advice. This is not a presentation of high level practices that are beyond our capacity. They are not practices meant for great bodhisattvas on the higher grounds. We can definitely adopt practices such as generosity in our everyday life. Once we have made the decision to be generous, we are more than capable of engaging in the act of generosity. It is the same with the practice of morality. Once we make the decision to practise ethics, we can engage in the practice of morality, and it is the same with patience and so forth.

Not only are these practices of benefit in this life, but they are also way to prepare for our future life, so that we can enjoy good conditions at that time. As the teachings explain very clearly, the basic cause of a fortunate rebirth, such as a human rebirth, is the practice of ethics. So the practice of **morality** is the main cause for obtaining a good rebirth in the next lifetime.

Engaging in the practice of **generosity** in this life is the main cause to obtain sufficient conditions of wealth and so forth to sustain ourselves without worry in the next lifetime.

The practice of **patience** is the way to secure a beautiful body and intact faculties that we can utilise for the practice of the Dharma.

Likewise **enthusiasm** or joyous effort is way to ensure that he have a charismatic appearance of majesty.

Bodhisattvas have created the earlier conditions to ensure a fortunate rebirth, with wealth to sustain themselves, good features, a beautiful body, sound faculties and a charismatic appearance of majesty. Having all those good conditions means they won't be distracted and can focus entirely on the Dharma. Thus they will be able to practise **concentration** without the influence of worldly affairs.

The practice of **wisdom** arising from concentration will enable one to be completely liberated from the whole of cyclic existence.

This is how the six perfections become a complete practice that enables one to utilise not just the immediate conditions of this life and the future life as well, but they are also the means by which one can become completely free from the cyclic existence. The main thing we need to resolve is that it is a matter of a choice. We have the ability to see the great advantage of practising virtue and disadvantages of non-virtue, so it is then up to us to decide to actually adopt the practice and implement it in our life.

The essential point is although we enjoy a human rebirth, our contaminated aggregates are in the nature of samsara, and so we ultimately have to abandon the contaminated aggregates. However, temporarily, we do need to obtain such a human rebirth again. We need to understand that even though our human body is a contaminated body that has to be completely abandoned, we need to have a body

like this while we are in the process of acquiring the causes and conditions to free ourselves from samsara to achieve liberation and enlightenment. Accumulating virtue and the two collections would be quite difficult without a human rebirth.

1.3. Maintaining what was established earlier

This is subdivided into three:

1.3.1. General teaching

1.3.2. Way of appointing caretakers

1.3.3. Equal maintenance

1.3.1. General teaching

The root text reads:

318. *Also you should maintain other centres of doctrine
Established by the previous kings –
All the temples and so forth –
As they were before.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary adds an additional point of clarification:

Also you should maintain and prevent from decline, other centres of doctrine established by the previous kings – all the temples and so forth – as they were before.

The meaning of this is quite clear, which is that while utilising your wealth to establish the basis for the doctrine, you should *also maintain and prevent from decline other centres of doctrine established by previous kings*, which includes temples and monasteries *and so forth*. While establishing new places of doctrine to benefit others, it is equally important to maintain already established centres of learning, worship and so forth, *and thus prevent them from decline*. So the king is being advised to take responsibility for places set up by other kings.

1.3.2. Way of appointing caretaker

319. *Please have them attended by those
Who are not harmful, are virtuous,
Keep their vows, are kind to visitors, truthful,
Patient, non-combative, and always diligent.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Please have them attended by caretakers possessing the eight qualities: those who are not harmful; are virtuous; who practice to keep even one aspect of their vows; are kind to existing dwellers as well as newly arrived visitors; who speak truthful words; are not weary and patient with tasks; non-combative and always diligent in acquiring virtue.

Again, this is very pungent advice that we should adopt. We need to adopt the qualities of a caretaker for monuments and temples and so forth that are listed here. *Who are not harmful* refers to those who do not harm others and who do not carry any harmful intentions towards other beings. Not only does it refer to not harming other beings, but it also refers to objects that belong to others such as temples and so forth.

