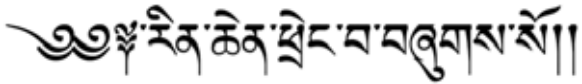

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

11 May 2010

With a positive motivation, we will do the meditation.
(Meditation)

It would be good to generate the following motivation to receive the teachings, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, I need to obtain the state of enlightenment, so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well'.

This motivation consists of the two-fold altruistic intention to benefit sentient beings, which is highly meaningful. In the first part one develops a keen wish to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, which suffices for the aspiring bodhichitta. Whereas the second part, where one commits oneself to put the teachings into practice, which suffices for engaging bodhichitta. Thus, this type of motivation is highly meaningful for whatever practice one may engage in. One will notice particularly that this relates to every sadhana, where a similar format is laid out at the beginning of the practice. So, when one recites the lines relating to this, one will be able to generate the appropriate motivation and corresponding state of mind.

2.1.2. Extensive explanation of definite goodness

This is sub-divided into three:

2.1.2.1. Proving the conceptions of 'I' and 'mine' to be false

2.1.2.2. Refutation of inherently existent bondage and liberation

2.1.2.3 All phenomena as free of the extremes of permanence and annihilation

2.1.2.1. PROVING THE CONCEPTIONS OF 'I' AND 'MINE' TO BE FALSE

This is further sub-divided into four categories:

2.1.2.1.1. Actual proof

2.1.2.1.2. Attainment of liberation through abandoning these conceptions

2.1.2.1.3. Teaching reality through the example of a reflection

2.1.2.1.4. Realisation of emptiness as the cause of liberation

2.1.2.1.1. Actual proof

These are the verses that relate to proving that the conceptions of 'I' and 'mine' are false:

28. *"The I exists, the mine exists."
These are wrong as ultimates,
For the two are not [established]
By a thorough consciousness of reality just as it
is.*

29. *The mental and physical aggregates arise
From the conception of I which is false in fact.
How could what is grown
From a false seed be true?*

In relation to the first line, 'The I exists, the mine exists', when we consider the conventional or nominal existence of 'I' and 'mine', we have to agree that nominally an 'I' does exist; there is an entity to the reference of 'I' which does exist. Likewise with 'mine', which is in relation to the aggregates, such as 'my nose', 'my eyes', and 'my ears',

which do exist. By observing the functions of the sense organs, we can definitely agree that the aggregates actually exist. For example, we see with our eyes, smell with our nose and taste with our tongue, so they definitely do exist. Thus, there are no qualms about the nominal existence of 'I' and 'mine'. One needs to understand, because the nominal 'I' and the nominal aggregates referred to as 'mine' do exist, the mere perception of 'I' and the mere perception of 'mine' are not false.

Gyaltsab's Je's commentary explains that although 'I' and 'mine' do exist nominally, the perception of 'I' and 'mine' as existing ultimately is a mistaken perception, and wrong. As explained in the commentary, an 'I' and 'mine' do exist nominally, however the perception of an 'I' and 'mine' existing ultimately or as being inherently established is wrong, and is a mistaken perception, i.e. it is a false perception.

The older students would be familiar with the distinction being made here. However for the newer students, the point to understand is the distinction made between the perception of a nominal 'I' and 'mine', and the view of the transitory collection, which is the view that the 'I' and 'mine' of one's own continuum are inherently existent. The 'I' as perceived by the view of the transitory collection, does not exist. Likewise the aggregates that are perceived by the view of the transitory collection do not exist. However a nominal 'I' and nominal aggregates do exist. The distinction between existence of nominal phenomena, and the non-existence of phenomena as perceived by the mistaken view of the transitory collection needs to be clear.

The view of the transitory collection in relation to 'I' and 'mine' is a mistaken perception, and a wrong consciousness. Why is that so? The reason why it is considered a wrong consciousness, is because the 'I' perceived by the view of the transitory collection does not exist in the way that it is perceived. Likewise the aggregates perceived by the view of the transitory collection, do not exist in the way that they are perceived. Thus, because the 'I' and the aggregates perceived by the view of the transitory collection do not exist in the manner that they are perceived by the view of the transitory collection is a wrong consciousness.

Why is the 'I' that is perceived by the view of the transitory collection non-existent? To understand this we need to know how the view of the transitory collection perceives the 'I', and then we will understand why such an 'I' does not exist. The view of the transitory collection perceives the 'I' as being independently existent—an 'I' that exists without depending on any causes and conditions and thus existing in and of itself. However, such a solely independent 'I' cannot possibly exist.

First of all the 'I' appears as being independently and self-sufficiently existent, and the view of the transitory collection then grasps at that appearance, believing that the 'I' actually exists in that way. Thus, it is a combination of a wrong appearance and grasping at, and adhering to such an appearance. The conclusion is that the view of the transitory collection that perceives an 'I', as well as the view of a transitory collection that perceives 'mine' (the aggregates), is false and is a wrong consciousness.

Gyaltsab's Je's commentary explains that if 'I' and 'mine' were inherently established, then they would have to be perceived by aryas in meditative equipoise. However for the aryas who directly perceive ultimate reality in its entirety,

there is no perception whatsoever of an 'I' or 'mine'. These points of course were explained in great detail previously¹.

It would be good to refer to the earlier teachings. In summary, the view of the transitory collection that perceives 'I' and 'mine' as being inherently existent is false and wrong. If 'I' and 'mine' were to be established inherently, then they would have to be perceived by aryas in meditative equipoise. Whatever is perceived by aryas in meditative equipoise is that which exists ultimately. If it is false to the perception of an arya being, then it is not true and cannot be established as being true.

As you would recall from previous explanations, if conventional phenomena were to exist to the perception an arya being in meditative equipoise, then they would have to be established as truly existent phenomena. However because the 'I' and 'mine' do not exist to the perception of an arya being in meditative equipoise focused upon emptiness, they lack true existence. Their existence to the perception of an arya being in meditative equipoise focused upon emptiness is thus the object of negation. As the teachings explain, the lack of conventional phenomena to the perception of an arya being in meditative equipoise is the perception of emptiness. It has been clearly explained that the only thing that is directly perceived by an arya being in meditative equipoise is ultimate reality, i.e. emptiness.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains that this point is established with the following syllogism. Take the subject, 'mental and physical aggregates that arise from the conception of 'I': they are false, because the conception of 'I' itself is not established ultimately, and is thus false.

This syllogism explains that once the conception of the 'I' being false is established, then the consequence arising from that is that the mental and physical aggregates also have to be false. When the cause is established as false, then by default, that which arises from that cause is also established as being false. Specifically, the conception of 'I' not being established ultimately and thus being false is the reason that is used to establish that the mental and physical aggregates that arise from such a conception of 'I' are also false.

Gyaltsab Je then states that this reason is pervasive, because whatever grows from a false seed cannot be true. That is because if the cause is false, then it does not carry the potential to bring about a true result. By establishing the cause itself being false, it follows that whatever is produced by that cause, the effect, naturally has to be false also. Through the use of a syllogism the reasons are established in a very logical way, and it is good to really understand how the logical use of subject, predicate and reason in the syllogism actually works.

It is good to relate the explanations given here to the main point, which is that all of our mistakes, faults, problems and so forth actually arise from strong grasping at a self. When we actually think about it, it becomes quite clear how true this is. For example, if we think how the 'I' appears when we say 'I do not agree', or 'I cannot accept it', or 'It doesn't accord with my wishes', then it will be quite clear that the 'I' appears as being a very strong and independently existing 'I'. With such a misconception of the 'I', we have a strong sense of self-identity at that time, which seems to give us an extra boost of energy. It can sometimes make us excited and can give rise to very strong emotions. I usually tell people to

be wary when strong anger arises, as the extra boost of energy produced by a strong sense of 'I' can cause quite a bit of destruction.

Such a sense of strong self-identity can be related to a strong sense of grasping at one's opinion, in which case it would be a case of attachment. Due to strong attachment, the sense of self-identity becomes very strong. In turn anger arises from a strong disagreement and strongly conflicting opinions. Whether it be from a strong attachment or anger, that sense of 'I' becomes very strong. As I mentioned earlier, even someone who would normally be considered as a 'weakling' becomes much stronger when a strong sense of self-identity arises in their mind. When that 'I' or self is threatened, there is an extra boost of energy.

The strong sense of 'I' arises when any kind of delusion arises in the mind. However what we are referring to here is the root delusion, the root cause of all of the other delusions that arise in the mind, which is the conception of 'I' that is a particularly a strong grasping at the 'I' or the self.

When we develop an attitude such as 'it's fine with me whatever you decide', or 'whatever you wish is fine with me', and 'I will accept that', then because the sense of self-identity is not strong and opinionated, one will naturally be calm. On the other hand, with 'I cannot agree with that', 'I cannot accept that', the sense of 'I' and 'me' becomes very strong, and results in agitation and conflict. In this way you can see how a change in attitude can make a huge difference to one's reactions.

In the West there is a lot of concern about depression. If we look into what actually causes depression, then we see in some cases that the depression is nothing more than a really strong sense of clinging to the 'I' or 'me'. If we really look into the general mentality of people in the West, we will find that there seems to be a strong underlying sense of individuality, what we might call a sense of pride. It seems that thoughts and activities are mostly driven by that sense of individuality or pride. As explained in the teachings, pride is none other than a manifestation of grasping at the 'I' or the self, i.e. arises as a result of grasping to the self.

