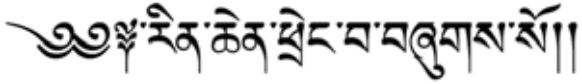


Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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

16 February 2010

We have the great fortune to gather again - old friends and Dharma students - so I'd like to take the opportunity to welcome you: Tashi dalek! It's nice to see you again.

It is necessary for all of you to be familiar with the discipline that Study Group involves. We have four classes followed by a discussion in the fifth session, and then an exam in the sixth week. It is good for you to be aware of the necessity for coming to all of those sessions and making the commitment to do so. Also, part of the discipline of the Study Group is to try to attend all of the sessions during the course of the year.

The most important thing, however, is to set a positive motivation for receiving the teachings. Most of you would be familiar with how to set a positive motivation. However it is good to remember that the real reason for studying and practising the text is to develop a kinder and gentler mind and attitude; whatever practice and study one does should be towards that end. If, as time passes, one finds that one's mind has become gentler, a bit kinder and calmer, then the study or practice has served its purpose. Furthermore we need to pay attention in generating a happy mind.

The way to accomplish a happy and kinder mind is to remove or abandon whatever negativities there may be in one's mind-stream, and to adopt even the smallest positive qualities. This procedure will eventually lead to a state of being free from all negativities and acquiring all positive qualities. Reaching such a state of being free from all negativities and endowed with all positive and supreme qualities is not something that just comes about suddenly from somewhere above. Rather it is a step-by-step procedure that we need to follow in order to reach that goal.

Another part of the curriculum of the Study Group is to do a bit of meditation prior to each session. We won't do the meditation this evening, but will leave it for our subsequent sessions. The meditation that we will adopt will be the *tong-len* practice, which literally translates as 'giving and taking' in English. One can base this meditation on verse 95 of the *Guru Yoga* which I have explained two or three times before. It would be good to memorise the verse so as to retain it in your memory. After reciting the verse together we go into individual meditation. I have taught the tune previously as well [*Geshe-la chants the verse*].

D'e-na je-tzün la-ma t'ug-je-chän
Ma-gy'ur dro-wäi dig-drib dug-ngäl-kün
Ma-lü d'a-ta dag-la min-pa-d'ang
Dag-g'i de-ge zhän-la tang-wa-yi
Dro-kün de-d'ang dän-par j'in-gy'i-lob¹

The tune is basically, the same tune as the tune of the seven-limb prayer of the Guru puja. However the tune I used now is a simpler version. You should take note that the last line of the verse is repeated twice to fit the melody. Having familiarised yourself with the meaning of the verse, you come to understand

¹ And thus, O venerable compassionate Gurus, we seek your blessings,
That all karmic debts, obstacles and sufferings
Of mother beings may without exception ripen upon us right now,
And that we may give our happiness and virtue to others
And thereby invest all beings in bliss

that it is a means to instil love and compassion, which is said to be the very basis of the Mahayana teachings. Thus, when reciting the verse one thinks about its meaning, and generates a sense of love and compassion towards all living beings.

The text that we are going to cover in our following sessions is called *Precious Garland*. The full Sanskrit title involves the cause and effect sequence of how to develop high status and definite goodness. Here 'high status' relates to obtaining a precious human re-birth and 'definite goodness' relates to obtaining liberation and enlightenment. Those who have the commentary can refer to that. The commentary on the root text will be the one composed by the Tibetan master Gyaltsab Rinpoche. In fact, there are only two existing commentaries on the root text, Gyaltsab Rinpoche's commentary and that by the Indian master Mipam Shyinyin. Some other commentaries do exist, but they have not been able to be brought out of Tibet. The second commentary by Mipam Shyinyin is actually quite brief and doesn't cover a literal explanation of the verses of the root text. Gyaltsab Rinpoche's commentary is also not very extensive either, but it does give a literal explanation of the meaning of the verses.

The commentary itself begins with an introduction and an actual presentation, but we can skip the details of the introduction. As presented in the commentary, the introduction includes a biography of the author Nagarjuna. We won't go into the detail of his biography; however those with the text book can read it.

In brief, Nagarjuna was renowned as a great master who was prophesied by the Buddha himself, and there are many texts that relate these prophecies. Nagarjuna composed many great treatises on Buddhism and the arts such as astrology and medicine, and so in that way he was a great master of both contemporary and religious texts. The second part of the introduction presents some of the major Buddhist treatises that Nagarjuna composed, which you can look up. Nagarjuna, in fact, was an unequalled and unique master who has been particularly kind to our tradition, because he provided so many clearly explained treatises on the profound and subtle teachings of the Buddha. In our lineage we consider Nagarjuna to have been extremely kind in presenting all of those teachings so very clearly.

According to Gyaltsab's commentary *Precious Garland* has four sub-divisions:

1. The meaning of the title
2. The translator's obeisance or salutation
3. Presenting the meaning or subject matter of the treatise
4. Conclusion

Presenting the material by breaking it up into these different sub-divisions also gives an inkling of how the great Indian masters composed their treatises. It is also a good way for us to become familiar with the actual method of composition, so that if we were to ever compose some text, or do some writing, then we have good example before us.

1. THE MEANING OF THE TITLE

The Sanskrit title of the text is *Rajaparikatha-ratnamala*. In English this is translated as *The Precious Garland of Advice for the King*. Breaking up the actual Indian Sanskrit into syllables 'Raja' means King; 'parikatha' refers to advice; 'ratna' refers to precious and 'mala' is garland or rosary. 'The King' referred to here is King Udayibhadra. One can derive from the title the understanding that the advice appearing in the text is analogous to a precious garland of priceless gems. Each bead is invaluable, and the individual beads are strung together in an orderly sequence, where one individually precious bead very neatly follows another. Like that the advice presented in this treatise is organised sequentially, so that one piece of advice precisely follows the other, with each piece of advice being extremely

precious. This is how we can understand the subject matter of the text as well.

There is a description of the actual mala that we use for mantra recitations which may also be noteworthy. The small beads of the mala are said to represent the arhats and the arya beings, whereas the two beads at the top of the mala (one bigger bead and a smaller bead on the end) represent the two bodies of the Buddha - the form body and the wisdom body. This amazing description of the mala might entertain you [*Geshe-la laughs*]. In fact that understanding of the mala and what it represents can also give your recitation of mantras a more profound meaning. For example, when you are doing a retreat on a particular deity such as Yamantaka, when the sadhana indicates that you do the recitation of mantras, you visualise each bead to be in the aspect of the deity which then dissolves into yourself. So when one recites any mantra with a mala, it would be good to remember that significance; using the mala in that way itself becomes much more meaningful.

Leaving that aside, and coming back to the author Nagarjuna, the reason for presenting the biography of the author is a way for us to develop a genuine connection with the author, and to remember the kindness of the author. Nagarjuna was of southern Indian origin. He was said to be born in Bhandara near to where the Dalai Lama gave the Kalachakra initiation a few years ago. There is actually a town named after him, which is quite near to the area where Nagarjuna was born. As mentioned previously, Nagarjuna was prophesied by the Buddha to come to revive the teachings of the Buddha, and so he was definitely a blessed being in the sense of being predicted by the Buddha himself.

Nagarjuna is known for his great works that revived the Buddha's teachings, particularly the Mahayana teachings. Thus he is renowned as a 'trailblazer' for reviving the Buddha's teachings and explaining them very clearly and precisely. So it is really thanks to the kindness of Nagarjuna that today we have the great fortune to study the teachings and acquire a profound understanding of the meaning of the Buddha's teachings. So it is good for us to know a little bit of background of Nagarjuna, as that helps us to make a genuine and more profound connection with him, and to remember his kindness.

In the Buddha's prophecy there are details of Nagarjuna's birthplace. The gist of the prophecy is that 'in the southern region of India, at a place called Bhaida a person with the name 'Naga' will revive my teaching'. Nowadays Lord Nagarjuna's birthplace is called Bhandara. There is also a park named after Nagarjuna, which is very beautiful and serene, and even a very clean and nice vegetarian restaurant named after Nagarjuna. When someone suggested that there was a park named after Nagarjuna and asked whether I would like to visit it, I said 'Oh most certainly, it would be auspicious to visit a park named after Nagarjuna'. Then soon after we had a stroll in the park which is very beautiful and serene, someone said 'Oh there is a restaurant called 'Nagarjuna', shall we eat there?' 'Well, why not', I said, 'that it is even more auspicious!' I really felt very elated and happy, being in an area that was named after the great Nagarjuna.

While I was seated at a table in the restaurant, I noticed that there was a short Tibetan person nearby who kept glancing at me. He didn't seem to know me and I also didn't recognise him. When he asked me where I came from I said 'I come from Australia' and when I asked where he was from he said that he had come from Switzerland. Although I initially didn't recognise him I said 'Would you happen to be Ralu Rinpoche?' (Ralu is the same province in Tibet where I come from and I knew about Ralu Rinpoche). When I asked him whether that was his name he said 'actually I am the so-called Ralu Rinpoche, however that Rinpoche part is made up and not really genuine in my case' [*Geshe-la laughs*]. There was a lady there and he said 'this is my girlfriend' [*laughter*], so he had given back his robes.

Later, when I learnt more about Rinpoche's present life, I heard that his partner was really a very kind woman who had taken very good care in looking after him, and who had genuine concern and fondness for Rinpoche; she was a very good partner. When he indicated that 'the title Rinpoche doesn't really suit me or is not genuine in my case', he was referring to the fact that he was now living an ordinary life without that grand religious connotation.

As mentioned previously the title of the treatise is the *Precious Garland of Advice for a King*. The king referred to in the title is King Udayibhadra. The subject matter, the 'precious garland' refers to the value of the advice that is presented in the treatise itself. That covers the meaning of the title.

2. THE TRANSLATOR'S OBEISANCE

In this case the translator would be the Tibetan translator who translated the original Sanskrit text into Tibetan. It was customary for the translator, to pay homage at the beginning of the translated treatise in so as to remove obstacles and so forth.

The translator's obeisance or homage, as indicated in the commentary is:

Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas

The older students will be familiar with that particular type of homage, i.e. prostrating to all buddhas and bodhisattvas. What does that indicate?

Student: That it is a Sutra teaching?

Perhaps Claire's guess was more accurate. The translator's homage indicates which basket of teachings it comes from. The Buddha's teachings are divided into the three baskets: Sutra, Abhidharma, and Vinaya.

In this case, prostrating and paying homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas indicates that the text belongs to the Sutra basket of the Buddha's teachings. The treatises on the Abhidharma teachings and commentaries and so forth would have a salutation paying homage by prostrating to Manjushri. Vinaya texts pay homage to the Omniscient one.

This convention was introduced by the earlier Dharma kings of Tibet so it would be clear, just from the homage of the translator, what basket of the Buddha's teachings the treatise belongs to. Then there would be no confusion. Thus from the homage of this treatise, we can understand that it is a treatise on the sutra teachings of the Buddha. The real reason for the translator to pay homage and do prostrations to all buddhas and bodhisattvas is as a means to accumulate extensive merit, prior to composing the treatise, so as to be able to succeed in completing the composition, and also to remove any obstacles.

3. PRESENTING THE TREATISE ITSELF

Presenting the meaning of the treatise itself is further divided into three:

1. The activities to be done prior to composing the treatise
2. The treatise itself
3. Completion of the treatise

I. THE ACTIVITIES TO BE DONE PRIOR TO COMPOSING THE TREATISE

This section has two sub-divisions:

- A. Obeisance to and praise of the Buddha
- B. Promise to compose the treatise or the book

A. OBEISANCE TO AND PRAISE OF THE BUDDHA

This is further divided into three sub-divisions, which consist of:

1. The purpose of doing the homage or obeisance
2. The concise meaning of the obeisance itself
3. Meaning of the actual words

1. The purpose of doing the homage or obeisance

As explained in the commentary, the purpose of the obeisance is two-fold: to accomplish one's own goals as well as accomplish the goals of others.

