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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

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As usual, we will spend some time in meditation by sitting in a comfortable and relaxed position, and setting a motivation along the lines of the Refuge and Bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited.

[Meditation]

We can set the appropriate motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to obtain enlightenment myself, thus I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

## 2.2. Actual explanation of the thirty-two marks of a buddha (cont.)

In our last session we completed the verses on the thirty-two major signs of a buddha which ended with this summary:

196 *Thus in brief know well  
These thirty-two signs  
Of a great lion of beings  
Together with their causes.*

Even though we explained this verse in our last session, I will go over the main points again. In his commentary Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation of this verse:

To summarise, *thus in brief know well these thirty-two signs of a great lion of beings, together with their causes.* You must show respect for the accomplishment of the causes of the signs. Also while in the process of accomplishing the causes, you must understand the interconnected relationship between the causes and effects, and establish the link by making stainless prayers to obtain the distinctive features of the signs.

This indicates that our understanding of the causes of each of the signs should be incorporated into our own practice. On the basis of knowing what the signs are and the specific causes for obtaining those signs; *you must understand the interconnected relationship* between the virtuous deeds that are the *causes* for obtaining the particular signs of an enlightened being and the result itself. Having understood that, we then need to *establish the link* in our own practice by *making stainless prayers* to obtain the distinctive signs oneself.

As explained in the teachings, it is very important that we dedicate whatever virtues we accumulate towards the ultimate goal of enlightenment. The term *stainless prayers* refers to making strong aspirational prayers and dedicating one's merit to the ultimate goal of enlightenment rather than temporary goals such as being free from sickness in this life, or just to obtain a good rebirth in the next life. When we dedicate the virtues we have accumulated towards obtaining enlightenment, the dedication then becomes a stainless prayer.

As the teachings indicate, and the lamas reiterate, it is really important that we dedicate whatever virtue we accumulate towards alleviating the immediate suffering of sentient beings—such as sickness, hunger and thirst, all conflicts and natural disasters in the world—to the long life of the Mahayana teachers who present the Mahayana teachings, and finally dedicate it towards the ultimate goal of enlightenment. With such dedication our practice will be sealed.

Making stainless prayers is an essential part of our practice. As explained by the great master Nagarjuna, 'that which directs our virtues towards a particular goal is dependent upon our dedication. It is like the bridle on a horse, where the side of the bridle that is pulled directs the horse to move in that direction. Similarly our stainless prayers and dedications direct our virtues to a particular goal'.

So stainless prayers in the form of dedication are really important with respect to the goal to which the prayers are directed. When we dedicate our virtues—all of the required causes towards achieving enlightenment—then our virtues will not be wasted on mundane or temporary goals. Rather, by the virtue of our stainless prayers of dedication to that goal of enlightenment, they will be sustained over all our lifetimes, until we actually achieve enlightenment.

Stainless prayers of dedication are aspirations that are not stained by the worldly concerns of merely this life. In contrast, if we were to engage in practices aimed at short term goals, such as being free from sickness in this lifetime, then although it will have the effect of eliminating pain and suffering in this life, the merit that we have accumulated will then be exhausted. It would not work towards enlightenment or future lifetimes, because it would have been stained with the temporary goals of this life. So we really need to understand that *stainless* refers to pure prayers dedicated towards the long-term goals of future lives and, in particular, enlightenment.

Our dedication must, of course, be in accordance with our daily practice. If we make noble aspirational prayers, but neglect to put them into practice in our daily life, then we have really lost the point. For example, we may commence a practice with the four immeasurable thoughts, which include the very noble aspirations of wishing all sentient beings to be endowed with happiness and the causes for happiness, and to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering and so forth, but even though we may have recited it over 100,000 times by now, it will be of no value if we neglect to help and be of service of those sentient beings around us in our everyday life.

There are many examples of ordinary people outside our immediate Dharma circle who may not be acquainted with the Dharma as we know it, let alone reciting aspirational prayers, but who engage in very noble deeds and service to others; selflessly dedicating their life to helping their fellow human beings. Those people can put us to shame if we don't actually put our noble aspirations into practical effect as well. The main point is that while we may recite major aspirational prayers, we must also remember that is essential to put them into practice.

If we cause greater suffering to those beings around us, then, rather than bringing about happiness we will have completely missed the point. If, rather than trying to help people to be a little more happy and joyful we cause them greater misery and deprive them of further happiness, then we will have failed to apply those noble aspirations at a practical level. It is really important that we put our aspirations into practice in our immediate surroundings, and then slowly extend outwards from that.

### **3. REASON FOR NOT ELABORATING HERE ON THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF THE BEAUTIFUL FEATURES**

This heading particularly relates to the eighty minor marks of a buddha. As the verse reads:

*197 The eighty beautiful features arise  
From a concordant cause of love.  
Fearing this text would be too long,  
I will not, O King, explain them.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins his explanation of these lines with:

*The eighty beautiful features arise from a concordant common cause of love that wishes all beings to be happy.*

While there are particular causes for all of the eighty marks, the common cause of them all is *love that wishes all beings to be happy*. This very clear and explicit explanation shows us that amongst all the various causes, generating love towards others is the basis of all of the enlightened signs. Thus if we were to neglect expressing genuine love and concern for others, starting with those who surround us, it will, of course, be impossible for us to assume that we are creating any causes for enlightenment! How could we possibly accumulate causes for enlightenment if we neglect the very basic cause of expressing genuine love for those around us?

To assume that our practice is directed towards obtaining enlightenment, while at the same time neglecting to express genuine love and concern for those around us, is a false assumption. After having practised for a long time, we might even complain, 'Why am I not closer to becoming enlightened? How come I'm not a buddha yet?' If we have been neglecting the common cause (which is expressing genuine love for others), then how can we possibly assume that we are getting closer to enlightenment? This is a really essential point for us to remember.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

*Fearing this text will be too long if each of the particular causes were explained, thus I will not, O King, explain them.*

Here Nagarjuna is basically implying to the king, 'As you are very busy with a lot of tasks at hand, you may not have time to contemplate on all of the particular causes, so I will not explain them in detail here'. One of the eighty signs, for example, is that the finger nails are copper coloured, and the specific causes for this mark are explained in the teachings. On that note, it would be good for you to have a copy of the eighty marks and their causes from *The Ornament of Clear Realisation* for reference, and as a means to become acquainted with the eighty marks—even though we are not going to cover

them here. Would you happen to have the verses on the eighty marks with you now? No. Well we can recite that together next week. Returning to the main point, Nagarjuna skilfully says that while there are particular causes for each of the eighty minor marks, fearing it will be too long to present them, 'I will not present them now'.

