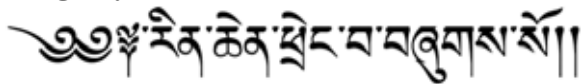


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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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

21 June 2011

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Keeping in mind the motivation of the refuge and bodhicitta prayer that we have just recited, we can do the meditation. [meditation]

Generate a motivation for receiving the teaching such as, 'For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the Dharma teaching and put it into practice well'.

## 2.2. Advice not to be lazy about accumulating the two collections (cont.)

### 2.2.4. No cause for laziness about accumulating the two collections

According to the meaning of the Tibetan a more accurate translation is 'No cause for being overwhelmed or discouraged about....' would be.

The two verses relating to this outline are:

- 224 *Since thus they are not greatly harmed  
By physical and mental suffering,  
Why should they be discouraged  
Though they lead beings in all worlds?*
- 225 *It is hard to bear suffering even for a little,  
What need is there to speak of doing so for  
long!  
What could bring harm even over limitless time  
To happy beings who have no suffering?*

Gyalsab Je's commentary on the meaning of the first verse opens with a rhetorical question:

Even though bodhisattvas need to liberate limitless beings from limitless worlds, why should they be disheartened?

This indicates that even though bodhisattvas have to work towards *liberating limitless sentient beings*, there is no reason for bodhisattvas to feel *disheartened*.

Gyalsab Je goes on to explain:

There is no reason to be discouraged *since they are not greatly harmed by physical and mental suffering, so why should they be discouraged though they lead beings in all worlds.*

We can relate this to our own reasons for feeling discouraged if we experience physical or mental hardship when we undertake a task. Although experiencing such hardship may discourage us, bodhisattvas experience neither *physical nor mental suffering*, and so there is no reason for them to feel *discouraged*.

The reason why we may feel discouraged when we face hardships is because of our inability to endure the hardships. Lacking a sense of endurance is the reason why we become disheartened or discouraged. For bodhisattvas, however, such feelings do not arise since the very cause for becoming discouraged or disheartened, which is suffering, is absent.

Gyalsab Je's commentary continues:

*It is hard to bear suffering even for a little, what need to speak of doing so for long!*

Although we find it hard to bear minor suffering and minimal hardship, the scope of a bodhisattva is a determination to continuously help sentient beings over many eons. Because they have such a great scope normal suffering cannot dishearten a bodhisattva.

As Gyalsab Je further explains:

However, *what could bring harm even over limitless time to bodhisattvas who are happy beings and who have no suffering?* As there is only gain without even the slightest loss, it is appropriate to quickly engage in the accumulation of the two collections and not appropriate to be lazy.

The reason why bodhisattvas do not experience extreme suffering is primarily due to their practice of patience, particularly the patience of enduring suffering. We, on the other hand, can become disheartened or discouraged when we face even the slightest hardship, because of our lack of patience. If we lack that ability to willingly take on hardships with endurance, we become discouraged.

Here, we need to relate the importance of enduring hardships to our own practice. We need to develop this particular type of patience in order to maintain the continuity of our practices. The patience of enduring suffering helps to maintain the integrity of one's practice, because the very nature of patience is that it prevents one's mind from being disturbed in the event of difficulties or hardships. When we engage in the practice of patience, our mindset does not allow us to become disturbed by hardships and suffering and so forth. Thus, an undisturbed and calm mind helps to maintain the integrity and continuity of one's practice.

When the text specifically mentions that bodhisattvas do not experience suffering, it may be referring to higher level bodhisattvas who only experience joy. However, at the beginner level of the practice, the main factor that maintains continuity of practice is the practice of the patience that endures hardships and suffering. When one doesn't allow the mind to become disturbed by hardships, one is able to maintain a sense of joy and calmness, and in that way one is able to protect one's practice.

This can also be related to the factors that cause anger to arise in our mind. As soon as we lose our patience and allow our mind to become disturbed by suffering, hardships and so forth, then anger will arise. We all share the experience of feeling irritable because we have lost our patience, which of course makes it difficult to relate to others.

It is really important that we understand the significance of the patience of willingly enduring suffering. Then, in the event of facing real hardship, such as sickness for example, because of familiarity with the practice of patience the physical suffering will not cause much mental disturbance.

As you are aware, the very definition of patience is the lack of mental disturbance in the event of suffering or harm. Therefore, if we exert ourselves to practise patience while things are going relatively well for us then, then due to familiarity and virtue with the practice, we will be able to practise patience when actual hardships occur. That is the real significance of the practice. Being able to apply the practice of patience at the time when it is most needed depends on applying it in our everyday lives now. That is how we need to understand the significance and relevance of the practice.

In order to engage in the practice of patience, we need to fully understand it. In particular we need to fully comprehend what the patience of willingly enduring suffering means. Whose suffering is it referring to? Does it relate to the suffering of others or is it one's own suffering? We really need to be clear about that distinction and fully understand that it relates to our own suffering. We really need to understand that the practice of patience that endures sufferings refers to our own suffering.

Gyaltsab Je then concludes:

As there is only gain without even the slightest loss, it is appropriate to quickly engage in the accumulation of the two collections and not appropriate to be lazy.

### 2.2.5. The power of great compassion

This translation doesn't seem to incorporate full meaning of the Tibetan, which refers to both the potential as well as the power of great compassion.

226 *They have no physical suffering;  
How could they have mental suffering?  
Through their compassion they feel pain  
For the world and so stay in it long.*

Here one needs to understand the distinction between normal compassion and the great compassion that is the subject of this outline. Unlike normal compassion, where one might be biased in feeling compassion for some beings and not others, great compassion is extended to all sentient beings, regardless of how they affect you, or appear to you. Great compassion refers to reflecting, without discrimination, on how every sentient being is suffering and thus wishing them to be free from suffering.

Renunciation is the basis on which one develops great compassion. Without having first developed renunciation, which is the wish to be completely free from suffering oneself, there is no possibility of developing the attitude of wishing others to be free from all suffering. Therefore we need to understand that in order to develop great compassion for all living beings, we need to have first developed renunciation.

To further expand one's understanding of the meaning of compassion, particularly in the Buddhist context, it is important to understand the distinction between general compassion and the compassion that is based on the understanding of the real causes of the suffering of other sentient beings. We develop general compassion when we see the normal suffering of other sentient beings, i.e. the suffering of suffering which refers to the physical and mental suffering that we can relate to on an obvious level. When that kind of suffering is perceived, then a sense of compassion can be spontaneously and naturally developed, which is of course a very good and noble thought.

However, the compassion being specified here is a compassion that is based on understanding the very causes of suffering, in particular the way samsaric suffering as a whole is connected to the twelve interdependent links. Wishing all sentient beings to be free from all types of suffering that are experienced in samsara as well as the very causes of that suffering, is a much more profound level of compassion. In fact we can safely say that this level of compassion is unique to the Buddhist tradition. As far as I understand, other faiths and traditions don't explain compassion to this extent.

The compassion that is developed on the basis of seeing suffering in general can be developed not only by religious followers of other faiths, but even by those who are not

necessarily religious minded. When any ordinary sympathetic human being sees someone else suffering, they have a sense of empathy, a natural wish for them not to suffer, which is compassion. However the very profound level of compassion based on the understanding of the twelve interdependent links and so forth is unique to the Buddhist tradition.

More specifically, three categories of compassion are explained in the teachings:

- ∞ compassion focussing on the suffering of sentient beings;
- ∞ compassion focussing on phenomena;
- ∞ compassion focussing on the suffering that is based on thusness or the identitylessness of other beings.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je opens his explanation with a question:

If asked, doesn't a bodhisattva experience any mental suffering?

Having explained earlier that bodhisattvas do not experience any physical or mental suffering, this question is probing even further by asking, 'Are you sure that bodhisattvas don't have even a tiny bit of suffering?' This is very appropriate question of wishing to really know whether there is any suffering that bodhisattvas may experience is very much related to the modern way of thinking.

Gyaltsab Je then responds to that question by explaining the meaning of the verse:

*They have no physical suffering* in relation to their own needs; ...

The unequivocal point being made here is that *in relation their own needs they have no suffering* at all. As they have no *physical suffering in relation to their own needs*, how could they have any mental suffering either?

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

They do not have it even slightly. However, *through their compassion* for beings who are suffering, *they feel pain for the world* which is due to their exceptional virtue and not unwillingly,...

While it is the case that bodhisattvas do not experience any physical or mental suffering in relation to their own needs, however when they focus on the suffering of other sentient beings, they do feel pain in the form of sadness for the suffering that others experience. Due to their exceptional virtue, the slight pain they feel in their heart when they see other beings suffering is not in the nature of suffering, but rather a cause for great virtue.

This explanation is very suitable for those who have questions about feeling empathy or compassion for others. They often ask questions like, 'Wouldn't one experience unnecessary suffering if one feels compassion for others?'. Of course at our level, we might feel disheartened and even some discomfort when we feel compassion for others. However we must remind ourselves that such an uncomfortable feeling is a virtue rather than a non-virtue. As explained here, bodhisattvas willingly embrace pain when feeling compassion for other sentient beings. Thus their compassion is a great and exceptional virtue.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then concludes with this statement:

...thus they *stay* in samsara for a *long* time.

This is really the main point of the power of compassion referred to in the outline heading. Due to their great

compassion bodhisattvas want to liberate and help all sentient beings in samsara, so they willingly accept staying in samsara for a long time. When the teachings mention that the bodhisattvas do not intend to abandon samsara, they are referring to this point. For the sake of benefitting sentient beings and out of their great compassion for sentient beings, bodhisattvas don't feel any hurry to leave samsara for their own sake, but willingly endeavour to stay in samsara to benefit other sentient beings.

In summary, through the power of their great compassion, bodhisattvas have no hesitation in remaining in samsara for the benefit of other sentient beings, the sole purpose their vow to remain in samsara is to benefit other sentient beings. You will recall that the opening verse of the Madhyamaka teachings states that compassion is important at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. As explained in other parts of the text, it is the power of great compassion that allows one to abide in samsara to benefit other sentient beings, by helping them to abandon samsara. When they obtain enlightenment, it is through the power of great compassion that they are able to continuously benefit sentient beings to an even greater extent.

When we relate to the teachings in this way, we can see the relevance of great compassion in association with the practices of the patience of enduring the hardships and difficulties of benefitting sentient beings; as well as ethics and so forth. All of the six perfections are complementary to the main practice of great compassion, which bodhisattvas extend to all living beings.

As the great master Lama Tsong Khapa said, in order to benefit other sentient beings we need to develop the wish for them to be free from suffering and to be endowed with happiness and joy. Without those intentions, there is no possible way for us to be of any benefit to other sentient beings.

Now we come to conclusion of the section concerning not feeling inadequate about accumulating the two collections.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. SUMMATION

The verse that relates to this outline is:

227 *Hence do not feel inadequate thinking,  
'Buddhahood is far away.'  
Always strive at these [collections]  
To remove defects and attain good qualities.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Hence, because of these reasons, do not feel inadequate thinking, 'buddhahood is far away', rather always strive at these [collections] to remove defects and attain good qualities.*

For the reasons that were presented earlier, those with intelligence should not feel inadequate by thinking that buddhahood is far away, but rather strive to accumulate the two collections, to remove defects and attain all of the good qualities. In this context 'to strive' is the personal instruction to actually engage in the practice of the two collections.

Thus the main point of this section of the text is to contemplate all the reasons that were presented earlier. One needs to build up the courage to clear away and overcome any feelings of inadequacy or discouragement, and see one's own great potential when accumulating the two collections. As presented earlier, there are various ways of engaging in the two collections; recollecting that the purpose of doing so

is because the two collections serve as the main cause for obtaining the ultimate results of the two bodies of an enlightened being.

Giving into feelings of inadequacy and laziness obstructs one from engaging in removing the non-virtuous states of mind and obtaining good qualities. Even though this advice specifically refers to engaging in the two collections, we need to apply this advice to whatever practice we engage in. It is good to remember this point.

The way we can strive to transform or better ourselves is to remove defects or faults and further develop good qualities. Thus we cannot give into laziness, otherwise our practice will suffer. As the sutras indicate, there is no possibility of accumulating any white virtues for one who gives into laziness. So we really need to understand the ill-effects of laziness, and fully acknowledge that the cause of all our defects is laziness. In the first place, it is laziness that prevents us from accumulating any virtue or positive qualities, and if we have engaged in accumulating some virtues or good qualities, it is laziness that prevents us from further increasing those qualities. So not only does laziness prevent one from gaining any qualities, it also prevents the further development of them.

## D. THE ENTITIES OF THE TWO COLLECTIONS

This section is sub-divided into three:

1. Advice to forsake the opposites of merit and to rely on the meritorious
2. Effects of three poisons and of their opposites
3. Actual two collections

### 1. ADVICE TO FORSAKE THE OPPOSITES OF MERIT AND TO RELY ON THE MERITORIOUS

The verse relating to heading this is:

228 *Realising that desire, hatred, and obscuration  
Are defects, forsake them completely.  
Realising that non-desire, non-hatred, and non-  
obscuration  
Are good qualities, inculcate them with vigour.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*By realising that desire, hatred and obscuration [or ignorance] are defects, forsake them completely...*

One needs to fully understand that *desire* or attachment, *hatred*, and *obscuration* or ignorance are defects or faults. Only then will one develop a strong wish to completely overcome them.