Who are virtuous and *who practice to keep even one aspect of the vows* refers to diligence in maintaining virtue by maintaining even just one aspect of their vows well (for example, refraining from killing).

Kind to existing dwellers relates to the residents of a place. For example we have residents here at Tara Institute, some who are new residents along with older residents. As explained here, we should be kind to all, and not neglect one group. We should not neglect the welfare of long time residents, thinking, 'Oh, they are old timers so we don't have to pay attention to them' or treat newcomers with contempt

thinking, 'Oh, this is a newcomer'. There should be no distinction between long-time dwellers and newcomers, and we should be equally kind to both.

Being *truthful* is clear; being *patient* protects us from being daunted by tasks; while *non-combative* means not being quarrelsome. Although this advice is directed to those who dwell in monasteries, temples and so forth; it can also apply to any residential community. Here at Tara Institute we are living in a Buddhist institution which is equivalent to a temple, so those who live here need to have all these qualities of being non-combative and so forth. *Always being diligent in acquiring virtue* refers engaging in virtue on a daily basis, not just once in a while. These are *the eight qualities* that the caretakers need to have.

1.3.3. Equal maintenance

The verse relating to this heading is very clear in its meaning.

320. *Cause the blind, the sick, the lowly,
The protectorless, the destitute,
And the crippled equally to obtain
Food and drink without interruption.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Be a cause for the blind, the sick, the lowly, the protectorless, the destitute and the crippled to equally obtain sustenance such as food and drink unceasingly and without interruption.

As clearly explained here, the king is being exhorted to help the needy such as the *blind*, the *sick*, those who are of *low* status and so forth. The *protectorless* (those who are bound by cruel masters, debts and so forth), the *destitute* and the *crippled*, to help them *to equally obtain sustenance such as food and drink*. Here, *equally* indicates that we should serve others in an unbiased manner, not favouring some and neglecting others. Rather you need to ensure that your help can be equally obtained by all who are needy. A simple analogy is when we are given something and told to share it amongst ourselves, which means that we want to ensure that everyone has an equal share, and that no one is left out. *Unceasingly* refers to helping without interruption, which means not turning people away while engaged in the act of giving and so forth. It also has a connotation of providing without interruption.

1.4. Providing even for those who do not seek it

The relevant verse is:

321. *Provide all types of support
For practitioners who do not seek it
And even for those living
In the countries of other monarchs.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je adds some clarification:

Provide all types of support, such as food and the like, to the best of your ability, for practitioners who do not seek it, and even deliver them for those living in the countries of other monarchs.

The king is being advised to try to extend his generosity not only to those who are destitute in his own domain, but to others who may not particularly seek it. When you notice that others are in need of your help, such as with food and the like, then you must try to extend it to them. This refers to other practitioners who may not come to you, but who nevertheless are in need, as well as those who are destitute in the countries of other monarchs. So again the king is being exhorted to go beyond the limits of his own domain, and have an unbiased attitude of compassion even for the

subjects of other monarchs, and then extend help to them when they need it.

1.5. Way of appointing ministers

This section is further subdivided into four:

1.5.1. Appointing religious leaders

1.5.2. Appointing ministers

1.5.3. Appointing generals

1.5.4. Appointing treasurers, etc.

1.5.1. Appointing religious leaders

Having established temples and so forth, what kind of teachers need to be appointed. The verse reads:

322. *At all centres of the doctrine
Appoint attendants who are
Not negligent, not greedy, skilful,
Religious, and not harmful to anyone.*

As explained in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

At all centres of the doctrine such as temples and the like, appoint attendants and the like who are not lazy and negligent, not greedy for wealth, retinue and so forth, skilful, religious and not harmful to anyone, including cattle and so forth.