However, says Gyaltsab Je,

Implicitly this also indicates that one needs to endeavour in cultivating the common causes.

This means that while it may be hard to comprehend and think about each of the particular causes, you can definitely relate to the common cause of each of the marks, which is generating the love of wishing all beings to be happy. That is not too difficult to understand, thus putting the common cause into practice will be sufficient for now. This is great advice for ourselves too. While we may feel that the text and the explanations are vast and intricate, we can definitely relate to the common cause of developing love. That is something that we should keep in mind and put into practice.

As I mentioned earlier, the significance of acquainting ourselves with the list of the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks is that when we do our daily practice such as refuge, and any sadhana practice that refers to the deity who is adorned with the signs and marks of a buddha, it is good to be able to recall what those signs and marks are. The teachings also mention the sixty elegant features of the Buddha's speech, so it would be useful to become acquainted with those too.

As you will remember, when we contemplate the qualities of enlightened beings, we recall the qualities of their body, speech, mind and their deeds. So the qualities of the enlightened *body, speech, mind and actions* summarises all the qualities of an enlightened being. Recalling those qualities inspires us to also obtain those qualities ourselves. At a mundane level, when we see someone quite successful in their work, or in their studies, we want to emulate them, and we think 'oh, it would be wonderful if I could become like them'. Even though we know that we cannot become exactly like them in every aspect, if we admire them and put in the same kind of effort and so forth, we may be able gain some of their qualities. Similarly, recalling the qualities of an enlightened being can help us to develop a stronger faith and inspiration to become like them. That is the real benefit for oneself.

### **4. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MARKS OF A BUDDHA AND OF A UNIVERSAL EMPEROR**

The differences between the marks of a buddha and of a universal emperor are presented in three sub-divisions:

- 4.1. Difference in effects
- 4.2. Difference in causes
- 4.3. Example

#### **4.1. Difference in effects**

The relevant verse is:

*198 All universal emperors  
Are regarded as having these,  
But their purity, beauty, and lustre*

*Cannot match even a little those of a buddha.*

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

If one were to ask what is the difference between the signs and marks of a buddha and a universal monarch? *All universal emperors are regarded as having a mere approximation of these signs and marks, but there is a great difference from those of the buddhas for their purity is that which is free from all defilements, endowed with extremely appealing beauty and lustre, which is not obscured by any defilements. Thus they cannot match even a little those of a buddha.*

While a universal emperor or monarch would have an approximation of these signs, they are in fact very different from the signs of a buddha. The signs of the Buddha have three main qualities: *their purity is that which is free from all defilements, endowed with extremely appealing beauty, and lustre which is not obscured by any defilements.* All of the signs and every feature of an enlightened being's body are completely appealing in their beauty and lustre, which indicates there are no defects. With ordinary beings some features may seem attractive, but you also find that other features are not so attractive, and have faults or defects. So they are not beautiful in every aspect.

An enlightened being, however, does not have any defects. As explained in other texts as well, an enlightened being's body is always pleasing; there is not single aspect that is defective or unappealing, and they are not obscured by any defilements. Thus the universal emperor's signs do not even remotely match those of the Buddha.

#### 4.2. Difference in causes

The first verse relating to this heading is:

**199** *The auspicious signs and beautiful features  
Of a universal emperor  
Are said to arise [even] from the single cause  
Of faith in the King of Subduers.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary mentions:

There is great difference in the causes as well, for *the auspicious signs and beautiful features of a universal emperor are said to arise [even] from the single cause of generating faith in the King of Subduers.*

The causes for the signs of a universal emperor, for example, would arise by merely generating faith in the Buddha himself.

The next lines relating to this sub-heading read:

**200** *abcd But such virtue accumulated one-pointedly  
For a hundred times ten million eons  
Cannot produce even one  
Of the hair-pores of a buddha.*

Relating to that difference in cause, Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*But such virtue which are causes for the signs and marks of a universal emperor, accumulated one-pointedly for a hundred times ten million eons cannot produce even one of the hairs-pores of a buddha.*

This is a very explicit explanation of the great difference in the causes of the various signs and marks. We covered

the 'hair-pores' that are a particular quality of an enlightened being's body earlier, so we can recall those features here.

#### 4.3. Example

Now we come to the third and last outline which relates to the last four lines of Verse 200:

**200** *efgh Just as the brilliance of suns  
Is slightly like that of fireflies,  
So the signs of a buddha are slightly like  
Those of a universal emperor.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of these lines:

*Just as the brilliance of the sun which illuminates the world during the day, is slightly like that of fireflies, so this example illustrates how the signs of a buddha are slightly like those of a universal emperor.*

Here the analogy of fireflies refers to the glow in their bodies near the end of their abdomen. That slight glow is not noticeable when the sun is out, because it is overpowered by the sun's rays. The illumination of the sun completely overrides the glow of the firefly. Similarly, compared to the signs of the Buddha, the signs of the universal emperor have only a very slight lustre, and much less brilliant. So the Buddha's signs completely overwhelm and surpass the majesty and lustre of the universal emperor's signs. That is the meaning of the analogy.

Then the root text concludes the chapter with:

*The second chapter of the Precious Garland,  
The Interwoven, is finished.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then explains:

The commentary on *the second chapter of the Precious Garland of Advice for a King, the Interwoven* explanation of the cause and effect of definite goodness and high status, is complete.

The first chapter described the causes of high status and definite goodness, and the second chapter has interwoven the causes of high status and definite goodness. Having completed those chapters we now come to the third chapter which covers the collections for enlightenment.

### CHAPTER THREE: ADVICE TO TRAIN IN THE TWO COLLECTIONS OF MERIT AND WISDOM-THE CAUSES OF HIGHEST ENLIGHTENMENT

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, in order to obtain unsurpassable enlightenment, one needs to engage in the two collections of merit and wisdom. This chapter gives advice on how to train in these two collections, which are the primary causes for the highest enlightenment.