As also explained extensively in other texts, the three poisons, in particular the ignorance of grasping at a self, are the basis or root of all our suffering. Due to the grasping at a self, there is attachment to things that are favourable to the self, and hatred and anger develop towards those things that are unfavourable or that oppose the self. That is how one needs to understand that the ignorance of grasping at the self is the very root of all our suffering.

Gyaltsab Je continues to explain:

*...and by realising that non-desire, non-hatred and non-obscuration are good qualities inculcate them with respect and vigour.*

The opposites of merit referred to in the heading are the three poisons of desire, hatred and obscuration or ignorance. For as long as one harbours the three poisons within one's mental continuum, there will be no opportunity to engage in meritorious acts and gain merit for oneself. When one recognises that desire is a defect and wishes to abandon it,

<sup>1</sup> Begun on 24 May 2011.  
Chapter 3

one needs to cultivate the opposite of desire, which is non-desire. Similarly, when one recognises anger and hatred as being defects or faults, then to overcome those one needs to develop the opposite, which is non-hatred; likewise non-obscuration is the opposite to ignorance.

These opposites are good qualities, otherwise called meritorious. Thus, to *inculcate them with respect and vigour* means to fully embrace them and to engage in cultivating them. Thus the abandonment of each of the three poisons is itself a root virtue: the root virtue of non-desire, the root virtue of non-hatred and the root virtue of non-obscuration.

One needs to go beyond merely relying on the words, and really understand that non-desire is not just having a state of mind of indifference, but that it is a state of mind that is an antidote for overcoming desire. Even though the virtue is explicitly stated as 'non-desire', one needs to understand that it is a state of mind that actually opposes desire, which is essentially an antidote for overcoming desire. Likewise, non-hatred is a state of mind that serves as an antidote for overcoming hatred or anger, while non-obscuration is a state of mind that serves as an antidote for overcoming ignorance. So we need to understand the full implication of what is being presented here in order incorporate it into our own practice.

We need to identify the anger and ignorance that lie within ourselves. We are very familiar in seeing others being angry or feeling desire and we readily attribute those faults to others, so we don't need any further practice in that! However in order to develop a practice for our own transformation, we need to relate the same faults within ourselves. Just as one sees others feeling miserable from the pangs of desire, ask 'Do I too have that within me?'. Likewise, as one sees the faults of anger in others, ask 'Do I have anger within myself?'. If we can tell that others are angry, we can detect the same in ourselves and then see how it is the cause of our own misery and suffering. It is only then that we develop the determination and commitment to overcome our own desire, hatred and ignorance. That is how we need to apply it in our practice.

## **2. EFFECTS OF THREE POISONS AND OF THEIR OPPOSITES**

The verse relating to this reads:

*229 Through desire one goes into a hungry ghost transmigration,  
Through hatred one is impelled into a hell,  
Through obscuration one mostly goes into an animal transmigration.  
Through stopping these one becomes a god or a human.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Through desire to things one goes into a hungry ghost transmigration. Through hatred one is impelled into hell. Through obscuration it is possible to go to a happy transmigration, however one mostly goes into an animal transmigration. Through the virtue of stopping these three, one becomes a god or human.*

Having explained the three poisons and their effects in detail, this verse is pointing out that in overcoming the three poisons, one also experiences the opposites of those, which are meritorious rebirths.

Here again, we can incorporate the more detailed explanations given in the Lam Rim teachings, which explain how desire is one of the main causes for being born in a *hungry ghost* realm, and for experiencing the suffering of that

realm. There are also the hell realms and as explained here, harbouring anger or hatred is a cause for the extensive suffering of the *hell* realms (which are explained in detail in the Lam Rim teachings). Contemplating those kinds of suffering encourages us to overcome the causes of that suffering by overcoming desire, hatred and ignorance. That of course is the intent of these teachings.

In summary when, as mentioned in other teachings, we understand that the three poisons are a cause of suffering because they cause a rebirth in either the animal realm, hungry ghost realm or the hell realms, we then gain a greater understanding of how the three poisons are the root causes of suffering. If we can imagine the sufferings of the animal, hungry ghost and hell realms and imagine ourselves experiencing such suffering, we would consider it unbearable.

The way to overcome such suffering is to engage in the opposites of the three poisons, which are the three root virtues of non-desire, non-hatred and non-ignorance. Establishing those root virtues within one's own mental continuum is the cause that overcomes all experiences of suffering. This is how we gain the understanding of the intent of the teaching on the sufferings of the lower realms.

Gyaltsab Je's presentation is a very comprehensive way of pointing out what the three poisons are and how they are the cause of suffering. In addition he indicates that the opposites of the three poisons are the virtues, which are the causes for a happy life. This is an easy way to derive the main point of the comprehensive presentation.

Venerable Rigsal underwent knee-surgery this morning, which apparently has been successful. So we can now make dedications for her speedy recovery.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright*

*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett*

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*Edited Version*

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develop that realisation. Endeavouring to gain that realisation is the *collection of wisdom*.

Therefore the collections of merit and wisdom are the two essential practices that are the causes for enlightenment. As presented many times in the past, the structure of the path to enlightenment has three main stages:

- ∞ The basis, which is the two truths. Without understanding the two truths, one cannot possibly engage in the practice of bodhicitta and gain the realisation of emptiness. In order to develop bodhicitta and gain the realisation of emptiness, one must first have a clear understanding of the two truths, which are therefore considered as the basis.
- ∞ The path, which is the two collections. The two collections are referred to as the path, because the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom encompass all the practices on the path that leads to an ultimate state of enlightenment.
- ∞ The result, which is gaining the two bodies of the enlightened being. The ultimate goal of engaging the accumulations of merit and wisdom is to gain the two bodies of the Buddha.

One needs to understand how the two resultant bodies of a buddha are dependent on the two collections, which are in turn related to the two truths, which are the basis. If we understand this overview of the whole path, it will deepen our understanding of the relevance of the teaching here.

As I emphasise regularly, we need to be careful to ensure that our practice is steady and constructive, which means that it is founded on the basis of what we already know and understand now. Then we can further develop and deepen our understanding. One of the main pitfalls of our spiritual development is having the attitude of 'oh, I already know that, so what more can I gain from it? Rather, I can undertake higher levels of practice'. If we are not careful and wary, we can easily develop an attitude where we feel contempt for what we know, thinking 'I have already learned that', and focus on seeking something more profound. However in that very pursuit, we might neglect the very basis, which is the profound practice that we need to be working with. As the text itself mentions later, if we jump from one practice to another with the expectation that the alternative will be something better, then in the end we may end up with no substantial result at all.

The main points of the verse we are covering now are:

- ∞ When we adopt those practices that are the opposites of the three poisons, which are the three root virtues, and complement them with a bodhicitta attitude, then that is the collection of merit that is the main cause for obtaining the rupakaya, or the form body of the Buddha.
- ∞ When on the basis of the three root virtues, one endeavour to gain the realisation of emptiness, then that is the collection of merit that is the main cause for obtaining the dharmakaya or the wisdom truth body of the enlightened being.

If any one of us here were to be asked, 'Do you aspire to become a buddha?', then no doubt the answer would be 'Yes, I definitely want to become an enlightened being'. So if that is our aspiration, we need to know the causes for obtaining buddhahood and the methods needed to achieve that goal. If we have an aspiration or a strong wish to do something, but pay little attention to the actual causes, then we will not obtain the desired result. Here we are attempting

to understand how to achieve the aspiration that we all have, which is to become enlightened. So it is reasonable to implement it in our practice

## E. BRANCHES OF THE TWO COLLECTIONS

Under this heading there are two sub-divisions:

1. Brief indication
2. Extensive exposition

### 1. BRIEF INDICATION

This is further sub-divided into two:

- 1.1. Branches of the collection of merit
- 1.2. Branches of the collection of wisdom

#### 1.1. Branches of the collection of merit

This heading has three sub-divisions:

- 1.1.1. Establishing objects of worship
- 1.1.2. Worship
- 1.1.3. Ceasing to worship unworthy objects

Having acknowledged the collection of merit as being a paramount cause to obtain enlightenment, the methods of accumulating merit are presented here. The three main ways are establishing objects of worship for one's offerings, the actual worship is making offerings, and ceasing to worship or make offerings to unworthy objects.

##### 1.1.1. Establishing objects of worship

Again this is sub-divided into two:

- 1.1.1.1. Newly establishing objects of worship
- 1.1.1.2. Worshipping them once established

Here, *newly established objects* refers to exhorting the king to make an effort to construct and establish holy objects, while *worshipping them once they have been established*, refers to either newly constructed objects, as well as already existing objects of worship.

##### 1.1.1.1. NEWLY ESTABLISHING OBJECTS OF WORSHIP

The two verses relating to this heading read:

- 231 *You should respectfully and extensively construct  
Images of Buddha, monuments, and temples  
And provide residences,  
Abundant riches, and so forth.*
- 232 *Please construct from all precious substances  
Images of Buddha with fine proportions,  
Well designed and sitting on lotuses,  
Adorned with all precious substances.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

O king, *you should respectfully and extensively construct temples and provide residence to the Sangha, abundant riches and so forth. To be placed in the temples, please construct from all precious substances, images of Buddha with fine proportions, well designed and sitting on lotuses, adorned with all precious substances.*

The point we need to understand here is that when the king constructs temples and so forth, he is advised to do so in a respectful manner. In this context *respectful* indicates that the construction should not be an occasion for pride. So we need to ensure that our own practices of constructing images or making donations are done in a respectful manner, without ostentation or boasting about the magnitude of the deed, e.g. making a large donation. Giving with respect will help to overcome any sense of pride and superiority.

The object of the offering of temples and residences are the Sangha. Here one needs to understand that the merit one accumulates from offering to the Sangha is superior to the

merit that can be gained from making offerings to even the Buddha or the Dharma! So making offerings to the Sangha is a very meritorious act, far greater than offering to the Buddha and the Dharma.

The second quality is that the construction should be done *extensively*, which indicates that construction should be undertaken carefully and not rushed, and that it should be done in a thorough manner without any negligence.

At a personal level, we can understand that if we support the construction of temples or monasteries or images of the Buddha, by donating whatever we can in a respectful manner, then that will be a very meritorious deed. The real significance is that constructing temples and monasteries and images of the Buddha provides the means for others to accumulate extensive merit. This shows us why making respectful donations is such a meritorious act.

#### 1.1.1.2. WORSHIPPING THEM ONCE ESTABLISHED

The first two lines of Verse 233 are:

*233ab You should sustain with all endeavour  
The excellent doctrine and the communities  
Of monastics ...*

Here again *communities* refers to the Sangha. When one relates to the reason behind it, one will understand the significance of these lines. The Buddha jewel relies on the Dharma jewel which in turn relies upon the Sangha jewel. Therefore the Sangha are the basis for cultivating the Dharma jewel and ultimately the Buddha jewel. So the Sangha are held in very high esteem, and thus making offerings to the Sangha is a very meritorious deed.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*You should sustain* the already accomplished *with all endeavour*; texts of *the excellent doctrine* and necessitates such as food and clothing *for the communities* of fully ordained *monastics* and other Sangha, and provide them with a residence that is free from the harm of enemies and so forth.

As clearly indicated here, when temples or monasteries have been established, one needs to endow these structures with the means that will enable monastic communities to live there. This includes providing the *texts of the excellent doctrine*, which refers to the written texts of the Buddha's sutras and so forth, in addition to *necessities* for the *fully ordained monastics or Sangha such as food and clothing*, and to *provide them with a residence that is free from harm of enemies and so forth*. So in addition to constructing monasteries in a suitable location, the king is being advised to maintain them well. For example, one of the practices is to protect the texts from silverfish and the like with camphor, and another is to ensure that there are no leaks near the texts and statues, and to prevent them from being damaged or destroyed. Of course it is not just a matter of protecting texts and statues, but the Sangha who live in the temples need to be protected and fed well; so they need to be given good food and drink!

#### 1.1.2. Worship

This section refers to how to make offerings.

*233cd ... and decorate monuments  
With gold and jewelled friezes.*

*234 Revere the monuments  
With gold and silver flowers,  
Diamonds, corals, pearls,  
Emeralds, cat's eye gems, and sapphires.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Decorate monuments [stupas] with gold and jewelled friezes and revere the monuments with gold and silver flowers, diamonds, corals, pearls, emeralds, cat's eye gems and sapphires.*

Here *decorate monuments with gold*, can refer to the highest point of a temple or monastery. In Tibet, the topmost parts of many temples and monasteries have these kinds of decorations made from gold.

As the commentary explains, the decorations are made *with gold and jewelled friezes and to revere the monuments with gold and silver flowers, diamonds, corals, pearls, emeralds, cat's eye gems and sapphires*. This indicates that decorations such as flowers are not real flowers, but decorative flowers made out of gold, silver, diamonds, corals and pearls and so forth. Again, one must remember that this particular instruction was given to a wealthy king; Nagarjuna was very skilfully instructing the king to use his riches in a meaningful way, thereby accumulating great merit.