2.1.2.1.2. Attainment of liberation through abandoning these conceptions

This section explains how the attainment of liberation is achieved by abandoning these misconceptions of 'I' and 'mine'. The relevant verse is:

**30. *Having seen thus the aggregates as untrue
The conception of I is abandoned,
And due to abandoning the conception of I
The aggregates arise no more.***

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains that by seeing the aggregates as untrue, the conception of 'I' and 'mine', which comes from the perception of an inherently established 'I' and 'mine', is abandoned. Having abandoned that perception, the suffering aggregates will arise no more, and thus one will obtain liberation, which is the state of abandoning true suffering and true origination. This shows that one needs to realise the lack of true existence of both person and aggregates in order to obtain liberation. It also clearly shows that the two selflessnesses of person and phenomena are also realised at the subtlest level by the hearer and solitary realiser aryas.

Gyaltsab's commentary is quite explicit and clear. Perceiving the aggregates as being truly or inherently existent causes the conception of 'I' to arise. By perceiving the aggregates as lacking true existence or inherent existence, the conception

¹ Covered most recently on 21 July 2009 and 11 August 2009, and more extensively in May and June 2004.

of 'I' and 'mine' arising from that will naturally cease and is abandoned. When the conception of 'I' ceases or has been abandoned, the suffering aggregates (i.e. the aggregates that are in the nature of suffering) will no longer arise. It is through seeing the aggregates as being truly existent that the conception of 'I' arises, and when the aggregates themselves are seen as being not true or false, then naturally the conception of 'I' will not arise. When the conception of 'I' is abandoned, the suffering aggregates (which are a result of the conception of 'I') will also not arise. Thus one will obtain liberation which is, as explained in the commentary, *the state of abandoning true suffering and true origination*.

To further explain this, one first needs to understand that the perception of truly existent aggregates is grasping at the self of phenomena. The perception of a person or 'I' as being truly existent is grasping at the self of person. It is due to the grasping at phenomena or the aggregates that the grasping at person arises. Thus, in the cause and effect sequence, the grasping at the aggregates is the cause for the grasping at the person. In reverse order, when grasping at the aggregates ceases, then grasping at the person will also cease. When the grasping at the person ceases, then that conception of the 'I' will be abandoned and the effects of the conception of the 'I', which is the suffering aggregates, will arise no more. Thus, the suffering aggregates cease. Thus by abandoning true suffering as well as the true origination of suffering (which is grasping at the self, or the conception of an 'I'), one obtains the state of liberation. One needs to understand this sequence.

We really need to try to derive the main points from this explanation, as well as their implication. It may seem quite complex at first but if you approach it in gradual steps then it will become clearer and clearer in your mind. The cause of all our problems—grasping at an inherently existent self of aggregates and of person—is false. The perception of truly existent or inherently existent aggregates is referred to as grasping at the self of the aggregates. This grasping at the self is the cause of all of our mistaken views and problems. In order to overcome that misconception (of grasping to the self of aggregates), one needs to realise the lack of true existence of the aggregates. That will then become the direct antidote for overcoming the misconception that the aggregates are truly existent.

In order to gain the realisation of the lack of true existence, one questions whether the aggregates actually exist in the way that they are perceived. Do the aggregates exist truly or inherently, which means independently and existing in their own right? Do they exist in that way or not? Having investigated it in this way, one comes to understand that the aggregates cannot possibly exist truly in and of themselves, without depending on anything else. Then one will gain the inkling that they actually lack true existence. With this realisation, one will understand how the 'I' itself, which is dependent on the aggregates, also lack true existence. When one gains the realisation of the lack of true existence in relation to aggregates and person, one will then overcome the misconception of a truly existent self. That then serves as a cause for overcoming all misconceptions, which are causes for obtaining the contaminated aggregates, which are in the nature of suffering. It is good to understand this step-by-step approach to reaching the correct understanding of reality.

One needs to further understand that the object is the same for both the misconception and the correct perception. For example, if we were to ask 'what is the object of the perception of truly existent aggregates?' then the object is the

aggregates, right? If we were to further ask 'what is the perception of the lack of true existence of the aggregates?', then the object is also the aggregates. As explained in the teachings, one needs to reach a good understanding of how there are two completely contradictory views that focuses on the same object. If one realises this contradiction, then one has an inkling of the correct view. You are focussing on the same object, but there are two different types of perceptions. One needs to understand the distinction between those two perceptions, and then try to gain the understanding of the correct one.

2.1.2.1.3. Teaching reality through the example of a reflection

This section is divided into two:

2.1.2.1.3.1. Example for ceasing sufferings and their sources through realising the person and aggregates as not truly existing

2.1.2.1.3.2. The opposite example

2.1.2.1.3.1. Example for ceasing sufferings and their sources through realising the person and aggregates as not truly existing

This outline presents the teaching on the nature of reality, with the example of a reflection in a mirror. The English translation of the text does not convey the meaning that that true suffering and true origination will cease when one gains the realisation of the lack of inherent existence of the person and the aggregates. The example that illustrates this is presented in the following verses:

31. *Just as it is said
That an image of one's face is seen
Depending on a mirror
But does not really exist [as a face],*
32. *So the conception of I exists
Dependent on the aggregates,
But like the image of one's face
The I does not at all really exist.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that these verses indicate that although one can see the image of one's face in a mirror, the image does not exist truly. It is not established as it appears, in the slightest way. Likewise by depending on the aggregates and so forth, one will have the conception of 'I', but just as the image of one's face in the mirror is false, so too the person and the aggregates are not established inherently in the slightest way.

The main point of using the example of an image of one's face in a mirror is to explain the falsity of the 'I' and the aggregates. The example is quite obvious. The image of one's face is reflected upon the mirror, but the image that we see in the mirror is not our face. This example is used to illustrate that even though aggregates and the 'I' appear to be truly existent or inherently existent, in reality they do not exist in that way. That is how one needs to understand the analogy of an image in the mirror.

The commentary explains that while the details of the image of our face will be clear in all aspects, that image is in no way any part of our face. We see an image of our whole head in the mirror, we see our nose, our ears and so on, but none of the detail that we see in the image is actually any part of our face. The nose that we see in the mirror is not our nose, the ears are not our ears, and likewise our eyes and so forth. No aspect of the details that we see in the mirror is any part of our face.

Likewise the aggregates and the 'I' appear to the faulty perception as being truly existent. Every aspect of the aggregates as well as the 'I' itself appear as being inherently existent or inherently established. However, just like the image in the mirror is not true in any way, even though the aggregates and the 'I' appear in every aspect and detail to be inherently existent, there is not even the slightest aspect of true existence in any part of the aggregates or the 'I'.

The commentary further explains that even a simpleton or an elderly person with conventional knowledge, realises that the image of a face in a mirror is not actually the face. One needs to understand how the analogy is being used here; – it is not the image itself that is false. To understand the image itself as being false is more subtle, and is an example of the realisation of emptiness. Whereas here the analogy refers to realising that the image is not the face itself, which is not a very subtle or obscure realisation. Even a simpleton or an elderly person who has mere conventional knowledge will realise that. In other words, realising that the image is not the face is not a realisation of emptiness. There is, a phrase in Tibetan that you can look at an image of *momo* in a glass case, but you can't really taste it. [*Geshe-la laughs*]. The image of a *momo* in the mirror cannot be tasted or eaten. Right?

2.1.2.1.3.2. The opposite example

The opposite example relates to verse 33:

33. *Just as without depending on a mirror
The image of one's face is not seen,
So too the conception of I does not exist
Without depending on the aggregates.*

In his commentary, Gyaltsab Je explains that just as one cannot possibly see an image of one's face without depending on a mirror, so too one cannot have a conception of an 'I' without depending on the aggregates. Thus, without realising the lack of inherent existence of the aggregates, one cannot possibly see the lack of inherent existence of 'I' and 'mine'. As explained in the commentary, this is emphasising the points that were explained earlier.

The commentary explains this using the following syllogism. Take the subject 'a person and the aggregates': they lack inherent existence, because they are interdependent originations, just like the image in a mirror. Here the syllogism is using the reasoning of interdependent origination.

At this point one needs to understand that the analogy of an image in a mirror is being used here in a more subtle way than in the previous verses. The analogy refers to understanding the lack of true existence of the image itself, rather than understanding the image as not being the actual object that is reflected (which is the face as in the earlier example). As also explained in the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*, it is by first realising the lack of true existence with an example that one will be able to gain the realisation of the lack of true existence of the main subject, which is the aggregates and the person. The reason why it is easier with an example is that the subject, the mirror, which is the basis of imputation, is easier to relate to as being false. Because of the nature of object, or basis of imputation, it is easier to understand the lack of true existence based on the reflection in a mirror, than it is to understand the lack of true existence of the aggregates and the person. Thus, when one understands the lack of true existence based on the example of the reflection in the mirror, one will then be able to utilise that understanding to

understand the lack of true existence of the aggregates and the person. Is that clear?

