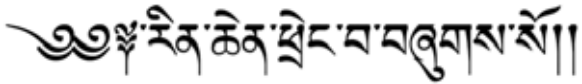


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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

8 November 2011

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Along the lines of the motivation generated by reciting the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the meditation practice. When we recite the refuge prayer, we need to bring to mind the full implication of what refuge entails, and when reciting the prayer of aspiration for bodhicitta, we need to recall what bodhicitta implies and bring that to mind. Doing that will suffice as a good motivation for whatever practice we do. It is good to keep this in mind.

[meditation]

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings. We reaffirm the motivation that we established earlier, and then contemplate these lines:

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

## 2.1.2.2. MAKING ONESELF COMPASSIONATE

This has three sub-divisions:

2.1.2.2.1. Providing out of compassion

2.1.2.2.2. Being compassionate especially to the wicked

2.1.2.2.3. The correctness of the above

### 2.1.2.2.1. Providing out of compassion

This is explained in the following verse, which relates to being compassionate to others, and in particular to criminals and so forth.

**330. Even to those whom they have rightfully fined,  
Bound, punished, and so forth,  
You, being moistened with compassion,  
Should always be caring.**

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

*Even to those they have been rightly fined with penalties of wealth, bound in prison, punished with beatings and so forth by governing bodies, you, being moistened with compassion should always be caring, such as pardoning those who seek forgiveness.*

The governing powers, or those in authority, determine the punishments for those who break the law or who have acted inappropriately. As mentioned here, these punishments include being *fined with penalties of wealth, or bound in prison* (which means imprisonment), or *punished with beatings* (which occurred in the past) *and so forth*. Even though others may consider such punishment appropriate, 'You, the king, being moistened with compassion, should not follow suit and administer such harsh punishments'.

This indicates that the king should practise forgiveness; those who have transgressed are in a pitiful situation and are therefore objects of compassion. They are not objects of scorn and further suffering should not be inflicted upon them. As they are already experiencing great suffering they are objects of compassion. So the king is being exhorted to display

compassion by pardoning those who seek forgiveness and so forth.

We need to derive the essence of this advice and apply it as a personal instruction. The king, as the direct recipient of this advice, is being exhorted to exercise a genuine sense of love and concern, not only for his subjects in general but in particular the pitiful criminals. Although governing bodies may use their authority to determine the severity of a punishment, Nagarjuna is exhorting the king to use his powers as a ruler to take the initiative intervene and pardon or reduce the punishment for those who have committed an offence.

We should gain a real understanding of the essential point that is being explained here and apply it to our own personal life. If we encounter others of a wicked nature then, instead of feeling angry, we need to develop a genuine sense of compassion for them. They may have done wrong, but they have done so out of confusion and delusion, which is a really pitiful state. So we should feel compassion for them.

By relating to their plight we can generate a greater sense of compassion. We don't readily develop compassion for those who are doing quite well (having wealth and so forth); our usual object of our compassion is those who are in a pitiful state, who undergo real hardship and difficulty. This is where we can increase our compassion. Rather than focusing on those who are doing well, we focus on those who are suffering, and who are thus objects of our compassion.

The great master Chandrakirti mentioned in his *Madhyamaka* text that the way to develop a deeper sense of compassion is to think about the plight of sentient beings who are in samsara. Their constant suffering is due to the interdependence of the twelve links, and contemplating these points becomes an impetus for us to develop a really deep sense of love and compassion for other beings. Chandrakirti really emphasised this point and it is important for us to pay attention to that. Thinking about beings who are suffering instils a sense of compassion within us.

Another essential point explained in the text is that the king should always be caring, which has the connotation of continuous, ongoing love and compassion for other beings. We have all experienced occasional feelings of love and compassion, but that is not sufficient to cultivate an unceasing love and compassion towards other beings. Rather our sense of love and compassion needs to be continuous and ongoing. Just as the king is being exhorted to always care for those beings, we too need to take that as a personal instruction. If we are to develop a genuine sense of love and compassion, we need to meditate and think about compassion on a continual basis.

We also need to derive a deeper understanding of the points that are mentioned here. Even when others are *bound in prison and harshly punished with beatings by governing bodies, you, being moistened by compassion, need to pardon those who seek forgiveness* and so forth. So the main point for us to understand is that the king is being exhorted to practise a true sense of non-violence. If he were to agree with the delivery of harsh punishment, there would be an aspect of harmful intent, because punishment (whether it be a financial penalty, imprisonment or beatings) definitely involves harm.

Whenever a harmful action is carried out, a harmful intention is also involved. Therefore if the king were to approve harsh punishments, there would be harmful intention from the king's side as well. The king would then

be forsaking non-violence, which would go against the fundamental principle of the Buddha's teachings – the Buddhadharma. The teachings explain that the basis of the Buddha's doctrine is non-violence. So the king is reminded of this essential practice of the Buddha's teachings, 'Lest you forsake an act of non-violence, you must ensure that you do not engage in punishments that will cause harm to other beings'.

As mentioned previously, we need to derive the essence of the advice given here and really try to apply it to our daily practice. If one develops and practises love and compassion for others, then naturally the sense of harming others will not occur. We never have any intention of harming those for whom we have a true sense of caring and love and compassion - that is only natural. Conversely, when the sense of love and compassion for others begins to decline then a sense of wanting to harm them could occur. Therefore, as the advice presented here indicates, when one develops a true sense of love and compassion for others, any intention to harm them will naturally be removed.

#### **2.1.2.2.2. Being compassionate especially to the wicked**

For those of a particularly wicked nature, one needs to develop the sense of love and compassion even further.

The verse relating to this reads:

**331. O King, through compassion you should  
Always generate just an attitude of altruism  
Even for all those embodied beings  
Who have committed awful ill deeds.**

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Even for all those embodied beings who have committed awful deeds, such as the heinous crime, O King, through compassion you should always generate just an attitude of altruism with the wish to benefit them, and not to forsake them or ever generate harmful intentions.*

This advice relates to those beings of a wicked nature who have committed particularly heavy negative karma, such as the *heinous crimes*, another translation of which is *immediate retribution*. The Tibetan word has the meaning of there being no break in-between. This means once the negative karma of a heinous crime (for example, killing one's mother) is committed, then the immediate next lifetime will be an unfortunate re-birth in the lower realms, unless that negative deed is purified in this lifetime. The term *immediate retribution* carries the meaning that, such is the gravity of the negative karma, the consequence of the negative karma from the heinous ill-deed in this lifetime will be experienced in the immediate next lifetime. Beings who have engaged in such negative deeds as killing their own mother may seem oblivious, lack in any sense of remorse and seemingly live a happy life now. However if we were to consider the consequences, and the great suffering they would have to experience in the future, then it becomes very clear why they are an object of immense compassion.

Understanding why an individual who has committed such a hideously negative deed is an object of great compassion, is very much dependent on a profound understanding of karma. When one has a deep understanding of karma, one will be able to realise that although engaging in such a negative deed may not render immediate karmic consequences in this lifetime, the consequences will definitely be experienced in a future lifetime. Thus a profound understanding of karma will actually prevent one from engaging in negative deeds. We may have a general understanding of karma, knowing that if we engage in

negative deeds, we will experience negative consequences and that if we engage in positive deeds, we will reap the positive results. However a simplified interpretation of karma may not suffice to move one's mind to be cautious about engaging in negative deeds.

We may find ourselves engaging in negative deeds without really paying much heed to the consequences. If we find that whatever practice we do, meditation for example, is not bringing about any change to our mind, then that is said to be the consequence of negative karma. Having a mind that remains very rough and self-centred, and showing no real improvement, is said to be the consequence of the negative karma that we have created in the past. If we fail to purify our negative karma, then whatever practice we do will not have much effect in transforming our minds, which will remain very solid and stubborn.

While a very profound understanding of karma will result in one being very conscientious and cautious about not engaging in negative deeds now, it will also instil a profound level of intention to purify the negative karmas that one has accrued in the past. Recalling all the negative deeds that one has committed in previous lifetimes will be an impetus to employ really strong purification practices. The combination of purifying previous negative karmas, while henceforth avoiding creating any new negative karma, is a means for real personal transformation to take place. So we need to understand that a real sense of compassion for those who engage in negative deeds will only come about if we have a profound understanding of karma, knowing how they will experience the negative consequences of their act, if not in this lifetime, then definitely in future lifetimes. With the prospect of great suffering in the future, they are an object for great compassion.