Again, it is to be understood that Nagarjuna's instructions to the king follows the tradition of ornately decorating temples and so forth with the most precious substances possible, such as gold and jewels like emeralds and so forth. Offering whatever precious stones that are available is a means to accumulate extensive merit.

Here, one must not misinterpret the teaching at this point, and think that these precious stones and jewels are to be offered to the Sangha. The specific instruction here is that they are to be used to decorate the monuments and temples and so forth, while good food and clothing are offered to the Sangha!

The specific instruction to the king was that he should establish temples and monasteries in such a place and manner that are free from harm. Once established, he should use his power to protect them and ensure that the communities, or the Sangha, thrive. The decline of Buddhism in India over time occurred due to the lack of protection of monasteries and so forth. External forces were able to destroy monuments and temples and for a long period of time, there were no monasteries, temples or even statues in India, and the Sangha were left to fend for themselves. If they had been continuously protected from earlier times, this may not have happened. As the king has the power and the means to give protection, Nagarjuna exhorts him to do so. That covers the worship of monuments.

Next is making offerings to those who propound the doctrine (notably the teachers of the Dharma).

*235 To revere propounders of doctrine  
Is to do what pleases them—  
[Offering] goods and services  
And relying firmly on the doctrine.*

In explanation of this verse Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*To revere propounders of doctrine is to do what pleases them, offering goods such as clothing and services and relying firmly on the six practices explained previously. Some texts read 'rely firmly on the doctrine'.*

The king was initially instructed to construct temples and revere them by applying extensive decorations, and to make offerings to sustain the Sangha community who live in the monasteries or temples. Now he is being asked to revere or make offerings to those who propound the doctrine or the Dharma. Just as the Sangha are extremely precious, so too are the teachers who propound the doctrine, or the Dharma,

to the Sangha. So the king is being exhorted to offer service to that end.

The next verse refers to how to listen to those who propound the doctrine.

**236** *Listen to teachers with homage  
And respect, serve, and pray to them.  
Always respectfully revere  
The [other] bodhisattvas.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

When listening to the Dharma, *listen to teachers with homage and respect*, mindfully *serve*, ask after their well-being *and pray to them*. *Always respectfully revere the [other] bodhisattvas* as well, who are not your teachers.

In relation to one's own teachers, one listens to the Dharma with *homage and respect*. Likewise, one *mindfully serves* one's teacher and *asks after their well-being*, checking if they are well and comfortable. One should bear in mind that one also needs to pay respect to other great beings such as bodhisattvas, who may not be one's own teacher. This is another profound personal instruction: we may naturally have an affinity or fondness for our own teacher, but we should not neglect or ignore other great teachers or bodhisattvas to whom we must also pay respect.

### **1.1.3. Ceasing to worship unworthy objects**

The verse relating to this outline is:

**237** *You should not respect, revere,  
Or do homage to others, the Forders,  
Because through that the ignorant  
Would become enamoured of the faulty.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with:

*You should not respect, revere or do homage to others, the Forders...*

*The Forders* refers to those who hold onto wrong views or non-Buddhist views. They are also called the Tirthikas. The commentary goes on to explain the reason why one should not revere and pay respect to such Forders:

*... because, if a king pays respect to the ignorant, who are not able to distinguish between faults and virtues, then others, thinking that they are worthy, would become enamoured of the faulty.*

One must understand that even though one should not *revere* or worship Forders, this doesn't mean being disrespectful to them. However, as indicated here, if the king were to pay respect and worship such teachers, then ordinary people who may not have the capacity to distinguish right from wrong, would naturally follow suit. Some people will naturally ape the actions of those in authority, thinking, 'If the king pays respect to such a person, then I will also have to pay them respect'.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

You must completely forsake those who may have the name 'teacher', but who propound false doctrines.

Here, Gyaltsab Je is emphasising that one must completely forsake those who propound false doctrines with erroneous conduct, even those who may have the title 'teacher'. Not only would it be detrimental to one's own progress but, as indicated to the king, it would be detrimental to the progress of others as well.

One needs to pay due respect to one's teacher, because of what the teacher represents, which is that he or she guides

one's development. As indicated in Aryadeva's text, *Four Hundred Verses*, a suitable student should have:

1. An intelligent mind
2. An unprejudiced mind
3. A keen interest<sup>1</sup>

These three qualities ensure that the student will see no faults in their teacher. One of the qualities of a discriminative mind is that it can discriminate between what is right and what is wrong. So when a teacher imparts knowledge, the student will apply the teaching as personal instruction and will validate it with their own intelligence. In that way, the student will naturally have respect for their teacher and so will be inclined to see no fault in them. This is the how one's mind can be trained.

I have mentioned a few times that some passages from *the Four Hundred Verses* are important verses to keep in mind and to memorise if possible. Recently His Holiness also mentioned two particular verses to remember. If those verses which I indicated earlier had been kept in mind, then when His Holiness mentioned them, you would have recalled them.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
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Edited Version*

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<sup>1</sup> See teaching of 16 October 2007.



# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་གྱི་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་།།

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

5 July 2011

With the motivation we generated during the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teaching 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 teaching and put it into practice well'.

## 1.2. Branches of the collection of wisdom

Verse 238 reads:

238 *You should make donations of pages and books  
Of the word of the King of Subduers  
And of the treatises they gave rise to,  
Along with their prerequisites, pens and ink.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary gives this explanation:

*You should make donations of pages and books of the word of the King of Subduers, which is the dominant condition for the treatises they give rise to; along with their prerequisites, pens and ink.*

Here the *conditions* include the writing of the treatises as well as their prerequisites, pens and ink. This means making donations towards the purchase or production of books of the Buddha's own words as well as the treatises they give rise to (such as the commentaries and so forth). In addition, writing them oneself or contributing to the conditions for writing them, is also a highly meritorious act. Just as writing the Buddha's words or teachings is highly meritorious, writing the study group exams is, as I remind you regularly, also a very meritorious act, and thus shouldn't be taken lightly.

239 *As ways to increase wisdom,  
Wherever there is a school in the land  
Provide for the livelihood of teachers  
And give lands to them [for their provision].*

As Gyalsab Je's commentary explains:

*As ways to increase the collection of wisdom, wherever there is a school in the land, provide for the livelihood of teachers who teach reading, writing, mathematics and so forth, and give lands and homes to them [for their provision].*

As indicated here, the ultimate purpose of providing for the livelihood of teachers who teach in schools and so forth is to increase the means for the collection of wisdom. Basic levels of study, such as the general arts of reading, writing and mathematics and so forth form the basis that provides the means to ultimately engage in the collection of wisdom. Thus engaging in study, as well as providing for others to engage in study, serves as the means to increase the collection of wisdom, which is a highly meritorious deed.

As I regularly emphasise, as we have the right conditions it is important that we try to gain a clear understanding of what emptiness is. Even though at our level it may only be a mere intellectual understanding, it becomes the platform to gain a more profound understanding of emptiness. By

working at accumulating the means for the collection of wisdom, an intellectual understanding of emptiness will eventually turn into a conceptual understanding, which can then lead on to the direct realisation of emptiness. So we need to understand that providing the means for even the very basic level education that is means to collect wisdom, is highly meritorious.

Lest we lose the point with the detailed explanations that are presented here, we need to refer back to the earlier presentation, where Nagarjuna exhorts the king not to be daunted by the prospect of having to accumulate vast amount of merit and wisdom in order to achieve enlightenment. You will recall that Nagarjuna explained that there is no need to be daunted, because there are so many different ways to engage in collecting merit and wisdom. These verses are a presentation of some of those many ways.

As explained in sutras such as the *Vajra Cutter Sutra*, which many of you would have read a number of times, the merit gained from the mere recollection of emptiness is unimaginable and inexpressible. Even if the three worlds were to be filled with precious jewels, it would still not equal the value of the merit collected from reading, writing and contemplating, as well as explaining to others the points on emptiness. Therefore we need to remember those points, and encourage ourselves to contemplate emptiness as much as possible. We need to make queries such as: What does emptiness mean? What is the benefit in gaining an understanding of it?

As the realisation of emptiness is the ultimate antidote for overcoming the delusions, the process of gaining an understanding of emptiness will definitely help to reduce those delusions. So there is great benefit in studying to gain the understanding of emptiness.

## 2. EXTENSIVE EXPOSITION

This is sub-divided into two:

- 2.1. Branches of the collection of merit
- 2.2. Branches of the collection of wisdom

### 2.1. Branches of the collection of merit

Here there are four sub-divisions:

- 2.1.1. Giving one's own property
- 2.1.2. Other giving
- 2.1.3. Giving away all wealth
- 2.1.4. Giving based on different needs

#### 2.1.1. Giving one's own property

240 *In order to alleviate the suffering  
Of sentient beings—the old, young, and  
infirm—  
You should establish through the estates [that  
you control]  
Doctors and barbers throughout your country.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary explains that:

*Giving one's own property* has fourteen categories.

These fourteen sub-categories are relatively easy to understand and is just a matter of putting them into practice.

The **first** category is

*In order to alleviate the suffering of sentient beings – the old, young and infirm, the sick and impoverished...*

The suffering of our human existence is very obvious, so the king is being exhorted to engage in providing for those who are incapable of caring for themselves, including *the old*, the *young* (the literal translation of the Tibetan is 'infant'), *the infirm*, *the sick* and *the impoverished*. All these beings are

incapable of caring for themselves and there is always a need to provide for their well-being.

We can all relate to these very practical ways of helping when we consider our social welfare system. There are, for example, educational schemes to assist those who are younger than 18; there are sickness and disability benefits available to those who are incapable of working; and the elderly have access to pensions and other benefits. The system is in place because of the needs of those groups, and we need to understand the very practical nature of these benefits.

Earlier we meditated (as we do regularly) on the practice of giving and taking, which is specifically the practice of taking in the suffering of other beings, while giving them one's joy, merit, wealth and so forth. This practice can assist us in practical ways. Indeed, when we sincerely undertake this meditation practice, we will definitely notice a difference in our own attitudes when we encounter suffering beings.

During an early part of our life when we had no specific training for taking the suffering of others, we may have felt a bit helpless when we saw someone suffering. Likewise we did not know how to give our joy to others. After having engaged in this meditation practice, however, our whole attitude will be different when we see someone suffering. If there is no practical or physical way to benefit them, we can work on imagining taking in their suffering and try to give our benefits and so forth to them. To that extent it is really important that we train our mind to engage in these ways of benefiting others.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary states, the practical way to benefit these beings is:

*... you should establish through the estates [that you control] doctors and barbers throughout your country.*

The advice to the king is to use his wealth and estates to help the needy, including infants and minors, the very old and the sick and those who are impoverished. The king is thus exhorted to provide the means, for example establishing hospitals and clinics with doctors, as well as practical services like barbers for those who cannot afford to pay, as well as other personal needs. The reference to the king's estates means that he should not expect the help to come from others, but that he should use his own wealth and resources. Rather than leaving his wealth to his own sons, daughters or relatives the king is being told to use it to benefit others, in particular the needy. We can also take this advice on a personal level.

The **second** of the fourteen categories relates to the next verse:

**241** *O One of Good Wisdom, please provide  
Hostels, parks, dikes,  
Ponds, rest-houses, water-vessels,  
Beds, food, hay, and wood.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

*O one of good wisdom, please provide hostels for guests in towns and along the road. In the middle of cities provide parks with flowers and trees,...*

Here there is a traditional distinction between towns and cities. I have explained this previously, so we need not go into any further detail of that here. However, as indicated by the English terms, a town has fewer people than a city. Practical ways of benefiting those living in towns are to provide hostels for guests in towns and along the road, as well as providing parks with flowers and trees in the cities. We can all relate to the great benefits of having parks; seeing flowers in

the beautiful gardens of the parks gives us a sense of joy, and even a sense of relaxation. It brings pleasure to the mind, so to that extent it actually benefits others. As the commentary further explains:

*... dikes, ponds with beautiful arches on either side and beautiful paths, rest houses, water vessels, beds, food, hay and wood.*

Providing these things is a very practical way to benefit those who live in towns and cities. As the king is someone who is endowed with *good wisdom*, it is appropriate for him use his wealth to ensure the life of his subjects in towns and cities is comfortable and pleasant. Of course that is also of benefit to the king, as it is easier to rule subjects who are content and happy. So what it is of benefit to his subjects is, in turn, beneficial for the king.

The **third** category relates to these two lines:

**242ab** *Please establish rest-houses  
In all towns, at temples, and in all cities*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Please establish rest-houses in all towns, at temples and in all cities,*

This relates to the practical benefits of providing rest-houses and so forth for those who visit these places.

The **fourth** category is:

**242cd** *And provide water-vessels  
On all arid roadways.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains:

*... and provide water-vessels on all arid roadways.*

This refers to roadways where there is a scarcity of water.

We can see how Nagarjuna was extremely skilful in providing advice to the king in relation to his own spiritual development i.e. practices relating to Dharma, as well as how to engage in his kingly duties. Specific advice to the king about how to perform his duties is explained in the fourth chapter, Royal Policy.