In relation to the purpose of **accomplishing one's own goals**, as mentioned in the commentary, paying homage to incomparable holy objects with great reverence and faith in one's mind has the purpose of being able to accomplish the composition of the treatise and remove any obstacles or hindrances that may be involved. In that way the temporary as well as all ultimate goals will be fulfilled.

The second purpose of accomplishment **for the sake of others** is for the completed composition to be a source for others to relate to by listening, studying and practising it, thus fulfilling their wishes.

2. The concise meaning of the obeisance itself

The two sub-divisions of the concise meaning of the obeisance are:

2.1. Praise

2.2. Prostration

2.1. Praise

In the layout of the Tibetan verse, the praise comes first followed by the prostrations, however the English rendition is the other way around.

The root text reads:

1. *I bow down to the omniscient
Freed from all defects,
Adorned with all good qualities,
The sole friend of all beings.*

The last three lines are part of the praise, while the first line is the actual prostration.

The praise consists of praising the Buddha, who has the two excellences, which are:

1. Excellent accomplishment of one's own goals
2. Excellent accomplishment of the goals of others

In brief then, the qualities of the Buddha can be condensed into these two excellences. Praising the Buddha endowed with the excellent accomplishment of one's own goals has two aspects: abandoning all abandonments, and gaining all realisations

Freed from all defects indicates abandoning all of that which is to be abandoned. *Adorned with all good qualities* refers to the excellence of obtaining all the good qualities. The *sole friend of all beings* refers to the excellence of the accomplishment of the goals of others. This praise indicates that the Buddha is endowed with three qualities in total, the excellent accomplishment of one's own goals, which consists of two qualities - abandoning all abandonments and gaining all realisations, and the third quality is the excellent accomplishment of the goals of others.

The word *Omniscient* refers to the Buddha, who is referred to as the 'excellent teacher'. It is good to note that an excellent teacher is one who is adorned with the three excellences (the excellence of having abandoned all abandonments, the excellence of having obtained all good qualities and the excellence of accomplishing others' goals). A being who has these excellent qualities, is thus referred to as an 'excellent teacher', as they are unlike other ordinary beings or ordinary teachers.

2.2. Prostration

The words *I bow down* refers to the prostration in the homage.

This verse of homage also indicates very concisely the object of refuge. The Buddha refuge is the Buddha himself, the qualities that the Buddha is endowed with (having obtained all qualities and having abandoned all abandonments) is the Dharma refuge, and the being who actually possesses these qualities is the Sangha refuge. So paying homage to the Buddha in this way

also suffices as homage to the Three Jewels. As indicated by all masters, paying homage to the Three Jewels before engaging in any activity is a sure method for removing obstacles and accomplishing all of one's goals.

The lam rim teachings indicate that the most genuine and profound way of taking refuge is to understand the qualities of the objects of refuge. With such an understanding, going for refuge is a really profound and genuine refuge. The way to present the objects of refuge is by presenting the qualities of each of the objects of refuge with the three excellences. An understanding of what the three excellences refer to will instil a real and genuine sense of faith in the Buddha. When taking refuge in the Buddha, for example, if we have a concise understanding of what the actual term 'Buddha' refers to, then our act of going for refuge itself becomes much more meaningful.

The Tibetan term for the Buddha is *sang-gya*, which is comprised of two syllables: *sang* means to clear away or to awaken, while the connotation of *gya* is to proliferate. If one were to wake up from a deep sleep the mind would be fresh again, so the word *sang* indicates a mind being fresh and clear. *Sang* particularly refers to the mind being completely free from ignorance and in that way being awakened from the slumber of the darkness of ignorance. That is what the first syllable of the term for Buddha refers to. The *gya* basically refers to having abandoned all abandonments and acquired all the good qualities, and so proliferating with the qualities of having abandoned all negativities and acquired all good qualities.

Earlier we referred to the Buddha as being endowed with the excellences of being completely free from all negativities, endowed with all good qualities and engaging in enlightened activities - the great deed of benefitting other beings. Such an excellent teacher, referred to as the Buddha (or *sang-gya* in Tibetan) is a being who does not just come about spontaneously without causes and conditions. Rather it is a result of having engaged in practice over a long period of time.

So our practice is to gradually remove each negativity and acquire each small quality. The way to achieve that state of being completely free from all negativities and endowed with all good qualities is based on gradually removing each and every negativity from one's mind and acquiring every small quality. This is the progressive procedure that leads to the state of being the 'excellent teacher', which is something that we can also achieve if we follow the same path. That is something that is good for us to remember.

3. The meaning of the actual words

The 'I' in the words *I bow down*, refers to Nagarjuna himself. Who is Nagarjuna bowing down to? It is the Omniscient one. *Omniscient* connotes the being who is endowed with a complete understanding and knowledge of all that is to be known, which is condensed into all ultimate phenomena as well as all relative phenomena. Thus an omniscient one is one who is endowed with complete knowledge, in particular one who simultaneously understands all phenomena, that which consists of the ultimate reality, as well as the relative reality. A being endowed with those qualities is called omniscient.

The word *free from all defects* indicates that the Omniscient one (the Buddha) has the particular attribute of abandoning all abandonments, which consists of abandoning seeing the person and the aggregates as being inherently existent. In other words, the defect of the deluded obscuration - having the defilement of seeing the person and the aggregates as being inherently existent - has been abandoned. Furthermore having also abandoned the dualistic view - indeed the very imprints of the dualistic view, means that the obscuration to omniscience has also been eliminated. So the two obscurations have been completely abandoned.

Adorned with all good qualities refers to having obtained the qualities that are common to the hearers and solitary realisers. These include qualities such as the Thirty-seven Practices and so forth, and the uncommon qualities include the ten powers and so forth. The earlier indication was like a summary, indicating the first of the common and uncommon qualities. Here, however, the commentary adds 'and so forth' to 'common and uncommon qualities' to indicate that all the uncommon and common qualities have been completely realised by the mind of the Buddha.

The second and third lines refer to the excellence and accomplishment of one's own goals i.e. one's personal qualities. The last line in the English translation of the verse, *the sole friend of all beings*, refers to the excellence of the accomplishment for the good of others. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, by being endowed with great compassion the Buddha benefits all beings in an unbiased manner. The Buddha benefits all beings without discrimination by protecting them from all faults and negativities, and by helping them to remove all faults and negativities, and in this way leading them to the unsurpassed state of complete happiness. By referring to the Buddha as the 'sole friend' the text is referring to a real and genuine friend who helps one, regardless of one's response. Regardless of the attitude one may have towards the Buddha, the Buddha from his own side benefits all beings, without any attitude of bias or discrimination. In this way, the Buddha is the *sole friend of all beings*.

This relates to the Buddha being endowed with the qualities of being an excellent teacher. Now if the Buddha had only those perfect qualities but didn't have the great love and compassion to benefit other sentient beings, then the quality of being an excellent teacher would be lacking. Thus while having all the good qualities in relation to one's own accomplishments, the quality of being endowed with great love and compassion also has the excellence of benefitting other beings.

In summary, the first verse of *Precious Garland* is a verse of obeisance or homage to the Buddha. The person paying homage is the author himself, Nagarjuna, and the object of the homage is explicitly the Buddha and implicitly the three jewels.

The Buddha is explicitly praised as being the excellent teacher who is free from all defects, adorned with all good qualities and the sole friend of all beings. 'Free from all defects' connotes the complete abandonment of all negativities and 'adorned with all good qualities' connotes the obtaining of all great realisations and 'the sole friend of all beings' connotes the excellent accomplishment of other beings. In this way, as he has the three excellences, the Buddha himself is portrayed as being the excellent teacher. So in this verse Nagarjuna pays homage to such an omniscient being. Implicitly this verse also shows homage to the Three Jewels, the Buddha himself (the Buddha jewel) and the qualities within the Buddha (the Dharma jewel) and those who strive and work towards achieving those qualities (the Sangha jewel). So in this way, the first verse refers to the three jewels as well making homage to them.

It would be good for everyone to recite together the first verse and homage together.

*Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas
I bow down to the omniscient
Freed from all defects,
Adorned with all good qualities,
The sole friend of all beings.*

I've just learned the verse myself now thus I can recite it from memory. It is good to be familiar with this verse as a way to remember the meaning behind the words, (as indicated in the commentary). Then when we recite the verse we remember the meaning behind the words and in this way it will become really meaningful and very profound.

So this evening we have covered the author and we have identified who the author is.

Who is the author of the *Precious Garland*?

Students: Nagarjuna.

Where is Nagarjuna from?

Students: Southern India.

Who is the object of homage or obeisance of the translator?

Students: All the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Who is the object of obeisance or homage of the root text?

Students: The Buddha.

Yes, the Omniscient one, and we can also say the excellent teacher.

What does the word 'omniscient' refer to?

Students: One who knows all.

We have to be very precise here. Rather than only saying 'knowing' it is important to include the words 'simultaneously and directly'. Thus omniscient refers to 'simultaneously and directly knowing all phenomena'. It is important to include those two aspects, otherwise there could be some faults.

So we have broken the ice with the text, which is more or less a straight forward text. That's not to say that it's easy, but it is quite straight forward. It will be good for those of you who have access to the root text to do some preparation from your own side. Also if you access to any commentaries on this text, it will be good to read that as well.

The way I try to present my teachings is to go over each of the verses of the text. In conjunction with the commentary I try to really cover the meaning of each verse and not to leave anything out. That is how I have taught the texts that we have studied. It's not that I'm boasting about it but I really try to go into all of the meanings without leaving anything out. Maybe the reason why I am compelled to do that is because you have paid such good attention in the past. If you continue to do so, then that is a very good basis for us to continue.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version
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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བཀའ་ལྷན་པའི་སྐུ་ལོ་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

23 February 2010

Our motivation can be along the lines of the refuge and bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited. In fact whenever we do any practice it should be preceded with a motivation imbued with refuge and bodhichitta.

Having taken refuge and generated bodhichitta one then dedicates whatever practice one engages in, such as listening to teachings, towards the benefit of all sentient beings, as indicated in the refuge and bodhichitta prayer. If one's practice is meditation then the ultimate purpose is to benefit sentient beings, while making attempts to subdue one's own mind.

As explained in the teachings, there is no greater merit than the merit accumulated with the bodhichitta attitude. That is because of the vast scope it encompasses - as the number of sentient beings is limitless, dedicating one's practice towards achieving enlightenment for the benefit of sentient beings is a great way to accumulate vast merit.

Along with the altruistic motivation of bodhichitta, it is good to remind oneself that at a practical level, the purpose of doing practices such as listening to teaching, or any other Dharma practice, is really to subdue one's mind. Then whatever activity one engages in will be in accordance to the Dharma. On the other hand, engaging in activities with an unsubdued mind doesn't produce sustained good results. It can also be the source of a lot of confusion, destruction, and meaningless activities. So the purpose of subduing the mind is to make life meaningful, regardless of the activity one engages in.

We should adopt the habit of checking our attitude prior to engaging in any activity, periodically analysing it to determine the kind of attitudes and motives behind our activities. If one finds that one has a negative state of mind then recognise that and remind oneself 'if I were to follow actions motivated by this negative attitude then it will only bring harm to myself and others, so there is no benefit at all. It is by following this sort of negative attitude that I have made so many mistakes in the past'.