The main point is that in order to gain the understanding or realisation of the lack of true existence of the subject 'aggregates and person', one needs to initially understand the example of a reflection in a mirror. The syllogism presents the subject, 'person and aggregates' as lacking inherent establishment, because it is an interdependent origination, and the example is a reflection in a mirror. This indicates that understanding the lack of inherent establishment is easier if one first uses the reflection of an image in a mirror as an example, rather than beginning with the subject 'person and aggregates'.

While this explanation relates to a subtle understanding based upon the example of an image in a mirror, one can also gain an understanding of the lack of true existence at the grosser level, by understanding that the image of a face in the mirror is not actually the face itself. Even with that grosser example, when one understands that the reflection of one's face in the mirror is not actually the face, one can see how, even though the person and aggregates appear as being inherently existent, they lack inherent or true existence in reality. We need to gain some understanding of the syllogism that is presented here using the earlier, grosser, example of the image in the mirror. So it is really good to reflect on the grosser as well as the subtler levels of understanding of the example of the image in the mirror.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*

might think 'the beginning of my samsara must have started in my mother's womb', which of course is not the case.

When we contemplate and meticulously analyse the nature of samsara in relation to ourselves, it actually induces great sense of joy within oneself. When some people think about renunciation, their mind may feel uncomfortable and uneasy. If one feels uncomfortable thinking about samsara and renunciation, then that is because one has not really understood the main point yet. One has only gained a superficial understanding. That is why study is really important.

When we study and gain an understanding of what has been explained in the teachings, then we will experience a sense of joy. When we contemplate 'What is the origin of suffering?' and 'What is the cause for our own samsara?', and then relate that to our continuum in the past, we see that we have created the causes for our own contaminated aggregates now. Then we might wonder, 'what caused the person in a past life to have contaminated aggregates'? That is how countless past lives are understood. When one further analyses past lives in this way, one will gain an understanding of the fact that there is no beginning to one's samsara.

Then when one contemplates where all this leads us to in the future, we begin to realize that for as long as we are influenced by the root cause of samsara, which is the conception of the 'I', we will continue to obtain a similar existence with the contaminated aggregates from life to life.

One needs to gain an understanding what it means for our contaminated physical aggregates to be in the nature of suffering. It does not mean that the physical and mental aggregates are actually an experience of suffering, for example the body itself is not suffering. Rather, it means that they serve as the basis for us to experience various other types of sufferings. When we really think about it, it is very true. Our contaminated physical and mental aggregates are the basis on which we experience so many types of suffering. So, that is why they are in the nature of suffering.

Thus obtaining a contaminated body and mind in the future comes about from the misconceptions that we have now. If we are guided and influenced by the misconceptions that we have now, then it will be really difficult for us to see that there is actually an end to our own suffering as well as an end to our own samsara. So it becomes quite clear that until one gains the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness, which directly opposes the misconception that is the cause of samsara, there is no possible way to end samsara. All of this becomes quite clear when we do the analysis in this way.

The conclusion that one comes to with this analysis is that the end to one's samsara is possible only when one gains the realisation of selflessness or emptiness, which is the direct opponent to the misconception of grasping at a true self. One needs to see the possibility of extinguishing that misconception of grasping at true existence with a state of mind that directly opposes that misconception, which is the wisdom realising emptiness. That then becomes a source of great encouragement, and one gains a real sense of joy from getting in touch with the possibility of ending the very cause of one's suffering and samsaric existence.

When we relate to the teachings in this way, it becomes a great source of inspiration and joy. As I have mentioned earlier, this is unlike meditation where we focus single-pointedly on one object. When we engage in such meditation practice we might have a temporary release from the

delusions, and feel a sense of joy for a while, but that in itself does not lead in any way to overcoming the negative states of mind. While we are single-pointedly focused on an object, we may feel joyful, but when we come out of the meditation we resume our normal samsaric existence. Single-pointed meditation alone doesn't provide much impetus to really engage in the practice of the Dharma.

For me, contemplating these teachings and thinking about their meaning is definitely a great source of inspiration. I really find that the teachings themselves are such a wondrous and incredible revelation, and thus a great source of inspiration. That should also be the case for you too. As I mentioned previously, we all have the great conditions right now of having access to the Dharma, and to teachers who expound the teachings clearly. We have the great fortune to have incredibly good conditions right now. As I have mentioned before, we are on the threshold of making a choice to either go up to a good rebirth in the next lifetime, or to fall down to another unfortunate rebirth. That choice is because of the genuine freedom that we have now. Recognising that we have that freedom and using it in an optimum way is really what we need to be doing now.

As mentioned previously, the causes for obtaining a good rebirth in the next lifetime are, to refrain from killing, which is not something beyond our capacity. We also have the fortunate condition of not having a compulsion to steal, so we can avoid stealing, and avoiding sexual misconduct is also something that we can manage to do. When we refer to the rest of the causes for a fortunate rebirth in this way, we can see that obtaining the causes for a good rebirth is not beyond our reach. There is a real possibility if we practise in this way. That is what I mean about having an independent choice now.

We need to see that we have the right conditions now and that it is essential to use them in the most optimum way that is possible. The main practice is, as I regularly emphasise, to generate a kind attitude; this is really what it all comes down to. If we practise a true sense of concern and generosity toward others then that will really benefit us. Apart from the benefits for our future lives, we can experience the benefits of such kind attitudes right now. It is thus worthwhile for us to engage in the practice of generating a kind mind.

Since we all naturally wish to be happy and we all wish for good things in our life, and as the cause for happiness and goodness is a positive state of mind, we need to familiarise ourselves with how to obtain such a mind. As the great master Shantideva mentioned, there are many causes for happiness, but the supreme cause is the flawless Dharma. There may be many external conditions that make us temporarily happy, but the supreme source of real happiness and joy within our mind is, as indicated by Shantideva, the flawless doctrine, or the Dharma. While we may gain some temporary satisfaction and happiness from external factors, when we gain the happiness and joy of the Dharma then that it is something that is heartfelt and something that we can always carry within ourselves. As we can keep it within us, wherever we are, it is the supreme source of happiness.

As mentioned previously, the genuine source of happiness is a kind and virtuous state of mind. For as long as we feel a genuine sense of love and compassion towards others, we feel quite fulfilled within ourselves, and our mind is naturally imbued with a sense of joy and happiness. Whereas when we begin to lose that sense of genuine concern and love for others, then that is when the real source

of unhappiness starts to grip us. We start feeling depressed, and an unhappy state of mind comes from that. Whenever we have a diminished sense of concern and kindness for others, then that is the time when whatever we do seems unsatisfactory. When we are eating, the food doesn't taste as nice; if we go out and try to enjoy something, it doesn't feel so joyful; if we are staying at home, we feel lonely and unhappy. Even if we go out we seem to be unable to relate to others, and we have no companions. That is when the real source of unhappiness sinks in. Thus, as I emphasise regularly, the greatest investment for our own temporary and future happiness is a kind attitude and a gentle mind. The reason I am relating all of this to you is because I consider you to be Dharma practitioners.

The way in which losing that genuine sense of concern and love for others destroys one's own happiness is quite clear and obvious when we look into various situations. If we ask someone 'would you like to have companions?' The answer would be 'Yes, I would like to have companions'. But people destroy their relationships through being agitated or constantly short-tempered or grumpy. Because of their unwelcoming and unappreciative attitude, others don't feel comfortable around them. When a family sits down to have a meal together they might initially be joyful, but when someone starts to exhibit grumpiness and become unsettled then that starts to disturb everyone else. That is when people start to distance themselves from that person. Of course we cannot blame anyone in this particular situation. When someone is infected by a negative state of mind and able to identify such attitudes within themselves, then it is their responsibility to try and overcome these attitudes.

2.1.2.2. REFUTATION OF INHERENTLY EXISTENT BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

This section has four subdivisions:

- 2.1.2.2.1. Order of entry into cyclic existence
- 2.1.2.2.2. Order of ceasing cyclic existence
- 2.1.2.2.3. Benefits of realising emptiness
- 2.1.2.2.4. Nature of liberation

Just by reading the sequence of outlines we can see how the instructions follow smoothly from one to the other with meticulous logic. The first section shows how one enters cyclic existence, and the second explains how to reverse that and abandon cyclic existence. The third explains the benefit of applying that method of emptiness, which is liberation, while the fourth explains what liberation is. So just from the presentation of the outlines one can gain a profound understanding of how to use our intellect and reasoning. They really illustrate the way to reason.

As explained in the teachings on the twelve links of interdependent origination, their order represents how we enter cyclic existence. The first link is ignorance, and due to that ignorance one creates the causes for the second link, which is karma, specifically projecting or throwing karma. The imprints of that are then left upon the consciousness, which is the third link. The earlier link causes the next link, all the way up to the twelfth and final link which is ageing and death.¹ That is the way in which the forward progression of the links can be understood.

To explain the cessation of samsara, the reverse order of the links is used. Samsara actually ceases is when the link of

ageing and death ceases and thus the link of birth naturally ceases. We see how this works by understanding where each link comes from. Where do ageing and death come from? They come from birth. So if there was no birth to begin with then the link of ageing and death cannot occur. Thus ageing and death is linked to birth. When ageing and death cease, then the link of birth will naturally cease, and then the links existence, grasping, the six sources of contact and so forth, will all cease in reverse order. Thus the forward and reverse order of the twelve interdependent links show how one enters into cyclic existence or samsara, and how one can actually reverse that process.