The **fifth** of the fourteen categories is:

**243** *Always care compassionately  
For the sick, the unprotected, those stricken  
With suffering, the lowly, and the poor  
And take special care to nourish them.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Always care compassionately for the sick, the unprotected, those stricken with suffering, the lowly from lower castes and the miserable poor. And take special care to nourish them respectfully.*

As indicated here, the special instruction is to again care for those who endure unfortunate circumstances, such as the sick. We all know that it is a very difficult period for everyone concerned when someone is stricken with disease. The second group referred to here are *the unprotected*, those who don't have protection, for example, the victims of domestic violence and so forth. Then there are those who are stricken with other types of *suffering*. *The lowly*, as indicated in the commentary, are those from the lower castes.

In ancient India and even to this day the lower castes are subjected to discrimination. As you may well know, they are looked down upon and are scorned. Thus the king is exhorted to take care of those who are from a lower caste. In Australia we may not be confronted by castes, however we could perhaps relate to the distinction between rich and poor. The rich seem to scorn those who are not as wealthy,

and those who are less wealthy may despise the rich, calling them 'snobbish' and so forth.

We should make a note of two main points from this explanation.

1. To *always care compassionately for the sick the unprotected, those stricken with suffering, the lowly from lower castes and the miserable poor*. Caring compassionately indicates that it is not enough just to have a compassionate thought, but that one actually needs to extend care to those who one feels compassion.

2. To *take special care to nourish them respectfully*. This is in line with the practices for developing compassion that are explained in other teachings such as Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings. Having developed a compassionate attitude towards others one should then extend compassion and care to others to the extent of one's own ability.

This is a great point that we need to consider. Even though we have not yet developed the capacity to give all our wealth or sacrifice our body and so forth; we can train in that practice at the level of intention through practices such as *tong len*, which is the giving and taking practice that we did earlier. On a practical level we can engage in benefitting others to best of our capacity. This is a very important point.

Initially we train our mind and cultivate compassion in our heart. The next step is to benefit others by practical means. As indicated here, it is not enough to just feel compassionate, but important to actually extend care, particularly to those who are less fortunate. Also indicated here, the care should be offered respectfully. The king is being advised against feeling proud and pompous about his good deeds and to undertake these practices in a respectful manner.

We need to apply these instructions at a personal level to the best of our capacity. When we encounter those who are sick, or in need, or less fortunate than ourselves, we can provide help to them in a respectful manner to the extent that we are capable.

The verse relating to the **sixth** category reads:

**244** *Until you have given to monastics and beggars  
Seasonally-appropriate food and drink,  
As well as produce, grain, and fruit,  
You should not partake of them.*

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

*Until you have given to monastics and beggars seasonally-appropriate food and drink, warm in the winter and cooling in the summer, as well as produce, grain and fruit, you O king, should not partake of them.*

In countries like Thailand and Burma, the tradition is that when the lay community serve food, monastics are served first, and the lay people eat only when the monastics have eaten. This follows ancient traditions when the Sangha were held in high esteem. In Tibetan monastic communities, when the lay community come to offer the monks food and drink at a puja, for example, members of the lay community can only eat after the monks in the main assembly hall of the monastery have offered the food and begun to eat. This is in line with that ancient tradition. Thus the king is exhorted to provide *seasonally-appropriate food* for others, particularly the *monastics* and the impoverished such as *beggars*, and advised not to partake of the food until the monastics have taken their food.

The **seventh** category is indicated in this verse:

**245** *At the sites of the water-vessels  
Place shoes, umbrellas, water-filters,*

*Tweezers for removing thorns,  
Needles, thread, and fans.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

For those who do not have shoes and are exhausted by the heat, *at the sites of the water-vessels, place shoes, umbrellas, water-filters, tweezers for removing thorns, needles, thread and fans.*

The king is instructed to provide for the needy in other ways, such as providing *shoes* at places like rest houses. For those who are exhausted by the heat, the king should place things such as *umbrellas, water filters* (for the ordained to filter the water prior to drinking), and *tweezers for removing thorns; needles and thread* as well as *fans* to keep cool.

The verse relating to the **eighth** category reads:

**246** *Within vessels place the three medicinal fruits,  
The three fever medicines, butter,  
Honey, eye medicines, and antidotes to poison,  
And write out mantras and prescriptions)*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

For sick patients and guests, *within vessels place the three medicinal fruits, the three fever medicines, butter, honey, eye medicines, and antidotes to poison.*

Here the king is being exhorted to take care of the sick, as well as guests who are in great need because they have come from a different region and are unfamiliar with the place, and so a list of the provisions they may need is presented.

The commentary continues with further instructions:

*And write out mantras* which by merely reciting, alleviates illnesses *and prescriptions* that prescribes the correct antidote for particular diseases.

The **ninth** category is:

**247** *At the sites of the vessels place  
Salves for the body, feet, and head,  
As well as wool, stools, gruel, jars [for getting  
water],  
Cooking pots, axes, and so forth.*

These are very practical items. Their modern equivalents are all the things that are provided when we stay at a hotel or an apartment.

Gyaltsab Je explains:

For the purpose of guests, *at the site of the vessels place, salves for the body, feet, and head. As well as wool, stools, gruel, jars [for getting water], cooking pots* to cook foods such as meat, *axes* to chop wood *and so forth.*

The next category is the **tenth**:

**248** *Please have small containers  
In the shade filled with sesame,  
Rice, grains, foods, molasses,  
And suitable water.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*Please have small containers in the shade filled with sesame, rice, grains, foods, molasses and suitable water.*

The verse relating to the **eleventh** category reads:

**249** *At the openings of ant-hills  
Please have trustworthy persons  
Always put food, water,  
Sugar, and piles of grain.*

As the commentary reads:

*At the openings of ant-hills, please have trustworthy persons. Always put food, water, sugar and piles of grain. Trustworthy persons could include the king himself.*

This particular instruction to the king is similar to the instruction in the Vinaya teachings about how to care for one's environment. If there are *ant-hills* and so forth, one needs to protect them and not disturb the ants. That is because in the event of a disturbance, the ants lose the ability to provide for themselves, so food and the items listed in the verse should be placed at the opening of the ant-hill to help the ants.

The next verse corresponds to the **twelfth** category:

**250** *Before and after taking food  
Always appropriately offer fare  
To hungry ghosts, dogs,  
Ants, birds, and so forth.*

As the commentary states:

*Before and after taking food, always appropriately offer fare  
to hungry ghosts, dogs, ants, birds and so forth.*

Little explanation is required for these verses as they are quite clear. The practice of offering to hungry ghosts is that after dedicating a portion of food to the hungry ghost, imagine them to be in your circle and then offer the food to the hungry ghost. Then they will get the essence of that food, which is beneficial for them.

The following verse relates to the **thirteenth** category:

**251** *Provide extensive care  
For the persecuted, the victims of crop failure,  
The stricken, those suffering contagion,  
And for beings in conquered areas.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Provide extensive care such as foods and so forth, for the  
persecuted by the king and like,...*

This could refer to those persecuted by kings of other lands, and those who have been banished from other countries and so forth.

*... the victims of crop failure, the stricken, those suffering  
contagion, and for beings in conquered areas.*

This refers to providing for *the victims of crop failure*, which could also refer to being on the verge of famine; *contagion* refers to a contagious disease; and *the beings in conquered areas* are the victims of wars and the like.

The **fourteenth** and last category, relates to the first two lines of the next verse:

**252ab** *Provide stricken farmers  
With seeds and sustenance.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je states:

The king is instructed to *provide stricken farmers* who lack seeds, plough oxen and so forth, *with seeds and sustenance.*

A farmer's crop may fail, or he may not have sufficient seeds to plant a crop. When such events occur, the king is instructed to help those farmers with the seeds for the right crop, along with sustenance and nourishment to enable them to work in the fields while preparing their crops for harvest.

### 2.1.2. Other giving

This section has nine categories, which we can leave it for our next session. This part of the text should be relatively easy for you to follow.

*Student: How do we actually practice the offering of food to hungry ghosts? Do we leave some food on our own plate? Do we place it outside, and for how long do we leave it out for them?*

The practice mainly involves having good intentions rather than performing it as mere ritual. However along with the good intention, you can offer them some food. After your meal, you can place the portion of your meal that you put aside for them in your garden, for example. You don't have to leave it on your plate. The key thing is that once you have made up your mind to leave a portion to the hungry ghosts, you don't then eat it yourself!

The main part of the practice is the intention of giving to the hungry ghosts who are far less fortunate than ourselves. Their primary suffering is hunger and thirst, therefore the intention is that they will benefit from being given a portion of one's food. With that intention, dedicate that food to them, and finally generate the thought that they have been satisfied with that food. It is said that some beings will actually benefit from such a positive intention and act of giving.

Actually it is a mutually beneficial practice as it is also a way to increase one's practice of generosity. At a more expansive level, there is the meditation practice of giving and taking, where you imagine give sustenance to the vast number of hungry ghosts in their realms, who are stricken with great pangs of hunger and thirst.

On a practical level, however, if one is not careful and someone were to see you taking out food on a daily basis, they might think you have gone a bit crazy, because there are no hungry ghosts to be seen. Therefore we need to know the real significance of this practice and not get too carried away with how to do it. This reminds me of a young girl who would tell her grandmother, (who has a habit of saying mantras wherever she went, even in town) not to recite mantras too loudly, otherwise people might think she had gone crazy.

Sometimes there is purpose for keeping quiet about what we experience with particular practices and so forth. If you start blurting out your experiences to others, people might be taken aback and think that you are talking about weird things, or nonsense, and conclude that you might have gone crazy. So that is good reason to keep certain practices to oneself.

Thinking in this practical way sheds light on the purpose for keeping certain practices secret. If you tell someone, who has no idea who Tara is and no knowledge of the deity aspect, 'I have visions of Tara and she speaks to me', the person you are telling might think 'he or she has gone completely crazy!' So if one does not pay heed to these things, there may be the danger one will be taken away to a mental institution!

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Edited Version*

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much. Even though I may not have any great insights or realisations to share with others, one thing I can boast about is that I have a happy mind.

Despite the fact that I don't have anything valuable to share or give, we can definitely achieve something meaningful together from the good intention that we generate from both sides—a positive motivation from my side as well as from your side. I truly believe that this can contribute to achieving a great purpose. The happy state of mind that I possess is the only valuable thing that I have. In terms of friendship it is like my best friend and companion, and in terms of wealth it is my most valuable possession. Wherever I go, whether I am in my room alone or when I go out, I always carry it with me, which is why I consider it as my most valuable asset.

Now let us remind ourselves to generate the positive motivation for receiving the teachings, such as: In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well. When we generate such a motivation from the depth of our heart then it really does make our purpose in being here meaningful.

## 2.1. Branches of the collection of merit (cont.)

### 2.1.2. Other giving

As explained in the commentary, this outline is divided into nine different forms of giving. The first two are:

*252cd Eliminate high taxes [levied by the previous monarch].*

*Reduce the tax rate [on harvests].*

In Tibetan, the root text only says, *Eliminate high taxes; levied and imposed by the previous monarch* comes from the commentary.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je says

'Other giving' has nine categories:

**First**, *eliminate high taxes* levied by the previous monarch.

This explains that that the king should *eliminate high taxes* and in that way making it much easier for the subject to pay their dues. It is an act of generosity in that it helps the needy by making it easier for those who are having difficulties in paying their taxes.

Here *taxes* also refers to unreasonably harsh high taxes. The Tibetan word *tsen-thap* has a connotation of punitive taxes, imposed without any reference to the well-being of the subjects. It implies that these taxes are imposed without the subjects having any say about it, and that payment is enforced vigorously, regardless of the suffering this causes the subjects. So Nagarjuna is instructing the king to eliminate any unreasonable high taxes levied by a previous monarch, thus providing relief for his subjects. *Levied by the previous monarch* also carries the implication that the king should also be careful not apply such taxes in the future.

**Second** is *reduce the tax rate*.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Reduce the tax rate on harvests and so forth.*

The term *on harvests* indicates that this form of giving specifically applies to farmland. It also carries the connotation that taxes are to be collected fairly from all. This means that the government takes no more than is needed and that influential people are not exempt or favoured.

*253 Protect [the poor] from the pain of wanting [your wealth].*

*Set up no [new] tolls and reduce those [that are heavy].*

*Also free [traders from other areas] from the afflictions*

*That come from waiting at your door.*

The **third** of the nine categories is *protecting the poor from wanting wealth*. Gyaltsab Je's commentary doesn't give any further explanation saying:

*Protect the poor from the pain of wanting your wealth.*

What is missing in the translation is the connotation of the Tibetan word translated here as *poor*. It doesn't relate so much to any general poverty but specifically to those who are so crushed by debt that they are not able to repay even the interest on their original debt, so the debt increases to the point where they are in an unstoppable downward spiral where they accumulate interest on top of interest. This is a very pitiful state to be in; it causes great misery for any individual or family who is in that state.

So here *protect* refers to those who are in debt. In Tibet there were people in debt from generation to generation; they inherited their father's debt, which he in turn inherited from his father. So the burden of generations of debt was really heavy. Soon after His Holiness the Dalai Lama assumed temporal power, he absolved these debtors of the need to repay their debts. Nagarjuna is advising the king to use his power to protect people from such poverty and misery.

With respect to the **fourth** and **fifth** categories Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Set up no new tolls and reduce those that are heavy.*

*Set up no new tolls* refers to not setting up new tolls while the *fifth*, *reducing those which are heavy*, refers to reducing heavy tolls imposed by a previous monarch.