The way to relate to the topics presented here is to, first of all, contemplate the great unsurpassable qualities of enlightenment. Having contemplated the qualities of an enlightened being and the enlightened state itself, then reflect upon the causes of that and work sequentially backwards through the causes. So, contemplating that the immediate cause of enlightenment is bodhichitta and all of the bodhisattva levels, one comes down to the very causes of bodhichitta itself, which is love and compassion.

Even before entering the path, the common causes that become the causes to enter the path, are the practices of the medium scope and the small scope. So in this way we come right down to the very basic level of the initial causes that we can be engaging in right now. In this way, we can make a personal connection with the ultimate state of enlightenment. By working through the sequence of causes, we can reach the level of basic causes which we are able to engage in right now. In this way we can develop a holistic view of the path to enlightenment, and relate it to our own level of practice now.

The six main categories that comprise the chapter are:

- A. Modes of the collections
- B. Effects of each collection
- C. Advice not to feel inadequate about accumulating the two collections
- D. The entities (or nature) of the two collections
- E. Branches of the two collections
- F. Benefits arising to one who amasses merit

Seeing the sequential nature of the presentation of the material, we can really see how skilfully it has been presented. The text begins with the *modes of the collections* which explain what the collections are. Then it goes into the *effects of each collection*, followed by *advice not to feel inadequate*. Here, some of you might remember that one of the three types of laziness is the laziness of feeling inadequate in doing practice. Therefore we need to overcome laziness in order to engage in the accumulation of merit. When accumulating the two collections we need to encourage ourselves in our efforts, in order to overcome the feeling of inadequacy. Then the chapter moves onto the nature or *entities of the two collections* themselves, followed by the *branches* or the number of divisions within the two collections, concluding with the *benefits*.

One needs to derive an understanding of the structure of the presentation. The ultimate goal of unsurpassable enlightenment is presented first. Then, lest we feel that that such an enlightened state is out of reach, the causes for obtaining that state of enlightenment are then presented. Presenting the causes indicates that the great enlightened being, the Buddha, was not an entity who miraculously or spontaneously arose from nothing; he was dependent upon causes and conditions. In relation to the context at this point, what are the causes of the collections of merit and wisdom?

Thus we can develop a sense of affinity with the causes and see how, by accumulating the causes now, we can actually obtain that state of enlightenment ourselves in the future. Showing the relationship between the causes and the effect (the state of enlightenment) shows us that the state of enlightenment is attainable and something that we can achieve ourselves. This great presentation shows us a way for us to make that connection for ourselves, and see the possibility.

## A. MODES OF THE COLLECTIONS

This is sub-divided into four divisions:

1. Exhorting the king to listen
2. Limitlessness of the collection of merit

3. Limitlessness of the collection of wisdom
4. Limitlessness of effects of the two collections

### 1. EXHORTING THE KING TO LISTEN

The first verse of the chapter reads:

*201 Great king, hear from the great scriptures  
Of the Great Vehicle  
How the marks of a buddha  
Arise from inconceivable merit.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The earlier three specific causes were presented as primary causes, however all causes for unparalleled enlightenment are subsumed into the two collections. As such they are presented here.

*The earlier three specific causes* were covered earlier in the text. Compassion extending to sentient beings in all directions, bodhichitta, and the wisdom realising emptiness are the three specific primary causes for unparalleled enlightenment, and they can be subsumed into the two collections.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

What has been presented so far is that when buddhahood is obtained, the king will be adorned by the signs of a buddha. However the amount of merit to be accumulated has not been specified. Thus to present this, he is addressed as *Great King*, and exhorted to *hear from the great scriptures of the Great Vehicle, how the marks of a buddha arise from inconceivable merit*.

The three specific causes presented previously were presented as primary causes. When buddhahood is obtained, the king (and indeed anyone who attains buddhahood) will be adorned by the signs of a buddha, and although the causes for each of the thirty-two major marks were explained, the amount of merit that has to be accumulated in order to obtain each of the signs was not presented. As the commentary explains, to present this - the king is addressed as *Great King* and he is exhorted to *hear from the great scriptures of the Great Vehicle*. The great Mahayana scriptures, the 20,000 verses of *Prajnaparamita sutra* for example, explain how the marks of the Buddha arose from inconceivable merit, and that the merit required to obtain each of the signs is inconceivable. Even though the merit is inconceivable, an analogy in accordance with the capacity of ordinary beings is presented to get an idea.

There is also a sutra request by the girl Rinchen, which explains the signs and marks. However the explanation in this sutra is a bit different from the explanations in the *Prajnaparamita sutra*. The presentation in *The Ornament of Clear Realisation* by Maitreya, is related to that of the twenty-thousand verses of the *Prajnaparamita sutra*.

### 2. LIMITLESSNESS OF THE COLLECTION OF MERIT

This is sub-divided into two:

- 2.1. Actual explanation
- 2.2. The collections are infinite but are taught to trainees as measurable

#### 2.1. Actual explanation

Even though there is no real measure of the merits that need to be accumulated (which is why they are referred

to as inconceivable), there needs to be some sort of guidance, in the form of comparisons, so that ordinary beings can conceive the notion.

The actual explanation of a comparison of that inconceivable merit is presented in five sub-divisions:

2.1.1. Achieving one hair-pore of a buddha through ten times the merit of solitary realisers, etc.

2.1.2. Achieving one beautiful feature of a buddha through a hundred times the merit for achieving a hair-pore

2.1.3. Achieving one mark of a buddha through a hundred times the merit for producing all the beautiful features

It is more difficult to accumulate merit for a major mark than it is for a minor mark, because more merit is required than that needed to obtain a minor mark. *Achieving one mark of a buddha through a hundred times the merit for producing all the beautiful features*, relates to the eighty minor marks.

2.1.4. Achieving the hair-spiral on a buddhas brow through a thousand times the merit for producing all the marks

The merit needed to *achieve the hair-spiral on the Buddha's brow* (or forehead) is one thousand times the merit needed to produce all the marks

2.1.5. Achieving the crown protrusion through a thousand times the above merit

To obtain the *crown protrusion* of the Buddha one thousand-fold of the merit that is needed to achieve the hair-spiral is required. It is said that as the crown protrusion is the most majestic feature of the Buddha's marks, it needs the most merit.