The reverse order of the twelve links indicates the way in which cyclic existence ceases. However to stop the links from occurring altogether, one begins with the first link, the link of ignorance. When one stops the link of ignorance, then the following link, karma, cannot be created. Without creating the link of karma the following links cannot be experienced all the way up to ageing and death. So stopping the links is a matter of stopping the first link, which is ignorance. When one gains this understanding, then it becomes very profound.

One needs to relate the teaching on the following verses to the twelve interdependent links. One enters cyclic existence by possessing the first link of ignorance, which naturally leads to the second link of creating karma, which in turn leads to the third link of leaving the imprints of karma upon one's consciousness and so on. So to stop experiencing the twelve interdependent links, one needs to start with the very first link by eliminating ignorance, which in turn eliminates the karma that is created out of ignorance, and thus the mental imprints of that karma cannot be stored in one's consciousness. In that way the rest of the links will be naturally stop as well.

We presented the four sub-divisions in this category earlier, the first which is:

2.1.2.2.1. Order of entry into cyclic existence

This is sub-divided into two:

- 2.1.2.2.1.1. Identifying the root of cyclic existence
- 2.1.2.2.1.2. Example for cyclic existence

2.1.2.2.1.1. Identifying the root of cyclic existence

I have quoted the following verse many times in my teachings to you. It is also quoted in many other teachings, thus being familiar with this verse and its meaning is essential.

35. *As long as the aggregates are conceived,
So long thereby does the conception of I exist.
Further, when the conception of I exists,
There is action, and from it there also is birth.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that the first line of the verse refers to the misconception of the aggregates as being inherently established. As the commentary explains, for as long as the aggregates are conceived to be inherently established and the apprehended object is not refuted, the conception of 'I' that is perceived by the view of transitory collection exists, and remains without the slightest decrease.

Here Gyaltsab is explaining that the conception of 'I' is based on the conception of truly existent aggregates. This means that by first relating to the aggregates, and perceiving them as being truly existent, the strong grasping at 'I' and 'mine' arises from that. As explained here in the commentary, the view of the transitory collection refers to grasping at the 'I' and the aggregates of one's own

¹ The twelve links are ignorance, karma, consciousness, name and form, the six sources, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, existence, rebirth, ageing and death.

continuum as being truly existent. When the commentary says that *it remains without the slightest decrease* it is referring to the fact that for as long as there is the conception of inherently established aggregates, there will be no decrease in the strong grasping at 'I' and 'mine'

In summary, perceiving phenomena as being truly existent leads to the view of the transitory collection, which is grasping at the 'I' and 'mine' of one's own continuum.

As explained in Gyaltsab's commentary, when the grasping at 'I' and 'mine' is very strong and vivid in one's mind, one will naturally have a strongly opinionated mind, considering certain things to be favourable to the 'I' and other things to be unfavourable to the 'I'. In relation to the 'I' and 'mine' of the transitory collection, there is a strong sense of like and dislike. Attachment develops with the objects that you like, and anger develops towards the things that you dislike. And out of attachment and anger one engages in different kinds of actions, which are karma. These karmas then become the causes for all our suffering. So it is the creation of karma that is the cause for rebirth.

It was also explained in the Madhyamaka teachings, that unless and until the apprehended object is refuted, one will not be able to overcome that misconception of grasping to true existence. That is how one gains the realisation of the lack of true existence upon phenomena, which is the realisation of the emptiness of phenomena.²

The commentary further mentions that this is how Nagarjuna also establishes that even hearers and solitary-realiser arhats have gained the realisation of emptiness.

2.1.2.2.1.2. Example for cyclic existence

36. *With these three pathways mutually causing each other
Without a beginning, a middle, or an end,
This wheel of cyclic existence
Turns like the wheel of a firebrand.*

The three pathways referred to in the verse are delusions, karma and the production of the remaining links of interdependent origination, such as birth and so forth. The three pathways are the means by which one enters into cyclic existence. Through delusions one creates karma, from karma there is the production of birth, and the suffering that follows from that. That is how one enters into samsara. If one does not strive to free oneself from these three pathways, one will have to experience suffering unceasingly. The cycle of suffering has *no beginning, no middle and no end*. Thus one needs to free oneself from these sufferings.

In relation to having no beginning, no middle and no end, it has been explained that karma arises from delusions, which leads to suffering, and from which further delusions arise. When we look into how the cause and effect sequence works, we see that there is no end to this cycle; an earlier cause leads to a result, which then becomes the cause for the next result, which in turn leads to the creation of further causes, which are similar to the initial causes. In an endless cycle they turn without a beginning, middle, or an end, *like a firebrand*. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, they each contribute to the arising of another, and thus it is like a firebrand, which has no beginning, no middle and no end. Gyaltsab concludes with a summary of the advice that one

should take from this, which is having identified the root of samsara, one must engage in the practice of applying all root virtues to becoming the method for overcoming samsara.

Samsara is basically the result of an initial misconception of grasping at the aggregates as being truly existent, from which the view of the transitory collection, which is grasping at the inherent existence of one's 'I' and 'mine', arises. That then becomes the cause for all of one's further suffering and thus the cause of samsara. Having identified and understood the ultimate cause in this way, one needs to apply whatever merit or virtue that one may accumulate to make sure that it becomes the cause to overcome this misconception. Thus we have the method of freeing oneself from samsara.

Gyaltsab Je then concludes by saying that if one wishes to understand these points in greater detail, one can refer to Lama Tsong Khapa's great treatise, *Illumination of the Thought*, a commentary on Chandrakirti's *Madhyamakavatara*. We covered the points made there with quite extensive explanations, so students can refer back to those teachings as well.

It should be obvious that we are covering many points that have already been explained in detail in the past. I am not sure how much you have retained from the explanations that have been given in the past. Nevertheless, you may appreciate the fact that the previous teachings have opened many doorways for you.

To summarise, the main point of practice is, as I emphasise regularly, to try to cultivate a kind attitude and protect whatever kind attitude and good mind that one has already developed. That is the advice that is given in the teachings, and it is something that we need to endeavour to do. The explanation of how we enter cyclic existence and how to escape cyclic existence or samsara provides us with an impetus to develop renunciation. Based on our own wish to be free from samsara, we can then generate the wish to free others from samsara too. Thus the explanation of how one enters and frees oneself from samsara is not limited merely to the development of renunciation, but is also an impetus for developing love and compassion followed by bodhichitta. The explanation of how the understanding of samsara serves as a means to develop bodhichitta is explained in the Madhyamaka teachings.

As one of my own late masters, Kyabje Trichang Rinpoche used to emphasise in his teachings, the manner of developing love and compassion based on an understanding of the samsaric nature of sentient beings, is much more profound than developing love and compassion by merely focussing on their obvious level of suffering. This is an important point to understand. When we see someone who is obviously suffering, we might have an immediate and strong emotional response to that and feel some love and compassion, but it doesn't go much beyond that. In fact when we see someone that we dislike who is suffering, we might even feel happy about that, rather than feeling compassion. However, when we think about samsara then we understand that all beings, regardless of whether they are experiencing an obvious level of suffering or not, are an object for which to develop love and compassion. That sort of compassion is much more profound.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute

² The Madhyamaka teachings from 11 May 2004 to 21 September 2004 cover 'Establishing the selflessness of person with logic', which incorporates the refutation of a number of different propositions about the nature of the self of person.

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་འགྲུབ་མཚན་ལོ་།།

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

25 May 2010

As usual, we will begin the practice with the appropriate motivation. (*Meditation*)

With a clear and relaxed state of mind we adopt the motivation, 'in order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself, so therefore I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

2.1.2.2. REFUTATION OF INHERENTLY EXISTENT BONDAGE AND LIBERATION (CONT)

2.1.2.2.2. Order of ceasing cyclic existence

Here verse 37 states:

37. *Because this wheel is not obtained from self,
other,
Or from both, in the past, the present, or the
future,
The conception of I is overcome
And thereby action and rebirth.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that because the interdependent origination of the cyclic existence is not produced inherently from *self* or *other* or *both*, nor from any of the three times, it lacks inherent production. Through understanding this and meditating on it, grasping at the self perceived by the view of the transitory collection will be extinguished. Thus karma and rebirth will also cease.

As the commentary clearly explains, when one realises that just as the very causes, as well as the effects of samsara don't have even an atom of inherent establishment, the conception of the 'I' as perceived by the transitory collection, as well as the grasping at that self will also naturally cease. When the conception of the 'I' is extinguished, the cause and effect sequence of karma will also naturally cease. Thus, that which leads us into cyclic existence will cease. This is quite easy to understand isn't it? As explained here in the teachings, it is good for us to reflect upon how the cessation of samsara is actually possible in general, how that can occur, and thus achieve the cessation of one's own samsaric existence.

The main point to reflect on is how one enters into samsara, which is by grasping at the aggregates as being truly existent. This grasping at the aggregates produces the conception of 'self', and grasping at the 'I' and 'mine' of one's own continuum, which is called *view of the transitory collections*. By grasping at our 'I' and 'mine' we create the karma that leads us into cyclic existence.