Gyaltsab Je describes the **sixth** category as

*Also free traders from other areas and from the afflictions of those that come waiting at your door.*

This refers to freeing *traders who come from other areas* from heavy taxes as well as those who wait at your door, or who beg to be absolved of their heavy taxes and so forth. *From the afflictions* refers the particular afflictions that cause their problems and worries.

The **seventh** category is described in the following two lines:

*254ab Eliminate robbers and thieves  
In your own and others' countries.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Eliminate robbers and thieves in your own and other's countries.*

This refers to *eliminating known robbers and thieves* who cause the king's subjects much worry and fear. At a

personal level this refers to being careful not to engage in the act of stealing.

The **eighth** category is listed in the last two lines of the verse:

**254cd** *Please set prices fairly  
And keep profits level [even during scarcity].*

With respect to this Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Please set prices fairly, and keep profits level even during scarcity.*

This relates to setting prices that are fair to both buyers and sellers, so that the sellers make a reasonable profit, while the buyers don't have to pay unfairly high prices. In other words it means setting prices at a level where there is equal benefit for the sellers as well as the buyers.

The **ninth** and final category is covered in these two verses:

**255** *You should know full well [the counsel]  
That your ministers offer,  
And should always enact it  
If it nurses the world.*

**256** *Just as you are intent on thinking  
Of what could be done to help yourself,  
So you should be intent on thinking  
Of what could be done to help others.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*What need is there to say much, you should know full well the counsel that your ministers offer, and since there may be things said that harm the world, should always enact what is virtuous and good, and only if it nurses the world.*

*What need is there to say much* indicates that as the king is learned and from a noble clan, he has a great deal of knowledge already. So as the king is quite intelligent and so forth, says Nagarjuna, there is no need to explain this in too much in detail.

*You should know full well the counsel that your ministers offer* indicates that the king doesn't have to make all the decisions himself, as he has a council of ministers. Here however, Nagarjuna is advising the king to listen to what his ministers have to say, but at the same time to use his own intelligence to discern if the advice they offer is of benefit or not.

*Since there are things that harm the world*, indicates that the king should not act on things that may harm the world. On the other hand he *should always enact what is virtuous and good and only if it nurses the world*.

So in a very practical way, Nagarjuna is advising the king of the importance of listening to his council first, without any assumptions about their intent. Again we can use this as personal instruction. We should carefully listen to advice and not act upon it if it is harmful to oneself or others. If, on the other hand, it is beneficial, or virtuous and good, and it nurses or benefits the world, then we should definitely act on that advice.

In relation to the last two lines of verse 256, Gyaltsab Je says:

*Nagarjuna further instructs the king: just as you are intent on thinking of what could be done to help*

*yourself, so you should intent on thinking of what could be done to help others respectfully.*

This condensed advice indicates that what is useful and beneficial for oneself is also beneficial for others. Again this very practical and profound advice that Nagarjuna shared with the king is also a personal instruction that we should adopt. This advice can be interpreted as meaning that one should respectfully return help and benefit to those who help oneself. This is really very practical advice that we need to adopt.

It is all too easy to return harm to those who benefit us, rather than being grateful and appreciative. When we really think about it, that is quite disgraceful behaviour. So we need to really protect ourselves from such misdeeds, while at the same time recognising those who are genuinely kind and concerned about us, and returning that favour with respect and kind words.

In one of his works Lama Tsong Khapa mentioned that the action of those who return harm to those who benefit them is worse than the behaviour of an animal. This implies that even animals recognise those who have been kind to them. We see, for example, dogs who respond with great affection to their owners who take care of them. They wag their tails and roll round showing in their own way their appreciation for their owner. If humans are not able to even recognise, let alone appreciate those who are kind to them, then their behaviour is definitely worse than animals in that sense. So we really need to be mindful of that.

This is all practical advice that will contribute to our well-being and happiness in this life. We need not think about the great long term benefits in a future life, as we are being given practical advice on how to develop inner happiness and well-being in our relationships (whether it be with another individuals or within a family situation) in this life. If appreciation is shown to us and seemingly affectionately returned, then there is mutual good feeling and a sense of well-being.

In the relationship between a master and his dog (or other pets) the master, of course, takes the initiative in caring for the dog by feeding it and so forth. When the dog responds with great affection, showing its appreciation in that way, this gives the master joy and happiness. It is even more case between humans; whether it is a family situation or people living together, when they are kind and affectionate to each other and show appreciation, then a genuine sense of well-being can be derived from that.

I really admire those who take great measures in the care of their pets. Some time ago on TV I saw Oprah Winfrey grieving over the loss of her pet dog. I have never seen a show with Oprah crying to that extent! Normally she tries to be very joyous and uplifting, but on that particular show she was sobbing so much. I don't know if she would have cried so much if her mother passed away – although I am not sure if her mother has indeed passed away! There are cases where people don't feel much sorrow when relatives die, but when their pet dies they feel very great sorrow. Losing a pet and feeling such sorrow is an indication of how close Oprah was to her pet dog. Whenever a close companion in life, pet or human,

passes on then there is grief and sadness, which shows the extent of their affection. The main point of this verse however, is that we need to recognise those who have been kind to us, and respectfully return that appreciation as well.

Going back to an essential point mentioned earlier: In verse 255 the king is instructed to listen to his council and ministers. The personal advice following from this is that when others give us advice with a good intention it is appropriate for us really listen to that advice. However listening respectfully to advice given with a good intention, perhaps by relatives or/and close friends, doesn't necessarily mean that we have to immediately apply that advice. Even if it comes from a friend and is intended well, it is still necessary for us to analyse what that advice entails, and if it is really useful or meaningful then we should follow it. But if we do not find it useful or meaningful or even harmful then we need to disregard it.

### **2.1.3. Giving away all wealth**

This outline is explained in two verses, the first of which is

*257 If only for a moment make yourself  
Available for the use of others  
Just as earth, water, fire, wind, medicine,  
And forests [are available to all].*

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

*Just as things which are not owned by anyone such as earth, water, fire, wind, medicine and forests are available to all, likewise O king, If only for a moment, make yourself available for the use of others.*

We can also relate this analogy of things that are not owned, such as *earth, water, fire, wind, medicine, forests* to areas like the national parks, which can be used by everyone. Even though they are not created with that intention, they are readily available for all to use. Using that analogy the king is being advised that although he may not make himself and his wealth available to others continuously, he should make himself available for the benefit of others even it is only for a moment.

*258 Even during their seventh step  
Merit measureless as the sky  
Is generated in bodhisattvas  
Whose attitude is to give all wealth away.*

In relation to this, Gyaltsab Je states:

*Even during their seventh step, without any extra effort, merit measureless as the sky is generated in bodhisattvas whose attitude is to give all wealth away.*

With their aspiration of bodhicitta, bodhisattvas are committed to obtaining enlightenment for the sake of all. They keep their aspiration in mind at all times, even when they are walking, for example, seven steps. Even though those seven steps will not help them to achieve that state of enlightenment quicker, they become a great meritorious act because of that great aspiration in the bodhisattvas' minds. Because of the great noble intention that they have in their mind, which is that to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, each step they take becomes a means to attain their goal.

Of course their noble intention entails an altruistic mind of wishing to give away all their wealth and possessions. So due to their motivation and good intention bodhisattvas obtain great merit. Thus, it is being emphasised here, it is appropriate to engage in deeds similar to that, and this advice applies to us just as much as to the king.

There is another interpretation, which is that when bodhisattvas take seven steps towards others with their altruistic intention of giving everything away, then even though they are not able to actually fulfil the hopes and wishes of all beings by giving everything away, the merit that they gain from those that seven steps is measureless.

We can apply this understanding at a personal level to whatever practice we engage in. For example in the *tong len* practice, the giving and taking meditation that we do, we imagine taking in the suffering of all beings and then we give away all our body, wealth and merit. In practice we may not be able to actually give away our body, or our wealth or all our merit right now, but the mere intention that we generate will be the source of a great amount of merit. So we can see how a practice, even at the mere level of intention, is very valuable, and we should not underestimate the merit that we gain from practices such as this.

Normally the next session would be discussion and the following one would be the exam. However, because I need to do the White Tara retreat in preparation for the initiation, I intend to teach for the following two weeks, with discussion on the first Tuesday of August and the exam on the second Tuesday of August. This revised schedule will enable me to complete that retreat.

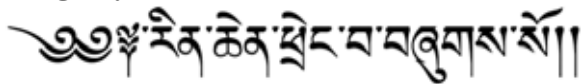
The Study Group seminar this year will be on August 21, so you need to decide what the subject would be. It needs to be a subject that is manageable for everyone to be able to research and study, as well as being beneficial. Once the subject is decided, different groups will prepare aspects of it. It would also good to have perhaps some secret questions prepared by each group to ask another group, so that people can add to their knowledge on the spot.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
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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

19 July 2011

With the appropriate motivation we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

Just as we have attempted in our short session now, it would be really beneficial to do some meditation in our daily lives.

One noteworthy aspect of our tradition is that the object of meditation is specified as being a virtuous object. Although there are various techniques of meditation, our tradition emphasises that the object of meditation needs to be a virtuous object. So, it is crucial that we keep in mind that the object of our meditation contributes to increasing virtue. Periodically I attempt to share points such as these with you, but I'm not too sure whether you take note of them!

The definition of *mental stabilisation*, (*ti-nge-zin* in Tibetan) is a mental factor which focuses single-pointedly on a virtuous object. Thus, because the object of focus is a virtuous object, by default a mind in meditation has to be a virtuous state of mind.

You may recall that His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentioned in his recent teachings that someone had confided in him that after having meditated for a long period of time, his mind tended to become more negative and that he lost his sense of joy and happiness. In mentioning this His Holiness was making a very crucial point. If you were diligently taking notes during the teachings you would have written that down, and if you were listening attentively, you would recall His Holiness mentioning that. If you weren't paying attention to the implications, you might have considered it as a passing remark. However His Holiness was making an essential point. Did you get that point? It's not too obscure if you think about it.

I have other stories to share on that note as well; however I won't take the time to go into them now. On a positive note, there are those who have confided in me that having come here regularly to practise meditation, they have gained great benefit as it has really helped their mind. One person, who was engaged in other forms of meditation said that after coming here and listening to the teachings, he realised that the emphasis was on love and compassion and on how to benefit others. These points, which are emphasised here again and again, seem to have made a strong impression on him. Of course those of us who have been hearing about this for many years may take it for granted, and not think of it as being particularly noteworthy. Nevertheless someone coming from outside, and hearing it for the first time, sees it as being a very significant and essential point.

## 2.1.4. Giving based on different needs

This refers to giving to others based on their particular needs; it has three subdivisions:

2.1.4.1. Giving to humans with certain needs

2.1.4.2. Giving to the needy

2.1.4.3. Giving that accords with doctrine [or the Dharma]

### 2.1.4.1. GIVING TO HUMANS WITH CERTAIN NEEDS

Here *giving* relates to giving to those with particular needs. The particular example used here is giving women to those who are in need of women. My interpretation is that this may refer to a custom that we had in Tibet: when the time came for a son to get married, the parents would approach another family who had a daughter. Likewise, when the time came for a daughter to get married, the family would approach another family with a son and ask for the son to be her groom. This is my interpretation of the example given here, although there might be other interpretations as well.

When we think about it, this formal approach to marriage has its own value. The modern tradition is that a boy decides which girl he fancies, and a girl decides who she wants to have as a boyfriend or husband. But this may also cause complications, because a rift may develop between the parents and the child if the family doesn't agree, and some hostility may arise too. In the old tradition, each family would check out the suitability of the other and when both families mutually agreed upon a marriage, there was less complication. Furthermore, in the event of a conflict between the husband and wife, then both families would help to mediate and try to mend the ties because they shared a mutual interest of wanting their children to be together happily. Today, however, the solution seems to be to just get a divorce.

There are two verses relating to this outline, the first of which is:

259 *If you give to those so seeking  
Girls of beauty well adorned,  
You will thereby attain  
Thorough retention of the excellent doctrine.*

In his commentary Gyalsab Je explains:

*If you give to those so seeking girls of beauty well adorned  
with precious ornaments, you will thereby attain  
thorough retention of the excellent doctrine.*

The Tibetan word *bumo*, translated here as *girl*, can also relate to daughter. When presenting his daughter as a bride to those who are seeking her, the advice to the king is to not withhold, but to give wholeheartedly without any sense of loss, and present her *well adorned with precious ornaments*.

Traditionally, when a daughter is given as a bride, the family of the groom expect that she will bring a dowry of ornaments, jewellery and so forth. If the king was not being mindful and was stingy, then that could cause problems down the track. Therefore the very practical advice given to the king is, 'When others seek your daughter as a bride, then present her with ornaments and jewellery and so forth'.

As result of giving with a generous mind, without any sense of loss, the king will attain *thorough retention of the excellent doctrine*. Here, *thorough retention* (*zung* in Tibetan) refers to a specific *siddhi* or attainment. Attaining the *siddhi* of thorough retention means that one will be able to retain in one's memory whatever words and meanings one hears about the Dharma indefinitely. This is a great attainment because of not forgetting, one will have access to the doctrine at all times, enabling one to impart it to others as well. The ability to explain or expound the Dharma to others with confidence is yet another *siddhi* (called *powa* in Tibetan). Those are the positive consequences that arise from the act of giving without any sense of loss.