With that recognition of the negative attitudes that one has, we further develop the determination to try to reduce and eventually overcome those negative attitudes. If one notices a positive attitude in whatever activity one does, then rejoice and recognise it as being an attitude that should be developed with further effort. If we use our analytical wisdom in this way on daily basis to discern whether one has a positive or negative attitude, and then try to cultivate the positive, and reduce the negative attitudes in one's mind, we will definitely be able to engage naturally in the process of reducing negativity, eventually leading to a complete, perfect state.

The value of taking to heart this practice of using one's own intelligence and analytical wisdom to check on one's

motives and attitude should not be underestimated; it is really of great value. As mentioned previously, when we really look into our life we can see that every time we have acted on a negative state of mind, or attitude, we have always suffered from it. We have never had real satisfaction, or real contentment from a negative state of mind. Actually the opposite occurs, which is feeling really uncomfortable, guilty, and even depressed afterwards. When we look into this feeling of being weighed down and depressed, it is because of acting upon the prevailing negative attitudes. If you can start to reduce the negative attitudes in your mind then it is like lifting off a weight. You will begin to feel naturally quite calm and more settled, and if you can begin to feel settled and calm in daily life then that will definitely be a positive result. Whatever activity we engage in, and whatever we encounter, and whatever our situation might be, with of settled, clear and calm mind our external circumstances will not disturb us. In that way we can see the immediate benefit of further developing or cultivating the analytical wisdom within oneself.

By seeing the benefit that we can experience in this life we can gauge the benefits for future lives. Initially we may not be able to easily think about the benefits for future lifetimes, as we are more concerned with immediate results. That's why I think it is more practical to first experience the benefits of developing a positive attitude in our daily life through meditation and other Dharma practices. That will then give us an inkling of how, if we believe that there is a future life, it will really benefit us then. In other words, if we see the positive results from our present experiences then we can use that see that it is possible to benefit in the future as well.

The great master Shantideva has described our present situation of being bombarded with negative thoughts as like being trapped in a cage unable to move. When our mind is filled with negative attitudes, we feel completely confined and frustrated and feel that there is no way out. We are actually imprisoned by our own negative thoughts. When we practise sincerely, our practice will begin to release us from the negative thoughts, and it is as if the door to the cage has been opened. Then we are freed from being imprisoned by our own negative attitude and thoughts, which will bring a sense of relief as we settle down and experience a calm and peaceful mind.

That immediate experience will then be an impetus for us to genuinely want to engage in further practice. Our interest will be genuine because it is based on our own experience of having been released from an otherwise very narrow, frustrated, shallow and disturbed mind. Even gaining some temporary benefit will be an impetus for us to persevere with the practice, which then becomes a very meaningful part of our daily life.

With meditation, the procedure is to first try to develop focus on a chosen object, and as we slowly develop our focus on the chosen object the mind naturally becomes more centred and focused, which naturally helps the mind to become clearer and brighter. A clearer and brighter state of mind has a natural, positive effect on the mind, leading it to becoming calmer and more settled. This is how meditation actually works. So initially in our meditation we try to put an effort into really settling and

focusing our mind on whatever object we choose to meditate on.

When we reach the point in our practice of meditation where we realise that we cannot do without meditation, and that it is something that we definitely need in our life, then we have reached a steady and stable point in our practice.

The point that I am emphasising here is that the reason one reaches this state of being convinced that one cannot do without meditation, and that it is an essential part of one's life, is because of the simple fact that we want to be happy and do not wish to experience any suffering. If we want a peaceful and happy mind then we need to engage in meditation practice, because that is the only way to gain genuine peace and calmness. In fact, I do not need to really prove this point as many friends have personally confided this very fact to me. They have said, 'Geshe-la, when I meditate, I feel happy, joyful and calm, and if I don't meditate then I feel very troubled'. They are relating something from their own life experience; those of you who have this experience know that without meditation you cannot feel settled or calm or peaceful.

In fact the very purpose of any authentic religion is to serve as a way of providing peace and some sense of contentment and joy. This principle is what makes religion an authentic one, separate from ordinary worldly activities. In every society religion is considered sacred, as its spiritual approach provides many different methods for gaining peace and some real contentment. So it is considered as being separate from the materialistic world. That is how religion came into being.

Every religion would agree that a sense of inner peace and contentment, joy and happiness does not come from outside but rather from within, from what we Buddhists call 'the mind'. Every religion would agree that a sense of joy and peace does not come about just through rituals or prayers or attending some sort of service. That is not sufficient. One needs to make some effort and actually work towards that state of contentment.

For example, even though Christianity would say that everything is created by God, they also say that without developing faith in God's purity and love, one cannot truly develop and inner transformation. That faith has to be developed within oneself.

The practice for developing one's inner qualities is based on generating a true sense of love and compassion towards others. That, it seems, is something that all religions unanimously agree upon - every authentic religion has a very strong emphasis on the developing of love and compassion. So we can agree that every religion is based on a sense of true love and compassion.

The meditation that I have suggested we do here is based on the principle of cultivating and developing love and compassion within our own heart as a basis to develop bodhichitta. We will recite the prayer together and then do the meditation. (*pause for meditation*)

Keep this prayer sheet and bring it to every Tuesday class. If you familiarise yourself with the visualisation as indicated, then you can use it in the meditation. I had given a teaching based on that visualisation twice, so if

you have notes perhaps you could make them available for others, as it's good for people to have them to refer to.

To summarise the motivation for receiving the teachings; with the bodhichitta attitude - i.e. the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, by liberating bodhichitta them from sufferings and bring them to complete happiness, we generate this thought, 'for the ultimate purpose of achieving enlightenment, I will listen to the teachings now, and put them into practice well'.

I. THE ACTIVITIES TO BE DONE PRIOR TO COMPOSING THE TREATISE

In our last session we covered the verse that contains the praise and prostration. As explained then, the praise consists of praising the qualities of the Buddha, which also explicitly refers to the Three Jewels. So the praise is to the Buddha and the three jewels, which is followed by prostrations with this intention: 'I prostrate with my three doors, (of body, speech and mind) to the one who is endowed with excellent qualities'.

B. PROMISE TO COMPOSE THE TREATISE OR THE BOOK

This heading is subdivided into:

1. The actual promise
2. The reason for teaching the Dharma to a suitable vessel

1. THE ACTUAL PROMISE

This is a further divided into:

- 1.1. Establishing the purpose and relationship
- 1.2. The suitability of the words and meaning

1.1. Establishing the purpose and relationship

This is covered in the first two lines of the second verse of the root text:

*2ab. O King, I will explain practices solely
virtuous
To generate in you the doctrine*

Having first given a short biography of the author, who is Nagarjuna, then presenting the homage, which is praise to Buddha Shakyamuni, Gyaltzab Je now goes on to explain the subject matter, which is the cause and effect sequence for obtaining high status and definite goodness.

To explain the meaning behind the terms: 'high status' relates to the rebirth and the happiness experienced in the human realm and god realms, while 'definite goodness' relates to the two ultimate goals - liberation from samsara and complete enlightenment. Therefore the subject matter of *Precious Garland* consists of the cause and effect sequences showing how to obtain the goal of achieving the happiness of the human and god realms, as well as the goals of liberation from samsara and the ultimate goal of complete enlightenment.

The next two lines of the verse indicate the four points which consists of the purpose and the relationship.

1. The *subject* is as just explained - the cause and effect sequence for obtaining high status and definite goodness.
2. The *temporary purpose* of composing the treatise is for those who study it to gain an understanding of the subject matter that is to be presented in the treatise.

3. The *ultimate purpose* of composition is having gained a full understanding of the meaning presented in the treatise and by putting it into practice with meditation and so forth, to achieve the ultimate state of definite goodness.

Here we take note that there is both a temporary purpose and an ultimate purpose. The temporary purpose of composition is for the reader to understand the meaning of the material of the book, whereas the ultimate purpose is to put that understanding into practice in order to achieve the goal of definite goodness.

4. The *relationship* is that without relating to the earlier points first one can not gain the results of the later part. What this refers to is that without the subject one couldn't possibly gain the meaning of the subject. Thus understanding the meaning of the subject is related to having the subject to begin with. Then, without practising the meaning of the subject one could not possibly achieve the ultimate goal of definite goodness. Therefore obtaining the ultimate goal of definite goodness is related to understanding the meaning of this subject, which in turn is related to the subject itself. So that's the relationship between the points.

Gyaltsab Rinpoche (the author of the commentary) points out that you cannot rearrange or skip a point in the sequence of the presentation. This also indicates that there is a natural sequence in obtaining realisations. Gaining a great realisation depends upon gaining a small realisation first, i.e. without obtaining a small realisation first, one cannot possibly obtain a great realisation.

In relation to the principles of the path i.e. renunciation and bodhichitta, one need to understand that without developing renunciation first one cannot possibly develop bodhichitta. So in order to develop bodhichitta one needs to have developed renunciation first.

Just to make sure that you have all got it right, who is the author of the treatise, the book?

Students: Nagarjuna.

Who is homage offered to in the opening verse of this text?

Students: Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

That is actually the translator's homage. We are referring to the text itself now, but that's an understandable confusion.

Just to make it clear, the first homage in the text was the translator's homage, which is the homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas. However the actual homage of Nagarjuna's treatise is the homage to the Buddha, who has the three excellences. These are the excellent qualities of one's own purpose and that of fulfilling the purpose of others. One's own purpose is divided into abandoning all negativities and acquiring all good qualities. The one who is endowed with these qualities is the Buddha jewel, the actual qualities are the Dharma jewel, and those who strive to accomplish these qualities are the Sangha jewel. Thus by directly praising the Buddha, the verse also indirectly presents the three jewels. Thus the praise and homage is offered to the Buddha and the three jewels.

What is the subject of the treatise?

Students: Cause and effect of high status and definite goodness.

And purpose of the treatise is?

Students: Understanding the meaning.

The ultimate purpose is?

Students: Putting it into practice and attaining high status and definite goodness.

Wayne is just giving a big smile. *[laughter]* Are you just smiling and remaining very neutral about what others are saying, and not showing any indication if it is right or wrong. What is your answer to the ultimate purpose?

Student: To attain definite goodness.

So the ultimate purpose is to gain enlightenment for oneself?

Student: Yes, because if you do that you are able to work for the purpose of others.

Of course from the holistic view point, obtaining enlightenment would be for the purpose of others. Even though it is explicitly explained that abandoning all abandonments and obtaining all qualities is the purpose for oneself, it is of course, ultimately for the purpose of benefiting other sentient beings. That needs to be understood.

One needs to actualise enlightenment oneself first before one can benefit other sentient beings, so that's why it is presented as the purpose for oneself. You will recall how bodhichitta is developed: first one develops love compassion for other sentient beings by thinking about their predicament, and then one strives to achieve enlightenment. So one trains one's mind to develop love and compassion for other sentient beings first, and then one trains one's mind to achieve enlightenment.

The point that is being presented here is that there are two states of mind, one first trains in benefiting other sentient beings by developing love and compassion, then one trains in obtaining enlightenment. Having obtained enlightenment oneself, one can then actually benefit other sentient beings by leading them to enlightenment too. One cannot possibly benefit other sentient beings and lead them to enlightenment before obtaining enlightenment oneself. It is good to understand that sequence.

This is a very logical presentation, because without having obtained enlightenment oneself there would be no possible way to really lead others to ultimate enlightenment. Logically speaking, one would have to obtain that state of enlightenment first, so as to be able to fully lead to others to enlightenment as well.