Having understood how we fall into samsara, we then go on to consider the reverse, which is the cessation of samsara. When the misconception of the aggregates as being truly existent is eliminated, then that will naturally stop the grasping at 'I' and 'mine', which will in turn stop the process of creating the karma. What is being specifically mentioned here is that the cessation of samsara is achieved by developing wisdom, specifically the wisdom realising emptiness; this is the main point.

However it should also be understood that as an aid to developing the wisdom realising emptiness, we also need meditative stabilisation, particularly calm abiding focussed on emptiness. In order to achieve calm abiding one needs to firstly train in moral ethics. Based on the practice of morality, one is then able to develop the meditative stabilisation leading on to calm abiding. Based on calm abiding, one will then be able to achieve the special insight focussing on emptiness. That then becomes the complete method to achieve the cessation of the cyclic existence of samsara. We need to be able to follow these points in order to understand that the earlier preliminary trainings are needed in order to gain the wisdom realising emptiness.

The main point being related here is that the process of extinguishing cyclic existence is dependent on extinguishing true origins. Within true origins, it is the ignorance of grasping at the self that must be overcome in order to end samsara. This will also be explained in the next verses.

One needs to be able to relate to this very profound logic, which shows us how to overcome cyclic existence or samsara. In particular we need to understand the logic of how overcoming the very root of cyclic existence will lead to the cessation of cyclic existence. The analogy is that cutting off the branches will not get rid of a tree, because the more you cut the branches the more the branches will grow. However if you destroy the very root of the tree, then the plant will be destroyed.

The next verse states:

38. *One who sees how cause and effect
Are produced and destroyed
Does not regard the world
As really existent or really non-existent.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains, those who have gained the understanding of suchness or the emptiness of phenomena, and who understand the production and the cessation of the cause and effect of samsara, will not be influenced by either the ultimate existence, or total lack of existence of the phenomena of the world. That is because such beings would have gained the full understanding of independent origination as being free from the extremes of permanence and annihilation.

2.1.2.2.3. Benefits of realising emptiness

The verse relating to this reads:

39. *One who has heard thus the doctrine
extinguishing
All suffering, but does not examine it
And fears the fearless state
Trembles due to ignorance.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, understanding independent origination, which is free from all fabrications of all extremes, overcomes suffering entirely.

The commentary then goes on to further explain that by failing to recognise these benefits, foolish beings will develop a *fear* of the cause of the *fearless state* of complete freedom. In other words they will fear emptiness itself. This is due to the *ignorance* in the minds of the foolish beings. If the presentation of emptiness evokes fear in those who are foolish, then the implication is that this is not the case for the wise. In fact it actually brings about great joy to the wise.

In summary, verse 39 is explaining the benefit of the realisation of emptiness or the interdependent origination that is free from all fabrications and extremes. Gaining that realisation will bring about the complete cessation of all

suffering. In brief, the benefit of emptiness is the cessation of all suffering.

A foolish being, unable to analyse and thus understand this, will feel fear. Rather than seeing the benefits and relating to it in that way, great fear arises in their mind. It is not that emptiness has no benefit, but the fact that foolish beings fear emptiness because of their lack of understanding or ignorance. The verse explains this quite clearly. The first part explains the benefit of the *doctrine* expounding emptiness as *extinguishing all suffering*. Those who are frightened of this are afraid due to their ignorance. The point here is to understand that without gaining the wisdom realising emptiness, there will be no way to completely overcome suffering.

2.1.2.2.4. Nature of liberation

This is sub-divided into four:

2.1.2.2.4.1. Unsuitability of fearing the extinction of the conception of a self at the time of nirvana without remainder

2.1.2.2.4.2. Liberation as the extinction of all conceptions of true existence

2.1.2.2.4.3. Difference between wrong and right views

2.1.2.2.4.4. Liberation as the extinction of the conception of true existence even during the nirvana with remainder

2.1.2.2.4.1. Unsuitability of fearing the extinction of the conception of a self at the time of nirvana without remainder

Nirvana is classified into two types, nirvana without remainder and nirvana with remainder. Older students will recall that this was explained in earlier teachings. According to the two lower Buddhist schools, the Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika, the difference between nirvana with remainder and without remainder is that when an arhat attains nirvana with remainder, he still retains contaminated aggregates (or aggregates in the nature of suffering). When those contaminated aggregates are completely eliminated then the arhat attains nirvana without remainder.

For the Prasangika (or Middle Way school), the distinction between nirvana with remainder and nirvana without remainder is whether there is an appearance of true existence or not. An arhat who still has the appearance of true existence would be an arhat in nirvana with remainder. When they obtain the complete cessation of all appearance of true existence, then they have obtained the nirvana without remainder. According to the lower schools, nirvana with remainder is obtained first, followed by nirvana without remainder. However, according to the Prasangika, nirvana without remainder is obtained first followed by nirvana with remainder.

**40. *That all these will not exist in nirvana
Does not frighten you.
Why does their non-existence
Explained here cause you fright?***

In explaining the meaning of this verse, Gyaltsab Je's commentary posits the questions that other schools would ask the Prasangika. In an earlier verse it was established that there should be no fear caused by either the realisation of emptiness, or the actual presentation of emptiness. The lower Buddhist schools now say to the Prasangika: 'It cannot be established that there is no fear associated with the explanation of emptiness. That is because the most intimate objects in relation to one's existence, namely 'I' and 'mine' are completely eliminated in the presentation of emptiness. How could that not cause fear?

Of course the reason why emptiness causes fear for the lower Buddhist schools is because they posit inherently established persons and phenomena. So when the Prasangika present the view of the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena, then for the lower schools (who establish inherent existence) that implies the annihilation of the self of persons and phenomena. Thus for them it means that there is no self of persons and phenomena, and that causes great fear.

As a response to that, the Prasangika ask the lower Buddhist schools: 'Then why doesn't obtaining nirvana without remainder, which according to you the aggregates cease to exist, cause fear for you?' This question arises from the assertion of the lower Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika Buddhist schools that when an arhat with remainder (meaning an arhat who still has the physical contaminated aggregates within their continuum) dies, they obtain the nirvana without remainder, and their continuum actually cease to exist; their aggregates as well as their mental continuum are totally extinguished. In other words there is nothing left of the continuum of that arhat.

So the Prasangika posit this question in relation to their explanation: 'Doesn't the fact that the continuum of their aggregates is completely extinguished cause fear? It should!' The Prasangika further say: 'Rather than being afraid of what we present, we are saying that the view of emptiness completely extinguishes the delusions, particularly the delusion relating to the appearance of inherent existence; so the cessation of the three root delusions, should not cause any fear. What brings that cessation about is the wisdom realising emptiness, and so there should be no fear of emptiness'.

Here, we need to understand the conflicting views in the presentations of the Prasangika and the two lowest Buddhist schools. According to the lower Buddhist schools grasping at true existence is a valid consciousness, whereas according to the Prasangika, grasping at true existence is completely erroneous and a wrong consciousness. This is where another conflict arises. According to the lower schools the perception of the aggregates, the perception of the 'I' itself and other phenomena, as being inherently existent is a valid perception. Whereas according to the Prasangika, it is a completely invalid and wrong perception. According to the Prasangika when one obtains nirvana, that misconception is completely eliminated. When the Prasangika say that there should be no fear in overcoming the very root of the delusions, they are referring to overcoming the very misconception of grasping at true existence or inherent existence.

Here we need to understand that the lower Buddhist schools cannot establish a liberation that extinguishes the misconception of grasping at true existence, specifically inherent existence. They assert that at a substantially, self-sufficiently existent 'I' is the root delusion or the root cause of our ignorance. So therefore overcoming that will be realising selflessness or emptiness.

2.1.2.2.4.2. Liberation as the extinction of all conceptions of true existence

This section refutes the assertions of the lower Buddhist schools with respect to the nature of liberation, and it has three sub-divisions:

2.1.2.2.4.2.1. Impossibility of an inherently existent non-thing as liberation

2.1.2.2.4.2.2. Impossibility of a thing as liberation

2.1.2.2.4.2.3. Meaning of liberation

2.1.2.2.4.2.1. *Impossibility of an inherently existent non-thing as liberation*

One of the assertions by the two lower schools is that not only is liberation a non-thing, but it is also an inherently existent non-thing. That is the assertion that is being refuted by the Prasangika.

The verse relating to this is:

**41. "In liberation there is no self and no aggregates."
If liberation is asserted thus,
Why is the removal here of the self
And of the aggregates not liked by you?**

In relation to the earlier question posed by the Prasangika, the lower Buddhist schools then say: 'I do not fear inherently established liberation, which is free from all suffering. I do not fear such liberation.' To that the Prasangika respond: 'If you assert that you do not fear the attainment of liberation, which is a state of the complete cessation of the person and aggregates, then the assertion that the aggregates and person are not established as being inherently existent should not cause any fear. To fear one and not the other is completely contradictory. How could the lack of inherent existence cause any fear?'

The verse argues: 'You assert that obtaining *liberation*, particularly *nirvana* without remainder is a complete extinction of the *self*, the person and the *aggregates*. Why then do you not like the *removal* of the *self*, which refers to gaining the understanding of a lack of an inherently established person and aggregates? In fact this presentation should suit you, and give you joy'.