So through this presentation we can see how the inconceivable amount of merit that needs to be accumulated to actually become a buddha. From this we need to learn not to be short-sighted, but rather to have the foresight to understand that 'no matter how long it takes to accumulate the merit, I will accumulate the merit to achieve those results'. Such an attitude will come from having a courageous and expansive mind.

### **2.1.1. Achieving one hair-pore of a buddha through ten times the merit of solitary realisers, etc.**

The next two verses read:

202 *The merit giving rise to all  
Solitary realisers, to learners, and non-  
learners,  
And all the merit of the transient world  
Is measureless like the universe itself.*

203 *Through such merit ten times extended  
One hair-pore of a buddha is achieved.  
All the hair-pores of a buddha  
Arise in just the same way.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*The merit that is a cause and giving rise to all solitary realisers who dwell in all parts of the universe, to the seven Hinayana arya learners and non-learners, and all the merit to be born in higher rebirths of the transient world is measureless like the universe itself. Through such measureless merit ten times extended,*

*one hair-pore of a buddha is achieved. All the hair-pores of a buddha arise from such merit in just the same way.*

*The merit that is a cause and giving rise to all solitary realisers who dwell in all parts of the universe, to the seven Hinayana arya learners and non-learners; plus all the merit that is a cause to be born in higher rebirths, which means that even to be reborn in our present condition as a human being we have had to accumulate an unimaginable amount of merit in the past - thus all of these merits combined to such a measureless merit ten times extended, i.e. ten times the number of immeasurable merits, is the merit needed to accumulate one hair-pore of a buddha. And all the hair-pores of a buddha arise from such merit in just the same way. So this gives us an idea of how much merit needs to be accumulated in order to obtain even one of the minor marks of an enlightened being, such as the hair-pore of a buddha!*

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Edited Version*

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Those of us who have taken refuge, and who practise regularly, recite the refuge prayer every day, sometimes many times over. Most of us have probably recited it over one hundred thousand times, which, if we have done it properly, will suffice as a preliminary practice. Perhaps the reason why we need a specific preliminary practice of one hundred thousand refuges is because we had not done it properly in the past.

If we don't incorporate the actual meaning of refuge and bodhichitta into our recitation of that prayer, and if we don't familiarise with it in our daily practice, then it is questionable whether or not it could ever become a good practice - even if we were to recite it one hundred thousand times. As we recite the refuge and bodhichitta prayer in our daily practice, it is critical that we make it a meaningful practice.

If we take the time to incorporate the visualisation and our understanding of the refuge and bodhichitta prayer, then due to that familiarity, it will become a really profound practice, and will be of great benefit when we actually recite it.

It is essential to have help when we are facing death, because no-one else can help us. Whatever wealth we may have accumulated during our life will not help us at that time; not even one penny will assist us on our journey. Whatever medication we may have been reliant on will no longer make any difference, as there is no medicine that can prevent death. Our very good friends and companions cannot help to prevent our death, nor can they help us on our journey. What will unfailingly help us at that time is the recollection of the objects of refuge and the bodhichitta mind. Whether or not this occurs is dependent on our everyday practice in our everyday life. If we have invested time and energy in our everyday practice then, by default, the natural consequence is that it will become even more vivid and clear at the time of death.

I cannot claim that I have had any great experiences, however there definitely seems to be a time when the objects of refuge are a great source of encouragement, energy, strength and a means to really uplift one's mind, especially when everything else seems bleak and difficult and questionable. I can really attest to the fact that it definitely has great value. So if we take the time to engage in the practice with sincerity, there will be a time in our life when we will see the great significance of that practice. In order to gain benefit from a practice, we need to incorporate it in our everyday life, and in that way, taste the real essence.

At the most vulnerable times of our life, particularly at the end of our life when we will be alone on our journey, generating and taking refuge can be more profound than tantric practices. If those who engage in tantric practices fail to develop a basis of genuine love and compassion and bodhichitta, then the tantric practice will have no essence; it will render no real result. Whereas if one undertakes refuge sincerely, it will definitely bring about great solace and benefit to our mind.

The reason for taking refuge and the manner of taking refuge are not very profound concepts. It is a practice that we can readily understand and thus can incorporate into our daily life. Furthermore, to touch on the more profound levels of the prayer of refuge, His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that when you recite 'from the merit I have accumulated through generosity and so forth, may I obtain enlightenment', you can recall that the referent 'I' is empty of inherent existence. Therefore, the recollection of

emptiness can also be incorporated into the refuge prayer itself. We have heard about and studied what selflessness or emptiness means. So to actually incorporate it in one's practice can be done by simply using the word 'I'. You can incorporate the understanding that the referent 'I' is empty of substantial existence and particularly of inherent existence. Incorporating both aspects of the path - method and wisdom - into the refuge prayer in this manner makes it even more profound. The reason why I re-emphasise all of these points is because it is a practice we are already doing daily, so it's important to take its essence and practise it well.

The importance of taking refuge, particularly the form with which we are familiar, the Mahayana refuge, cannot be underestimated. When we really think about it, it really encompasses the whole path to enlightenment. Being aware of the objects of refuge, and the initial cause of refuge, the fear of samsara and wishing to be free from samsara, and then actually taking refuge, encompasses the practices that are common to both the small and medium scopes. When one generates bodhichitta by relating to the cause, which is the practice of generosity, then generating bodhichitta itself is the result that allows us to enter the Mahayana path. So in this way, we can see how the practice of taking refuge and generating bodhichitta encompasses the whole path to enlightenment.

Furthermore, if we really pay attention and do this practice well, then we need not fear having to rely upon something else when the time comes. As mentioned previously, there will definitely be a time when one will be in great need of real help, which can't be provided by friends or wealth etc. At that time, when we really need spiritual help, having taken refuge regularly and having strong faith in the practice will be of great solace.

To re-emphasise the essential nature of the practice of refuge, Lama Tsong Khapa very clearly mentions that the entry point to the teachings and the doctrine is refuge. He indicates that without proper refuge, we cannot assume that we have entered the Buddha's doctrine. Other practices - tantra or whatever - may be profound, but if we have not established refuge well and truly in our mind, then we have missed the point and not entered the Buddha's doctrine. That is the point that we really need to consider and incorporate into our practice.

There is a saying that profound advice comes from experience. I don't have any profound experience - all I have is a crazy old monk's experience. [laughter] Indeed some may feel that what I say are the words of a crazy person.