The essential point to be understood from this presentation is the importance of gaining a profound understanding of the interdependent connection between cause and effect. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama emphasises in his teachings again and again, it is essential to gain a deep understanding of the interdependent connection between cause and effect. Such an understanding is really the basis for understanding karma and based on that, one will be able to relate pleasant and unpleasant experiences to the previous causes that one has created. With such an understanding we will gain a more profound and deeper level of understanding of what practice involves.

The definition of negative karma, or negativity, is that which brings about an unpleasant result. So having an understanding of the meaning of non-virtue and negative karma will instil a wish to avoid creating negative karma and non-virtuous deeds. The only resolution for the negative deeds and non-virtuous karma that have already been created in the past is to engage in purification practice. When we engage in a purification practice which incorporates all of the four opponent powers, then it is possible to purify any negative karma that has been created. One needs to have a complete understanding of the gravity of the negative deeds one has committed in the past, and develop a real sense of regret and a strong wish to not create negative karma again in the future. Then one engages in purifying those acts by doing whatever practice is necessary to purify the negative karmas. This is another way to develop a positive state of mind such as compassion.

At our basic level, living a spiritual life or a life of Dharma practice, from a Buddhist point of view, is subsumed into two main points. First of all we need to consider two

questions. What is it that I wish for? And what is it that I do not wish to experience? The answer to the first is happiness and well-being. And the second is not to experience any unpleasantness or suffering.

Based on our wish of not wanting to experience any suffering, unpleasantness, problems or difficulties and wanting to experience well-being and happiness, we then contemplate the definition of virtue. The very definition of virtue is that which brings about the result of joy and happiness or pleasantness. In contemplating what virtue means, and the consequence of that in relation to our own experiences of non-virtue, one then considers the state of mind with which one is most familiar. Is it a non-virtuous or a virtuous state of mind that I am more acquainted with?

If one finds more acquaintance with virtue and a virtuous state of mind, then the natural consequence will be happiness and well-being. One will experience the result even if one does not actively wish for it – happiness is a natural consequence of having a virtuous state of mind. Even if you were to say ‘I don’t want happiness’ it will still naturally come about through acquaintance with a virtuous state of mind! [*Geshe-la laughs*]. Conversely if one was more acquainted with a non-virtuous state of mind in the past, one will naturally experience the results of unpleasantness, problems and difficulties now, and will do so again in the future. That will be the case for as long as we harbour a non-virtuous state of mind.

So if we were to simplify our practice, it falls into these two crucial points: If I do not wish to experience suffering and unpleasantness then I need to avoid creating the cause, which is non-virtue, and if I wish experience happiness and well-being, then I will have to employ the cause which is virtue. As I regularly say, I never claim to have high levels of experience or realisations, or that I engage in high levels of practice. On a daily basis I do simple practices, and that is what I share with you. So if you find this is too simplistic and you have other means of engaging in higher levels of practice, then you’re welcome to do so! [*laughter*]. If you intend to engage in higher levels of practices meditating on deities and so forth and whatever else you may be interested in, leaving aside love and compassion and the understanding of karma, then that is up to you. However it is doubtful that you will ever achieve the intended results.

### 2.1.2.2.3. The correctness of the above

This heading relates to the appropriateness of generating compassion – why that is so and why it is correct.

The verse relating to this reads:

332. *Especially generate compassion  
For those whose ill deeds are horrible, the  
murderers.  
Those of fallen nature are receptacles  
Of compassion from those whose nature is  
magnanimous.*

There are five particularly evil and negative ill-deeds: *killing one’s mother*, killing one’s father, killing a foe-destroyer or arhat, drawing blood from a buddha or an enlightened being with evil intention, and creating a schism amongst the Sangha. These are called the five heinous crimes, although there are of course many other heavy negative deeds as well. These five heinous crimes are crimes of immediate retribution.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse:

It is appropriate to *generate compassion especially for those whose ill deeds are horrible* such as those who engage in the heinous crime of killing one’s mother and so forth, because *those of fallen nature are receptacles of compassion from those buddhas and bodhisattvas, whose nature is magnanimous.*

In explaining the appropriateness of generating compassion, the word *especially* has the connotation of applying *compassion* particularly to those of a wicked nature who engage in wicked deeds, because they are *of fallen nature*. The Tibetan word translated here as *fallen nature* has the meaning of falling from the essence of the Dharma. If we understand the essence of the Dharma as being non-violence, then those who have engaged in such heavy negative deeds have fallen from the very essence or nature of the Dharma. Because they are in such a predicament, they are objects of compassion and thus *receptacles of compassion from those buddhas and bodhisattvas, whose nature is magnanimous.*

To back up this point, the commentary quotes from the *Four Hundred Verses of Yogic Deeds*.

Just as a mother is especially,  
Anxious about a sick child,  
Bodhisattvas are especially,  
Compassionate toward the unwise.

This verse uses an analogy to explain why bodhisattvas are especially compassionate towards those who are unwise or, more literally, un-noble. Here the unwise or un-noble are those who have engaged in heinous crimes, such as killing their own mother. Everyone accepts that killing one’s mother is a particularly horrific negative deed, because there has been no-one kinder than our own mother. She conceived and gave birth to us, and nurtured us when we were growing up. Whatever we have achieved thus far is due to the kindness our mother. Taking her life instead of repaying her kindness is accepted by all as a most negative deed.

The one who commits such a horrific deed is an object of compassion because the gravity of their misdeed is such that there will be very grave consequences. Bodhisattvas feel compassion for such a being *just as a mother is especially anxious about a sick child*. This analogy refers to a mother’s paramount concern for her beloved child’s illness and her desire to cure the child.

A mother of, say, four or five children will have more concern and love for the child that is sick. Just as the mother is anxious and concerned about her sick child, the bodhisattvas are especially compassionate towards those who are unwise or, more literally, un-noble. The translation refers to beings of a wicked nature as being un-noble in order to contrast them with noble beings who have such great qualities and a virtuous state of mind. Those who have engaged in grave negative deeds such as killing their own mother are the complete opposite of those with a virtuous state of mind, so they are called un-noble.

Bodhisattvas have great compassion for such unwise beings, because of the gravity of their misdeed and the consequences of their negative karma that will inevitably be experienced in their very next life. In this way they are analogous to those who are gravely ill – their illness is that they will have to experience considerable suffering in the future. So by seeing such a prospect for these beings, a bodhisattva will feel great compassion for them.

### 2.1.2.3. FREEING PRISONERS AND MAKING PRISONS COMFORTABLE

This is divided into two sub-divisions, [which is not specified in the translation of the text that we are using.]

The subdivisions are:

2.1.2.3.1 Releasing them from prison

2.1.2.3.2 Ensuring the prisons are comfortable.

#### 2.1.2.3.1 *Releasing them from prison*

The first verse relating to this heading reads:

**333. *Free the weaker prisoners  
After a day or five days.  
Do not think the others  
Are not to be freed under any conditions.***

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Free the weaker prisoners, who are less powerful and so forth, after a day or five days. However do not think the others who are more powerful are not to be freed under any conditions.*

The next verse in this outline reads:

**334. *For each one whom you do not think to free  
You will lose the [layperson's] vow.  
Due to having lost the vow,  
Faults will constantly be amassed.***

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*For each one whom you do not think to free, you will lose the laypersons vow and incur a non-virtuous vow. Due to having lost the vow you will not be able to take the one-day vow, and due to incurring a non-virtuous vow, even though you may not be actively engaged in a non-virtue such as killing, nevertheless faults will constantly be amassed that serve as causes to be reborn in the lower realms.*

Here the king is being exhorted to free prisoners. Each prisoner the king does *not think to free*, will cause him to *lose the laypersons vow and incur a non-virtuous vow*. We make vows in a positive sense when we vow not to kill and so forth. A non-virtuous vow is the opposite to that - one may make a vow to commit a negative act such as vowing to kill. For example, I'm not sure if it still occurs now, but I once heard that when you enter the army, you have to pledge that you will go to war and engage in acts of killing. When such a pledge is made then, from that day onwards, even if one is not actively engaged in killing, one will experience the negative results of that on a constant basis, because of the non-virtuous vow one has taken. As you have heard, the benefit of making positive commitments and taking vows such as not killing, is that from that time onwards, as long as one observes the vow, one will be unceasingly obtaining the virtue of keeping that vow. The virtue created by making that vow continues even during one's sleep and so forth.