2.1.2.2.4.2.2. *Impossibility of a thing as liberation*

This refutation particularly relates to the Vaibhashika system, which also establishes permanence as 'a thing'. It is covered in the first two lines of Verse 42, which reads:

**42ab. If nirvana is not a non-thing,
Just how could it have thingness?**

As Gyaltsab Je comments in his commentary, if the cessation of the aggregates is considered as being a 'thing', then how could liberation also be a 'thing'? The answer is that it is because a thing cannot be an inherently existing thing.

In asserting that liberation is a thing, the Vaibhashikas are asserting that it is actually an inherently established thing. To refute liberation as being an inherently established thing, the Prasangika ask: 'How can there an inherently established thing when there cannot be an inherently established non-thing? Both "thing" and "non-thing" equally lack inherent establishment. So it is not possible to establish an inherently existent thing as liberation'.

2.1.2.2.4.2.3. *Meaning of liberation*

**42cd. The extinction of the misconception
Of things and non-things is called nirvana.**

Having refuted the assertions of the lower schools, the last two lines of verse 42 explain how liberation is established by our own Prasangika system. As explained in Gyaltsab's commentary, liberation is when one reaches the state of completely overcoming the misconception of perceiving bit things and non-things as being inherently established.

2.1.2.2.4.3. Difference between wrong and right views

The difference between right and wrong views is established in the next two verses.

**43. In brief the view of nihilism
Is that effects of actions do not exist.
Without merit and leading to a bad state,
It is regarded as a "wrong view."**

Firstly the Prasangika present their qualm, saying: 'If you assert that if liberation lacks inherent establishment, then liberation could not exist, that is not possible.' What is implied here is that according to the lower systems, the Prasangika view of the lack of inherent existence is a nihilistic view. In response to that, the Prasangika state: 'The view of the lack of inherent existence is not nihilism. If you deny the cause and effect relationship of karma, the four noble truths, and the existence of the three jewels, then that is what I would call a nihilistic view'.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains that if one were to adhere to a view that karma and its effects do not actually exist, then one is actually creating a non-meritorious karmic cause. As a result, one would then be reborn into the lower realms. Such a being is then called 'a being of a lower realm.'

According to the sutras, adhering to views such as the non-existence of the four noble truths, the three jewels and so forth is holding on to the wrong view of nihilism. It is good to understand these points, which establish what a wrong view is. It is clearly explained that holding on to a view that denies the relevance of the four noble truths, the three jewels and karma is considered to be a wrong view. It is also clearly explained that denying the existence of the cause and effect sequence of karma is what creates the non-meritorious karma that is the cause to be re-born in the lower realms. So, according to the teachings, holding that the four noble truths and so forth are non-existent is a dangerous view to have.

Having explained that adhering to the view of nihilism is adhering to a wrong view, the next verse explains the right view:

**44. In brief the view of existence
Is that effects of actions exist.
Meritorious and conducive to happy
transmigrations
It is regarded as a "right view."**

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains that *in brief*, refers to adhering to a view that establishes the existence of karma and its effects, which is considered as the right view. His commentary further explains that adhering to the view that establishes the cause and effect sequence, such that positive causes bring about positive results, and negative causes bring about negative results, creates meritorious or virtuous karma. The result of having created such karma is to be reborn in the higher realms. Therefore holding to such views is, as explained in the sutras, adhering to the right view.

Here the commentary is reiterating the main point, which is that the cause and effect sequence of karma does actually exist; it exists conventionally but not inherently. So it is presenting here the distinction between wrong view and the right view.

2.1.2.2.4.4. Liberation as the extinction of the conception of true existence even during the nirvana with remainder

45. *Because existence and non-existence are extinguished by wisdom,
There is a passage beyond meritorious and ill deeds.
This, say the excellent, is liberation from
Bad transmigrations and happy transmigrations.*

Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary that not only in nirvana without remainder is there the lack of a conception of true existence, but even in nirvana with remainder, there is also this distinction between the right and wrong view of the conception of true existence.

The verse is establishing that in both states of nirvana, (with remainder and without remainder), there is a lack of the perception of true existence, i.e. the view that things exist inherently is completely extinguished. As Gyaltsab's commentary further explains, it is by extinguishing this view through wisdom that one gets to the *passage beyond meritorious and ill-deeds*. This means that nirvana is the state where one has moved beyond creating the karma to be re-born again. This is in accordance with the literal implication of the word 'liberation', which is *shi-wa* in Tibetan. This has a connotation of being peaceful, as it is a state of not having to take rebirth again in subsequent lifetimes.

What is being established is that as long as there a conception of true existence in state of nirvana with remainder, then that will be the cause to be re-born again in the cyclic existence. Reaching the state of liberation where one has completely extinguished the very root of one's rebirth, which is the conception of true existence, means that an arhat does not have to be re-born again into cyclic existence.

As it is quite easy to relate to the meaning of the verses, I tend to go through them quickly now. The Vaibhashika system asserts that nirvana with remainder and without remainder are differentiated by the extinction of the aggregates. The more profound Prasangika point of view is that both liberation with remainder and liberation without remainder is a complete cessation of rebirth all together.

It would be good to familiarise yourselves with the text in preparation for the classes. If one pays some attention whilst reading the text, and really tries to think about its meaning, then that is actually a very good meditation, which will bring an immediate sense of joy. So as well as bringing a long-term benefit, there is definitely a temporary benefit as well.

Normally we refer to the blessings of the Dharma, which are none other than the joy that one feels when one reads a text and gains some understanding from it. We cannot establish any other blessing than that. The real blessing is when the misconceptions and confusions in the mind begin to reduce, and one gains a little bit more understanding. Then the confusion and distortion in the mind is replaced by some understanding and wisdom. That is the real blessing.

This transformation of the mind is reflected in the literal meaning of *jin-lab*, which is translated in English as 'blessing'. In Tibetan *jin-lab* carries the connotation of that which is established and transformed, which refers to establishing the right views that remove the wrong views, and thus transforming one's ignorant mind into that of wisdom and understanding. The word *jin* has the

connotation of to establish or to give, and it refers to implanting a very good potential in the mind. The word *lab* has the connotation of transforming a negative state into to a positive state.

I don't think that we have an actual English word for *jin-lab* other than 'blessing'. I think that sometimes translators may not be able to find a direct equivalent of the literal meaning of words and so they use a word with similar, but not equivalent meaning. That is not to say it is wrong, but it doesn't convey the literal meaning of the words.

Of course, when we study we bring to light a deeper meaning of the words and thus a gain a deeper understanding. That is how one actually gains an extra understanding of the text. The English words may not convey the deeper connotation of the text. For example, I have heard that the Tibetan word *ngye-jung* is normally translated as renunciation, which has the connotation of giving up everything, and that you should not possess anything. But that fails to reflect the actual connotation of the Tibetan word *ngye-jung*. No wonder people sometimes get frightened and feel hesitant about developing renunciation.

The main thing is to do some self-investigation as well as study. If one can understand some of the Tibetan words and their meaning, then that will give a bit more flavour to the teachings. Otherwise one might miss out a bit.

Translators have different opinions about this problem. Apparently the prominent translator Alexander Berzin presents a more literal explanation of the connotations of the Tibetan words. Jampa Ignen commented either to me personally, or maybe I heard the comment, that he was finding some fault with Jeffrey Hopkins' translations. I made the passing remark 'I don't know if Jampa Ignen is really qualified to oppose Jeffrey Hopkins!' My understanding is that Jeffrey Hopkins uses words that are more of a direct literal equivalent to the Tibetan words. These can sometimes be a bit obscure, and hard to understand.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པོའི་བཀའ་སློབ་ཀྱི་ལྷན་པོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

1 June 2010

Along the lines of the motivation prayer we have just recited, we will do the meditation. (*Meditation*)

As we usually do, we also generate the appropriate motivation for receiving the teachings. Our motivation is very important and is definitely not to be taken lightly, and the very act of generating a motivation serves the purpose of subduing the mind. When we generate a motivation such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment; for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice', we try to ensure that it actually serves the purpose of helping to overcome negativity in our mind. When we generate this motivation appropriately, it actually serves as an antidote to the self-cherishing mind within ourselves.

As we have learnt, self-cherishing is really the root cause of all of our problems and is an obstacle for generating bodhichitta within our mind. Thus generating an altruistic motivation of bodhichitta serves as an antidote for overcoming the self-cherishing mind. Adopting that motivation for practising Dharma is a very appropriate way of applying the techniques to subdue one's mind. Every part of our practice then becomes very meaningful, and in that way we can slowly improve our mind.

We need to analyse the state of our own mind, really looking into what kind of attitudes we have; essentially to check whether we have a strong self-cherishing mind or not. In a normal state of mind we may feel that we are quite okay, thinking, 'As far as I'm concerned, things are fine, I don't have any faults, it is really others who cause me problems and difficulties'. That is the fault of not thoroughly analysing our mind. If we were to spend time in analysing the state of our mind, we would begin to detect the faults within ourselves, which is really important.

It is good to reflect upon the very personal instruction that Atisha gives us. He said, 'When one is alone, check the state of one's own mind, and when with others, check one's speech'. This is very sound advice, as it helps us to maintain our composure at all times.