## **2. LIMITLESSNESS OF THE COLLECTION OF MERIT**

### **2.1. Actual explanation (cont.)**

#### **2.1.2. Achieving one beautiful feature of a Buddha through a hundred times the merit for achieving a hair-pore**

This section is covered in the next two verses:

- 204 *Through multiplying by a hundred  
The merit which produces  
All the hair-pores of a buddha  
One auspicious beauty is acquired.*
- 205 *O King, as much merit as is required  
For one auspicious beautiful feature,  
So much also is required  
For each up to the eightieth.*

In his commentary Gyaltshab Je does not provide much elaboration; he more or less quotes the verse itself:

It is thus explained, through multiplying by a hundred the merit which produces all the hair-pores of a buddha, one auspicious beauty [mark] is acquired. Thus, O King, as much merit as is required for one auspicious beautiful feature, so much is also required for up to the eightieth.

### **2.1.3. Achieving one mark of a Buddha through a hundred times the merit for producing all the beautiful features**

This relates to the following verse:

206 *Through multiplying a hundred-fold  
The collection of merit which achieves  
The eighty auspicious beautiful features  
One mark of a great being arises.*

Basically, Gyaltsab Je's commentary just reiterates the verse, which is quite clear:

*Through multiplying a hundred-fold the collection of merit which achieves the eighty auspicious beautiful features, one mark of a great being arises.*

### **2.1.4. Achieving the hair-spiral on a Buddha's brow through a thousand times the merit for producing all the marks**

207 *Through multiplying a thousand-fold  
The extensive merit that is the cause  
Of achieving the thirty signs  
The hair-treasure like a full moon arises*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*Through multiplying a thousand-fold the extensive merit that is the cause of achieving the thirty signs; the hair-treasure like a full moon arises.*

### **2.1.5. Achieving the crown protrusion through a thousand times the above merit**

The verse relating to this is:

208 *Through multiplying a hundred thousand-fold  
The merit for the hair-treasure  
A Protector's crown-protrusion  
Is produced, imperceptible as it actually is.*

The commentary just mentions the verse again, as it is clear:

*Through multiplying a hundred thousand-fold the merit for obtaining the hair-treasure, a protector's crown-protrusion is produced, imperceptible as it actually is.*

The phrase *imperceptible as it actually is*, has been explained more extensively in other texts. One of the features of the *crown-protrusion* is that no matter how often it is viewed, beings have the need to see it again and again. Its beauty and majesty are so great that looking at it never reaches the point of satiation. The next verse relating to this outline is not numbered. It reads:

*Through increasing ten million times  
A hundred thousand the merit  
For the crown-protrusion there comes  
The excellence producing the euphony  
Of a buddha's speech and its sixty qualities*

The 'sixty qualities' of the Buddha's speech were mentioned in our last session.

## **2.2. The collections are infinite but are taught to trainees as measurable**

The second chapter explained the causes of the signs, however the measure of how much merit is needed to obtain those signs was not really explained. Even though the collection of merit and wisdom is infinite (meaning immeasurable) an indication of how much merit is needed is presented here for the purposes of comparison.

The verse relating to this outline reads:

209 *Though such merit is measureless,  
It is said for brevity to have a measure,  
Just as [the merit of] the world is said  
For brevity to be included in the ten directions*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

*Though such merit to accomplish Buddhahood is measureless, it is said for brevity and in accordance to the level of the disciple's mind, to have a measure, just as [the merit of] the world is said for brevity to be included in the ten directions.*

The merit of the world is an infinite amount of merit, which is, of course immeasurable. When the merit of all the individual beings is combined together it is *measureless*. However, as explained here, for the sake of comparison we can say that *all the merit is included in the ten directions*. So even though it is measureless, the merit in the ten directions provides some sort of comparative measure.

I think we may have previously covered up to this point. When I check with you which verse we are up to, you need to be able to immediately respond 'we have come to verse number...'. When we went to receive teachings at the monastery, the teachers would often ask us, 'So where are we up to?' 'Which root verse are we up to?' or 'Where are we up to in the commentary?' Of course it wasn't that the teacher didn't know, but it was a means of checking how much attention the disciples have paid to their study. Therefore we were very apprehensive, and when we went to the teachings we would have to be really prepared. If the teacher asked where we were up to, we had to be confident and be immediately ready to say where we were up to. So if one has paid attention to one's studies, one will be confident enough to say 'we are up to here in the teaching'. But people are not showing that confidence.

Even though some are physically unable to attend teachings, they are still interested. For example, Carol is now unable to come to the teachings because of work commitments and living so far away, but apparently as a mark that she was using the transcripts to follow the teachings, she could tell Lynn exactly where we are up to, what has been covered from the text. So she is able to pass on to others what has been taught and what we are up to etc. That is a sign that she has been keeping up to date with the studies.

## **3. LIMITLESSNESS OF THE COLLECTION OF WISDOM**

The verse relating to this subdivision is:

210 *When the causes of even the form body  
Of a buddha are as immeasurable  
As the world, how then could the causes  
Of the truth body be measured?*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*When the causes of even the form body of a buddha are as immeasurable just as the world is infinite, how then could the cause of the truth body be measured? For it is indeed immeasurable.*

## **4. LIMITLESSNESS OF EFFECTS OF THE TWO COLLECTIONS**

The verse that relates to this subdivision is:

211 *If the causes of all things are small  
But they produce extensive effects,  
The thought that the measureless causes of  
buddhahood  
Have measurable effects should be eliminated.*

As the commentary explains:

From the tiny seed of the *nadota* [or Banyan] tree an enormous tree can grow, with branches and leaves



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that expand to give shade to a king's army and protect them from rain.<sup>1</sup>

Those of you who have attended Lam Rim teachings will be able to immediately relate this to the Lam Rim teachings on karma. The Lam Rim describes the four attributes or characteristics of karma: karma is definite; karma increases; one will not meet the results of karma that has not been created; and once created, karma will not disappear of its own accord. This verse particularly relates to the way karma increases; whatever karma is created, no matter how minute or insignificant, regardless of whether it is a positive or negative karma, has a natural tendency to increase by its very nature.

The analogy used here is the Banyan tree. From a tiny seedling the Banyan tree grows up and branches out to the point where a network of roots grows downwards from the branches, allowing more trees to grow. In ancient India, there were enormous Banyan trees which, as mentioned here, could shade the king's large army. These huge, enormous trees with their extensive branches and leaves grew from small seeds. Even though the seed may seem small and insignificant, when planted with good conditions, it will grow into an enormous tree, i.e. the seedling carries the potential to become an enormous tree.