The second verse relating to this heading is:

**260** *Formerly the Subduer provided  
Along with every need and so forth  
Eighty thousand girls  
With all adornments.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary gives this explanation of the verse:

If in doubt whether it is appropriate, consider how *formerly the Subduer* (when he was a renowned king) *provided along with every need and so forth, eighty-thousand girls with all adornments.*

In a previous lifetime, when the Buddha was a great and majestic king, he generously presented girls (his daughters) to others who sought them, beautified with all adornments and so forth. The main advice here is to be generous, even when it entails losing someone very close such as one's own daughter.

#### 2.1.4.2. GIVING TO THE NEEDY

The verse relating to this heading reads:

**261** *Lovingly give to beggars  
Various and glittering  
Clothes, adornments, perfumes,  
Garlands, and enjoyments.*

Gyaltsab Je explains this verse thus:

The king is instructed to *lovingly give to beggars* plenty of *various and glittering clothes* which are free from defects; likewise *give adornments, perfumes, garlands and enjoyments* such as food and drink.

Here *various* relates to being plentiful in number, and *glittering clothes free from defects*, refers to clothes considered to be of proper attire, without stains, not torn or damaged, and which are fit to wear. Along with that there are the *adornments, perfumes, garlands, and other enjoyments such as food and drink.*

The emphasis here is that the king needs to give to the needy with a loving attitude, and it also indicates that he needs to be respectful whilst doing so. You may give a poor person something, but it might be with an attitude of scorn, or just wanting to get rid of them quickly, and generally being disrespectful.

Generally when we give to someone of a higher status we do so with a certain amount of respect because of who they are. We also show respect to objects of worship such as teachers and so forth, because they are worthy of respect. We also show respect to those of equal status because we don't wish to be considered as disrespectful by our peers. However there is danger of becoming disrespectful to those of a lower status. Obviously those seeking help from the king would not be of equal or higher status, and most likely would be quite impoverished and really needy. Therefore the king is instructed that although engaging in generous acts is a highly virtuous deed, he must be mindful of doing so with a loving attitude, implying that he should be respectful.

Although this advice is specifically directed to the king, we need to take it as personal advice. We are already acquainted with the great benefits of being generous; it has been emphasised again and again in the teachings that we need to be generous. The point here is that we should engage in the act of generosity in a respectful and loving way, which can arise when we think about the plight of the other person. So when we give to someone who is in need, we can empathise with them by thinking about how we would feel if we were in need. When we relate to our own suffering, we can

understand the suffering of the other person. By relating to the suffering that the other is going through, a loving attitude can arise when we give to them.

On a practical level, this also relates to the animals that we may feed, for example birds or other animals in the wild. Having contemplated their plight and suffering, we may give them food with a loving attitude, wishing them to be relieved from their particular suffering. Such an attitude makes an act of generosity highly meaningful.

Feeding an animal is a good example of the value of giving to others with a loving attitude. The animal that is being fed will immediately respond to the affectionate way in which the food is given. When they finish eating they will stay near the person in a very comfortable way, feeling content and happy and very secure. They have genuine trust in the person, because they were fed with a loving attitude. If food is given to an animal in an abrupt or menacing way, the animal will grab the food quickly and run away; it will not stay around for fear of being harmed. It will quickly forget it was you who gave the food and will try to run away if approached. Whereas, those animals who know that the food was given with love and care feel very comfortable and will stay around the person. This goes to show that even animals have the intelligence to understand and appreciate that which is given with a loving attitude, and out of genuine concern.

What we need to understand is the way the animal develops a natural trust in the human. When we consider how that trust arises, it is clearly not based merely on having obtained a meagre portion of food. If the food is given in a menacing way, then the animal will try to grab the food and run off—there is no trust developed from the animal's side. Trust comes from the loving attitude of the human who gives the food. This goes to show that trust is not dependent on the actual substance, but is gained from the affection and loving attitude shown by the human.

When we think about it, we can see the very profound nature of this example, and to that effect, see the great value of providing for the needy with a loving attitude and with real care. This is something we really need to pay attention to.

#### 2.1.4.3. GIVING THAT ACCORDS WITH DOCTRINE

The meaning of next three verses is not too obscure, as they are quite easy to follow. Of course the main point is to try and put it into practice.

**262** *If you provide [facilities]  
For those most deprived who lack  
The means [to study] the doctrine,  
There is no greater gift than that.*

In relation to this verse Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*If you provide facilities for those most deprived who lack the means to study the doctrine, there is no greater gift than that, as you are giving the very doctrine that is studied.*

For those who have a keen interest in wanting to study the Dharma, but *who lack the means to do so, there is no greater gift than providing them with the material things that will enable them to study the doctrine or the Dharma.* To them, that is the ultimate gift, because it gives them the ultimate means to ensure their well-being and happiness. As it explains here, when you provide the means for study *you are giving the very doctrine that is studied*, which is essentially equivalent to giving them the Dharma itself. There is no greater gift than giving the Dharma.

263 *Even give poison  
To those whom it will help,  
But do not give even the best food  
To those whom it will not help.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

If you think that it is inappropriate for bodhisattvas to give poison to others, consider that it is acceptable to even give poison to those whom it will help to cure a certain disease...

As indicated here, the term *poison* denotes a substance that is harmful to anyone who consumes it. However, a substance which is known to have harmful effects can, on some occasions, be skilfully administered by a doctor to treat certain types of disease. So something that is normally considered to be a poison can also be highly beneficial in some cases. Of course this implies that whoever is administering the poisonous substance has the knowledge and skill to do so in the most appropriate way. Without such skill and knowledge, it could be really harmful or even deadly. The point here is that a substance that is usually considered as a poison can otherwise be beneficial when it is skilfully administered by a doctor.

The commentary then continues:

*...but do not give even the best of food to those whom it will not help.*

Foods that are normally considered to be very sustaining should not be given to a person, who may be harmed by that food because of a disease. If there is no benefit, then it is best not to give it to them.

264 *Just as it is said that it will help  
To cut off a finger bitten by a snake,  
So the Subduer says that if it helps others,  
One should even bring [temporary], discomfort.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that:

*Just as it is said, that it will help to cut off a finger bitten by a snake, so the Subduer says that if it helps others, one should even bring temporary discomfort.*

When a snake bites a finger, an immediate (albeit severe) measure might be to cut off the finger. Severing the finger would save the individual by preventing the poison from entering the bloodstream, which could result in death. That is an analogy of the Buddha's advice that if there is benefit for the other, then even though certain actions may cause discomfort, it is appropriate and necessary to apply those actions.

If one were to be asked whether it is suitable to give poison to others, then the immediate answer would normally be that it is not suitable to do that. However if there is a benefit and it helps to cure a particular type of disease, and if it is administered in the appropriate way, then under those circumstances it is suitable and beneficial to give someone poison. If the question is whether it is appropriate to give nice good food to others, then generally the answer is that it is indeed very appropriate. However if it might be harmful to an individual, then it is inappropriate. The point here is that whether something is considered as being appropriate or inappropriate depends on the circumstances.

What has been explained in the last few verses is how to be generous, and the need for a respectful manner while engaging in acts of generosity. The definition of generosity is the intention to give, while that which is given, such as food or materials, is called the substance of generosity. Thus we need to understand that generosity is a state of mind, while

various different substances or mediums can be used as the basis for generosity.

## 2.2. Branches of the collection of wisdom

As indicated in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

There are twenty-five *branches of the collection of wisdom*.

In relation to the first branch, the first two lines of the next verse indicate:

265ab *You should respect most highly  
The excellent doctrine and its proponents.*

The explanation in the commentary is:

**First:** *You should respect most highly the excellent doctrine of internal science, and its proponents with exquisite offerings of food, clothing and so forth.*

Here Nagarjuna is saying to the king, 'You need to take the initiative to *respect most highly the excellent doctrine*'. The Dharma is also referred to as the doctrine of internal science, because it is the study of the mind, so this is referring to respecting the Dharma. *Its proponents*, refers to those who propound the doctrine, and the way to show respect and appreciation for those proponents of the Dharma is by providing *food, clothing and so forth*.

I have explained on previous occasions what internal science refers to. You will recall that it is that which serves as an antidote to overcome the self-grasping within one's mind. That is the main point we need to understand.

265c *You should listen reverently to the doctrine*

With respect to this the commentary reads:

**Second:** *Without any conceit, you should listen reverently to the doctrine*

When one listens to the doctrine, one should do so without any conceit. This means that the intention of listening to the Dharma is first and foremost to subdue one's own mind, rather than merely seeing as a means to acquire more knowledge, and then boasting about having learned the Dharma. Having listened to many teachings and thereby learned the Dharma, one may assume oneself more skilled than others by virtue of having greater knowledge. If such an attitude develops, then one is listening to the Dharma with the intention of conceit, which is something about which we need to be very wary.

265d *And also impart it to others.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

**Third:** *And also practise generosity of Dharma, by imparting text books and so forth to others.*

This is quite easy to follow. The third branch was to listen to the Dharma without any sense of conceit and then impart it to others. Methods to *impart the Dharma* are either by teaching it directly or providing the means for others to learn, for example giving them *text books and so forth*. We should keep in mind that being generous in such ways is a very highly meaningful activity.

Another important point to bear in mind is that when imparting the Dharma to others, it should be done without any sense of conceit or pride. If those who listen to the Dharma are instructed to listen without conceit and pride, but the teacher is filled with pride and conceit, then that is completely contradictory. How could you expect your listeners to lack pride and conceit if you are imparting the doctrine while full of pride and conceit yourself? That would be hypocritical, and so we need to really keep that point in mind.

266a *Take no pleasure in worldly talk;*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then explains:

**Fourth:** *Take no pleasure in worldly talk, which either harms or does not have any benefit for others, as it becomes an obstacle to the practice of Dharma.*

Here, the king is instructed to *take no pleasure* by engaging in *worldly talk*, which can also be referred to as idle gossip. Worldly talk, or *idle gossip, is defined here as being either that which directly harms the other, or which is of no benefit to the other.* The commentary explains that engaging in worldly talk is *an obstacle to Dharma practice.*

As we all know, we can spend so many hours engaged in such chatter that we don't notice how the time has gone. That time could have otherwise been spent in a meaningful way such as in Dharma practice. Also worldly talk has a direct impact, as it can be specifically aimed at harming others. So it is clear that engaging in frivolous or worldly talk is definitely an obstacle to practising the Dharma.

**266b** *Take delight in what passes beyond the world.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

**Fifth:** *Take delight in speech which concerns what passes beyond the world, such as the methods for transcending samsara.*

Having previously explained the need to avoid engaging in worldly talk, the advice here is to take pleasure or delight in the activities that are the methods for passing *beyond the world, such as the methods for transcending samsara.* It is worthwhile to take delight in spending time and energy on that which serves as a means to overcome the causes for samsara, thus becoming a cause for liberation.

**266cd** *Cause good qualities to grow in others  
In the same way [you wish them] for yourself.*

As the commentary reads:

**Sixth:** *Cause good qualities, such as that of hearing, contemplating and meditation, to grow in others in the same way you wish them for yourself.*

It could also be implied that this also refers to the good qualities that one already possesses. In a very practical and profound way these lines are explaining that just as one has gained good qualities through *hearing* the doctrine and *contemplating* (which means to analyse and think about) the Dharma, whatever wisdom or intelligence one has gained from *meditating* on the Dharma, should be used to engage in activities to cause others to also gain those good qualities. The advice given here is to acknowledge the good qualities one has obtained from hearing, contemplating and meditating on the doctrine without any sense of conceit or pride, and then generate the wish for others to also gain such qualities.

In a very practical and profound way this is explaining that whatever good qualities one may possess such as the knowledge gained from directly hearing the doctrine, and contemplating the Dharma, and whatever wisdom, or intelligence, one has gained from meditating on the Dharma should be used to engage in activities that cause others to also gain those good qualities.

The process for gaining ultimate wisdom within ourselves is based on first hearing the doctrine, which indicates that one needs to initially hear it from qualified teachers. One will gain a certain amount of wisdom from hearing the Dharma, however it is not yet a very stable intelligence or wisdom. When one uses the material that one has heard to further analyse and think about the Dharma, then one will gain a more profound wisdom or intelligence. It becomes even

firmer and more stable because it is something that one has personally validated by analysing and thinking about it. When one recognises the validity of the Dharma, then it becomes more stable within one's mind. However it does not become one hundred per cent stable until we gain the actual realisation, which is done by meditating the points that one has understood and analysed previously.

This unique method of presenting the way to gain wisdom comes from the great Kadampa tradition. The Kadampa masters mentioned that the more one has heard the teachings, the more points one will have to contemplate and to think about, and thus gain wisdom through thinking. The more one has analysed the Dharma, the more points there will be for meditation. When one engages in meditation practice, one will have a rich source of information upon which to meditate and thus gain profound realisations. These are really crucial points for us to consider.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright  
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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པོའི་བཀའ་སློབ་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་རྐྱེན་གྱི་སྐོར་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

26 July 2011

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Keeping in mind the motivation generated in the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, we will engage in the practice of meditation.