Therefore, if the king were to harbour thoughts of not freeing prisoners, that would become a non-virtuous vow. Through having lost the layperson's vow, he would not be able to take the one-day vow, because if one does not have the layperson's vow as a basis, there is nothing on which to base the one-day vow. So, as the commentary reads, *having lost the vow you will not be able to take the one-day vow, and due to incurring a non-virtuous vow, even though you may not be actively engaged in a non-virtue such as killing, nevertheless faults will constantly be amassed that serve as causes to be reborn in the lower realms*. Thus the king is exhorted to not engage in any grave misdeed, which is yet another reason for him to free prisoners.

We need to know that just as there are positive vows, there can also be negative vows such as making a vow to kill. For as long as one does not relinquish that negative vow, one will continue to incur negative deeds from that non-virtuous vow.

The main thing is to try to put it into practice. You may not pay heed to everything I say, however Nagarjuna's advice is extremely profound, kind and beneficial. It covers everyone, lay people and ordained Sangha, as well as those who wish to practise tantra and undertake further practices. He presents the basis for all levels of practice, and so his advice is appropriate for the whole range of beings. The advice Nagarjuna gives in his treatise *Letter to a King* is also particularly intended for the lay community.

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*Edited Version*

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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

15 November 2011

Maintaining the motivation we generated during the recitation of the refuge and bodhicitta, we can now engage in the meditation practice.

[meditation]

We can generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines: I need to achieve enlightenment for the purpose of benefiting all sentient beings, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching, and put it into practice well.

So our job is outlined very simply right there. Along with this motivation we can bring to mind the essence of the *tong len* practice. Imagining taking in the suffering of all sentient beings can be an impetus to encourage us to willingly endure the hardships and suffering that we regularly experience. Without that type of patience, it would be very difficult for us to combat and manage the problems that arise in our lives. It is really important that we try to integrate these essential points into our practice. If we can understand how the practice can be of practical benefit in our life, then it really serves its purpose.

## 2.1.2. Actual instruction in non-degeneration (cont.)

### 2.1.2.3. ENSURING THE PRISONS ARE COMFORTABLE

Here the king is exhorted to make the prisons as comfortable as possible for the prisoners.

335. *As long as prisoners are not freed,  
They should be made comfortable  
With barbers, baths, food, drink,  
Medicine, and clothing.*

As the verse is quite straightforward, Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically re-states its main points:

*As long as prisoners are not freed, they should be made comfortable with barbers to cut their hair, baths, food, drink, medicine for the sick and clothing.*

Although it may be necessary to incarcerate criminals for a period of time, it is also necessary to make prison as comfortable as possible for them. As indicated, that includes having *barbers to cut their hair* when it grows too long, which can be very uncomfortable. Then there are other ways of making them comfortable such as providing a bath to keep their bodies clean, sufficient food and drink, appropriate clothing and, in the event of the prisoners becoming sick, providing them with medicine. Thus the king is being exhorted to take care of prisoners who, because they are living beings, deserve some comfort and happiness. While they are serving their sentence it is important to have a compassionate attitude towards them and to make their life in prison as comfortable as possible.

It is good to relate this advice to ourselves. If we lack sufficient material resources, our natural reaction would be to complain to the appropriate authority. Just like us, others also require these basic essentials to feel comfortable. Those who are deprived of these basic necessities, whatever their

situation, are also in need, and they too have the right to feel comfortable.

So it is worthwhile to investigate whether prisoners are provided with adequate food and clothing and if their overall living conditions are comfortable.

Under the same heading, the next verse reads:

336. *Just as deficient children are punished  
Out of a wish to make them competent,  
So punishment should be carried out with  
compassion,  
Not through hatred nor desire for wealth.*

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary with a query:

If you think, isn't it because you wish them to experience suffering that you place them in prison, then why imprison them if you wish them happiness?...

This query is raised because some would consider that the sole intention of imprisoning criminals is to give them a hard time and to inflict suffering upon them. So the query is: isn't the reason for imprisoning criminals *because you wish them to experience suffering?* If that is so, then why *wish them happiness?*

In answer to this Gyaltsab Je explains:

*...Just as deficient children are punished out of a wish to make them competent, so punishment should be carried out with compassion, and not through hatred or desire for wealth.*

That not being the case is explained with this analogy: although the parents of rowdy or disobedient children need to take harsh measurements like scolding them in order to teach their children how to behave, they do not do so because they wish to cause their children to suffer. Parents will, however, sometimes need to take harsh measures to discipline their children. Likewise, the intention of imprisoning criminals is so that they will change their old habits and behaviours and become good citizens again. That is the purpose for imprisoning criminals—it is not to intentionally inflict suffering upon them.

As the text clearly explains, *punishment should be carried out with compassion and not through hatred nor desire for wealth.* This clearly indicates that punishment should be carried out with compassion and a concern that the prisoners will become better citizens. That is the very purpose for carrying out the punishment; they should not be punished out of hatred or anger about what they have done wrong, or out of a desire for wealth. If those in authority are open to graft and corruption, or will accept bail, then prisoners will bribe their way out of any punishments by offering money or other wealth. [There was some discussion about vocabulary at this point].

One must be clear about what is being explained before one readily gives a suggestion. Once when Geshe Ngawang Dhargye was teaching chapter five of Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara* at Chenrizig Institute, his translator Tsewang apparently didn't understand a point so he asked Thubten Gendun for a suggestion. But Geshe Ngawang Dhargye said, 'There is no point in someone who does not know asking someone else who does not know either—just leave that for now and carry on with the rest'.

Indeed we need to be extremely careful about what is being related with respect to the Dharma, because once it has been recorded, that will become the source in the future, and those following will have to rely on what was recorded. That is

how a mistake can be perpetuated and the wrong interpretation will continue to carry on.

Western culture seems to rely heavily on books as a credible source. We often hear people saying, 'I read it in a book' or 'It is a credible source because it is written in a book'. The incomparable Buddha Shakyamuni said, 'You must analyse what I say, just like you would analyse gold by burning, cutting and rubbing it. Don't take my words out of mere faith'. Although the Buddha was omniscient and there would be no reason to doubt his words, he cautioned his followers that what is said or written down could contain mistakes. So the Buddha was indicating the need to really investigate and analyse everything, and not just readily accept it.

Here the Buddha has provided us with the means to develop sound reasoning and wisdom within ourselves. The analogy he used is how gold is tested to check its authenticity. Traditionally, the purity of gold was authenticated by using three specific techniques: burning, cutting and rubbing it. These three methods of analysis range from a gross level to a more subtle level.

If gold is not pure and is mixed with another substance, then the impurity would be very apparent when the gold is fired. Further analysis would be to cut the gold, when subtler levels of impurity would become evident. The most subtle method of determining impurity was to rub the gold. So the methods used to authenticate whether gold was pure or not ranged from the very obvious to the very subtle.

These three levels of analysis are applied to investigating the teachings as well. The three-fold analysis refers to the three criteria for validating a phenomenon:

1. Obvious things are not contradicted by valid bare perception.
2. Slightly obscure things are not contradicted by valid inference based on the force of evidence.
3. Extremely obscure things are not contradicted by valid inference based on scriptural authority.

If something is obvious then we do not need much reasoning, because we can perceive it directly with our senses and thus authenticate its validity. As more hidden phenomena or slightly obscure things cannot be directly perceived by our senses, we have to resort to further reasoning, by using valid inference based on the force of evidence. To authenticate extremely hidden phenomena or very obscure things, we have to rely on the sources from omniscient powers through their quotations and so forth.

This three-fold analysis is the method of investigating the authenticity of any phenomenon. This indicates how it is not easy to give a straightforward answer like, 'this is how it is' when something is not really clear yet.

To give an analogy of something that is obvious, if a faulty consciousness perceives yellow as blue, then that is something that can easily be contradicted by a direct sense perception, because we all know that yellow cannot be blue. However the impermanence of an object is not obvious to us and cannot be perceived directly, so we have to resort to valid inference in order to understand impermanence. Similarly, wrong conceptions such as viewing something that is impermanent as being permanent, or what is selfless as having a self, can be contradicted only with valid inference and reasoning. The authentication of citations, such as, 'through generosity one will obtain wealth in a future lifetime' can only be done by reliance on our belief in

the reliability of the source of that citation. It is difficult by mere reasoning or logic to prove that by being generous in this life, one will obtain wealth in the next life, therefore one accepts this to be authentic and true by resorting to the source of the citation i.e. the person who presented it. Thus, inference based on scriptural authority will authenticate extremely hidden phenomena.