There is an analogy given in the teachings that shows the importance of the right sequence. In an area where there was a famine, the father of a family found a lump of meat. Of course his first thought to try to divide it among his family members. But then it occurred to him that if he were to divide this small lump of meat amongst his large number of family members, everyone would get only a small piece which would not really satisfy anyone's hunger, or restore the energy of anyone. So he decided that it will be much more practical and wiser to have that piece of meat himself, as a way to restore his energy so he could go actually seek the means of getting food and resources to help everyone in the long run.

Perhaps the father was just being clever. *[much laughter]*

That covers the first subdivision of the actual praise, establishing the purpose and relationship.

1.2. The suitability of the words and the meaning

This refers to the suitability of the words that are presented in the actual composition.

Gyaltsab's commentary asks: what follows after having made prostrations and salutations?

Having offered the praise and homage, or as the translation says, 'obeisance', to the Buddha, Nagarjuna next addresses King Udayibhadra beginning with these words, 'O King' and so forth. As the commentary explains he is not only a king who reigns over his immediate entourage of ministers, attendants and so forth, but he has control over the whole kingdom.

In effect Nagarjuna is informing this powerful king that he is about to present him with the Dharma that will completely protect him from the sufferings of the lower realms, and that which is also valuable at all three times, the beginning, the middle, the end. This indicates the method of how to become free from the entire cyclic existence. The method to make all this happen is called the Dharma.

What follows is the *literal explanation* of the first two lines 'O King I will explain practices solely virtuous to generated in you the doctrine'.

- ∞ *Practices solely virtuous to generate in you doctrine* means 'I am presenting the Dharma to you so that you can generate it within yourself. That is the purpose'.
- ∞ The term *solely virtuous* indicates that which is unstained by any negativity, and which is completely pure.
- ∞ It will be good to understand here the actual definition of *dharma* in general, which is 'that which holds its identity'. Using that general definition, all phenomena is referred to as dharmas. That is because each phenomenon holds its own identity. However the *Dharma* referred to here is the noble Dharma, i.e. the actual spiritual practice and the realisations gained from practice. In this context whoever establishes Dharma within themselves will protect themselves from falling into the lower realms.
- ∞ The *noble* in 'noble Dharma' refers to that which instils in one the wish to accumulate virtue, - a noble intention.

So the literal explanation of the first two lines of verse two is that when Nagarjuna says to the king, 'O King I will explain the solely virtuous practices to you' he is referring to the Dharma, which is solely virtuous. The purpose of explaining the Dharma is indicated in the second line, *to generate in you the doctrine itself* i.e. *the doctrine* refers to Dharma. So Nagarjuna is saying to the king, 'The purpose of presenting the Dharma to you is for you to generate the Dharma within your own mindstream'.

Then Gyaltsab Rinpoche's commentary goes on to ask, 'what is the Dharma that is being referred to here?' Earlier the commentary gave the literal meaning of Dharma but here the commentary explains that the Dharma is specifically, establishing oneself in the practice

of ten virtues, which is not killing and so forth, as well as establishing the wisdom realising lack of extremes.

If these two are the causes, then the result or effect of that is to obtain the high status of the human and god realms, and the ultimate awakening mind, i.e. enlightenment.

That in brief is the purpose of the actual subject matter. The subject matter is the Dharma, which is the cause for obtaining high status and enlightenment, and the Dharma is presented as a means for the person listening to it to establish that within their own mindstream. More specific details about high status and definite goodness will be explained later.

2. THE REASON FOR TEACHING THE DHARMA TO SUITABLE VESSELS

2cd. For the practices will be established In a vessel of the excellent doctrine.

This section explains the reason for teaching the Dharma to suitable vessels. Gyaltsab's commentary asks: 'why is the Dharma presented to the king explicitly? Is it that which is presented by the noble being which is the excellent doctrine, or is it that the noble or excellent doctrine can be presented to the one who is already endowed with the qualities of being an excellent vessel? The commentary indicates that the excellent vessel for receiving the teaching, is the one who has the mind of Dharma already established in them.

To put it in contemporary language, Nagarjuna is indicating to the king: It will be most meaningful if the Dharma is presented to someone who is a suitable vessel, and you are a suitable vessel, because you have an intention to practice the Dharma. Thus because of your intention to practise Dharma you are a suitable vessel for me to present this treatise to you.

What this really indicates is that the teachings are given to those who have the wish to practise the Dharma. It would be rare to give a teaching to someone who has no wish, no intention, or no interest at all in practising the Dharma. There might be some rare cases but if there is no interest it is not really suitable. This indicates that if there are those who want to listen to the Dharma, then it is appropriate to teach the Dharma, but if there is no one wishes to listen to it then there is no reason to teach.

II THE BOOK ITSELF

Now we come to the treatise or the book, which is where the real material is presented. It has four subdivisions.

- A. Cause and effect of high status and definite goodness
- B. Advice to train in the two collections of merit and wisdom, which are the causes of highest enlightenment
- C. Advice for a king to train in flawless policy
- D. Advice for bodhisattvas wishing quickly to obtain liberation to become monastics

A. CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HIGH STATUS AND DEFINITE GOODNESS

This has two subdivisions:

- 1. Explaining cause and effect of high status and definite goodness individually
- 2. The interwoven explanation of cause and effect of high status and definite goodness

This subdivision explains why the treatise is comprised of five chapters, which are:

Chapter 1: Cause and effect of high status and definite goodness

Chapter 2: The interwoven explanation of cause and effect of high status and definite goodness

Chapter 3: Advice to train in the two collections of merit and wisdom, the cause of highest enlightenment

Chapter 4: Advice for a king to train in flawless policy

Chapter 5: Advice for bodhisattvas wishing quickly to obtain liberation to become monastics

CHAPTER 1. EXPLAINING CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HIGH STATUS AND DEFINITE GOODNESS INDIVIDUALLY¹

This has two subdivisions:

1. Setting the scene
2. Actual explanation

A. SETTING THE SCENE

Setting the scene is subdivided into four

1. Order of the two doctrines
2. Identification of the causes and of them as an effect
3. The difference between the main and the secondary of the two causes
4. Characteristics of a trainee who is a vessel

1. ORDER OF THE TWO DOCTRINES

- 3. In one who first practises high status
Definite goodness arises later,
For having attained high status,
One comes gradually to definite goodness.*

The commentary gives a general explanation of the meaning of the verse now. However there will be more specific explanations later. Gyaltsab's commentary says that first he will present the sixteen dharmas that are the causes of a high status, which should be integrated into one's practice with complete understanding, and then he will present the main meditation focus of the path, which is emptiness.

As the commentary further explains, the reason for first presenting the causes for obtaining high status, and then presenting the actual course for achieving definite goodness, is because we need successive lifetimes of being born in a high status to obtain the ultimate goal of liberation and enlightenment. It is because we need to have successive lifetimes of high status in order to obtain the ultimate goal of definite goodness, that the causes for obtaining high status are presented first. What we need to derive from this explanation is that the cause of definite goodness cannot be created in the unfortunate lower realms, such as the animal and hell realms.

More precise reasoning as to why the teachings are presented in this order is that understanding cause and effect, i.e. karma, is a relatively easier aspect of the Dharma. Having established a good understanding of that, if the profound teaching on emptiness is presented, then the student will be able to actualise the

understanding of emptiness. Otherwise it is not possible. The commentary goes on to explain that if emptiness were to be presented to an unsuitable vessel, i.e. someone who is not ready to receive it, then that could actually cause the fault of creating wrong or distorted views in relation to karma, and by abandoning the profound view of emptiness, actually creating the cause to be reborn in the lower realms.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further establishes the point by saying that even if one were to present emptiness to someone who is not fully capable of understanding it, at the very least that person should have some basic understanding of cause and effect. This is actually very profound advice for us when we discuss the Dharma with others.

There is actually a story relating to these points that I have already related to you before. The main point to understand here is that there is a danger of developing a distorted or wrong view if emptiness is presented to someone who is not suitable. For example, in the *Heart Sutra* there are the words 'no form, no smell' and so forth. If someone were to take those words literally, and then apply that to cause and effect, i.e. karma, then they could take that to literally mean that there is no cause at all, and that there is no effect. That would generate a grave wrong view of karma. Therefore, as we understand from our studies, we don't take the words literally to mean that there is no form and no smell and so forth. Rather, even though the words say no form, it refers to no inherently existent form, no inherently existing smell and so forth.

In ancient times there was a master who, through his meditation had gained a significant realisation of emptiness. Being quite in awe of that realisation, he thought, 'I must present this teaching to others immediately, and share this profound great realisation with others', without first checking the suitability of the vessel i.e. listener. So he presented that view to an audience. Now one the people in that audience was a king who had never heard such teachings before. When he heard the literal explanation that there is no form and so forth the king began to think, 'This is very dangerous, as he keeps denying the existence of things, and he keeps saying that what actually exists doesn't exist. If I allow this person to keep teaching he might lead people into having distorted and wrong views. So I had better get rid of him before he creates too much damage'. So the king gave the order for the master to be killed.

The king then sought another master who, with skilful means, presented the teaching in a sequential manner, first teaching about karma, and cause and effect, and then impermanence and so forth. By leading the king in this gradual manner he eventually taught emptiness to the king, when he was ready to receive and understand the profound teaching. At that point it dawned on the king how profound and how subtle these teachings on emptiness actually are, and having gained that realisation himself, he developed very strong regret about his negative deed of having ordered the first master to be killed. It is said that he developed such strong regret in his mind, and did so much purification practice in order to purify that karma, that he eventually had visions of that earlier master forgiving him.

¹ As has been the case in the past the numbering of each chapter will restart, to accommodate the depth of subdivisions.

2. IDENTIFICATION OF THE CAUSES OF THEM AS AN EFFECT

The sequence being presented is really very logical and comprehensible. First the specific causes for obtaining high status are presented followed by the specific causes of definite goodness. Identifying the individual causes in such a comprehensible and logical way makes the material really meaningful for us.

4. *High status is considered to be happiness,
Definite goodness is liberation.
The quintessence of their means
Is briefly faith and wisdom.*

Here high status and definite goodness are being specifically identified. As explained here, high status is considered to be happiness. The commentary explains that here, happiness refers specifically to both the happiness of the gods and humans, but also to neutral feelings.

The neutral feelings relate to some of the gods in the formless realm, i.e. those at the first and second concentrations and so forth who have a completely neutral sensation, feeling neither suffering nor happiness. The gods of the formless realm are in a meditative state of meditative absorption, where they have not only renounced the sufferings of samsara, but also the joys and pleasures of samsara. Thus they strive to perpetually be in a state of neutral equanimity. Thus *high status* specifically refers to the happy and neutral mental states of the gods and humans, as well as the rebirth in that realm.

Definite goodness refers to having abandoned suffering and the very causes of suffering by virtue of gaining the wisdom realising emptiness, which is called obtaining liberation. Thus the line 'Definite goodness is liberation' refers to state of obtaining liberation.

The reason why liberation is referred to as being a definite goodness is because the literal interpretation of 'definite goodness' is that one has obtained the irreversible state where suffering and causes of suffering will never occur and thus never be experienced again. Having reached such a state of irreversible liberation is called definite goodness.

The commentary further explains that the causes for obtaining those two effects of high status and definite goodness, is understanding karma, faith in the two truths and the three jewels, and the acquisition of the wisdom realising emptiness.

The word *quintessence* in the third line 'the quintessence of their means' refers to the actual effects of high status and definite goodness, while *briefly faith and wisdom*, refers to explaining in brief the causes of high status and definite goodness, which the commentary identifies as faith and wisdom, which respectively correspond to each of the effects. Thus, as the commentary explains, understanding faith specifically relates to having faith in karma and cause and effect, the two truths and the three jewels. Whereas wisdom refers specifically to the wisdom realising emptiness. That's the relationship between the causes and the effects.