We need to bear in mind the significance of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta. As mentioned in the teachings, for a Buddhist the purpose of taking refuge is to avoid following other mistaken paths, and in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the purpose of generating bodhicitta is to avoid following the lower vehicle paths. The objects of refuge are the Three Jewels. Generally speaking, all religious traditions incorporate an act of taking refuge, so we need to understand how taking refuge in the Buddhist tradition differs from other religions.

We can say that that the Buddhist way of going for refuge is unique. There are two main causes for taking refuge in the three Jewels: one takes refuge because of *fear of experiencing the sufferings of the lower realms* and fear of *the sufferings of samsara*. While other traditions also explain the sufferings experienced in lower realms and the reasons to fear that, the unique Buddhist tradition is that taking refuge provides the means be free from the sufferings of all cyclic existence.

In the teachings fear is specifically mentioned as being a cause or motivator for taking refuge in the Three Jewels. However a practical way to understand the need to go for refuge is to relate it to the *purpose* of taking refuge, which is that it is the means for eliminating the causes of suffering of the lower realms as well as every type of suffering in samsara. When we understand that attaining freedom from samsara is the purpose of going for refuge, then the reason for taking refuge becomes clearer.

The manner of taking refuge is to rely completely and wholeheartedly on the objects of refuge from the depths of one's heart. It's not just a matter of believing that the Three Jewels will protect us from the lower realms and samsara, rather, we must actually rely totally upon the objects of refuge. This is an important point to keep in mind.

As Buddhists it is essential to pay close attention to what refuge actually entails, and then generate that refuge in our mind. Developing genuine refuge, even if only for a few moments, is a very powerful practice. Leaving aside complicated details, what we can keep in mind is the basics and the essence of what going for refuge means. Taking refuge in the Three Jewels wholeheartedly (even for a few moments) is a genuine and authentic practice that is very beneficial for our mind. As mentioned earlier, taking refuge wholeheartedly with complete reliance means understanding the purpose of taking refuge, which is to be free, not only from the suffering of the lower realms, but the entire scope of samsaric sufferings. We need to be really mindful of that.

It is relatively easy for us to generate a partial wish to be free from suffering, which includes the suffering of the lower realms as well as the suffering of suffering of the human realm. Within the three types of sufferings, we can easily

relate to wanting to be free from the suffering of suffering. However, it is more difficult for us to see the need to be free from the suffering of change, because that includes all the contaminated pleasures that we experience. If we can't develop a sense of wanting to be free from the suffering of change, then we are no better than some other non-Buddhist school practitioners. Some of the non-Buddhist practitioners have developed renunciation in relation to the suffering of suffering as well as the suffering of change; however because they are attached to the happiness of equanimity they are not able to develop renunciation in relation to the all-pervasive compounded suffering.

They are able to overcome contaminated pleasures, which is the suffering of change, but they fall short when it comes to the happiness of equanimity. Having developed renunciation in relation to the suffering of suffering and the suffering of change, some non-Buddhist practitioners can reach up to the third and fourth levels of concentration. But once they reach these levels, they become attached to the contaminated bliss of equanimity, which is why they are not able to develop renunciation to overcome samsara.

So as Buddhists we need to be mindful of the need to renounce all levels of suffering—the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and all-pervasive compounded suffering. Thus we need to have a good understanding of all levels of suffering. How could one possibly develop genuine renunciation if there is even the slightest hint of attachment to worldly or samsaric pleasures? That would be impossible.

Having a full understanding of what refuge entails and regularly engaging in the practice of taking refuge is very important. During our day-to-day life we may not immediately see the great significance or benefit of taking refuge, but it will become most apparent at the time of death. If, at the time of death (which we will all inevitably have to face) we have familiarity with having wholeheartedly and sincerely taken refuge on a daily basis, then at that time the objects of refuge will naturally come to mind. As mentioned in the teachings, when all else fails and no one can help us, the unfailing sole guide will be the objects of refuge. If the objects of refuge come vividly to mind and one wholeheartedly relies upon those objects at that crucial time, then all other fears and worries will naturally subside. That would be considered as a peaceful death, because one lacks any fear and anxiety.

If we lack familiarity with taking refuge during the course of our day-to-day life, then it will not arise naturally at the time of death. So if we don't familiarise ourselves and wholeheartedly take refuge now when we have the right conditions, how can we expect to be able to take refuge at the time of death? It won't be possible to ask others how to take refuge at that point! We must become familiar with taking refuge on a regular basis, and then, without having to rely upon others, it will vividly come to our mind naturally at the time of death. When the objects of refuge come to mind and we place wholehearted reliance on them, without any doubt whatsoever and with absolute certainty, we will be freed from the lower realms in the next lifetime. So to that extent, we really need to take this advice to heart as a personal responsibility.

We may engage in various different Dharma practices, but if they fail to help us at the time of death, then they would have not really served their purpose. If a non-virtuous state of mind prevails at the final moments of death then, as explained and emphasised in the teachings, that will be the cause of a lower rebirth in the next life. Whereas, if the final

mind of death is virtuous, that will protect one from a lower rebirth, and one will be reborn in a fortunate realm.

In his teachings Lama Tsong Khapa, and indeed all other masters, emphasised this point again and again. As you will be aware from your studies, there are three states of mind can occur at the time of death: virtuous, non-virtuous and neutral. Someone may have engaged in non-virtuous deeds during their life but if, at the time of death, and under the right conditions—such as being in the presence of good friends and companions who are mindful—they are motivated to have a virtuous state of mind, then that person will be protected from a lower rebirth in the next lifetime. That will come about because they had virtuous state of mind at the time of death. Therefore we can see the great significance of familiarising ourselves now with taking genuine refuge, because that is what will be our unfailing protector at the time of death.

There is a specific prayer which says that at crucial times when one is really destitute, when there is no protection from anyone, from family, friends and so forth, 'may I be able to spontaneously rely on the objects of refuge for guidance and help'.

Now we can engage in the practice of meditation.  
[meditation]

We can generate a positive motivation for receiving the teaching such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, by liberating them from all suffering and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

## 2.2. Branches of the collection of wisdom (cont.)

This outline is sub-divided into twenty-five different categories, and we are up to the seventh.

*267a Please do not be satisfied with doctrine heard,*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary gives this explanation:

**Seventh:** *Please do not be satisfied with doctrine heard before but aspire to listen to even more.*

We need to consider this as a crucial point for our practice. *Not be satisfied with doctrine heard* refers to not becoming complacent by thinking, 'Well, I've already heard that before, so I don't need to listen to it again', which is how we often think. Such an attitude to the teaching is completely wrong. Rather, as mentioned here, we should *aspire to listen to even more*. We need to use what we have previously heard as a basis to inspire us to listen and study even more of what the teaching was about. That is how we need to develop ourselves. Listen to a teaching and use that as a basis to understand it more each time we hear it, and in that way we can increase our understanding.

When one feels inspired rather than daunted by having to hear a teaching again, then that is a good sign that one is progressing. When listening to the Dharma becomes very enjoyable, like partaking of a tasty meal, one has developed a strong aspiration to learn the Dharma. This is the attitude we need to develop.

*267b But retain...*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary elaborates these two words:

**Eighth:** *retain* the meaning of the doctrine concisely.

This is very significant and practical advice that we again need to consider taking to heart. Previously we were advised to not be satisfied with hearing the Dharma once or twice, but to aspire to listen to it again and again. Here we are

being advised to try to have a *concise* understanding of what has been taught and to keep it in mind. To *retain* means to keep it in mind and not forget it. While the very act of listening again and again serves as a means not to forget it, we also need to be mindful of trying to really understand the *meaning of the doctrine* itself.

It is normally considered that listening to the Dharma as many times as possible will leave a strong imprint on our mind. However I doubt whether a significant imprint would be left on the mind if one has not understood the meaning of what has been taught. Of course, that doesn't mean to say there is no virtue in just listening to the teaching, but whether that will establish strong imprint on the mind is questionable. If, on the other hand, one has made an attempt to understand the meaning of the teaching, then that will definitely leave a strong imprint on the mind. Understanding the meaning of the Dharma means listening to it again and again, contemplating it and thinking about it. When we understand its meaning in this way a very significant imprint will be left on our mind.

There is a further point about retaining the meaning of the teaching. The wisdom that one gains from listening to the Dharma comes from retaining the meaning of what one has heard in the teaching. If we have not retained the meaning of what we have heard, then how can we possibly analyse or think about it any further? If we miss out on analysing and thinking about the Dharma, then we will not gain the wisdom that is derived from the thinking process, and without that wisdom, how can we meditate on the meaning? It would be impossible to gain the ultimate wisdom that is acquired through meditation. The process of progressively gaining the wisdom is by first hearing the teaching, then contemplating and analysing it and then meditating on it; The whole process is dependent on retaining the earlier wisdom one has gained.

*267b ...and discriminate meanings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary doesn't add any further explanation:

**Ninth:** *and discriminate meanings.*

The commentary does not further elaborate on the root text. The Tibetan word *nambar-yiwa*, translated here as *discriminate* is the sixth of the eight divisions of grammatical structure. It refers to being able to distinguish between for example, what is the true and false, virtue and non-virtue, correct and incorrect and so forth. Thus it refers to the ability to discern the meaning of the doctrine.

*267cd Please always be intent*

*On offering presents to teachers.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

**Tenth:** *Please always be intent on offering presents and so forth to teachers.*

The main point is that one needs to recollect the kindness of one's teachers at all times. Here *teachers* refers to both the teachers from whom one has received the teachings directly from, as well as the lineage teachers. Essentially this branch of the collection of wisdom is to bring to mind one's teachers again and again. As I often say, I don't have many qualities to boast about, but one thing I can say is that I periodically bring to mind Buddha Shakyamuni, who is inseparable from Dorje Chang, from whom we derive the essence of all the teachings. I can safely say that I have a constant recollection of Buddha Shakyamuni, every few minutes throughout the day. The main point is that we need to develop a constant remembrance of our teacher.

Sometimes there is a misinterpretation of what *root lama* means. Some understand it to mean their first teacher, but that is not necessarily the case, so we need to have the correct understanding of what the term *root lama* actually means. With respect to the lineage, Shakyamuni, who is inseparable from the ultimate essence of Dorje Chang, is the main source for all lamas, the *extensive lineage* was directly passed on to Maitreya who in turn passed it down to Asanga and successive Indian and Tibetan masters; while the *profound lineage* which was passed down through Manjushri, Nagarjuna and successive Indian and Tibetan masters. So an unbroken lineage of teachings and instructions has been passed down from Buddha Shakyamuni to our present-day gurus, from whom we directly receive the teachings.

The significance of recalling the connection between the lineage gurus and our own guru is in identifying what the message is and who is giving the message. Simply put the message is to free yourself from the sufferings of samsara and obtain liberation. This message was handed down by Buddha Shakyamuni over 2,500 years ago. That may seem a very long time ago, however that message has been carried down through an unbroken lineage, all the way to our own root guru from whom we receive it directly. We have received the message now as a result of the connection with our guru. Thus, recollecting the kindness of one's guru is significant and important.

Although directed to the king, the advice here is to always present offerings to our teachers with respect and faith. It is good to note that there is a distinction between respect and faith. It is explained that we develop respect when we think about the qualities of the guru, whereas we generate faith when we think about the kindness of the guru. Thus we can pay respect not only to our own personal teachers, but any teacher who has the qualities and propounds the unmistakable doctrine. However faith in our own teachers is developed in dependence on the kindness of directly receiving teachings, advice and personal instructions from them. So we develop both respect and faith in our own teachers.

When we think about the kindness of our parents, we may not call it faith, but we do have a genuine appreciation and sense of reliance upon them. If we don't have genuine respect or trust, then there will always be some doubt in as to their concern for our well being. The same applies to our teachers as well; if we lack faith and respect towards our guru, then there will always be some doubt in our mind.

**268a Do not recite [the books of] worldly nihilists, and so forth.**

As the commentary reads:

**Eleventh:** Do not recite the books of *worldly nihilists and so forth*, as it will be a hindrance to the collection of wisdom.

Here *worldly nihilists*, refers to non-Buddhists who reject the possibility of future lives. Relating to the teachings of such proponents would *hinder the collection of the wisdom* realising emptiness. Being influenced by treatises that denounce past and future lives, and which promote the idea of an inherently existent self and permanence, will definitely hinder the development of the realisation of selflessness and impermanence, which are the doctrines used to gain the ultimate wisdom of realising emptiness. This branch of wisdom shouldn't be too obscure but rather clear and easy to understand.

However, if it is for the purpose of having a discussion or debate to benefit the other, then it is permissible to read their texts to be able to refute them. Although the king, who is the subject of this advice, would probably not have the need to engage in such debates.

**268b Forsake debating in the interest of pride.**

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je merely repeats the line as its meaning is quite clear.

**Twelfth:** *Forsake debating in the interest of pride.*

When one engages in a debate with others, it should be free from egotistical pride. If one's views are tainted with the motivation of defeating the opponent and winning the debate for the sake of the satisfaction of winning, then that would be *debating in the interest of pride*. So when engaging in a debate or discussion with another, you need to be careful not to do so with that intention in mind.