This external analogy is used to illustrate how karma works. The cause and effect sequence is that once karma is created, it naturally increases in our mental continuum. Therefore we should not neglect creating even the smallest positive karma, thinking that somehow it is insignificant. We should take every opportunity to accumulate even small virtues because of the fact that even a small virtue carries the potential to render great results in the future.

Likewise with negative deeds: a small negative deed carries the potential to produce enormous results in the future. So we should not neglect to avoid small misdeeds. We might think, 'Oh its okay to forgo this practice or deed. Even though it's inappropriate, it's a very minor thing, so its okay'. We may also have the tendency to utter white lies and so forth. By recollecting how even small negative deeds carry the potential to produce enormous results in the future, we can understand why we need to be wary of small misdeeds and try to avoid them at all costs.

With this understanding of karma in general, we can immediately understand the profound nature of the point being presented in this part of the text. We need to see how the various teachings are interconnected with respect to their meanings and so forth.

Gyalsab Je's commentary then reads:

*Thus, if the causes of all things are small but they produce extensive effects, the thought that the measureless causes of buddhahood have measurable effects should be eliminated; as it is not possible to conceive the amount of merit needed to obtain buddhahood.*

Just as a tiny seed can produce an enormous tree, similarly small causes can produce extensive effects. As the accumulation of the collections of merit and wisdom are in themselves enormous causes, the result that one obtains is definitely immeasurable; one cannot possibly comprehend the measure of the results they will produce.

To incorporate that concept of immeasurable merit with the understanding of karma and to relate it to our own practice,

we need to be mindful of our actions, so that we avoid accumulating negative deeds and, in every possible way, accumulate virtue. We all naturally want to experience happiness and the cause to experience happiness is virtue. There is no other substantial cause for happiness other than virtue. Thus for our own well-being, we need to take responsibility for accumulating virtue.

Likewise there is no-one amongst us who willingly wants to experience any kind of physical or mental suffering or misery. Accordingly, we need to take the initiative and be responsible for ourselves, by not creating negative karma. We need to avoid even the slightest negative karma, knowing that the consequences will only be misery and suffering. We need to really consider this very carefully and try to put it into practice.

If we adopt the opposite course of willingly creating negative karma, and shy away from accumulating virtue, then we will experience the negative consequences. We really have to keep checking up on ourselves; we might even feel regret that we have not had the opportunity to create some negative karmas. 'Oh what a shame, I was not able to carry out that deed'. Is that good? Should we be proud of such a thought? It is not something to be proud of. If that is how our mind is working, then we need to try and transform our attitudes.

Maybe I'm wrong, but I see some people who seem to have that attitude about negative karma. When we are feeling a little bit depressed or troubled and we have many problems and unwanted things are happening in our life, we need to consider 'why is this coming about?' 'Why am I experiencing these difficult circumstances?' 'Who is actually causing it?' At that point it is essential that we consider the real causes of our problems. When we relate our circumstances to the teachings on karma, it will become quite apparent that it is none other than ourselves who have created the causes to experience those unwanted results.

There are some people who are really unhappy. While they don't like to be in that state of unhappiness and misery, as I see it there seems to be a sense of unhappiness or deprivation because they feel they have been deprived of engaging in negative sorts of actions, which in nature are negative karma. Feeling unhappy about not having had the opportunity to create negative karma is really mindboggling!!

Maybe I'm wrong, but this is what I see. If one feels sad or unhappy because of being deprived of the opportunity to engage in negative karma, then it is completely contradictory to think 'I'm missing out on happiness', let alone contemplating a future result of happiness. That is completely at odds with what the teachings explain, and it is something we need to be mindful of.

Before we conclude for the evening, following the recitation of the *Heart Sutra*, we can pause and make prayers and aspirations to Buddha Amitabha particularly dedicating the merits to Carol's mother, who passed away recently. Of course we send Carol our condolences. She is a very good and old friend of ours, so at this time the best we can offer for her mum is our prayers and dedications.

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*Edited Version*

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<sup>1</sup> Trans: I couldn't find a translation of the word *nadota*, but Geshe-la explained that it is like a Banyan tree.



which is method and wisdom, and the *result* which is the two bodies of the Buddha. All of this can be incorporated into the explanation being given here.

Having such a clear understanding is the very basis of our practice. As Mahayana practitioners, our aspiration is to develop bodhichitta, and we engage in practices to develop an awakening mind for the purpose of obtaining enlightenment for the benefit of other sentient beings. So ultimately, our aspiration is to benefit other sentient beings, and the ultimate way to benefit other sentient beings is by becoming enlightened oneself. Hence the qualities of enlightened beings are explained in great detail so as to inspire us to aim to achieve that state ourselves.

As mentioned previously, the second chapter of *Precious Garland* specifically deals with the qualities of the Buddha's body, by detailing the thirty-two major signs and mentioning the eighty major marks. There are also qualities of the Buddha's speech and qualities of the Buddha's enlightened mind. Specifically relating to these qualities is a means for us to understand how, in each and every way, they benefit other sentient beings. So by studying and understanding the qualities of an enlightened being, we can become inspired to become just like the Buddha, and benefit other sentient beings. So it is essential that we have a good understanding.

As mentioned in our last session, we cannot underestimate how profound taking refuge is. That is because refuge encompasses the whole path to enlightenment. When we take refuge with the correct understanding, then it becomes a really profound practice.

With respect to verses 212 and 213, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The first verse indicates what effects arise from which particular collection, and the second verse exhorts the king to firmly establish it.

*The first verse specifically indicates the effects that arise from each collection. As explained previously, each of the collections serves as a cause for obtaining a particular aspect of a buddha's body. The second verse exhorts the king to firmly establish it. It is only by accumulating the two collections that we create the cause to become enlightened – there is no other way. Thus as the second verse explains, we need to establish that firmly within ourselves, which means putting it into practice.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Nagarjuna composed the text called *Sixty Reasons* in order to explain emptiness. The sixtieth reason, written in the form of a dedication, was the reason of dependent arising. He stated the following syllogism: the subjects, persons and aggregates—are empty of inherent existence—because they are dependent arisings.