This evening we have covered identifying the subject, and in that way identifying what high status is, and what definite goodness relates to. Then we identified the two main causes to obtaining high status and definite goodness. That in brief explains the subject matter.

What follows in the third subdivision, which is the differences of the main and secondary causes, is more specific. What serves as the main cause and what serves as a secondary causes to obtain those goals of high status and definite goodness, will be explained in more detail in the following verses. That should give you an inkling of what is to come next.

*Transcribed from tape by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
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Edited Version*

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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་གྱི་བུ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

2 March 2010

We set the motivation for this evening by thinking, 'For the sake of all sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering I need to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible, so for that purpose I will engage in the practice of meditation and listen to the teachings'.

Those who have been regularly attending the study group will be able to relate to the meaning of these words from the Guru Puja:

And thus O venerable compassionate Gurus,
we seek your blessing...

For those who are not so familiar with it, you can visualise Buddha Shakyamuni on the top of your crown. The main thing is to develop a wholehearted conviction that Buddha Shakyamuni, in the form of light, is actually present on top of your crown. There is no other guru more supreme than Buddha Shakyamuni, so visualising him is sufficient. The second line of the verse from the Guru Puja is:

That all karmic debts, obstacles and sufferings
Of mother beings may without exception ripen
upon us right now...

Here one visualises removing suffering as well as all the causes of the suffering. The cause of all suffering is negative karma, and both the cause and the resultant suffering are being experienced by sentient beings right now, and there are so many sentient beings suffering because of these conditions. Thus in order to free them from all suffering, one imagines taking the suffering upon oneself in the form of black light coming from all sentient beings surrounding oneself. The black light represents the karmic obscurations as well as the sufferings of all beings.

Imagine the black light entering into your heart, where your own self-cherishing mind is in the aspect of a black heap at the centre of your heart. Imagine the black light completely destroying the self-cherishing mind. It is important to imagine that the black light completely vanishes after destroying the self-cherishing mind, otherwise we may feel some residue of the negativity still remaining, which is not desirable. As a result of having taken upon the karmic obscurations and suffering of all beings, imagine that all sentient beings are free from those negative conditions, and that they are now experiencing great mental bliss. That great bliss completely pervades all sentient beings.

The last two lines of the Guru puja verse are:

And that we may give our happiness and
virtue to others
And thereby invest all beings in bliss.

One first contemplates the predicament of all sentient beings, which is that they lack even temporary contaminated pleasures, let alone being able to experience true happiness. Thus most sentient beings are completely engulfed by the suffering of physical and mental pain. As a way to bring about happiness for sentient beings one first thinks, 'I cannot remain settled with the knowledge that sentient beings are

deprived of happiness and bliss'; this thought is an element of great love. Thus as a means to bring about happiness and bliss for all sentient beings, one transform one's own virtues, accumulated over the three times (past, present and future), into bliss and happiness, in the form of white light that we imagine going out to all sentient beings. As the white light reaches all sentient beings, it simultaneously fills their entire being with great happiness and bliss. We then request Guru Buddha Shakyamuni to give us the blessings to actually be able to engage in this practice.

This has been a very concise and brief explanation of the meditation practice which we can do when reciting the verse from Guru Puja. It is good to begin with a simple form of the practice and then, based on that, slowly expand our visualisations. Basically the purpose of this practice is quite simple: the main thing is having brought to mind the sufferings of all sentient beings, and wishing them not to experience any suffering, one then takes upon oneself all their suffering; this element of the practice is to develop great compassion. So with this very brief practice, we are familiarising our mind to cultivate great love and compassion towards all sentient beings, a love and compassion that is free from bias.

This means that when one thinks about all sentient beings one is free from the discrimination of regarding some as friends, some enemies and others strangers. We can reason why we should include all sentient beings in our visualisation, by simply thinking, 'Just as I do not wish to experience the slightest suffering, and wish to experience every possible joy and happiness, so too each and every sentient has that same wish. Therefore it is reasonable for me to help sentient beings who strive to achieve the same aspirations as myself'. By merely generating the thought of not wishing sentient beings to experience suffering and wishing them joy, bliss and happiness, is an incredible and noble intention that we are cultivating within ourselves. We can slowly expand and develop this positive attitude to generate genuine love and compassion within ourselves.

As His Holiness regularly emphasis in his teachings, a very noble basic attitude to familiarise ourselves with is, 'I will not intentionally harm any sentient being in the slightest way, and offer whatever benefit I can. I will readily and willingly engage in doing this'. Just familiarising oneself with these noble altruistic intentions is really a very positive way of directing our mind in the right direction for developing love and compassion.

A concise practice is to recall certain points and remain focussed on them. So the first point is to recognise that each and every sentient being is exactly the same as oneself in not wishing to experience any suffering, and longing to experience joy and happiness. Think, 'We are all exactly the same; each and every sentient being is exactly the same as myself in that regard'. Equalise all beings in that way and just focus on that for a few moments. You will notice that merely bringing that thought to mind brings a shift to our attitude, and establishes something positive in our mind; it really has a positive effect upon ourselves. The next point, as His Holiness emphasises, is to develop this simple attitude, 'I will not intentionally harm any living being in the slightest way and I will do everything possible to benefit other sentient beings'. So having generated that thought maintain with it for a few moments.

Indeed, these noble intentions are something that we need to familiarise ourselves with daily. We should spend some time during the day practising bringing this to mind again and

again. The more we familiarise ourselves with this noble attitude and intention, the more stable our mind will become. *[Pause for meditation]*

Just as we have attempted in our meditation, it would be good to familiarise ourselves with the practice and do it regularly. Practising in this way is also a means to protect whatever love and compassion one has already developed within oneself. As I stress regularly, if someone were to lose the sense of love and compassion within, then that would be a great loss and even a dangerous state to be in. For such people, everyone around them appears to be an enemy; they feel that they have no friends around them, and that everyone dislikes them.

As I stress regularly, it is really important to consider the fact that if one loses the sense of love and compassion towards others (particularly with more immediate relationships), then it's obvious that what replaces that is anger and bitterness. It is also obvious that the relationship starts to deteriorate from that point onwards. Once anger is expressed it damages a relationship, therefore it is very important to sustain a sense of true concern of love and compassion for each other at all times. This is something that is really important in our daily lives.

In cultivating love and compassion towards all beings, the important element is to base that sense of love and compassion on the fact that, as mentioned earlier, all living beings (including oneself) are equal in wishing for happiness and not wishing to experience the slightest suffering. In that regard, we are all equal. This will also help us to understand the logic of being patient with others, which is where the practice of patience comes in.

As I have mentioned in previous teachings, expressing love and compassion to others is very difficult if we don't have the virtue of patience. *[laughs]* When we lack patience we can lose any sense of love and compassion very quickly. There are many who claim that despite the fact that they have shown a loving and caring attitude, there is no positive response from the other. The object of their compassion doesn't seem to appreciate it, which might result in losing the sense of wanting to care for them, because one cannot be patient with them any longer.

To practise, particularly in relation to really understanding the suffering of others, one must recognise that no one experiences any joy and happiness in a moment of great suffering. So if, for example, one's partner or friend is showing some obvious signs of being upset, it will help if we understand that they are in a state of real unease, and that they are actually suffering. Then, rather becoming angry and upset with them, we can be patient, with understanding and compassion towards them. This is how the practice can work in a really practical way. By relating it to our own experiences we can acknowledge and understand that the other is angry and upset as a result of being in an uncomfortable or uneasy state of mind. How do we feel when we are upset and angry? The anger is a result of not feeling at ease or content within oneself. The immediate condition may be an external condition, but if we don't feel disturbed by the external situation, we will not become upset. What upsets our mind initially is a feeling of unease, an unhappy and unsettled mind, then we get annoyed or angry. We can relate other's situation to our own experiences: whenever they are upset or angry it is the result of feeling uneasy or unsettled in their mind.

You will recall from the teachings that there are three immediate conditions for anger to arise within ourselves: the

inner condition of experiencing suffering; the external condition of things not working out well; and the condition of others harming us. So, as explained, due to the inner condition of feeling unease, even for a moment, becomes a cause for anger to arise within oneself. However when someone we call an enemy is at unease, that isn't a cause for us to become angry; rather it is a cause for us to feel joyful and happy that they are suffering. We may feel that it serves them right. *[laughs]* So, it is very true that it is our own suffering that causes us to become angry. Indeed, when someone is who is feeling unhappy becomes more depressed, it causes them to become more and more upset and angry. That is a fact. Whereas when everything seems to be working well for someone, they will not be in an angry state of mind.

When I went to visit Geshe Loden's centre last Saturday, I met up with Toby Gillies, who is a senior monk there. As we are quite fond of each other, we often talk and joke. The other day he said, 'Geshe-la, you always seem to be joyful and happy and always smiling, but don't you get depressed sometimes?' When I replied 'No, I don't get depressed' he said, 'Not even a little bit?' My response was that it doesn't serve any purpose to get depressed.

There were also two Christian monks present. After we finished the session one of them came up to me and shook my hand. Even though I didn't recall it, he said 'I met you at Tara once before and at that time I told you that there was sometimes quite a bit of trouble in the monks' community'. Apparently I had responded, 'Protect your own mind'. He said that he remembers that advice very clearly and that it has been very sound advice for him. It is true that while we may not be able to completely control external situations, if we control our own mind, then that will suffice to keep our mind in a state of equilibrium. The best example that we have is His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Chinese are always causing trouble and making so much fuss about him, however His Holiness meditates very peacefully inside. In response, His Holiness often refers to the Chinese as 'my old friends'.

The main point is that if we were to actually spend some time familiarising ourselves with cultivating and developing these attitudes of love and compassion, then there is definitely a benefit. There is no question about that. Merely cultivating those positive attitudes in our mind will help and benefit us, and in a practical way bring us closer to others. Even animals can respond to someone who has a sense of love and compassion.

There are some really amazing stories about how animals can respond to love and compassion. When love and affection are shown to them in the earlier part of their life, they can recognise and respond to that later in their life. Of course not all animals may have that capacity, but some animals definitely do show that response. Just to mention an incident that happened in our local area, a person who used to walk a dog regularly had an accident, and the dog apparently was able to alert the police! There are incidents where the dog notices that something has happened to its owner and becoming anxious, starts barking, which attracts attention and lead people to where the owner is.

It is also noteworthy how obedient these animals can be when they have been well cared for. Apparently there are cases where dogs have been sent to the supermarket with a note to buy meat and return to their owner with the meat in their mouth. Such dogs apparently return to their owners in a very discrete way so that other dogs won't attack them.

Then there is the famous incident during the Black Saturday bushfires of the man who gave water to a koala. The incident became world famous, just because of the fact that the koala responded to the human kindness. Such an encounter can bring tears to our eyes, because we can see the positive response by the koala to the fire fighter. Later the koala died of a disease, and apparently when the fire fighter who had given the water heard that news he cried, as if he had lost a dear friend.

The point is that we can learn a lot from these accounts of the positive response of animals to love and compassion. That is not to mention that it is definitely possible that if you interact with others with a sense of love and compassion and treat them with respect, then a positive response will be reciprocated. Of course there are some exceptional cases where the response may not be immediate, but in most instances love and compassion will definitely be accepted by any human being.

CHAPTER 1. EXPLAINING CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HIGH STATUS AND DEFINITE GOODNESS INDIVIDUALLY

A. SETTING THE SCENE (CONT.)

Last week, the earlier verses introduced 'high status' and 'definite goodness'. Having introduced 'high status' and 'definite goodness', we went on to describe what the causes are, and how they can be achieved. As the earlier verses explained, the main cause for high status is faith in the law of karma (or the law of cause and effect), and the cause for definite goodness is the wisdom realising emptiness.