When the Buddha showed us how to authenticate the Dharma by using these three modes of analysis, he presented a very profound means of developing a deep understanding and profound wisdom within oneself. As the Buddha said, 'Do not take my words out of mere faith, but use your own wisdom to analyse what I say'. He then presented us with a clear method of authentication through the three modes of analysis. This is really very profound.

It is because of this spirit of investigation that many people find Buddhism very appealing even in these times. It gives people the time and space to think about it themselves, and they don't have to immediately believe what the teachings say. It's not dogmatic in saying, 'you have to believe what is presented; it is not acceptable if you don't'. That is not how the Dharma is presented at all. People find Buddhism very appealing because of the gentle and profound ways of presenting it.

In giving his disciples the freedom to investigate and find out through their own analysis whether what he presented was true or not, the Buddha was showing in effect how his teachings are in fact flawless—even though he was not claiming that he was right. One of the Buddha's qualities was that he was fearless in presenting the truth. Because there is no doubt that it will be contradicted or found to be faulty, there is nothing to hide or fear. So there is no reason not to allow others the full freedom to investigate and find out for themselves whether it is true or not.

The Buddha instructed his listeners to accept what he said only when they found it to be true through their own investigation and reasoning. This, in effect, goes to show that on a more profound level the Buddha's teachings are flawless. In presenting his teachings the Buddha was not saying 'I am right, and there is no room to find any fault with it'. Rather, he presented it in a way for others to fully investigate it for themselves, which is in fact showing how profound his teachings are. The point is that we have to be wary when others come across in a way where they say that their teaching is flawless and that it has to be accepted as the truth.

It is essential that we fully understand how the Buddha presented the Dharma, in such a way as to allow his disciples to develop their own inner wisdom. With such inner wisdom, one will gain full confidence in the truth of the Dharma itself. So this presentation is a way to really develop the full potential of the disciples. When we understand how the Buddha presented his teachings, we can also learn from that. When we are in a position to share the Dharma with others, we can do so in the same spirit, without fear or doubt; but not expecting or forcing the listeners to believe whatever one says either.

When we think about it, the Buddha used an incredibly profound method of presenting the teachings of Dharma as a way to really develop personal wisdom and clarity. This is particularly so with respect to how to develop the method and wisdom within oneself, giving us a very clear blueprint of how to develop that.

Now we return to the text.

#### 2.1.2.4. IF NOT REFORMABLE, BANISHING THEM FROM THE COUNTRY

The relevant verse reads:

337. *Once you have analysed and thoroughly recognised  
The angry murderers,  
Have them banished  
Without killing or tormenting them.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Once you have recognised the angry murderers who intend to kill the king or others, have them imprisoned and thoroughly analyse whether they intended to further engage in ill behaviours such as murders and the like; if they don't then let them remain in equanimity. If however they are seen not able to restrain themselves from previous misdeeds of murdering and so forth, then have them banished without killing or tormenting them.*

Those who have committed a major crime such as *murder*, or even an attempted assassination, should be *imprisoned*, where their behaviour needs to be *thoroughly analysed* over time to determine their tendency to commit these negative deeds again. If they are found to be quite safe and not likely to repeat those evil deeds, then they should be left *in equanimity*, as they are, with no further punishment. *If however they are seen to be of a nature where they are not able to restrain themselves* and cannot conform to normal behaviour, they will need to be *banished* to places where they cannot carry out any evil deeds against others. That place should not be one where they themselves will be harmed by others.

As you may know, in some cultures murderers may be mobbed and killed by the people. Other punishments include gouging out their eyes, or cutting off their arms or legs. These are very harsh and severe punishments, which bring about much suffering. Rather, for their own good and for the good of others, it is better to banish them to a place where their own welfare is taken care of, with food and so forth, but where they cannot harm others. In the past some traditions sent them beyond certain boundaries and they were not allowed to return. In fact, they might find like-minded people as company in that area! *[laughter]*

We need to really pay attention to this compassionate advice to the king about how to care for his citizens. The advice is not to imprison those who have not committed severe crimes, but to free them. Even if you need to imprison them, then during their time in prison, make it possible for them to feel as comfortable as possible. If the query is raised, 'Aren't they being imprisoned to inflict suffering upon them? Why make them happy in prison?', then the answer is that the point is not to inflict suffering upon them, but to enable them to reform and become good and better citizens again. That is the purpose of imprisonment.

Even though this advice was given to the king and we feel that it doesn't relate to us, the point about being considerate to others with an evil nature and so forth is something we really need to bear in mind. We never know what kind of situation we might get into where we have to make judgements and so forth about others. Therefore we need to be mindful of this advice and take it as a personal instruction.

The analogy of a mother having to inflict harsh measures upon her child in order to instil good behaviour was explained earlier. When people are released from prison, check their behaviour to ensure they no longer have any

tendencies to commit evil deeds. If they are found to be reformed and are behaving well, leave them in equanimity as they are. But if they are found to have the tendency to commit further evil acts, they should be banished to a place where they are not harmed, or killed or tortured or subjected to harsh punishments.

#### 2.2. Developing previously non-existent practices

This is sub-divided into two:

2.2.1. Achieving practices

2.2.2. Ceasing non-virtues

##### 2.2.1. Achieving practices

This has two further subdivisions:

2.2.1.1. Sending out representatives

2.2.1.2. Examples

##### 2.2.1.1. SENDING OUT REPRESENTATIVES

The first verse relating to this heading reads:

338. *In order to maintain control, oversee all the country  
Through the eyes of agents.  
Always conscientious and mindful,  
Do what accords with the practices.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*In order to maintain control, send out agents without it being known that the king had sent them, to oversee all the country and get an overview through the eyes of agents; always encourage others to be conscientious and mindful, and do what accords with the practice; this means to deter others from engaging in wrong actions by maintaining conscientiousness.*

The next verse under the same heading reads:

339. *Continually honour in an exalted way  
Those who are foundations of good qualities  
With gifts, respect, and service,  
And likewise honour all the rest.*

With respect to this verse Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Continually honour in an exalted way those who are foundations of good qualities, fully-ordained monks and so forth, with gifts, respect, and service; and likewise honour and be generous to all the rest who may not have as many qualities.*

It is clearly explained here that *fully ordained monks and so forth*, which includes other levels of ordained sangha i.e. fully ordained nuns, novice monks and nuns, and even lay people who have taken vows, are worthy of respect because of the vows they have taken. They are to be honoured and respected *with gifts, and likewise honour all the rest who may not have as many qualities*, as they are also an object of honour and respect. This again, is very profound advice indicating that there although there are objects that are worthy of honour and respect, we also need to honour those who may not conventionally regarded as objects of respect. So in this way it indicates that all beings are worthy of respect.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright  
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Edited Version*

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purification. So it is the motivation behind that physical activity which makes it a Dharma practice.

Likewise we cannot claim that, in general, walking is a religious practice. However if we are walking to receive a teaching or going on a pilgrimage, the very act of walking is said to become a Dharma practice by virtue of its purpose. We are walking to receive a teaching with the intention of gaining wisdom in order to benefit other sentient beings. So with that motivation in our mind, walking to the teachings becomes a great virtuous practice. Thus walking to and from the teachings can be incorporated into the practice of Dharma because of the motivation behind it

Conversely, if one is walking towards something that will harm other beings, then every step taken towards that action will create negative karma. Although the act of walking itself does not create the negative karma, when it is done with a negative motivation it will become negative karma. So one needs to understand that what determines whether an act is in the nature of a practice is determined by the motivation. Through that, one can turn something not normally considered as a religious practice into a religious or Dharma practice.

It is through this explanation that we begin to understand how the accumulation of virtue or negativity in our actions of body, speech and mind is dependent on the motivation behind it. There is no other way for us to engage in either virtue or negativity other than through the three aspects of oneself which are the body, speech and mind. With a positive motivation in mind, every gesture and movement we make through our body, speech and mind is said to become virtuous by virtue of that motivation. When in a negative state of mind, every action created by our body, speech and mind becomes non-virtuous, thereby creating negative karmas. This is a very profound way of integrating the Dharma into our everyday life, and become a way to create virtue. That is the benefit of receiving the teachings and instructions.