This syllogism is said to be very profound, as it indicates the collections of both merit and wisdom.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further reads:

When the individual realises the property of the subject i.e. dependent arisings, they need to meditate on it again and again. Thus, by meditating on infinite dependent arisings, and causes and effects of phenomena, and applying the practice of adopting [virtue] and discarding [non-virtue] unmistakably on the path, this becomes the collection of merit.

As explained here, the *property of the subject*, which refers to the reason, *dependent arising*, is said to be both dependent

arisings and the causes and effects of phenomena. One accumulates merit by incorporating that understanding in one's practice.

More specifically, the first five of the six perfections (the perfection of generosity, the perfection of morality, the perfection of patience, the perfection of joyous effort and the perfection of contemplation) are the means for accumulating merit. Whereas the sixth, the perfection of wisdom, is the means for the collection of wisdom.

Engaging in the varieties of dependent arisings of phenomena, and using that as a means to adopt what is virtuous and to discard what is non-virtuous, is the means to accumulate merit. Thus one accumulates merit particularly by abiding by the laws of cause and effect.

As Gyaltsab Je further explains in his commentary:

The valid cognition that realises the predicate of the syllogism i.e. persons and aggregates being empty of inherent existence, is an aid for the collection of wisdom.

Here Gyaltsab Je is explaining that the means of accumulating the collection of wisdom is by contemplating again and again how persons and aggregates are empty of inherent existence.

Gyaltsab Je continues:

Adorning one's practice with vast methods and meditating continually on the valid cognition that realises the predicate becomes the actual collection of wisdom. The result of the two collections is to obtain the enlightened form body and enlightened truth body.

Here Gyaltsab Je is emphasising that one needs to adorn one's practice with *vast methods*, which relates to the collection of merit. Only when the collection of merit is combined with the collection of wisdom does it become the cause to obtain the two bodies of an enlightened being. Here one needs to incorporate the understanding that the collection of wisdom by itself is not sufficient as a cause to obtain enlightenment.

To give a more specific example; the hearer arya and the solitary realiser arya gain the realisation of emptiness when they obtain the path of seeing. On the paths of accumulation and preparation they have the conceptual understanding of emptiness, and when they obtain the path of seeing they gain the direct realisation of emptiness. However they still possess a contaminated body. Similarly, the bodhisattva gains the intellectual understanding of emptiness on the Mahayana paths of accumulation and preparation, and when they obtain the Mahayana path of seeing, they gain the direct realisation of emptiness or selflessness. And at that point, the bodhisattva's body transforms into an uncontaminated body.

We need to understand the reason for the difference. The realisation of emptiness that is obtained on the hearer path, the solitary realiser path, and the bodhisattva path is the same. So what causes the hearer's body to remain a contaminated body even when they obtain arhatship, until they go into the non-abiding nirvana, while the bodhisattva obtains an uncontaminated body on the path of seeing? It is because along with the accumulation of merit that creates the causes for obtaining buddhahood, the bodhisattva has developed love and compassion and bodhichitta. So we can see the reason why the bodhisattva on the path of seeing obtains an uncontaminated body.

However the practices of trainees on the hearer and solitary realiser paths should not be underestimated. Through their practice of ethics and morality, and their great deeds of generosity and so forth they accumulate much merit. However, as mentioned previously, what is missing is the great love and great compassion that accumulates into developing the awakening mind. When that is missing, the causes to obtain an uncontaminated body to progress further on towards enlightenment cannot be created. This needs to be understood as a way for us to see the great importance of accumulating vast amounts of merit, along with developing the qualities of love and compassion and so forth.

As mentioned previously, accumulating merit involves, on a practical level, engaging in the practices of generosity, morality, patience, and joyous effort. Whatever virtues we accumulate, no matter how tiny, and the tiniest non-virtue that we abandon, is way to accumulate merit. So at our level, we can readily engage in the accumulation of merit. We should not underestimate the collection of merit, as it really is the optimum cause to obtain enlightenment.

Finally, Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Whilst establishing the basis of the right view, if one did not understand that the two truths are unified and not mutually exclusive—like hot and cold—then one will not be able to fully comprehend the two collections that are to be practised on the path and the two resultant enlightened bodies of the Buddha. Thus, you must be skilled in knowing the distinction between the two truths.

This is explaining that one needs to have a clear understanding of the interrelationship between the two truths, rather than seeing them as completely separate entities. In terms of presenting the two truths, the older students of the study group will recall that when we studied Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses*, the first seven chapters relate to conventional truth, whereas the eighth chapter relates particularly to ultimate truth. Thus, we had studied the two truths quite extensively. What is being explained here is that one needs to have a very good understanding of how the two truths are unified, rather than perceiving them as being two completely distinct and separate entities.

### C. ADVICE NOT TO FEEL INADEQUATE ABOUT ACCUMULATING THE TWO COLLECTIONS

This section has three sub-divisions:

1. Brief indication
2. Extensive explanation
3. Summation

#### 1. BRIEF INDICATION

The relevant verse of the root text is:

**214** *Do not feel inadequate about this [accumulation]  
Of merit to achieve enlightenment,  
Since reasoning and scripture  
Can restore one's spirits.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

When reflecting on the immeasurable merit needed to achieve buddhahood, you should not feel disheartened by thinking who can possibly accomplish that? Thus *do not feel inadequate about this [accumulation] of merit to achieve enlightenment, since without having to experience great sufferings of body and mind, you can swiftly accumulate the collections with sound reasoning and authentic scriptures* – such as the *Vajra Cutter Sutra* – that are purified by the three analyses. This *can restore one's spirit*.

Having presented the immeasurable merits needed to obtain the infinite benefits of an enlightened being, one might feel disheartened and think, 'How could I possibly achieve that?' But one need not feel disheartened! As explained here, *without having to experience great sufferings*, great endurance, physical hardship and so forth, one can swiftly accumulate the collections with reasoning and the authentic scriptures. Thus, as explained in the commentary one can use the sound reasoning presented in the teaching, and relate to the authentic scriptures which are purified by the three-fold analysis.

The **three-fold analysis** uses three criteria for validating a phenomenon:

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

Any phenomenon can be validated using this three-fold analysis.