3. DIFFERENCE OF MAIN AND SECONDARY OF THE TWO CAUSES

The corresponding verse from the text is:

5. *Due to having faith one relies on the practices,
Due to having wisdom one truly knows.
Of these two wisdom is the chief,
Faith is its prerequisite*

In explaining this verse Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with this quote from a text:

Faith precedes all dharmas just as a mother
precedes the son

Another quote relating to this says:

Faith is the very root and thus that is to be
stabilised

In relation to faith, Gyaltsab's commentary explains that faith is the root or basis for all dharmas or all virtues. Because faith serves as the very root, someone with faith will naturally rely on the practices. The particular practice referred to here, as the commentary explains, is a practice such as the ten virtues. A more extensive explanation of this will be presented later on in the text. Here, however, we are considering how faith serves as the very basis of all dharmas and of all good. For example, in relation to our own aspirations, what do we long for? What do we aspire towards? Basically, it is happiness. We all aspire to be happy and that is something that we can all agree upon.

As the teachings present, if we look into the causes of happiness, we find that it is virtue. If we have the understanding that virtue is an unmistakable cause for happiness, we will develop a natural faith in the value of acquiring virtue. With that faith we will acquire virtue because we want the result, which is happiness. Likewise we naturally don't want to experience any suffering. When we

understand the origin of suffering, which is delusions and karma, and understand that as being the causes for suffering, then that is developing faith in naturally wanting to remove the causes for suffering.

The karma referred to in 'delusions and karma' is specifically negative karma. When one has a full understanding how negative karma is a cause for suffering, the wish to refrain from negative karma will naturally arise in one's mind. Likewise, when one can fully understand that virtue or positive karma is the cause for happiness and joy, then one will be naturally inclined to accumulate virtue, because one wishes to experience the result of happiness. Basically that cause and effect sequence summarises karma; negative karma or actions are the cause for suffering and positive actions are a cause for happiness.

Without having faith in cause and effect, one cannot possibly practise true Dharma. Even though karma is explained as being a profound subject, there is definitely a level that we can easily relate to, such as negative actions being a cause for suffering and positive actions being a cause for happiness. That is something that we can definitely understand. So, even though we may not be aware of the deeper implications of karma yet, we can still practice from whatever understanding that we have of karma.

We might wonder why, even with some level of understanding of karma, we don't readily and enthusiastically engage in virtue. Engaging in negative karma, on the other hand, is something that comes about very naturally and easily. Nevertheless we can do something about this situation, and begin to change our ways. If we don't change from the situation where we readily engage in non-virtue and are hesitant to accumulate virtue, then for as long as we remain in the situation of just following negative karma and doing nothing about accumulating virtue, we are just keeping ourselves in that vicious cycle of creating more causes of suffering for ourselves. Whereas if we begin to really see that relationship between negative karma and suffering and virtue and happiness, then the more we develop our faith and understanding in that, the more we will be inclined to try to avoid accumulating negative karma. Rather than voluntarily engaging in negative karma, we will try to be wary of creating negative karma and be quite joyful and happy with the opportunity for accumulating virtue.

Thus, as Gyaltsab's commentary explains, if someone has faith then the causes for obtaining a high status, which are practices such as the ten virtues, will be established. In other words, by relying on these practices one will be a suitable vessel. So if we find ourselves in a state of really wishing to engage in the ten virtues, then we can consider ourselves as a suitable vessel for obtaining high status. The alternative would be quite difficult for us.

In relation to the second line of the verse 'Due to having wisdom one truly knows' the commentary explains, that 'due to having wisdom' refers to having the potential to develop the realisation of the profound wisdom of emptiness, so with that potential one will have the capacity to truly know.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains that if one were to ask which of these two is primary, then the answer is the wisdom realising emptiness, because that is the actual antidote for overcoming samsara. The commentary further explains that while the wisdom realising emptiness is the actual antidote that will free one from cyclic existence, the essential prerequisite is faith in the infallibility of karma.

Without having first developed faith in karma there is no possible way of gaining the wisdom realising emptiness.

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRAINEE WHO IS A VESSEL

The corresponding verse in the root text is:

6. *One who does not neglect the practices
Through desire, hatred, fear or bewilderment
Is known as one of faith,
A superior vessel for definite goodness.*

In explaining the meaning of the verse, Gyaltsab Je first poses this rhetorical question: Having explained a suitable vessel needing to have faith and wisdom, then who is the suitable vessel? The commentary then explains the meaning of the verse. In this way the characteristics of the suitable vessel who is **endowed with faith** are presented.

- ∞ The line 'one who does not neglect the practice of the Dharma through desire' refers to, for example, longing to eat the meat of animals and killing animals out of that desire. That would be neglecting the Dharma due to desire. One of the characteristics of a suitable vessel is to be free from that.
- ∞ The second characteristic of a suitable vessel is that they should be someone who is free from hatred, for example, free from taking the life of others out of hatred. So, being free from neglecting the Dharma as a result of anger and hatred.
- ∞ The third characteristic is to be free from negligence of the Dharma out of fear. This refers to, for example, taking the lives of others as a result of fear of the law, i.e. being drafted to the army. So, a suitable vessel is free from that condition.
- ∞ The fourth is to be free from the condition of neglecting the Dharma due to bewilderment or ignorance. That would be for example, holding onto the view that it is acceptable to create negativity in order to support one's family, such as one's parents.

Gyaltsab's commentary then states that any being who is free from these four conditions i.e. free from the negligence of the Dharma due to desire, hatred, fear or bewilderment, as well as having strong faith in karma, is someone who is said to be a 'vessel with faith'. And such a person is indeed a vessel that definitely has the conditions to lead one to the result of definite goodness.

The next verse particularly relates to a Gyaltsab's rhetorical question: Who is a suitable vessel **endowed with wisdom**?

7. *Having analysed well
All deeds of body, speech, and mind,
Those who realise what benefit self and others
And always perform these are wise.*

As Gyaltsab's commentary explains, this refers to beings who analyse their body, speech and mind, where 'analysing' refers to analysing the state of mind, to see whether it is a virtuous, or a non-virtuous, or ethically neutral state of mind. Having distinguished between virtuous, non-virtuous and a neutral state of mind, and then abandoned the non-virtuous and neutral states of mind, one adopts a virtuous state of mind, and dedicates whatever virtues one has accumulated to the ultimate awakening of enlightenment for the sake of other sentient beings. Thus, as the last two lines read, the one who realises what is beneficial for oneself and for others is a wise one, i.e. a vessel endowed with wisdom.

Having a full understanding based on the earlier analysis of distinguishing virtue from non-virtue and neutral states of

mind, abandoning that which is non-virtuous and neutral, and adopting virtue, and then dedicating that towards the ultimate state of enlightenment, is the way to ultimately benefit oneself and others. A person with such understanding and knowledge and who is endowed with wisdom would then be called a wise one, a real scholar.

Actually, relating the meaning of this verse to our everyday lives in a practical sense is where we can derive the real benefit of studying the meaning of this verse. This is actually the advice of Buddha Shakyamuni, who in his teachings reminded us again and again that we must analyse and check our actions of the three doors. It is not all that complex when we think about it. Checking ourselves falls into checking the three outlets of our actions, which are of our body, speech and mind. These three are referred to the 'doors' as they are the outlets of actions that we need to be mindful of. We need to pay attention to the thoughts that occur in one's mind, and analyse them well. 'Is it a virtuous thought or a negative thought or a neutral one?' Then when one engages in verbal actions, really thinking about what kind of verbal actions they are, 'Are they virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral?' Similarly we analyse our physical actions.

In this way when we really analyse and think about it, if we are able to recognise and acknowledge that a thought, an intention to speak, or a physical action is negative, then we try to avoid that. At the same time we accumulate or enhance that which is virtuous. We should also not leave things in a neutral state either, but rather make sure that we transform it into virtue.

If we engage in analysis by following the advice of the verse, by avoiding creating negative karma and adopting virtue, and further dedicating that towards complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings then, as the teaching states, such a person would be a really wise person; a person endowed with wisdom.

This is something that we can try to adopt in our daily life; taking such a responsibility will really benefit us. These lines give us succinct advice for our daily lives. This is, of course, an abbreviated form of how to engage in the practice, which will be explained in greater detail further on in the text. However it is good to remind ourselves that all of the advice presented here is a means to be used in our daily life.

Gyaltsab's commentary further illustrates that if one has that knowledge, but does not engage in the practice of abandoning the negativities and adopting virtue, then the knowledge and the wisdom or intelligence that one gains will be nothing more than a knowledge of the contemporary works and sciences. This refers to the five major types of science or fields of study which are: 1) arts and crafts, 2) medicine, 3) grammar and poetry 4) logic and 5) inner science or philosophy i.e. relating to the treatises. Gyaltsab's commentary indicates that even if one has the knowledge of the five sciences, if one does not have the intelligence to distinguish between what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded and actually engage in that practice, then that person can not be called a wise person in this context.

In summary, as the commentary explains, the one who is endowed with the full understanding and knowledge of how to engage in the practices, and thus actually engages in the practices relating to the small, medium and great scopes, is someone who is endowed with faith and wisdom, and is called a 'suitable vessel'.

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བཀའ་ལྟོས་པའི་སྒྲུབ་ཀྱི་ལཱ་ལོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

9 March 2010

Before we begin our meditation, bring to mind the meaning of the words of the refuge and bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited. It is important to consider generating a proper motivation before engaging in any practice. *[Pause for meditation]*

B. THE ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HIGH STATUS AND DEFINITE GOODNESS

This heading has two subdivisions:

1. The cause and effect of high status
2. The cause and effect of definite goodness

Here it is good to recall again what high status and definite goodness actually imply.

1. THE CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HIGH STATUS

This is also subdivided into two:

- 1.1. Extensive exposition
- 1.2. Summation

1.1. Extensive exposition

This section has three subdivisions:

- 1.1.1. Practices for high status
- 1.1.2. Modes of practice
- 1.1.3. Fruits of practice

It is good to take note that the sequence in which the categories are presented is also the sequential method of how to engage in the practice itself.

One may begin to wonder if it is possible to achieve high status in our next rebirth, and so the treatise first identifies and then presents the possibility of achieving high status. Then we may wonder what the necessary practices to achieve high status are; thus the next subject of the text is presenting the causes. Following on from that, we then wonder how to actually put them into practice, and thus the second subdivision—modes of the practice. Then we might wonder what the actual results of doing the practice are, so the treatise presents—the fruits of practice. So we can learn a lot just from looking at the sequence of the headings. This sequential presentation actually anticipates our queries and then responds to them. It shows us how we can use our wisdom and intelligence to analyse and think about the topic.

1.1.1. Practices for high status

Earlier we identified the particular practices that are the causes of high status. This subdivision is basically another way of presenting the causes for high status.

This heading has four subdivisions:

- 1.1.1.1. Sixteen practices for high status
- 1.1.1.2. Non-existence of those in other systems
- 1.1.1.3. Fruits of wrongly engaging in those practices
- 1.1.1.4. Virtuous and non-virtuous causes and effects

1.1.1.1. SIXTEEN PRACTICES FOR HIGH STATUS

The sixteen practices of high status has three subdivisions

- 1.1.1.1.1. Thirteen activities to be ceased
- 1.1.1.1.2. Three practices to engage in
- 1.1.1.1.3. Summation

When we add the thirteen activities to be ceased to the three to engage in, then that makes up the sixteen practices for high status.