Rather than *attendants*, a better translation would refer to those who provide Dharma activity in centres of the doctrine, such as temples and the like. Such spiritual leaders should *not be lazy*, which refers particularly to the laziness of being distracted with worldly affairs. As indicated here, a spiritual teacher should be free from the faults of being attracted to worldly affairs, so they will not be *negligent*, meaning neglecting those who are earnest seekers. Such a teacher should also *not be greedy for wealth or retinue and so forth*, they should be *skilful* in presenting the teachings, be of a *religious* mind, meaning having a keen interest in accumulating virtue themselves, and *not harmful to anyone including cattle and so forth*. This means those who dwell in the temples are kind not only to inner seekers like the people who *visit the temple*, but also to that which belongs to the temple, such as cattle and so forth, These are the qualities of a spiritual teacher.

1.5.2. Appointing ministers

The next verse relates to nine desirable attributes for the king's ministers.

323. *Appoint ministers who know good policy,
Who practise the doctrine, are civil,
Pure, harmonious, undaunted, of good lineage,
Of excellent ethics, and grateful.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse:

Appoint ministers who possess the nine qualities: *knowing good policy* such as fostering good relations with other kings and giving them some of their wealth; are skilled in appointing or dismissing governing bodies; *who shun non-virtue and practise the doctrine* - thus fearful but faithful (*civil*) to the king; *pure* from stains of selfishness; *harmonious* having close relations with the other retinue and subjects; *undaunted* - being free of a hostile mind; *of good lineage*; *of good conduct* because of *excellent ethics*; and with the understanding of kindness and aggression, being very *grateful*.

Being *grateful with the understanding of kindness and aggression* indicates seeing the kindness that is extended to oneself, and being able to repay that kindness. Dealing with *aggression* means dealing with it in an appropriate way without hostility, and with compassion and love. It also means

correcting what is wrong. If others act aggressively then you need to be able to actually stand up for your rights. This is an important attribute for both the king and his ministers, otherwise others will take advantage of them. There will be instances where one will have to right wrongs, or take a stand against wrong things that are done out of aggression; it should be done with the right motivation, one that is imbued with compassion and love.

It is good to really bear in mind the main points of the advice which has been presented here this evening. We have heard very sound advice about our state of impermanence, and the need to be generous with our wealth and so forth, at a time when we have the capacity to act on it,

Transcribed by Su Lan Foo

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

© **Tara Institute**

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་འགྲུབ་མཚན་ལོ་ལོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

18 October 2011

Along the lines of the motivation that we have just generated with the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the meditation practice. [meditation]

We can set the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen the teachings and put them into practice well.

This implies overcoming the self-cherishing attitude and acquainting oneself more and more with the attitude and deeds of cherishing other beings.

One of the main points is the importance of acquiring what is useful and discarding that which is not beneficial. Otherwise we may find ourselves practising the opposite, which is acquiring what is harmful and discarding what is useful.

It is essential that we recognise and make the distinction between the positive attitudes of benefiting others, and those that are focused mainly on our own self-interest. It is the selfish attitudes that really hinder our progress and in particular our relationships with others. If we are not mindful about really working at combating the self-cherishing attitude, then whatever study or practice we engage in will not bear good fruit. Furthermore we need to be really mindful about being considerate in our relationships with others; we need to be mindful of their needs and have a genuine concern for them. That is the optimum way to maintain good relationships with others, and when we adopt these positive attitudes they will make us genuinely joyful, content and happy. That is worthwhile to consider.

The main point is that we need to maintain our inner companion of a positive mind at all costs, as that is the only one who unfailingly assists and guides us at all times. We always need to cherish and try to maintain that positive attitude. Even though we rely upon and enjoy the company of external companions, they are by nature unreliable. External companions are naturally subject to change, thus we cannot rely on them completely and they cannot assist us wherever we go. Because they cannot possibly be with us all the time there will inevitably be times when they will fail to help us. Thus the only one who can be relied upon to assist us at all times is our own compassionate mind, the unfailing inner companion that can be with us at all times. This is something that we need to recognise.