**268c Do not praise your own good qualities.**

This point is also mentioned in the mind-training teachings.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

**Thirteenth:** Do not speak about and praise your own good qualities.

Even though the commentary doesn't elaborate very much, we can derive from this explanation that speaking about and advertising one's own qualities could generate pride. For that purpose we need to refrain from proclaiming and speaking of our own good qualities. The essential point here is that whatever qualities we may have are ultimately for the sole purpose of subduing our mind. If those qualities generate pride, then that defeats the purpose of subduing the mind. This is an incredibly significant point to keep in mind.

Whatever the means used to obtain qualities, whether it is through study or practice, the objective is to subdue the mind, and thereby overcome the delusions. It is not for the purpose of going around and praising oneself, or using it as a means for self proclamation. When you think about it, this is the crux of the instruction.

There is a mind-training teaching called *Precious Rosary, Ratnavali* in Sanskrit, in which there is a particular verse mentioning how one needs to hide one's own qualities while proclaiming the qualities of others, and to proclaim whatever faults one has and hide the faults of others. This makes the same point as the thirteenth branch of wisdom.

**268d Speak of the good qualities even of your foes.**

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

**Fourteenth:** However, speak of the good qualities even of your foes.

Although one does not praise oneself or proclaim one's own qualities, it is still appropriate to mention the qualities of others, even if they are one's enemies.

**269 [When debating] do not attack to the quick.**

The commentary reads:

**Fifteenth:** When debating do not attack to the quick.

Basically the commentary is restating the root text. What is lacking in the English translation is the element of ridiculing or exposing the faults of others. I feel this point relates to a similar point in the seven-point mind training, where there is a specific reference to publicly ridiculing and expose the faults of people who have a certain status. However, the main point here relates to *debating*. When one is debating with others, one needs to be mindful not to debate or discuss anything that would ridicule others or highlight their faults.

This also relates to not divulging secrets about one's own points; when debating with non-Buddhist schools certain points shouldn't be disclosed to them as they are not ready to hear them.

**269bc** *Do not talk about others  
With bad intent. ...*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

**Sixteenth:** *Do not talk about other's faults with bad intent.*

One should *not talk about others' faults with harmful intentions*. So we should not talk about the faults of others if there is only harm and no benefit. This implies that in the event of there being some benefit to be gained, which will improve them and so forth, then there might be a timely purpose in talking about their faults with them. Otherwise it would be being done with harmful intent.

We also need to be wary about engaging in frivolous talk about the faults of others. Too often we find ourselves in a conversation, and without having and harmful intention, saying, 'Oh yes, he or she is behaving in a ridiculous manner'. Then we end up talking about the faults of others which when it gets back to them, could be very harmful.

**269cd** *... Individually  
Analyse your own mistakes yourself.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary echoes the same meaning:

**Seventeenth:** *Individually analyse your own mistakes yourself.*

This is a very significant point for our own practice. We need to be able to *analyse our own mistakes*, which implies that we need to recognise our own faults, lest someone else points them out to us, which would be very uncomfortable for us. We wouldn't want the discomfort of others pointing out our faults, but as we do need to eradicate these faults, it is fitting that we analyse our own faults for ourselves. For example if someone else comes up and says, 'Do you realise that you are a very angry person?' we would not like that at all. It would be very unpleasant and hard to accept such a criticism. However we can see for ourselves whether or not we are an angry person. If we detect that our anger is becoming harmful, we need to then take the initiative to do something about it.

To that effect the Kadampa masters said that we need to be our own witness, which means that rather than having others witness our mistakes, we are a witness to ourselves. As the great Kadampa master Durewa had said, 'The real witness is checking and analysing one's own mind'. It is by constantly checking and analysing our own state of mind that we become our own witness. Then when we notice a fault in ourselves we are able to begin to overcome that fault. That is how we serve as our own witness.

**270** *You should root out completely from yourself  
The faults the wise decry in others,  
And through your influence  
Also cause others to do the same.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

**Eighteenth:** *You should root out completely from yourself the faults the wise find suitable to decry in others, and through your influence also cause others to do the same.*

This is reiterating the root text, which is quite clear. Those particular faults that *the wise* detect in others, are the very faults that we need to *completely eliminate from ourselves*. As we progress in eradicating those faults, we can positively *influence others to do the same*.

**271** *Considering the harm others do to you  
As created by your former deeds, do not anger.  
Act such that further suffering will not be  
created  
And your own faults will disappear.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je says:

**Nineteenth:** *Considering the harm others do to you as a result of karma, created by your own former karmic deeds, do not anger as it will cause further suffering. Thus act such that further suffering will not be created and your faults will disappear.*

The essential point here is that you should not to react with anger when you are harmed by others. Rather you should contemplate how that harm is the consequence of your own karmic actions in the past. So whatever unpleasantness you experience is a just result of past karma.

If one were to ask, 'Why shouldn't I get angry if someone harms me?', the response is that *your anger will cause further suffering*. If you become angry when you are harmed by others, then rather than relieving the suffering experienced as a result that harm, you will actually create further suffering. This is closely related to the point of cultivating patience.

Of the two types of patience, the patience of not retaliating in the event of harm inflicted by others is applicable here. As the teachings explain, practising this kind of patience specifically means contemplating that the harm received from others is none other than the consequences of one's own previous karma. So if the unpleasantness one is experiencing is due to one's own karmic actions in the past, then it is unreasonable to become upset and angry with a person who only serves as a condition for one to experience that harm. The real cause is one's own previous karma. By contemplating in that way, one can develop the patience of not retaliating.

Not retaliating doesn't necessarily refer to a harmful action, but it specifically refers to not becoming angry. So when someone harms you, the patience described here refers to protecting your mind from becoming angry. Then you have developed the patience that protects the mind in the event of being harmed.

Simply put, when we are harmed by others, we should ask ourselves, 'Is there any benefit to be gained from becoming angry? What are the pros and cons? What are the advantages and the disadvantages? There are no advantages because anger does not overcome or reverse the harm that has been inflicted. But the great disadvantage is that anger will become a cause for further suffering.

As explained in the mind-training teachings, when one develops a mind of anger and then retaliates by inflicting harm on others, the very moment that the anger develops will leave an imprint on one's mind for further suffering. The action of reciprocating the harm will create more karma, to be experienced either in this life, or in future lives. We can easily see that in this life; when we harm someone, then when the opportunity arises, they will harm us back.

The harm we receive in future lifetimes could be related to harming others in this life as a result of anger. So as the Kadampa masters have advised, rather than returning harm with harm, one should consider how to benefit the other person. When we experience harm (as a result of our own negative karma) then our karma has ripened and we are using up the negative karma that we have created in the past, thus exhausting that particular karma. Therefore it is



more fitting to render benefit to those who harm us, rather than inflicting harm. That is the how the Kadampa masters practised.

So we are advised to *act such that further suffering will not be created and your faults will disappear*.

Becoming angry is only a cause for further suffering and if one prevents anger from arising, one will not be creating any further personal suffering. Becoming angry disturbs the mind, so not becoming angry means that there will be no mental disturbance. One way to feel kindness for the person who harms us is to contemplate how their very actions allow us to practise patience. If they didn't inflict of harm, then there would be nothing to be patient about.

You may recall that His Holiness emphasised this point in his recent teachings. He said that teachers and the Buddha are not the objects of our patience; the teacher teaches us how to be patient, and we don't need to practise patience with our teacher because our teacher is kind to us. It is the individual who inflicts the harm upon us who gives us the opportunity to practise patience, so therefore they are really being kind to us. What do we do to people who are kind to us? We try to benefit and please them with presents and so forth. So in that light it is fitting to benefit those who harm us, rather than retaliating. Retaliation serves no purpose because it may be met by further harm. For example, if someone has hit you and you hit them back, that will result in them hitting you back again! When I was a young monk I got into a lot of fights, I would hit them and they would hit back and it went on like that until there was blood everywhere.

As you are aware, next week will be a discussion session, and as I regularly remind you, it will be good to participate with good intention and motivation. The following week will be the exam. I may not be able to attend the exam myself, but I encourage you all to come to it.

The Study Group seminar will be conducted on Sunday August 21, and it would be good for you to take the initiative to prepare thoroughly and conduct it well.

One of the topics is refuge. It is good for those who are doing the presentation to research and try to further understand the two causes of refuge, and how one generates the refuge and so forth. Regardless of whether or not there will be enough time to present and discuss all of the details of your preparation, there will still be benefit from what you study and read.

Another topic is high status and definite goodness. What are the causes of high status? The text says that there are sixteen causes of high status. In previous sessions, we covered in detail the causes for definite goodness, which specifically refers to the wisdom realising emptiness. Then one needs to relate that to the three higher trainings of morality, contemplation and wisdom.

In relation to bodhicitta there is, of course, the presentation of the six causes and the effect, but the main point is to gain a substantial understanding of what this means. Look into the seven-point cause and effect sequence for developing bodhicitta. There is the contrived bodhicitta attitude and the spontaneously generated bodhicitta attitude. You need to be able to see how the six causes relate to the contrived bodhicitta attitude, which transforms into uncontrived spontaneously generated bodhicitta.

This means that the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of other sentient beings needs to be generated on the basis of many reasonings such as the recollection of all beings as being one's mother, remembering kindness, and generating love and compassion, up to the point of developing superior intention, when one takes personal responsibility, aspiring to achieve enlightenment for the purpose of freeing all sentient beings. Having developed that state of mind in this way, one will generate an unceasing and spontaneous aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. At that point, one has developed the actual bodhicitta. This is how we need to understand the progressive way of developing a contrived bodhicitta into an uncontrived bodhicitta. Of course, before developing the seven-point cause and effect sequences, one needs to develop equanimity.

As mentioned previously, there is also the technique of equalising oneself with other sentient beings. We are all exactly alike with respect to wanting to avoid suffering and wanting to experience happiness. So equalising here needs to be based on how we are all equal with respect to wishing for happiness and not wishing to experience suffering. That is another crucial point upon which one needs to also reflect.

Developing the bodhicitta mind by equalising and exchanging oneself with others involves thinking about the fault of cherishing oneself from many different angles. That is then further developed using logical reasons to contemplate the benefits of cherishing other sentient beings. Then based on that, one exchanges one's own happiness and self-interest for the benefit of others, making the interests of other sentient beings a primary concern.

A state of mind based on love—the practice of giving—and compassion—taking away the suffering of others—is where the *tong len* practice comes in. It is a cause for generating bodhicitta, and at that point there is an actual exchange of oneself with another. According to *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, there are eleven categories in that sequence. This is just prompting you to review those points, so try to keep them in mind.

After you have done your research and engaged in the seminar, it will be my turn to test you to see if you can remember all of the points!

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright  
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Edited Version*

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## Discussion (02.08.2011)

### Week: 1 (28 June 2011)

1. What is the definition of patience? [2]
2. Give the three categories of compassion. [3]
3. How does laziness work as the cause of all our defects and faults? [4]

### Week: 2 (28 June 2011)

4. What is the great significance of the dedication prayer? [2]
5. The realisation of emptiness paramount. Why? [2]

### Week: 3 (5 July 2011)

6. Why is providing the means for even the very basic level of education highly meritorious? [4]
7. Earlier in our life when we had no specific training in taking the suffering of others we may have felt a bit helpless when we saw someone suffering. After having engaged in the meditation practice of giving and taking, our whole attitude will be different when we see someone suffering. How so? [2]

### Week: 4 (12 July 2011)

8. a) Give the great Indian master Ashvagoshā's analogy that illustrates the purpose of Dharma. [2]  
  
b) Take the analogy further. [2]  
  
c) Why do we need to remove our faulty way of thinking? [2]
9. Explain verse 258: **Even during their seventh step  
Merit measureless as the sky  
Is generated in bodhisattvas  
Whose attitude is to give all wealth away.** [4]

### Week: 5 (19 July 2011)

10. What is the result of giving with a generous mind, without any sense of loss? [4]
11. Explain the process for gaining ultimate wisdom within ourselves. [4]

### Week: 6 (26 July 2011)

12. What did His Holiness emphasise in his recent teachings re: the objects of our patience? [4]

# Exam

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mark: \_\_\_\_\_

**Block 4**

**Week 8:** (09 August 2011)

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**Week: 1 (28 June 2011)**

1. What is the definition of patience? [2]

2. Give the three categories of compassion. [3]

3. How does laziness work as the cause of all our defects and faults? [4]

4. What is the great significance of the dedication prayer? [2]

5. The realisation of emptiness is paramount. Why? [2]

6. Why is providing the means for even the very basic level of education highly meritorious? [4]

7. Earlier in our life when we had no specific training in taking the suffering of others we may have felt a bit helpless when we saw someone suffering. After having engaged in the meditation practice of giving and taking, our whole attitude will be different when we see someone suffering. How so? [2]

8. a) Give the great Indian master Ashvagosha's analogy that illustrates the purpose of Dharma. [2]

b) Take the analogy further. [2]

c) Why do we need to remove our faulty way of thinking? [2]

9. Explain verse 258: **Even during their seventh step  
Merit measureless as the sky  
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11. Explain the process for gaining ultimate wisdom within ourselves. [4]

12. What did His Holiness emphasise in his recent teachings re: the objects of our patience? [4]