1.1.1.1.1. Thirteen activities to be ceased

These thirteen activities are subdivided into two categories:

- 1.1.1.1.1.1. Ceasing the ten non-virtues
- 1.1.1.1.1.2. Ceasing other improprieties

1.1.1.1.1.1. Ceasing the ten non-virtues

The ten non-virtues are presented with their opposites, which are the ten virtues. What we need to understand from this presentation is that ceasing to commit the ten non-virtues and engaging in, or adopting, the ten virtues is the cause for achieving high status.

The verse that relates to this outline is:

8. *Not killing, not stealing,
Forsaking the mates of others.
Refraining completely from false
Divisive, harsh and senseless speech*

Here each non-virtue is presented as its opposite, which is virtue. So the act of killing is a negative karma, while its opposite, not killing, is a virtue. It is the same with stealing - the negativity is the act of stealing, taking which is not given, and the opposite of that is to refrain from stealing. So the ten virtues are presented in this way as opposites of the ten non-virtues.

What we need to understand from this presentation is that the ten non-virtues are a cause for us to take an unfortunate rebirth, such as in the lower realms, whereas the opposites of the non-virtues, such as refraining from killing, refraining from stealing and so forth, are the causes for high status, i.e. to take rebirth in the human or god realms. This is how we need to understand the cause and effect sequence that keeps us in cyclic existence—in the lower realms as well as in higher realms. In this context some sets of causes lead us to an unfortunate realm while other sets of causes protect us from those lower realms and bring about the result of high status. This is the actual meaning of Dharma in relation to it being a protection—initially protecting oneself from the unfortunate rebirths.

The first act of morality that the Buddha presented is to refrain from killing. So we can see that refraining from killing is the first act of consciously adopting what is called morality or ethics. This also shows the centrality of non-violence in the Buddha's teachings. When we contemplate the Buddha's presentation of the teachings, we can really see that they give very sound and practical advice on how to live a righteous life.

The very first virtuous act that the Buddha presents is to refrain from killing, which is the opposite of the act of killing. We can easily relate to the act of killing as being a really negative deed. There is no living being who would not consider their own life as being the most precious of

all their possessions. Every living being will instinctively protect their own life, so taking that life away is the most negative act one could inflict upon someone else. Imagine someone threatening to take our life with a sword, and how much fear and suffering would that cause in our mind. Because life is the most prized possession, killing is the most negative act, and thus refraining from the act of killing is presented as the first virtue.

When we observe the Buddha's teachings in this light, i.e. that it is based on non-violence, then we can see that if we were to practise his teachings, it would definitely establish a sound basis for real peace. We want to have peace in the world, but how does peace come about? Peace comes about only by actively and voluntarily refraining from inflicting harm upon others. So this presentation is actually a blueprint for gaining real peace.

We cannot in any way underestimate the value of such practices. As mentioned earlier, if everyone were to actively stop killing we can just imagine how much peace and harmony that would bring to the community. It would definitely be a very safe and harmonious environment. In this way we can see the practical benefit of practices such as refraining from killing, stealing and the rest.

1. When we reflect on the advice to **refrain from killing**, one can realise that the Buddha is really giving us some practical advice to gain a real positive result for oneself. Put simply, the Buddha is saying that the act of killing is harmful to you: if you engage in act of killing then the result of that act will be to be reborn in an unfortunate realm and to experience tremendous suffering. Whereas if you refrain from the act of killing then that will be a cause for you to be reborn in higher realms, achieving high status of the human and god realms.

Indirectly the Buddha is also pointing out that by obtaining high status, such as a human rebirth, we will be able to then accumulate the causes to achieve the ultimate goal of definite goodness, which is enlightenment. The opposite of that is that if one were to engage in act of killing, then as that is the cause to be reborn in the lower realms, one would be reborn in an unfortunate state, such as being reborn as an animal. Being born in those kinds of circumstances will mean that one will not be able to create the causes for obtaining definite goodness. For as long as we remain in lower realms, the opportunity to create the causes for achieving the ultimate goal of enlightenment would not be possible. This is the real understanding that we need to derive from the presentation.

As mentioned previously, not killing and so forth are actually simple practices, but we must engage in them in order to bring about the positive results for ourselves. If we ignore these practices then we completely ignore the very basis of Buddhism. Indeed it is because we neglect these simple practices that we get stuck in samsara, being reborn again and again. We need to ensure that our life is based on these simple practices, then we can slowly build our spiritual development on top of that.

At this point we need to bring to mind what 'virtue' actually means and what its opposite, non-virtue, means. The earlier verses gave a general indication of what virtue

and non-virtue are, however here we can turn to the actual definitions. The definition of *virtue* is that which has the potential to bring positive results into fruition. While, *non-virtue* is that which has the potential to bring unpleasant results or experiences to fruition. We can also relate this to positive and negative karma.

2. The next virtue that is presented in the text is the opposite of the non-virtue of stealing. Stealing is the negative act of taking an object that is owned by someone else, which has not been given. Its opposite is the act of **not stealing**.

Again we can refer to the way in which refraining from stealing would create a positive and pleasant environment, one where we are certain that there are no thieves. If we were to go to such a place we would enjoy our travel; as there would be no anxiety in relation to theft, we would travel very easily in a relaxed frame of mind. So you can see that the virtue of refraining from stealing brings about a sense of ease and peace. On a very practical level we can understand that regardless of whether one is a Buddhist or not, we all agree that not stealing is a positive practice.

There are many examples of those who are known to actively engage in these practices. They are renowned for not harming others and so they are people who can readily be trusted. Even in a worldly context, someone who is known not to steal and to be honest would naturally be trusted. I could relate some stories of how people entrust their entire savings to someone who is known to be trustworthy; they do so happily because of the trust they have in the other. Someone who is known not to steal from others is someone that everyone would like to be associated with. Someone once told me that they had a Buddhist Thai worker at their home who had a natural quality of trustworthiness. The owner of that house told me that he felt very comfortable with that workman. On a very practical level, as Buddhists it is worthwhile to remind ourselves of the practical advice that the Buddha gave, such as to refrain from killing, from taking something that is not given to you and so forth.

3. The third virtue according to the root text is *forsaking the mates of others*. Basically this is **refraining from sexual misconduct**.

These first three virtues, the virtue of not killing, the virtue of not stealing, and the virtue of not committing sexual misconduct are said to be the three positive virtues that are accumulated by our physical body. The next four virtues relate to refraining from the non-virtues of speech.

4. The fourth virtue is described in the text as *Refraining completely from false*. Here 'false' refers to false speech. So the first non-virtue of speech is **lying** or false speech.

5. The commentary explains the non-virtue of **divisive speech**, often known as slander, as speech that is used to divide either individuals or communities. Refraining from the negativity of divisive speech is another of the virtues of speech. Divisive speech refers to using speech that would break up a relationship, or widen the gap between those who may have already have a strain on their relationship. Any speech directed towards that end

is called divisive speech, and it is good to be mindful of that when we engage in conversations with others.

6. The next non-virtue presented in the root text is listed just as *harsh* however Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that **harsh speech** relates to words that are hurtful to the other person. It refers to speech that really pierces the heart or mind of the other. The opposite of the harmful intent of hurting the other is the virtue of refraining from harsh speech.

This is something that we also need to take to heart and try to really be mindful of in our dealings with others, in relationships and so forth. When we consider the ill-effects of harsh speech, it is safe to say that harsh speech is one of the factors that can cause a break in a relationship with someone else. When you use harsh speech, others feel so hurt that it can cause a break in relationship. So this is something we need to be mindful of.

The lam rim states that refraining from harsh speech extends to refraining from uttering even what might be true, if it is going to cause some hurt or pain. For example, calling out to a blind person, 'Hey, blind person', would be unpleasant for them to hear. Now one could argue that it is true that the person is blind, so what is wrong with calling them 'blind'? However, because it hurts the other, it is advised that we refrain from uttering such speech. So to the extent that even if it is the truth, if it causes hurt to the other, then it is better not to mention it.

Basically the Buddha is presenting a practical list of how to behave well on a physical and verbal level, in a way that does not harm others, which is avoiding all physical and verbal actions that are harmful to others. This is what we need to practise on a practical level.

7. The fourth of non-virtues of speech, **idle gossip**, is called *senseless speech* in the text. In Gyaltsab Je's commentary senseless speech is explained as speech that really has no relevance to virtue, as it is just using speech mindlessly. Having identified senseless speech, the fourth virtue of speech is abandoning or refraining from senseless speech. Of all the ten non-virtues, idle gossip is the least severe in terms of the level of negativity, but it is also one of the most notorious in that can waste so much of our precious time in meaningless activity. For those who engage in study it is said that idle gossip is one of the worst obstacles, because it takes up so much precious time that would otherwise be used for study.

When we engage in idle gossip or senseless speech it involves talking about others too, and we might easily end up gossiping in a harmful way.

Verse nine presents the seven non-virtues and their opposites, which are the seven virtues. These seven virtues are related to physical and verbal actions. The three physical actions are the act of killing and the refraining from that, which is the act of not killing, stealing and refraining from that, and sexual misconduct and refraining from that. The four actions of speech are false speech or lying and the opposite of that, which is to be truthful, divisive speech and refraining from divisive speech, harsh speech and refraining from that, and senseless speech or idle gossip and refraining from that.

Of the ten virtues, the seven virtues are also within the category known as 'the moral discipline of seven-fold abandonments and their auxiliaries'. These seven moral disciplines and auxiliaries such as abandoning taking intoxicants and so forth are actually very practical ways to protect many other vows that we have taken. It is mentioned in the teaching that if we are mindful of the seven moral codes then that virtue, by default, will actually protect any other vows and commitments that we may have. So it is good to bear in mind the importance of these disciplines.

The remaining three virtues and non-virtues are covered in the next verse:

10. *Thoroughly forsaking covetousness, harmful intent,
And the views of Nihilists-
These are the ten gleaming paths of action;
Their opposites are dark*

8. The first of the three negativities of mind is **covetousness**, while forsaking covetousness is a virtue. Gyaltsab explains in his commentary that covetousness is a mind that, influenced by attachment, covets or longs to possess something that belongs to someone else. So basically this means that when we observe something nice or beautiful that belongs to someone else, we develop the strong wish, 'I would really like to have that for myself'. So a covetous state of mind involves attachment.

9. The second negativity created on a mental level is **harmful intent**, which specifically refers to a state of mind of wishing harm upon others, or wishing to harm others.

10. The third negativity created by the mind is referred to here as holding onto *the views of Nihilists*. As the commentary explains, this specifically refers to holding to view that denies karma or the law of cause and effect. This tenth non-virtue refers to not believing that creating positive karma reaps positive results, and that creating negative karmas reaps negative results. Holding such views that condemns karma is what is referred to as *the views of Nihilists* in the verse.

As the commentary explains, 'adopting the ten virtues' thus means to refrain from these three mental non-virtues plus the earlier seven of speech and body. The verse states that the ten virtues *are the ten gleaming paths of action*'. What is referred to as 'the gleaming path' in the English translation is presented in the teachings as 'the white path', or 'the virtuous path', whereas the opposite of that, is the 'dark path' or 'non-virtuous path', which is presented in the verse simply as *dark*. So we can understand from this presentation that the ten gleaming paths of action refers to the ten virtuous practices. As mentioned earlier the definition of virtue is 'that which has a potential to bring to fruition many positive results and happy experiences', and 'that which has the potential to bring produce negative results' is non-virtue.

The commentary further explains that four conditions must be met for a virtuous or non-virtuous karma to be complete. These are explained extensively in Lama Tsongkapa's *Lam Rim Chenmo* or *The Graduated Path to Enlightenment*. In brief the four conditions are 1) the basis,

2) the intention or the thought, 3) the actual act, and 4) the completion. All four conditions must be present for a karma (either virtuous or non-virtuous) to be complete. I am not going to go into detail about this here; I leave that for your discussion evening. A lam rim textbook will be suitable source on which to base your discussion.