1.5. The way to appoint ministers,

We have covered the verses that explain how to appoint religious leaders and ministers, and now we are up to appointing generals.

1.5.3. Appointing generals

Again, we can relate to this very practical advice given to the king to ourselves.

324. *Appoint generals who are generous,
Without attachments, brave, kindly,
Who use [the treasury] properly, are
steadfast,
Always conscientious, and practice the
doctrine.*

In explaining the meaning of the verse, Gyaltshab Je's commentary reads:

Appoint generals who are generous; without attachment to wealth; brave; kindly and faithful to the king;...

The meaning of *appoint generals who are generous* with their wealth is quite clear. *Without attachment* refers particularly to having the virtue of non-attachment. So *appoint generals without attachment to wealth*, also means endowed with the virtue of non-attachment.

Being brave is an essential quality for generals, and it also indicates being brave enough to take up any task as directed by the king, and not to be daunted by it. *Bravery* can also be related to bodhisattvas. The Tibetan term for bodhisattva has the connotation of being incredibly brave in taking upon themselves the personal responsibility to work for the welfare of all sentient beings.

Another necessary quality described in the text is to be *kindly*. The Tibetan word for this literally means having a very gentle mind, in contrast to a rough and stubborn nature. Being *faithful* (or close-hearted in Tibetan) to the king indicates a sense of fondness for the king. This is a really important attribute for the king's ministers to have. The tasks the king gives them would not be completed willingly without the sense of faithfulness, close-heartedness or fondness for the king.

On this note, I recall, an FPMT meeting many years ago up in Chenrezig Institute, which was attended by many geshes, as well as Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Ven. Roger Kunsang. We were discussing the appointment of teachers and translators to the various centres, and the best way to organise all of that. I suggested that whether it is a teacher or translator, or any other centre appointment, it is most important that they have three main qualities: first and foremost to have fondness and closeness with Lama Zopa Rinpoche as the spiritual head of the FPMT organisation; secondly to have a fondness and affinity with FPMT organisation itself; and finally to have a close affinity with whatever centre they are working for. At that point, Roger looked very pleased, and said, 'That is really important. I would like to send that message to all of the centres. These are qualities which are really necessary'. So it is really important to have that sort of fondness and close infinity with whatever organisation or person you are working for.

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of the necessary qualities of the king's generals continues:

...and *who use the treasury properly; are steadfast in not being influenced by others; and because of not consuming alcohol are always conscientious; and thus practise the doctrine.*

Another of the necessary qualities of the ministers is that they *use the treasury properly*. If the great wealth of the king's treasury is not used properly, then it is vulnerable to corruption and so forth. Therefore the ministers need to be honest.

As indicated in the verse, the ministers also need to be *steadfast in not being influenced by others*. This is another very important quality. It would be hard to trust a person who is easily influenced by others, because when they agree to perform a particular task, they could easily be influenced by others. Therefore this quality of being *steadfast* is really important.

As the commentary explains, *conscientious* relates to avoiding the *consumption of alcohol*. As clearly indicated here, intoxicants such as alcohol are one of the main causes for one to a lack conscientiousness. Under the influence of *alcohol* one might engage in all sorts of frivolous activities that are damaging to oneself and the king and so forth. Therefore the quality of being conscientious refers to avoiding alcohol, and in this way *practising the doctrine*.

We can see that all these attributes are relevant to our own lives. Those of you who have taken five lay person's vows, which include the vow of not consuming alcohol, will recall that avoiding alcohol is an auxiliary vow that helps one to maintain a conscientious mind; so as not to breach the other vows.