While we may lead a seemingly normal life, going to work and engaging in normal worldly activities, we can make every act a virtuous one by beginning our day with a proper motivation. Rather than setting out for work thinking 'I have to go to work because I need to make money', if we generate a proper motivation such as 'May my work become a means to benefit other sentient beings' and we do not specifically think about the money—although there is no question that we need it to sustain ourselves—then our work will become a virtuous act.

Indeed when we engage in our work with a positive motivation, the immediate beneficiary is the boss. If we become slack and neglect our work then that will upset and harm our boss, who pays us to fulfil certain tasks, whereas if we undertake our work with efficiency and a good intention our boss will thus gain immediate benefits, and we will have engaged in a right livelihood. So we really need to understand how we can turn engaging in work, which is the means for our survival, into a practice of Dharma. This is a practical way of understanding how we are not deprived of the conditions to practise Dharma and accumulate virtue if we generate a proper motivation. So we need to incorporate this practice into our daily life.

Furthermore, if we can apply the practice of patience in our daily life, we will see the benefits when we go to work. As mentioned previously if we make it a priority to apply patience to whatever activity we are engaged in then, when we encounter someone who is difficult to deal with, rather

than them becoming an object of distress, they can actually become an object to further enhance our practice of patience. Rather than being regarded as someone to scorn and avoid they can be used as an object of great learning. This is how we need to see the value of the practice of patience.

People often lament, 'Oh I had a very difficult day today because there was someone who caused so many problems'. When others are seen as being a problem then that in itself becomes a problem for ourselves; we have allowed it to become a problem because we have not practised patience. Just today, a young man told me about someone who was causing him difficulty at work. He said, 'having heard and seen the value of the teachings, even though the person was difficult, I didn't allow them to disturb me, because I applied whatever practice of patience that I have to the situation'.

This shows that if one takes the initiative, then a seemingly difficult situation will cause only minimal disturbance. As I emphasise again and again in my teachings, we need to maintain a sense of love and compassion in our heart in whatever activity we engage in. We always need to remind ourselves, 'may my actions not become a cause to harm others but only a means to benefit them'.

As I often emphasise, I can't claim to have engaged in any high level of practices, but I can at least say that every day, I pay close attention to ensure that my state of mind is one of genuine consideration for others. I avoid any hostile thoughts and harmful intentions in my mind. I always try to maintain a sense of love and compassion in my mind. This is something to which I pay specific attention.

Of course, that is not to say that I don't make an attempt to engage in other levels of practice, for example, the generation and the completion stages of tantra, emptiness and so forth. These are very profound high levels of practice and I cannot in any way claim to have mastered any of these, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't make an attempt to acquaint ourselves with these very precious practices. Of course we need to make attempts to engage in higher forms of practices, but on the practical level we must maintain the practice of patience, love and compassion in our daily life.

Patience, love and compassion are accessible practices, and it is essential that we practise and a genuine consideration for others on a daily basis. This is something that I regularly emphasise, and it is really important to keep this in mind.

As the teachings advise, we need to engage in the practices of purification and accumulation. The Tibetan word for practice incorporates both; the practice of purification is to purify negative karma and the practice of accumulation is to accumulate virtue.

Practising *virtue* means increasing virtue in one's mind and the most extensive way to do that is to meditate on love and compassion. All the masters agree that the most practical way for us to increase virtue is by developing love and compassion in our hearts. The practice of *purifying negativity* is to acknowledge negative karmas we have created in the past and to engage in a practice with the intent to purify them so that we don't have to experience the consequences of those negative karmic imprints.

## 2.2.2. Ceasing non-virtues

The first verse relating to this outline is:

343. *You did not bring your dominion with you from your former life  
Nor will you take it to the next.  
Since it was gained through religious practice,  
You would be wrong to act against the practices.*

The condensed advice in this verse is a very profound instruction to the king.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*O King, you did not bring your dominion with you from your former worldly existence, nor will you take it to the next. Since it was gained through religious practice, it would be wrong for you to act against the practice for the sake of your dominion, which was obtained through the practices.*

This is simply saying that there is no doubt that the king's dominion and majesty are great, however he is being told that he didn't bring his present regal status from a past life, and nor can he take it with him into the future. His status is none other than the result of former practice; *it was gained through the religious practice* that was done in the past. That being the case, the king is told, it would be wrong to now engage in activities which are against Dharma practice *for the sake of your dominion*, which was itself obtained through the practices.

There are a lot of profound points mentioned in this seemingly simple advice. It incorporates the understanding of impermanence and an understanding of karma in that what is experienced now is the result of previous virtuous deeds. It also points out the practices for overcoming a great sense of pride. Lest the king falls victim to pride about his own majesty and regal status, he is being reminded that 'What you experience now is none other than the results of previous good deeds and is not something you have brought with you into this life'.

We can incorporate this instruction and advice at a personal level by thinking about our own precious human rebirth. As explained in the teachings, our present precious human life is a result of practices such as observing morality and making stainless prayers in the past. It is through those conditions, aided by the practice of generosity and so forth, that we have obtained this precious human life.

However we will not necessarily take our precious human rebirth with us to a future lifetime, which is why a human rebirth is considered as a very rare and precious condition. We worked very hard in our past lives to obtain what we have now, so it would be a great pity and loss if we were to completely waste it by engaging in negativities that will prevent us from obtaining precious human rebirths again in the future. We need to interpret the advice as being directed to ourselves and incorporate the main points into our own personal life.

Furthermore, we need to understand the great and precise reasoning that is being presented here. It is pointed out to the king that, 'Whatever regal majesty you now experience, your dominion is not something you found by mere chance. It is none other than the result of having engaged in the practice of Dharma'. Presenting the advice to the king in this way provides many reasons to assist the contemplation of these essential points.

When applying this advice to ourselves, we need to incorporate an understanding of how the conditions we

enjoy now with our own precious human rebirth did not come about by mere chance, and it was not easily obtained. Rather it is a result of many virtuous causes and conditions that we had created in the past. By using such reasoning we remind ourselves that wasting our precious human life would be really shameful. Just as we have obtained this precious human life as a consequence of previous practices of virtue, we must continue to apply those practices now, in order to achieve a precious human rebirth in the future.

The profound and logical reasoning presented here is that our present good fortune is the result of previous virtue, which indirectly encourages us to further engage in virtue continuously.

The next verse reads:

344. *O King, exert yourself  
To avert a sequence  
Of miserable supplies for the realm  
Through [misuse of] royal resources.*

The advice in this verse seems to relate particularly to paying heed when engaging in trading - buying and selling merchandise and so forth.

In relation to this Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*O King, exert yourself to avert a sequence of miserable supplies (which, if of good value when purchased gives rise to pleasure and if bad to suffering) for the realm through misuse of royal resources. If your dominion is not sustained by Dharma now, the future generations will result in mass suffering. Thus you must resolve, 'I will not allow this to happen'.*

Again, this is very profound advice. Generally, if one purchases something of value, it gives rise to pleasure which would be a cause for developing strong attachment, while purchasing something that is not of any value will result in unpleasantness and suffering that will be a cause for anger to arise. When the activity of trading causes either attachment or anger to arise, then those activities will become a means to acquire non-virtue, which is contrary to Dharma practice.

The king is, 'You must pay heed and not *misuse the royal resources*'. He is advised, '*If your dominion is not sustained by the Dharma now, your future generations will result in mass sufferings, so you must resolve to not allow this to happen*'. Thus the king is being exhorted to be mindful that he is not a cause for this to happen.

The next verse reads:

345. *O King, exert yourself  
To increase the succession  
Of the dominion's resources  
Through [proper use of] royal resources.*

Although these verses are not ambiguous or difficult to understand, we must ensure that our understanding is not superficial, thinking 'Oh yes, I understand what this means'. Rather, we must go beyond the surface to determine where and how the verse is related to the previous advice. We need to understand the depth and profundity of the reasoning and the manner in which it has been presented. Then our understanding of the meaning of the verses will be much more profound, rather than just skimming the surface.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

*O King, exert yourself to increase the succession of the dominion's resources, so as to ensure the benefit of future generations, through proper use of royal resources. You must ensure that the resources of your dominion don't become the means to buy succession*

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of suffering, but rather that it becomes the means to buy a succession of dominions.