Another point to discuss would be how to purify any negative karma that we might create. It is also good to remind ourselves of a simple statement about negative karma, which is that 'one good thing about negative karma, is that it can be purified'! This profound advice.

The fact that negative karma can be purified should encourage us to engage in the practice of purification. If karma could not be purified then we would feel that there is nothing we can do. However the fact that all negative karma and karmic imprints can be completely purified, will propel one towards actually engaging in the purification practices. You can discuss how a purification practice works in your discussion next week. Discussing and clarifying these points will be of the greatest value in your discussion.

For a complete purification to take place the four opponent powers need to be applied. When the four opponent powers are intact then a complete purification can take place. Discussing by trying to posit ideas and refute something and so forth may have its place and its own virtues. I am certainly not saying it is a waste of time, however engaging in a discussion to gain a good understanding of some important points is extremely valuable and makes the discussion really worthwhile. That is why I feel that sometimes it is good to really bring out a textbook in discussion, and clarify these points.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, by beginning with the ten non-virtues you establish yourself on the virtuous path, which becomes the cause for obtaining high status and indirectly to obtaining definite goodness.

1.1.1.1.2. Ceasing other improprieties

The thirteen activities to be abandoned is subdivided into two—abandoning the ten non-virtues, which we have completed—and three others described in the following lines:

10 ab. Not drinking intoxicants, a good livelihood, Non-harming...

1. The first of the three additional improper actions that are to be abandoned is **drinking intoxicants**. As the commentary explains, consuming intoxicants affects our body and leads to an uncontrolled mind. So it is a non-virtue that needs to be abandoned.

2. The second improper activity to be abandoned is **wrong livelihood**. The opposite of that is right livelihood. For a lay person a wrong livelihood would be engaging in a livelihood involving deceiving others, for example, when a grain trader uses the scales to make the weight less when selling, and more when buying, so his the profit is increased when he is buying and selling. Engaging in such acts of deception and cheating for profit are examples of wrong livelihood.

Gyaltsab specifically mentions that for an ordained person wrong livelihood refers to the five wrong livelihoods, which he lists. They are also presented in the

lam rim text so you can refer to that, as it is useful to understand.

Specifically the lam rim teachings refer to the five wrong livelihoods in the preliminary practice of making offerings. It mentions that one must make offerings that are free from acquisition involving a wrong livelihood. There are two categories: that which is deceitful through thought and that which is deceitful in causes. Deceitful through thought refers to making offerings with the eight worldly concerns. Deceitful offerings by its cause, refers to acquiring material offerings through any of the five wrong livelihoods. What you need to understand in this context is that it is said that even though you should not acquire offerings from any of the wrong livelihoods, if someone hands you an offering that has already been acquired through wrong livelihood, then that should be offered as a way to purify that karma.

The third of other improper deeds is **harming**. This is different from harmful intent, as it refers to actual harm that one inflicts upon others, for example, hitting someone else with a stick and causing physical pain. The opposite of that is non-harming. So avoiding the ten non-virtues, plus the three other improper deeds makes up the up the thirteen activities to be abandoned.

Of the sixteen practices of high status, thirteen have to be abandoned and the following three have to be adopted

1.1.1.1.2. Three practices to be adopted

The root text states:

10bc. ...respectful giving, Honouring the honourable and love-

1. The first practice to be adopted is **giving**, which refers to the act of generosity. Gyaltsab's commentary explains that if, for example, an act of generosity involves a material object it should be given to the other in a respectful way. We need to understand from this that when something is actually given from one's own hand then that is much more meritorious than, say, sending it with someone else. Giving with our own hands in a respectful way is highly meritorious.

When we refer to the act of giving, for example, we can take it down to the simple act of serving a guest with a cup of tea. We know from our own experience how much we appreciate it if the tea is handed to us in nice respectful or gentle manner. So when we offer tea to someone, even though it is just cup of tea, if it is given in respectful and nice way it will be much appreciated by others. That is how we can apply these practices at a practical level in our everyday life

In relation to the object, the commentary explains that we give to the poor and the needy, and that we can also give to those who are worthy of receiving an offering, such as the abbot of a monastery, or those who have higher qualities than oneself, so we give to 'all the objects worthy of offering, such as the enlightened beings'.

Before we drink a cup of tea, we can engage in an act of generosity by first making an offering of that tea to the enlightened beings, which then becomes an act of generosity. As we offer it we envisage the enlightened beings, our teachers, so in that way our offering becomes an act of generosity. Yet again we can see how the

Buddha has presented these practices in a very practical way, relating them to our everyday activities. Even when we drink or eat, we can turn that act into a practice by simply adopting an attitude in our mind, and then make the offering to our teachers and enlightened beings. That is a very practical way to practise virtue.

Although this seems to be a very simple practice, you should not dismiss it on the grounds of its simplicity. If we don't perform simple practices then when *are* we going to engage in any practice? Practice begins at a very practical level in what we do on a regular basis, such as drinking or eating. When we offer tea or a meal to someone else, if we offer it in a manner that is gentle and which shows respect for other, then that simple act of giving tea and offering a meal (which we would have done anyway) becomes a virtue. Because of one's attitude and manner it will be a karmic cause for obtaining high status.

High status basically refers to having good rebirth in the next lifetime. One may think, 'Oh, the causes and conditions for high status are very obscure and difficult', but in fact that is not the case. As explained here, engaging more mindfully in everyday activities, making them a bit more worthwhile, is a simple way of creating the appropriate causes. If you give to others, to friends, or your partner, and you do it a respectful way then it becomes an act of generosity. Along with dedication it becomes the cause of high status and definite goodness.

Everyday we need to drink and eat so if, for example, before we drink tea we just spend a few moments being mindful and mentally offer it to the enlightened beings, then that becomes the cause for high status. So we can make even normal activities, like drinking tea, into virtue and a cause for high status and ultimately enlightenment. This is how we engage in practice. We all agree that the practice of generosity is a good deed, but how we are going to engage in really big acts of generosity if we don't have the means to do so? It is much more practical to begin with the means that we already have, which are presented to us in our everyday life.

2. Next is **honouring the honourable** which has, in fact, just been discussed.

3. The root text just mentions **love**, however as the commentary explains, it specifically refers to bringing to mind, for example, the four immeasurables and cultivating them: immeasurable love, immeasurable compassion, immeasurable joy, immeasurable equanimity. Cultivating such thoughts in our mind is a way to practise real love. As mentioned in the commentary, this is what is called the Dharma.

The sixteen dharmas that we have listed this evening are the causes that enable us to obtain the high status.

On the question of respectful giving, Gyalsab Je explains there are three types of gifts: giving spiritual advice or Dharma, giving material needs to others, and also giving protection from fear. Although this is only mentioned in brief here, one can understand how the giving of Dharma is a really meaningful act of giving. So when sharing the Dharma with others be mindful, and do so in a respectful and gentle way. That then becomes really great act of generosity. Giving material needs can be, for example,

giving tea or a meal to others. Giving protection to others or protecting them from fear means, for example, actually saving life, or helping others when they are sick.

1.1.1.1.3. *Summation*

The summary is contained in last line of verse ten, which is:

10d. Practice in brief is that.

What one needs to understand from this line is that, in brief, the causes to obtain the high status are these sixteen practices.

It is good to refer to other texts as well. If you have commentaries on this text then that's fine, but other texts, like the lam rim, also refer to these points. They can help you to understand a little more about the points which are mentioned here. I could go into much more detail but that would mean taking up much more time, and we do have to cover the whole text. Nevertheless these are really important points. I can safely say that I could spend much more time going into detail about these points, but if you ask me whether I do the practice, then that is questionable. However, I am quite comfortable that I can explain these points in much more detail. The main point for you is to look up and become familiar with the points mentioned in this text.

There is Tibetan saying that 'even fishermen could quote words of Dharma'. This is saying that it is not enough to be able to quote eloquent sayings from a text if one does not put into practice. Once when I was walking along St Kilda pier I happened to pass a man who was fishing and as we glanced at each other he said, 'There are no fish to catch today', and my immediate response was, 'Oh, that's very good' [laughter] He actually smiled and seemed to understand the point I was making.

As you would be aware, the next session is the discussion session. As I mentioned earlier, it would be very meaningful to have a good discussion and make it really worthwhile. Also bear in mind that engaging in a good discussion means sharing your knowledge with others. That would be a real act of generosity of the Dharma. So do not underestimate the value of sharing in discussing the Dharma well. Then on the following week there will be the exam; I encourage you to come and participate in the test.

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Edited Version

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Tara Institute Study Group 2010 'Nagarjuna's Precious Garland'
DISCUSSION **Block 1** **16 March 2010**

Geshe la said it is good to refer to other texts as well. "If you have commentaries on this then that is fine, but other texts like the Lam Rim, also refer to these points. I could go into much more detail but that would take up much more time, and we do have to cover the whole text."

Week 1 (16 February 2010)

- 1.a) What is Nagarjuna known for? [2]
- b) Why is it good for us to know a little bit of the background of Nagarjuna? [2]
2. Give a summary of the first verse of Precious Garland. [5]

Homage to all Buddhas and bodhisattvas
I bow down to the omniscient
Freed from all defects,
Adorned with all good qualities,
The sole friend of all beings

Week 2 (23 February 2010)

3. Explain the meaning behind the terms:
 - a) 'High status' [2]
 - b) 'Definite goodness'. [2]
4. Explain the four points, which consist of the purpose and the relationship. [4]
- 5a) Give the actual definition of *dharma*. [2]
- b) Explain the *Dharma* referred to here (in the treatise.). [2]

Week 3 (2 March 2010)

1. Give a brief explanation of the meditation practice, which we can do when reciting the verse from the guru puja. [5]
2. How does faith work in relation to cause and effect? [4]
3. Give the characteristics of the suitable vessel who is endowed with faith. [4]

Week 4 (9 March 2010)

9. Name and discuss the four conditions that must be met for a virtuous or non-virtuous karma to be complete. "These are explained extensively in *The Lam Rim Chen Mo* or *The Graduated Path to Enlightenment*." A Lam Rim textbook will be a suitable source on which to base your discussion. [4]
10. Another point to discuss would be how to purify any negative karma that we might create. Discuss how a purification practice works. (Not in exam)
11. Of the sixteen practices of High status, name the thirteen that have to be abandoned and the three that have to be adopted. [8]

Test

Name:

Block: 1

Mark:

Week: 6 (23 March 2010)

1a) What is Nagarjuna known for? [2]

b) Why is it good for us to know a little bit of the background of Nagarjuna? [2]

2. Give a summary of the first verse of Precious Garland. [5]

*Homage to all Buddhas and bodhisattvas
I bow down to the omniscient
Freed from all defects,
Adorned with all good qualities,
The sole friend of all beings*

3. Explain the meaning behind the terms:

a) 'High status' [2]

b) 'Definite goodness'. [2]

4. Explain the four points, which consist of the purpose and the relationship. [4]

5a) Give the actual definition of dharma. [2]

b) Explain the Dharma referred to here (in the treatise.). [2]

6. Give a brief explanation of the meditation practice, which we can do when reciting the verse from the guru puja [5]

7. How does faith work in relation to cause and effect. [4]

8. Give the characteristics of the suitable vessel who is endowed with faith. [4]

9. Name and discuss the four conditions that must be met for a virtuous or non-virtuous karma to be complete. "These are explained extensively in the *Lam Rim Chen Mo* or *The Graduated Path to Enlightenment*." A Lam Rim textbook will be a suitable source on which to base your discussion.
[4]