1.5.4. Appointing treasurers, etc.

This refers to appointing treasurers and other employees. The first verse under this heading reads:

325. *As administrators appoint elders
Of religious disposition, pure, and able,
Who know what should be done, are skilled
in the [royal] treatises,
Understand good policy, are unbiased, and
are kindly.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse thus:

As administrators appoint elders of religious disposition, even if they are lay practitioners who are of a kind character; are pure of selfishness and able to perform tasks;...

The specific mention of lay practitioners indicates that these qualities are to be adopted by you as well. On a personal level, as a *lay practitioner* one needs to have the qualities of having a kind disposition and being *pure* of selfishness and so forth.

...*who know what should be done with the tasks at hand; are skilled in the royal treatises; understand good policy; are unbiased; and are kindly and close-hearted to the king.*

This is clearly explaining that administrators need to have the ability to perform whatever task they are given, who have the wisdom or intelligence to know *the tasks at hand*

that need to be performed, and being able to distinguish between tasks that are necessary and those that are not. Being *skilled in the royal treatises* indicates being versed in the royal policies that are the means of government. Other important qualities are being *unbiased, kindly* and, as mentioned previously, having a *close-hearted* relationship with the king.

The next verse reads:

326. *Every month you should hear from them
About all the income and expenses,
And having heard, you yourself should tell
them
All that should be done for the centres of
doctrine and so forth.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains:

It is not sufficient just to appoint them, *but every month you should hear from them about all the income and expenses of the king, and having heard, you yourself should tell them all that should be done, such as when there is a deficiency in funds for the centres of doctrine and so forth, and increase the amount for the intended projects.*

The commentary adds that *it is not sufficient to just appoint the minister, but it is important to ensure that they are actually carrying out their given tasks and responsibilities*. For us this means that if we are given any task in any kind of organisation, it is not sufficient to just assume the title. Rather, we need to ensure that we actually engage in the task at hand, and fulfil the responsibilities of that role. This is very practical advice.

As indicated here, the king needs to check the accounts on a *monthly* or other regular basis, to ensure that the appointed ministers are performing their tasks properly, making sure that the funds are being used for *the centres of doctrine and so forth*, for the Dharma to spread. If there is a lack of sufficient funds then the king needs to *increase the amount for the intended projects*, and in that way to take that responsibility for completing the task.

The following verse is quite easy to understand:

327. *If your realm exists for the doctrine
And not for fame or desire,
Then it will be extremely fruitful.
If not, its fruit will be misfortune.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The reason for advising to engage in Dharma is that *if your realm exists for the doctrine*, then because of that reason *and not for fame or desire, then your kingdom will be extremely fruitful*. If it is for fame and so forth, then *its fruit will be misfortune*, to be experienced in the lower realms.

This relates to the earlier advice to the king in relation to how to practise in accordance with the Dharma, with respect to himself, and how to appoint his ministers and generals and so forth.

As the commentary explains, *if your realm exists for the doctrine*, indicates that because your realm exists for the doctrine or for the sake of the Dharma, then *your kingdom will be extremely fruitful*. In other words, governing your kingdom with policies that are endowed with the values of the Dharma will bear extremely good fruit in the

future. In contrast to that, if it is governed *for fame and so forth then its fruit will be misfortune, which will be experienced as being reborn in the lower realm.*

2. INSTRUCTION IN NON-DEGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

This section is subdivided into two:

2.1. Instruction in non-degeneration of previously existent practices

2.2. Developing previously non-existent practices

Again, we can derive an understanding of the meaning of the verses just from the layout of the headings in the commentary. These two subdivisions indicate that the first priority is to maintain whatever practices have been done previously, and not allow them to decline. That is very important advice. Then while maintaining what has been already previously established, develop new practices that have not been established in the past.