This is presenting the king with another essential point: make sure that you use the resources of the dominion in the proper way, so they don't *become a means to buy* future suffering. This is saying in a very straightforward and simple way to the king, 'Don't use your resources now to purchase future suffering, which will be the case if they are used now to engage in non-virtue'. Misusing \ resources to engage in non-virtue now, is equivalent to purchasing future suffering, which of course is the case with respect to karma. By creating non-virtue now, it's as if one is buying suffering to be experienced in the future.

In conclusion, as the commentary says, *rather* you must use your resources now as a *means to buy a succession of dominions*. This means the king should ensure both his own well-being, and that of future generations, by using his wealth to gather further resources and *dominions* for the future. This implies that if we use our resources in a proper way, in accordance with the Dharma, to accumulate virtue, then they become a means to secure further well-being and dominions in the future. This is, again, very practical advice.

The king is being advised here in a very simple way to not use his resources to buy suffering, but rather to use it to purchase further dominions. We can also apply this advice at a personal level. We need to understand how we must pay heed to not using our time and energy to acquire further suffering, but rather utilise our time and energy to create virtue, and in that way secure future happiness for ourselves.

### **3. ACHIEVING LIBERATION AND NOT FORSAKING THE SCRIPTURES OF THE GREAT VEHICLE**

This section of the text is sub-divided into two:

- 3.1. Training in the path of liberation
- 3.2. Stopping forsaking the scriptures of the Great Vehicle

#### **3.1. Training in the path of liberation**

Here there are two sub-divisions:

- 3.1.1. Refuting inherently existent objects of attachment, pleasant and painful feelings
- 3.1.2. Both Lesser Vehicle practitioners and Great Vehicle practitioners equally realise the subtle emptiness

##### **3.1.1. Refuting inherently existent objects of attachment, pleasant and painful feelings**

This is sub-divided into three:

- 3.1.1.1. Refuting real feelings of pleasure
- 3.1.1.2. Refuting inherently existing pain
- 3.1.1.3. Result of the refutation

###### **3.1.1.1. REFUTING REAL FEELINGS OF PLEASURE**

This again is sub-divided into three:

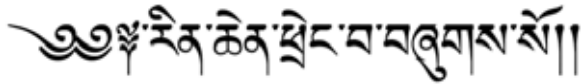
- 3.1.1.1.1. Transition
- 3.1.1.1.2. Brief indication
- 3.1.1.1.3. Extensive explanation

Having gone through the headings now, we can leave the explanation of them for our next session.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright  
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Edited Version*

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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

29 November 2011

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

Last session we listed the next sequence of outlines, of which there are quite a few.

## 3. ACHIEVING LIBERATION AND NOT FORSAKING THE SCRIPTURES OF THE GREAT VEHICLE

### 3.1. Training in the path of liberation

#### 3.1.1. Refuting inherently existent objects of attachment, pleasant and painful feelings

##### 3.1.1.1. REFUTING REAL FEELINGS OF PLEASURE

###### 3.1.1.1.1. Transition

The first verse relating to this heading is:

346. *Although Universal Monarchs rule  
Over the four continents, their pleasures  
Are regarded as only two –  
The physical and the mental.*

I have presented this point many times over the years, maybe over a hundred thousand times, with a particular focus on the importance of mental pleasure. It seems that what I have been trying to emphasise over and over again is in fact supported by Nagarjuna [laughter]. In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Although O King you may obtain the state of a *Universal Monarch who rules over the four continents; their pleasures are regarded as only two – the physical feelings of pleasure and mental pleasure*. If asked how profound is this pleasure?<sup>1</sup>

The four continents refers to the four directional continents around Mount Meru, with our earth being the southern continent. The main point is that even if the king were to *rule over all four continents*, 'the pleasures that you would be able to experience, even as a great ruler are only twofold – *physical feelings of pleasure and mental pleasure*'.

This is actually a very significant point. When it comes to the pleasures that we can experience as humans they can be subsumed into just two, physical and mental, and there are no exceptions, even for a king. Even though he is a great regal king, he can only experience two kinds of pleasure – physical and mental. Likewise there is no other experience of suffering except physical suffering and mental suffering.

Simply put, the Dharma is the means to obtain genuine pleasure or real happiness and to alleviate suffering, which is what we are all striving to achieve. It is quite easy to keep this point in mind. The cause of pleasure is a virtuous state of mind and all the positive deeds motivated by the virtuous mind, and the cause of suffering is a non-virtuous state of mind and the negative deeds arising from that state of mind. The Lam Rim teachings present these essential points very clearly, and it is good to keep them in mind.

As we all wish to experience happiness and do not wish to experience any kind of suffering, it is worthwhile to consider whether we are creating the appropriate causes to experience happiness, and whether we are engaging in the right actions to alleviate suffering. These are important points for self-analysis.

If we really investigate within ourselves, we might find that rather than pursuing the real means of happiness and relieving suffering, we are actually engaging in the opposite. In his text, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, the great master Shantideva mentioned that although wishing for happiness, sentient beings intentionally avoid and destroy the causes of happiness as if they were an enemy; and while wanting to avoid suffering, they eagerly pursue the causes of suffering.

So, isn't this also true for us? Are we actually creating the appropriate causes for happiness while abandoning the causes of suffering? With respect to the ten non-virtuous deeds, if we at any time intentionally engage in the act of killing then we are voluntarily accumulating the causes of suffering, because the natural consequence of engaging in the act of killing is to experience suffering. Likewise with stealing: if we take something that does not belong to us we might feel we are gaining something, but actually we are just creating the cause for much greater suffering in the future. It is the same with sexual misconduct or adultery. We have all seen how engaging in an act of adultery causes so much suffering right down the line.

These are very practical ways of checking our conduct to see whether we are appropriately engaging in the causes of happiness and avoiding the causes of suffering. This is advice that we need to put into practice in our daily life. Neglecting this very practical advice while attempting to engage in some high level of practice is missing the point; we must really establish a sound basis on which we can further develop ourselves.

In making the attempt to accumulate virtue and avoid non-virtue, we need to first be very clear about what virtue is and what non-virtue is, which can be understood through their definitions. *Virtue is that which brings about pleasant results, and non-virtue or negativity is that which brings about unpleasant results.*

So you need to consider which states of mind bring about pleasant experiences. The virtuous thoughts of kindness and genuine consideration towards others, are states of mind which, by their very nature, bring about the positive result of pleasant experiences. Whereas negative states of mind, such as harmful intentions and so forth, are the ones that bring about unpleasant experiences. As I emphasise in my teachings regularly, we need to really pay attention to protecting a kind mind and a kind heart at all costs, and then further increase and protect whatever qualities we already have. That is the way to progress in our spiritual practice.

The second verse under this outline reads:

347. *Physical feelings of pleasure  
Are only a lessening of pain.  
Mental pleasures are made of thought,  
Created only by conceptuality.*

The main point of this verse is extensively elaborated in Aryadeva's *400 Verses*, which we have studied in the past.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*Physical feelings of pleasure are only a lessening of pain. Except for the pleasure experienced as result of the lessening of pain, there is no specifically characterised*

<sup>1</sup> This question is a lead-in to the next verse.

pleasure in this world, but there is specifically characterised suffering.

*Specifically characterised* is a literal translation of the Tibetan word, *rangtsen*, which has the specific meaning in this context as *true* or *real*. There is *no specifically characterised or real pleasure in this world but there is specifically characterised suffering*. Worldly pleasure is none other than a lessening of suffering. The lessening of suffering is experienced as, and called *pleasure* but, as explained here, it is not a real pleasure, i.e. it is not specifically characterised as a real pleasure. For example, when we experience a cool breeze on a very hot day then the sensation of feeling very hot and uncomfortable is immediately alleviated. Because the earlier experience of extreme heat has been removed, that cool breeze is experienced as pleasurable.

To re-emphasise the point, from our own experience we have a sense that suffering seems to be at the core of our existence. Happiness, called pleasure in a worldly context, only occurs when the predominant, underlying suffering is lessened a bit. The predominant underlying experience we seem to have is of one suffering and that is quite apparent if we really think about it.

However it would be wrong to say that there is no happiness or pleasure at all for, conventionally speaking, we do experience happiness. But when we investigate, we find that what we term pleasure is none other than a lessening of an underlying suffering. It is only when that underlying suffering is lessened that we experience pleasure or happiness. That is the main point being presented here.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

'Specifically characterised' here does not refer to a specifically characterised phenomenon which is negated by reason, but rather refers to there being no specific pleasure except for the lessening of pain.