When one engages in the practice of investigating one's state of mind along the lines of Atisha's advice, then that very process of investigating one's own state of mind by focussing inward, and not allowing the mind to become distracted, is a form of meditation. It will give a sense of fulfilment and joy. Thus when one is alone one will not have to experience the suffering of loneliness, as one will actually be quite contented and happy to engage in that practice. To that extent, this practice definitely has great benefit for oneself.

The second part of Atisha's advice refers to checking one's speech when one is with others. We will have noticed that on many occasions when we are involved in casual conversation and gossip with others, we often say hurtful things, that disturb others and lead to conflict and so forth.

A lot of useless, hurtful and damaging speech occurs when we are not careful.

Using these methods and techniques in our daily lives is an essential tool to bring about more clarity in our mind. Restoring and ensuring such clarity, as well as a more peaceful and joyous state of mind, will ultimately lead to a more virtuous state of mind. In this way, our own characteristic ways of thinking become a source of encouragement as we pursue the path of accumulating virtue. So it is beneficial in that way. In particular, the technique of looking within and investigating one's own mind as a form of meditation, is a way to bring back a sense of joy, particularly when we feel weighed down and disturbed.

It is of course normal to feel a bit down or disturbed at times, as that is part of our samsaric existence. However, if we allow ourselves to remain in a disturbed state and allow that situation to escalate, then it becomes more difficult to handle the situation. It is when we notice that we have a disturbed or unhappy state of mind, that we need to take the initiative to engage in the practice of analysing why that is so, to check our attitudes, and then try to cultivate a positive state of mind.

The most supreme meditation is that which helps to cultivate love and compassion in one's heart. Our motivation at the beginning of our practice is the very important method for further cultivating love and compassion within our minds. As I mention regularly, love and compassion are the very essence of our practice. When we work at developing love and compassion, we don't miss out on anything, as we are incorporating the very essence of the Mahayana teachings into our practice. If our love and compassion decreases, then our Mahayana practice has also decreased, and if love and compassion increases then our Mahayana practice will increase as well. That is really important to understand.

Love and compassion, particularly love, are cherished by everyone, regardless of whether they are religious or not. Love is something that everyone appreciates and values, thus it is not restricted to any religious belief. For example, if there have been some bad feelings or conflict with your relations, and later on one of them continues to display some concern and kindness towards us, then at a certain point our whole attitude will turn around. We will really appreciate that person, because they have extended their love towards us, regardless of previous conflicts or behaviours or mistakes. That shows us the value of love. We really appreciate anyone who shows us genuine concern and love. So we can think along these lines about why love is considered very valuable, which everyone recognises.

We need to ensure that we listen to the teachings and study the text because we know that they are a method to help subdue our mind. Otherwise they don't really serve any great purpose. If we listen to the teachings and study the text, but retain negative and selfish attitudes, then listening to the teachings will not have served its purpose. As explained in *Precious Garland*, by listening to the teachings one gains the profound advice they contain and leaves the positive imprints on the mind. But if we don't actually make an effort to utilise the teachings to change and transform ourselves then, as I mentioned earlier, there isn't really much benefit.

The fact that we don't experience real joy and happiness is because we have an unsubdued mind. As Buddha Shakyamuni said, 'A subdued mind is a happy mind'.

Conversely, an unsubdued mind is an unhappy mind. Buddha Shakyamuni also said, 'One is one's own teacher, and one is one's own protector'. Here he is referring to taking the initiative to apply the teachings in order to transform oneself by subduing one's mind; then one becomes one's own teacher and protector. This particular point of the Buddha's teaching is that one's happiness and sadness is dependent on the state of one's mind. It is crucial that we understand how our own happiness or misery is dependent on the state of our own minds. When we recognise that, we have found the crux of our problem.

What I'm relating to you now is in accordance with the advice in *Precious Garland*. At the beginning of the text it explains that we need to practise the Dharma in order gain temporary as well as ultimate benefits. In fact, the whole text is a presentation on how to solve our immediate problems by practising morality, which also brings about a happy rebirth in the future. The ultimate benefit is to obtain liberation and enlightenment.

With respect to the temporary benefits of Dharma practice, when we examine our state of mind now, we will be able to detect that many of our problems and negative states of mind are dependent on the particular attitude that we adopt at that time. When we make an effort to change an attitude by analysing our mind and meditating, then we will gain a temporary relief. However, even though there is that temporary benefit from our practice, when we resume our normal daily life activities, we are again affected by negative states of mind, emotions and tainted attitudes. Once again we experience a sense of unhappiness or sorrow. If we wonder, 'Why is that so? Why am I constantly affected by these negative attitudes, worries and problems?', then we need to remember the explanation presented in the teachings, which is that the root cause of our problems is the conception or grasping to the 'I', which comes from the imprints of previous lives.

That root problem can only be overcome by gaining the realisation of emptiness, which serves as a direct antidote for overcoming the misconceptions we hold within ourselves – which is the conception or grasping of 'I'. When we relate to the teachings in that way, we begin to gain a better understanding of our own situation. We will also gain a profound appreciation for the teachings on emptiness, and how crucial it is to gain the realisation of emptiness. We might think that the wisdom realising emptiness is a bit beyond us right now, and that we may not be able to attain it immediately. However what is worth acknowledging is the fact that we definitely gain a strong imprint of emptiness in our mind. Hearing about emptiness now, and making an effort to study emptiness, will definitely implant a very profound and positive imprint on our mind, which serves as a condition to actually gain the wisdom realising emptiness. For that reason we must recognise and appreciate the value of the teachings.

We need to try to approach the more profound aspects of the teachings by first of all relating to the obvious and practical way in which the teachings reflect our own experience. Once we see the benefits of the teachings at a practical and obvious level, we will be able to approach the more subtle aspects of the benefits of the teachings, which can be obtained with further practice.

The same valid being who shows us how to gain temporary benefit also explains the more long-term and subtle benefits of the teaching. The supreme teacher would not give a false presentation. Therefore if we can relate to and accept his

advice on the temporary benefits, there is no reason why his teaching on the ultimate benefits would not be true as well. Thus by recognising the immediate obvious benefits that we gain, we will be able to understand and accept the benefits of the more subtle and obscure levels. For example the law of karma is that positive actions bring about positive results in the future, and that negative actions will bring about negative results. At the more subtle levels, this is quite obscure and difficult for us to understand right now. The workings of the cause and effect sequences of karma are said to be hidden phenomena, which is why it is more obscure and difficult to understand now. However based on some experience that we have now, and through the use of sound reasoning we can accept that karma also works on more subtle levels. That is how we develop our understanding and faith in karma.

It seems like we have side-tracked a bit, however with the positive motivation explained earlier, we will cover the next few headings in the text.

2.1.2.3 ALL PHENOMENA AS FREE OF THE EXTREMES OF PERMANENCE AND ANNIHILATION

This is sub-divided into four:

2.1.2.3.1. Extensive exposition

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

2.1.2.3.3. Freedom from extremes as an uncommon feature of Buddhism

2.1.2.3.4. Refuting inherently existent things

2.1.2.3.1. Extensive exposition

This is further sub-divided into four:

2.1.2.3.1.1. Refuting inherently existent cause and effect

2.1.2.3.1.2. Avoiding contradiction with what is renowned in the world

2.1.2.3.1.3. Liberation through realising the meaning of non-duality

2.1.2.3.1.4. Illustrative example

2.1.2.3.1.1. Refuting inherently existent cause and effect

This heading has two sub-divisions:

2.1.2.3.1.1.1. Cause and effect as free of the extremes of existence and non-existence

2.1.2.3.1.1.2. Refuting inherently existent cause and effect

2.1.2.3.1.1.1. Cause and effect as free of the extremes of existence and non-existence

Here the root text states:

46. Seeing production as caused

One passes beyond non-existence.

Seeing cessation as caused

One also does not assert existence.

To understand this, one needs to first of all understand the views of the different Buddhist schools. The Svatantrika-Madhyamaka, Chittamatra, the Sautrantika and the Vaibhashika schools all assert inherent existence. It is only the highest Prasangika-Madhyamaka school that completely denies the inherent existence of all phenomena. As explained in earlier teachings, the reason why the schools below the Prasangika-Madhyamaka assert inherent existence is because they say that when you do a thorough analysis and search within any phenomena, you will always find something existing from the side of the object. Whereas according to the Prasangika, when you analyse and thoroughly search any phenomena, ultimately you cannot find an inherent existence.

According to the Prasangika-Middle Way school, all existence is thus merely imputed by conception. Whatever object it may be, there is no inherent existence from the side of the object, therefore all phenomena are merely imputed by conception. Whereas the lower Buddhist schools such as the Svatantrika-Middle Way school assert that the mode of existence is a combination of an inherent existence from the side of the object as well as the imputation from the side of the conception. So for Svatantrika-Madhyamaka phenomena exist through the mode of that combination.

To put it in another way, the Prasangika assert that things cannot exist from the side of the basis of imputation. Whereas according to the lower schools, if something did not exist from the side of the basis of imputation, then it couldn't possibly exist at all. They say that to deny inherent existence would completely annihilate the actual existence of that thing. So, this is the profound difference between the Prasangika school and the lower Buddhist schools.

These are points for discussion, where you can clarify the distinction between the Prasangika assertions of reality and those of the lower Buddhist Schools. What is the distinction? How are they different? Why do the differences occur? These questions and their answers need to be clearly understood, based on that understanding the rest of the explanation in the text will become much clearer.