In relation to this point, I recall that several years ago Jampa Ignjen, who was at that time an ordained monk, sought advice from Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey about whether he should go on retreat or do some other practice. The advice what was that while it is good for you ponder other practices, it is also worthwhile to really consider maintaining what you already have. Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey said, 'You already have your ordination vows of a monk, so wouldn't it be worthwhile to actually maintain and preserve them at all costs? Then, based on that, you gradually add other practices'. When Ven. Fedor heard that advice later, he commented that it was incredibly sound and practical advice.

In his presentation of these outlines, Gyaltsab Rinpoche is again showing his incredible understanding of the text, and how it relates to the practices. The way the root text is presented in the outlines shows Gyaltsab Rinpoche's great intelligence, and his really deep understanding.

2.1. Instruction in non-degeneration of previously existent practices

As the commentary explains, one should ensure that what one has already established in the past does not degenerate.

This outline is further subdivided into:

2.1.1. Transition

2.1.2. Instructions in non-degeneration

2.1.1. Transition

*328. O Lord of Humans, since in this world nowadays
Most are prone to wreak havoc on each other,
Listen to how your governance
And your practice should be.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains that:

If you have this qualm: When the king practises the doctrine then he would have to go against the royal policies of punishing others and so forth, while adopting the royal policies of punishing others with the death sentence and so forth would be against the practice of the doctrine. Thus it must be

impossible to practise these two without contradiction.

This qualm presents the implication of what is being explained to the king. The advice on royal policy that is presented to the king by Nagarjuna is in accordance with the values of the Dharma, and the king might then have the qualm, 'How could I possibly implement the practices of the Dharma that might go against *policies* on implementing *punishment* such as *death sentences and so forth*'.

The commentary then explains the response:

That is not the case, O Lord of humans, since in this world nowadays most are prone to wreak havoc on each other, which is harmful to the kingdom as well; thus, listen to how your governance and your practice should be applied without contradiction.

Addressing the king as *O Lord of humans*, Nagarjuna explains that these days people are prone to causing destruction and havoc for each other which, in turn, will affect the peace and integrity of the kingdom. Thus, the king is told, *your governance should be applied without contradiction.*

2.1.2. Actual instruction in non-degeneration

This is subdivided into four:

2.1.2.1. Gathering those of special powers

2.1.2.2. Making oneself compassionate

2.1.2.3. Freeing prisoners and making prisons comfortable

2.1.2.4. If not reformable, banishing them from the country

Again we can see the relevant advice that is presented within the outlines. Gathering those of special powers indicates how to appoint those who have special powers, i.e. who are able to be agents of reform. Secondly, those reformers should be compassionate, which is incredibly important advice. Third is freeing prisoners and making prisoners comfortable. Lastly, when prisoners are not able to be reformed then they should be banished to a far away place, where they cannot cause havoc and destruction in the kingdom.

2.1.2.1. GATHERING THOSE OF SPECIAL POWERS

*329. Let there always be around you many persons
Old in experience, of good lineage,
Knowing good policy, who shrink from ill deeds,
Are agreeable, and know what should be done.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of the verse thus:

If those who lack special powers are appointed [as governing bodies] the fault of not punishing those who are punishable and punishing those who are not punishable will incur. Thus *let there always be around you many persons old in experience*, who have the intelligence to know what is suitable to be done and what is not. If of bad lineage then the fault of lacking dignity and a good heart will incur, thus appoint those *of good lineage; knowing good policy of the kingdom; who shrink from ill deeds; are agreeable*

with other governing bodies, and know what should be done favourable to the policies.

First of all there is a presentation of the reason why it is necessary to appoint those with special powers. If *the governing bodies lack the special powers* (indicating having authority with the qualities that are presented), then *the fault of not punishing those who are punishable and who deserve punishment, while punishing those who are not punishable and who do not deserve to be punished, will occur*. These practices are commonplace even in our times. If a judge is not fair or not skilled, then the wrong sentence might be passed down. Worse would be the case if the judges and so forth are corrupt, then they would condemn those who have not actually done wrong. This is a grave mistake. So the importance of appointing those governing bodies who have special powers is emphasised here.