Lest one misunderstands the point about there being no specifically characterised pleasure, Gyaltsab Je explains that not being specifically characterised can also mean that pleasure does not exist from its own side, by its own characteristic. In other words it can also refer to the negation of inherently existent pleasure, which is established by Nagarjuna's syllogism: The subjects, persons and aggregates—are empty of inherent existence—because they are dependent arisings<sup>2</sup>.

So when the commentary refers to negation by reasoning it is referring to both suffering and pleasure equally lack inherent existence by virtue of their own characteristics. Therefore the negation of inherent existence is same for both pleasure and pain.

The point being made here is that *specifically characterised*, as used here, refers to the fact that there is no specific pleasure apart for the lessening of pain, rather than referring to the negation of its inherent existence.

Gyaltsab Je continues his commentary with an example:

Just as 'blue' and not 'yellow' comes to mind when the colour blue is placed side by side with the colour yellow, similarly for the feeling of pain to come to mind, it does not have to depend on the lessening of pleasure.

This is explaining very clearly how what is conceived of as being pleasure in a worldly sense is actually none other than the lessening of pain. This is illustrated with the example of how when *yellow is placed beside a predominant colour* such

as *blue* then you perceive it as blue and not yellow. The experience of suffering *does not depend on the lessening of pleasure*, because suffering is the predominant experience, and the experience of pleasure depends on the lessening of pain.

Another example Gyaltsab Je presents is:

The feeling of pain is always present, however just as 'short' is posited in relation to 'long', it is at the time when a degree of suffering has decreased and a slight relief is experienced, that the notion of pleasure comes to mind.

As explained here when the term *short* applied to any object it is always *in relation* to something that is longer than it. And if an object is described as *long* it is only longer in relation to something that is shorter than it. Likewise, *pleasure* is characterised as being the lessening of pain, i.e. pleasure is experienced relative to pain.

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary cautions:

However you must be careful not to deny the conventional existence of feelings of pleasure.

Lest we again fall into a misinterpretation, Gyaltsab Je is pointing out that we *must be careful not to deny the conventional existence of feelings of pleasure*. We cannot deny that the fact that we say, 'I experience this as pleasurable', so our experience of pleasure at a conventional level does exist. However, the mode of existence, which is the main point, is that what we experience as pleasure is none other than the lessening of pain.

When the predominant underlying level of suffering is minimised, that is when we experience pleasure. But other than that there is no real lasting underlying pleasure that we experience at all times. As explained in the teaching, what is referred as worldly pleasure is a contaminated, worldly pleasure. The teachings explain that contaminated pleasures are a form of suffering called the suffering of change. So, contaminated worldly pleasures fall into the category of suffering.

When we think about it, we can see that that whatever pleasurable experience we have starts to feel uncomfortable after a while. For as long as it is a contaminated pleasure there is no real lasting pleasure. These are essential points, and I feel that if you really look into them and think about them, you can derive a profound understanding of the reality of our situation in samsara.

The main point being presented to us here is a very profound way of using logical reasoning. Experiencing pleasure as pleasure that which is none other than the lessening of pain indicates that when our problems reduce a bit then that is when we consider we are experiencing good times. But actually what we experience as good times is merely a lessening of some of our problems and difficulties.

Simply put, no pleasure can be experienced in perpetuity. What we consider as being pleasure is just the lessening of an earlier experience of suffering. That is all there is to it. So we really need to be aware that what we consider as a happy or pleasurable life in samsara is, in truth, not real pleasure or happiness.

This is the reality and nature of samsaric pleasures, which is that it is not really true pleasure in the first place, and that whatever we experience as pleasure doesn't last. Consider again the example of the heat of the sun: when go out and sunbathe we experience the pleasure of the warmth of the sun's rays, but if we stay too long in the sun then the earlier experience of pleasure is transformed into unpleasantness.

<sup>2</sup> See teaching of 24 May 2011.

Then we have a longing to go into the shade. When we first go into the shade, and feel a cool breeze then we experience relief from the earlier uncomfortable experience of heat. However if we stay in the shade for too long and there is too much of a cool breeze then we start to feel uncomfortable again. So this is how our feelings constantly fluctuate between the experience of suffering and momentary contaminated pleasantness and pleasure.

We need to understand why contaminated pleasures are called the suffering of change, and how they are a form of suffering. From the logical explanation, we can understand the statement that samsaric pleasures are a suffering.

Thinking in this way can help us to develop renunciation. When we really think about this point carefully, not only does reflecting on the obvious suffering of pain become the means for us to develop renunciation, but even contemplating the reality of the pleasures of samsara becomes a cause for us to develop renunciation.

So the advice being given to the king is very profound, and we need to try to integrate it into our own lives. In our personal practice we need to really think about the nature of what we call pleasure and pain, and see how every pleasurable experience has the nature of pain and suffering, and thus see that there are no real redeeming qualities of samsara. When we meditate in this way again and again then we can develop renunciation.

The commentary concludes:

A more extensive explanation on this point is presented in the *Four Hundred Verses of Yogic Deeds*. Conventionally *Mental pleasures are made of thought, created only by conceptuality*. Thus, you need to understand that mentally imputed specifically characterised suffering exists, but specifically characterised pleasure does not exist.

### 3.1.1.1.2. Brief indication

**348. All the wealth of worldly pleasures  
Are just a lessening of suffering,  
Or are only [creations of] thought,  
Hence they are in fact not meaningful**

The meaning of this verse is quite straightforward. In his commentary Gyaltsab Je says:

*All the wealth of worldly feelings of pleasures are just a lessening of suffering, or are only conceptually imputed by thought, hence they are in fact not meaningful [or specifically characterised].*

This supports the earlier point. *All the wealth of worldly feelings of pleasures and so forth, are just the lessening of suffering and only conceptually imputed by thought, hence they are not specifically characterised*, meaning there is no real pleasure. What we conceive of as pleasure is basically a mere imputation by our conceptual mind, and other than that there is actually no real pleasure.

### 3.1.1.1.3. Extensive explanation

This section is subdivided into two:

#### 3.1.1.1.3.1. Refuting proofs of real pleasure

#### 3.1.1.1.3.2. Refuting the entity of real pleasure

##### 3.1.1.1.3.1. Refuting proofs of real pleasure

This is again subdivided into two:

###### 3.1.1.1.3.1.1. Refuting proofs for real mental pleasure

###### 3.1.1.1.3.1.2. Refuting proofs for real physical pleasure

#### 3.1.1.1.3.1.1. Refuting proofs for real mental pleasure

**349. Just one by one there is enjoyment  
Of continents, countries, towns, homes,  
Conveyances, seats, clothing, beds,  
Food, drink, elephants, horses, and women.**

Gyaltsab Je begins his explanation with a doubt that is raised by others:

If you say that specifically characterised mental pleasure exists because the cause of that, which is that Ishvara and so forth exist, that is not so, because what you accept as the causes of pleasure are not inherently existing causes of pleasure, as [the syllogism to prove the theses lacks the forward and reverse pervasion].<sup>3</sup> *Just one by one there is enjoyment of the following thirteen: continents, countries, towns, homes, conveyances, seats, clothing, beds, food, drink, elephants, horses, and women.*

Here there is a list of thirteen objects that are said to give rise to pleasure, but pleasure only exists with one object at a time. The explanation of this reasoning will be presented in the following verse. Meanwhile we need to gain the understanding that if, as claimed by others, Ishvara or a creator God is the cause of pleasure and so forth, then logically that would mean that one could experience all pleasures at the same time. That is because there is only one cause of all pleasures, which is Ishvara – the creator. However, as explained here, these pleasures are individually experienced, one by one, and they cannot be experienced simultaneously.

Within the thirteen categories of pleasures, for example, there is the pleasure in riding a horse and there is the pleasure in riding an elephant. When you are riding an elephant, you can't say that you are experiencing the pleasure of riding a horse can you? So if one experiences enjoyment with one object and not the rest, then that is proof that all pleasures cannot be created by one cause, such as a creator.