In its explanation of verse 46, Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that according to our Prasangika system, samsara definitely does have causes and effects. This presentation refutes the argument by the lower schools that if you assert the lack of inherent existence of phenomena that would completely annihilate the cause and effect of samsara, and thus samsara couldn't exist.

In response to that, the Prasangika say that it is not the case that cyclic existence lacks causes and effects. That is because the fact that suffering is produced by the conception of a self can easily be validated. So in this way the cause and effect of samsara is established. However, the cause and effect of samsara is not established inherently, because the cessation of samsara is achieved by realising the path.

More specifically, the cause and effect of samsara cannot be inherently established, because the cessation of suffering is achieved by the truth of the path, which can be validated. This explains why both samsara and nirvana (or liberation) lack inherent existence. If samsara and its causes were to be inherently established, then one could not produce the other. The main point is that if samsara were to be inherently established, then it would not depend on any causes and conditions. Likewise if liberation were to be inherently established, then it would not depend on any causes and conditions.

What is being established here is that as samsara is dependent on the cause of the conception of the self, it cannot be inherently established. Likewise, as liberation is dependent on the cause of the realisation of the truth of the path, it too cannot be inherently established. That is because if something were to be inherently established, then it could not arise as a result of a cause. As there are causes and conditions for both samsara and liberation, neither can be inherently established.

The presentation of the outline, *cause and effect as free of the extremes of existence and non-existence*, is clearly explained in the verse itself, and do not require too much further explanation. The first two lines, *Seeing production as caused, One passes beyond non-existence*, refers to removing the

extreme of non-existence. While *Seeing cessation as caused One also does not assert existence*, refers to being free from the extreme of permanent existence.

So the verse clearly explains freedom from the extremes of both non-existence and permanent existence.

2.1.2.3.1.1.2. Refuting inherently existent cause and effect

The root text states:

47. *Previously produced and simultaneously produced* [causes]

*Are non-causes; [thus] there are no causes in fact,
Because [such] production is not confirmed at all
As [existing,] conventionally or in reality.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that there is no inherently established cause, and goes on to explain the reason for that. Why is there is no inherently established cause?

Students: No response

When I pose a question, it is good to speak up if you know the answer. Some may be pompous and think, 'Well, I know the answer but I don't really need to reply', but it is good to answer if you can. Sometimes someone may ask a question when they already know the answer, in order to assess the understanding of another. There have been instances where someone asks a question of another geshe, and then in response to the answer, they reply 'yes, I know that'. To that the geshe responds, 'Well why did you ask that question if you already know the answer?' However, in general, if someone asks a question then it is good to share one's knowledge.

Others have talked about the video where Tenzing Palmo asks His Holiness some questions. Half way through His Holiness' answer she says, 'I know, I know!' [*Geshe-la laughs*]. That is an indication that she may have already gained the answer at that point, but she interrupts half way through saying, 'I know the answer'. Some people have indicated that this is discourteous.

In explaining the meaning of verse 47, Gyaltsab Je states in his commentary that as there cannot be an inherently established cause, there cannot be a cause and effect that are produced simultaneously, and nor can there be a cause and an effect that is produced at a later stage. So there is no instance where there is an effect that is inherently established.

The verse refers to the fact that there cannot be an effect that was *previously produced* by a cause or *simultaneously produced* at the time of the cause. The main point being explained here is that there cannot be an inherently established cause, because there is no inherently established effect. The reason why there is no inherently established effect is because an inherently existing effect is not confirmed either conventionally or ultimately. Thus, there is no valid cognition that can establish the inherent existence of effects. Neither a conventional valid perception, nor a perception that sees the ultimate, can establish the inherent existence of effects. Because of the fact that no valid conventional or ultimate perception can establish inherent effects, therefore an inherently existing effect cannot exist.

2.1.2.3.1.2. Avoiding contradiction with what is renowned in the world

This outline refutes the assertion that the lack of inherent existence goes against worldly conventions. The relevant verses from the root text are:

48. *When this is, that arises,
Like short when there is long.
Due to the production of this, that is produced,
Like light from the production of a flame.*

49. *When there is long, there is short.
They do not exist through their own nature,
Just as due to the non-production
Of a flame, light also does not arise.*

The objection raised by the lower Buddhist schools is that if you assert the lack of inherent establishment of causes and effects, then that would be contrary to worldly convention. In other words, the world accepts the convention of causes and effects. Due to causes such as planting a seed, an effect will arise, which is the sprouting of a plant. These causes and effects are something that everyone accepts. So, the lower Buddhist schools object to the Prasangika point of view regarding the lack of an inherent establishment of cause and effect, saying 'That goes against worldly convention'. The Prasangika reply, 'That is not so'.

The Prasangika system doesn't reject worldly convention; they say that worldly conventions establish that cause and effect do exist at a nominal or conventional level, however they do not exist from their own side. These conventions as to how things function and work occur without any in-depth analysis. It is also explained in the teachings that Chandrakirti established that while the presentation of the lack of inherent existence doesn't contradict normal convention, it is nevertheless a unique presentation, where, through thorough analysis, one comes to understand that what is conventionally established also lacks true or inherent existence. That is the unique quality of the Prasangika presentation.

Not contrary to normal convention

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, our system is not contrary to normal convention. However that which is presented in accordance with normal convention (the cause and effect sequence for example) is free from inherent establishment. Furthermore, when the verse states, *when this is, that arises*, then that relates to compositional karma arising from ignorance. The second line of verse 48, *like short when there is long* refers to the normal convention that shortness is always established in relation to something longer. You cannot establish something as being short if there is nothing longer than it. In other words, short is established in relation to long.

Due to the production of this, that is produced relates to compositional karma being produced as a result of the production of ignorance. The example used is *like light from the production of a flame*. Rays of light cannot be produced without a flame, thus light is related to the flame and can only be established in relation to the flame. This cause and effect relationship is accepted by worldly convention.

Gyaltsab Je further explains in his commentary that due to ignorance there is compositional karma. This is presenting the interdependent origination of cyclic existence. The presentation of interdependent origination, (for example, ignorance and its result of compositional karma) is also a presentation of the lack of inherent existence. Therefore, in this presentation, all phenomena are established as originating interdependently and thus lacking inherent existence (i.e. existing from its own side and not depending on causes and conditions).

Interdependent origination of phenomena

In order to further establish the interdependent origination of phenomena and thus the lack of inherent existence, verse 49 gives examples. *When there is long, there is short* means that short cannot be established inherently, as it always depends on long. Thus *they do not exist through their own nature*. The second analogy is *just as due to the non-production of a flame, light also does not arise*. If a flame is not produced, then light cannot arise, and there cannot be any illumination. So the illumination of light is dependent on the flame of a butter lamp. Thus both *short* and *light* have arisen interdependently, but not independently and inherently by themselves.

The main point to be understood is the lack of inherent existence in relation to cause and effect. Causes and effects do exist, but not inherently. They exist interdependently due to the effects arising from causes. The very fact that cause and effect depend on each other, proves that they are not established inherently. Likewise the lack of permanent existence is illustrated in the example of light coming from a flame; light cannot exist permanently, as it has to exist in dependence on the flame. So, that interdependent connection negates the extreme of permanent existence as well.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*

Week: 1 (11 May 2010)

1. Give Gyaltsab Je's syllogism in relation to the mental and physical aggregates [3]

2. Explain the cause and effect sequence in relation to grasping at phenomena or aggregates and grasping at the person. [4]

3. Give the syllogism that refers to the image in the mirror. [4]

Week: 2 (18 May 2010)

4. What is the cause of our own samsara? [4]

5. What does it mean for our contaminated aggregates to be in the nature of suffering? [2]

6. One needs to relate the teachings to the twelve interdependent links. Explain how one enters cyclic existence and how one stops experiencing the twelve links. [4]

Week: 3 (25 May 2010)

7. What is the complete method to achieve the cessation of cyclic existence? [4]

8. Explain nirvana with remainder and nirvana without remainder according to:

a) The lower Buddhist schools. [2]

b) The Prasangika school. [2]

9. According to the lower systems, the Prasangika view of the lack of inherent existence is a nihilistic view. In response, what do the Prasangika call a nihilistic view? [3]

Week 4 (1 June 2010)

10. According to the different Buddhist schools:

a) What do the lower schools assert and why?

b) What do the Prasangika assert and why?

"These are points for discussion, where you can clarify the distinction between the Prasangika assertions of reality and those of the lower Buddhist schools. What is the distinction? How are they different? Why do the distinctions occur?"

4. What is the cause of our own samsara? [4]

5. What does it mean for our contaminated aggregates to be in the nature of suffering? [2]

6. One needs to relate the teachings to the twelve interdependent links. Explain how one enters cyclic existence and how one stops experiencing the twelve links. [4]

7. What is the complete method to achieve the cessation of cyclic existence? [4]

Explain nirvana with remainder and nirvana without remainder according to:

a) The lower Buddhist schools. [2]

b) The Prasangika school. [2]

9. According to the lower systems, the Prasangika view of the lack of inherent existence is a nihilistic view. In response, what do the Prasangika call a nihilistic view? [3]

10. According to the different Buddhist schools:

a) What do the lower schools assert and why?[2]

b) What do the Prasangika assert and why?[2]