Furthermore it is important to appoint those who have the intelligence and wisdom know *what is suitable to be done and what is not*. And if they are of *bad lineage* then they may disrespect the fair and righteous policies and impose very severe, harsh punishments. Thus the king is advised to appoint those of good lineage.

Knowing good policy of the kingdom, means having a good understanding of the policies, and *shrink from ill deeds* means avoiding engaging in negative deeds. Being *agreeable with other governing bodies* means not being in conflict with other governing bodies with respect to the law and actual policies, and ensuring that *there is agreement*, good communication, and a good relationship with other governing bodies. *What should be done favourable to the policies* means being able to pass laws that are not harmful but favourable to the king's policies. So these are the qualities indicated by the term *special powers*.

Knowing what should be done favourable to the policies also indicates that whatever the policy that is adopted the governing bodies should ensure that it of benefit to the citizens, and not harmful.

As people would be aware the next session is the discussion, followed by the test. I have heard that people are taking their tests seriously and doing them well, so that definitely makes me happy. As mentioned previously, the discussion also needs to be conducted in a good manner.

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

© **Tara Institute**

Discussion (25.10.2011)

Week: 1 (27 September 2011)

.1. a) The Buddha explained that one’s students or disciples, who are eager to learn, must be told the truth. Explain the manner of giving the advice. [4]

b) “It must also be meaningful and salutary and delivered at a proper time.” What does this indicate? [2]

2. “When we reflect back on earlier points, we can see that there is an explicit sequence to giving advice or explaining the Dharma,” Explain this sequence. [6]

3. What is the real message we need to derive from the text and what does this mean? [4]

Week: 2 (4 October 2011)

4. What is the appropriate way to view beggars? Why? [4]

5. When we engage in the act of generosity what should our intention be? [2]

6. a) What is the exalted mind? [2]

b) How does a deed naturally become an exalted deed? [4]

7. Verses 313 and 314 are exhorting the king to engage in the practice of dharma without delay. Why? [4]

Week: 3 (11 October 2011)

8. Explain, a) what practicing the Dharma is understood to mean. [2]

b) how one incorporates a virtuous mind into daily life. [4]

9. What is the practical benefit of adopting a lifestyle where the primary focus is on benefitting our future life? [4]

10. Explain how the six perfections becomes a complete practice. [6]

Week: 4 (18 October 2011)

11. Explain verse 324. *Appoint generals who are generous,
Without attachments, brave, kindly,
Who use [the treasury] properly, are
steadfast,
Always conscientious, and practice the
doctrine.*

Exam

Name: _____

Mark: _____

Block 6

Week 6: (01.11.2011)

.1. a) The Buddha explained that one's students or disciples, who are eager to learn, must be told the truth. Explain the manner of giving the advice. [4]

b) "It must also be meaningful and salutary and delivered at a proper time." What does this indicate? [2]

2. "When we reflect back on earlier points, we can see that there is an explicit sequence to giving advice or explaining the Dharma," Explain this sequence. [6]

3. What is the real message we need to derive from the text and what does this mean? [4]

4. What is the appropriate way to view beggars? Why? [4]

5. When we engage in the act of generosity what should our intention be? [2]

6. a) What is the exalted mind? [2]

b) How does a deed naturally become an exalted deed? [4]

7. Verses 313 and 314 are exhorting the king to engage in the practice of dharma without delay. Why? [4]

8. Explain, a) what practicing the Dharma is understood to mean. [2]

b) how one incorporates a virtuous mind into daily life. [4]

9. What is the practical benefit of adopting a lifestyle where the primary focus is on benefitting our future life? [2]

10. Explain how the six perfections becomes a complete practice. [6]

11. Explain verse 324. *Appoint generals who are generous,
Without attachments, brave, kindly,
Who use [the treasury] properly, are
steadfast,
Always conscientious, and practice the
doctrine.*