The next verse continues to explain this point:

**350. When the mind has any [one of these as its  
object],  
Due to it there is said to be pleasure,  
But since at that time no attention is paid to  
the others,  
The others are not then in fact meaningful  
[causes of pleasure].**

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*When the mind pays attention to any one of these as its object, due to this there is said to be pleasure at that time. But since at that time when the mind takes pleasure in one of these objects, no attention is paid to others. Thus, the others are not then in fact meaningful [or more literally specifically characterised] causes of pleasure. If these thirteen objects were in fact inherently<sup>4</sup> causes of pleasure, the others are not then in fact meaningful [or specifically characterised] causes of pleasure. If these thirteen objects were in fact inherent causes of pleasure, then even when not engaged and no attention is paid to them, they would still give rise to pleasure. However that is not the case. Rather when*

<sup>3</sup> The Dalai Lama at Harvard said: A correct sign, or reason, is tri-modal. In brief, this means that 1) the sign is established as being a property of the subject, 2) the forward pervasion is established, and 3) the counter-pervasion is established.

<sup>4</sup> Here *inherently* can be understood as the negation of the inherent existence of phenomena.

one object is enjoyed the rest cannot be enjoyed. Thus, just their existence cannot be a cause of pleasure.

Using the thirteen objects as an example, this is a further refutation of the assertion that there is one supreme cause of pleasure, such as the creator Ishvara. One experiences pleasure while engaging with one particular object at a particular time, and not all at the same time. It is only when we pay attention to a particular object that we engage with that object, and experience pleasure. Therefore pleasure does not arise from a primordial cause, such as a creator or from inherently existent causes. *If these 13 objects were in fact inherent causes of pleasure, then even when not engaged and no attention is paid to them, they would still give rise to pleasure.* But that is not the case.

This points out how the experience of pleasure is a dependent arising. In order to experience pleasures from an object, we have to engage with that object. By engaging in a particular type of object it gives rise to a particular type of pleasure and not randomly. So the pleasure that is experienced with a particular object is a dependent arising in relation to that particular object and does not arise independently or inherently.

We have come to verse 350, and thus we have finished half of chapter four, so we will conclude for this evening. We have the remaining half of chapter four, plus chapter 5, which is not too extensive or complicated.

The remaining verses contain some great advice, and useful instructions. In chapter five there is lot of discussion about mind and mental factors, which will be very useful and practical for us.

As you know the next session will be discussion, followed by the exam in the following week. I don't have to really remind you too much because you have been paying attention to the discussion as well as the exams over the year. I want to thank you for your attention and for taking it seriously, and I exhort you to continue to do so.

The Tuesday after the exam, December 20 will be an evening puja to celebrate the anniversary of Lama Tsongkapa's passing. You need to keep in mind that it was suggested that maybe the study group should do a guru puja as part of their commitment. I mentioned at that time that there is no necessity to specify the date of that guru puja; the Lama Tsongkapa puja will suffice for that purpose.

The commentary on *Precious Garland* was written by Gyaltsab Je, who was one of the chief disciples of Lama Tsongkapa. Even the work of one of his disciples shows us how great a scholar Lama Tsongkapa was. The elder disciple of Lama Tsong Khapa was the disciple Gyaltsab Je and the second was Khedrub Je.

Prior to meeting with Lama Tsongkapa Gyaltsab Rinpoche was a renowned scholar of the Sakya tradition. The story is that Gyaltsab Je came to meet Lama Tsongkapa with the intention of debating with him. Apparently Gyaltsab Je arrived while Lama Tsongkapa was actually engaged in giving a teaching. Gyaltsab Je had only small sack of belongings, indicating that he was really a wandering monk, and apparently he was wearing a hat as well. There is a story about how that hat actually flew away but I think that is probably a bit of an exaggeration. Maybe it just fell off, but it was seen as significant as it occurred just as he came into the gathering.

Since he had come with the intention of debating with Lama Tsongkapa, Gyaltsab Je went up and sat on the throne beside him as an equal, which was somewhat presumptuous. Lama Tsongkapa continued to teach, not paying much attention to Gyaltsab, even though he was just sitting there right beside him. When Gyaltsab started to listen to the teaching, he slowly descended from the throne, and did three prostrations and sat down with the rest of the disciples.

Gyaltsab Je was a renowned scholar in his own right, and of course after meeting Lama Tsongkapa he excelled in his understanding of the great treatises. He composed many profound commentaries on the work of the great Indian masters, such as the *Treatise on Valid Cognition*, the *Pramanavatika*, which is a very profound explanation of valid cognition. I have two cousins who study in India in the Sakya college, and they mentioned that they use that commentary by Gyaltsab Je. His other texts such as the great commentary on the *Prajnaparamita* are also used in Sakya monasteries.

When we studied Aryadeva's *400 Verses*, we used Gyaltsab Je's commentary. Those who studied it will recall his very clear explanations. We also used Gyaltsab Je's commentary when we studied the *Bodhicharyavatara* text. And now, as we study Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*, we are using a commentary composed by Gyaltsab Je. So you can see how his explanations are very precise and very clear.

An example of this is the verse we did this evening, which indicated that there is no specifically characterised pleasure, which could also be understood that to meant that there is no inherently existent pleasure. If we were to just refer to the root text, it would be very easy to assume that that this point actually refers to non-inherently existent pleasures. But then we would wonder why just pleasures are being negated as inherently existent when sufferings also lack inherent existence. So in order to clarify that doubt Gyaltsab Je made it very clear that 'not specifically characterised' in this context refers to the lessening of pain and does not refer to non-inherent existence in this context. This is just one example of Gyaltsab Je's clear and precise explanations. Through his commentaries we begin to understand the real depth and profundity of the root texts.

To return to the story of Gyaltsab Je, it is believed to this day that initially sitting on the throne alongside Lama Tsongkapa was actually an auspicious omen, in that when Lama Tsongkapa passed away Gyaltsab Je was appointed as the first throne holder of Lama Tsongkapa's tradition.

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*Edited Version*

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## **Discussion (6.12.2011)**

**Week: 1** (8 November 2011)

1. In reference to verse 330 and Geshe la said, “We really need to derive the essence of the advice given here and really try to apply it to our daily practice.” What is this essence? [4]

2. a) What will a very profound understanding of karma result in? [4]

b) How does this profound understanding of karma help develop a real sense of compassion for those who engage in negative deeds? [2]

3. What is the definition of negative karma? [2]

4. Describe another way to develop a positive state of mind such as compassion. [4]

5. What is the definition of virtue? [2]

**Week: 2** (15 November 2011)

6. Gyalsab Je begins his commentary with a query..... “Isn’t the reason for imprisoning criminals because you wish them to experience suffering? If that is so then why wish them Happiness?” Explain Gyalsab Je’s answer. [4]

7. a) Give the analogy the Buddha provided as a means to develop sound reasoning and wisdom within ourselves. [3]

b) Explain how these three levels are applied to the teachings. Give an analogy/example of each. [6]

**Week: 3** (22 November 2011)

8. a) How is the king being advised to handle difficult citizens such as criminals? [2]

b) How can we relate to this advice? [2]

9. How can we turn something that is not normally considered as a religious practice into a religious or Dharma practice? [4]

10. How did we gain our present human life? [2]

*Week 4 (29 November 2011)*

11. ‘So contaminated worldly pleasures fall into the category of suffering’. Explain and give an example. [4]

12. How is the experience of pleasure a dependent arising? [2]



# Exam

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

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

## **Block 7**

### **Week 6: (13.12.2011)**

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1. In reference to verse 330 and Geshe la said, "We really need to derive the essence of the advice given here and really try to apply it to our daily practice." What is this essence? [4]

2. a) What will a very profound understanding of karma result in? [4]

b) How does this profound understanding of karma help develop a real sense of compassion for those who engage in negative deeds? [2]

3. What is the definition of negative karma? [2]

4. Describe another way to develop a positive state of mind such as compassion. [4]

5. What is the definition of virtue? [2]

6. Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary with a query..... “Isn’t the reason for imprisoning criminals because you wish them to experience suffering? If that is so then why wish them Happiness?” Explain Gyaltsab Je’s answer. [4]

7. a) Give the analogy the Buddha provided as a means to develop sound reasoning and wisdom within ourselves. [3]

b) Explain how these three levels are applied to the teachings. Give an example of each. [6]

8. a) How is the king being advised to handle difficult citizens such as criminals? [2]

b) How can we relate to this advice? [2]

9. How can we turn something that is not normally considered as a religious practice into a religious or Dharma practice? [4]

10. How did we gain our present human life? [2]

11. 'So contaminated worldly pleasures fall into the category of suffering'. Explain and give an example. [4]

12. How is the experience of pleasure a dependent arising? [2]