1. Obvious things are not contradicted by direct valid perception, so we can validate them through our direct perception of them.
2. Slightly obscure things are not contradicted by the valid inference, so they can be validated through inference or sound reasoning and accepted through the force of evidence.
3. For extremely obscure things we need to resort to scriptural authority. Extremely obscure phenomena will not be contradicted by valid inference based on scriptural authority. Here 'authentic scriptures' refers to the scriptures that are validated through the three criteria. I have referred to these three criteria for validating phenomena in the past as well, so you can refer back to those.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION

This section is sub-divided into two:

- 2.1. Advice not to be lazy about the collection of merit
- 2.2. Advice not to be lazy about accumulating the two collections

#### 2.1. Advice not to be lazy about the collection of merit

Here there are three subdivisions:

- 2.1.1. Limitlessness of the merit of generating the aspiration to enlightenment
- 2.1.2. Ease of attaining buddhahood through that cause
- 2.1.3. Ease of attaining buddhahood by reason of having the four limitlessness

##### 2.1.1. Limitlessness of the merit of generating the aspiration to enlightenment

Lest we feel disheartened by the magnitude of accumulating the causes for enlightenment, we need to reflect upon the limitless ways and the limitless merit that are causes for generating the aspiration to enlightenment, such as with the bodhichitta attitude. Bodhichitta can be a means and an end in itself. Aspiring to develop bodhichitta in itself becomes a cause for developing bodhichitta itself. We can accumulate limitless merit by, for example, reflecting on developing great compassion towards other sentient beings, who are limitless in number. The moment we develop and extend

<sup>1</sup> See 19 June 2001 (Tenets); 16 and 23 October 2007 (Aryadeva). These can be found in the collected teachings CD.

our love and compassion to limitless sentient beings, the merit that we gain from that will naturally be limitless. That is how it needs to be understood. When we are presented with the right methods and means, then in just one moment we can accumulate vast amounts of merit with the right motivation and right intentions. We need to understand that the material being presented here is a means to overcome feelings of disheartenment or inadequacy.

There are two verses relating to this outline:

- 215** *Just as in all directions  
Space, earth, water, fire, and wind  
Are without limit,  
So suffering sentient beings are limitless.*
- 216** *Through their compassion  
Bodhisattvas are determined to lead  
These limitless sentient beings out of suffering  
And establish them in buddhahood.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary reiterates the meaning of the verse, which is quite clear:

*Just as in all directions, such as above and below, space, earth, water, fire and wind are without limit, so suffering beings are also limitless. Through their motivation of compassion, bodhisattvas are determined to lead these limitless sentient beings out of suffering and establish them in buddhahood.*

This is a presentation of the limitlessness number of sentient beings along with their limitless suffering. The concept of limitless sentient beings relates to the analogy of the four elements. Just as the four elements pervade the whole universe, likewise sentient beings and their individual suffering are also limitless. Through their motivation of compassion, bodhisattvas develop a determination to lead the limitless number of sentient beings out of suffering towards buddhahood. Thus, as clearly presented here, because of their motivation of great compassion focussing on the limitless number of sentient beings, bodhisattvas will naturally accumulate limitless merit from that very intention.

Even though more specific details will be presented later, at this point we need to gain an understanding of how, with the proper motivation, one can accumulate vast amounts of merit, even within just one moment. Because the number of sentient beings is so vast, we can accumulate vast amounts of merit or limitless merit in an instant.

These are really important points for us to consider adopting in our daily practice. As I mention regularly, it is very important that we expend some energy into developing compassion within our heart. We can slowly increase the very basic level of love and compassion that we have now, and turn it into great love and compassion, which then becomes the basis for developing bodhichitta. So in this way, we can see the great significance and practicality of the practice.

The bodhichitta practice (based on the development of love and compassion) is the most beneficial way to swiftly accumulate great amounts of merit. This can be illustrated with to the story of King Prasenajit, who asked the Buddha what methods could he possibly follow from the Mahayana path in order to accumulate the causes to achieve enlightenment. He said, 'Since I don't have a focused my mind, and because of my many activities and duties as a king which keeps me busy, can you present any other method to enable me to engage in the Mahayana practice?'

In response the Buddha said, 'Meditating on love and compassion and developing bodhichitta will suffice for you to practise the Mahayana path, and accumulate the merit and means to acquire enlightenment. Then you will not have to abandon your kingly duties or the Mahayana practice. This is the practice for you to adopt, in order to develop bodhichitta'. As presented in the teachings, and further on in the text, cultivating love and compassion and bodhichitta encompasses the essentials of the path. The two most essential things at the beginner level are to accumulate merit and to engage in purification practices, which can be done through cultivating love and compassion and bodhichitta.

We often incorporate into our daily practice the prayer of the *Four Immeasurables* which refers to four particular types of intentions that we develop in relation to sentient beings. Because sentient beings are immeasurable, then the love that is extended towards them with the wish for them to be endowed with happiness and to be free from suffering and abide in equanimity, will likewise be immeasurable. These thoughts are immeasurable because the objects of their focus (sentient beings) are immeasurable.

### **2.1.2. Ease of attaining buddhahood through that cause**

The next two verses are:

- 217** *[Hence] whether sleeping or not sleeping,  
After thoroughly assuming [such compassion]  
Those who remain steadfast—  
Even though they might not be meticulous*
- 218** *Always accumulate merit as limitless as all  
sentient beings  
Since sentient beings are limitless.  
Know then that since [the causes] are limitless,  
Limitless buddhahood is not hard to attain.*

As the commentary explains:

*Hence, bodhisattvas who have made the pledge, whether sleeping or not sleeping, after thoroughly assuming [such compassion] those who remain steadfast – even though they might not be meticulous [conscientious] about engaging in virtue, they always accumulate merit as limitless as all sentient beings, since sentient beings are limitless. Know then that since [the causes] are limitless, limitless buddhahood is not hard to attain*

This explanation is in accordance with the *Bodhisattoacharyavatara* by Shantideva. The bodhisattva's pledge is based on aspiring bodhichitta and engaging bodhichitta. Once the pledge has been made and has been adopted as a practice, then every time one is conscientious about accumulating virtue, by the mere fact of having developed that awakening mind and having made that pledge, all one's activities (whether one is asleep or awake or sitting or walking) become a means to accumulate merit. Thus one accumulates a vast amount of merit as a result of the intentions that one has developed. So with the proper motivation, there are limitless ways to accumulate merit regardless of the activities we engage in. In this way we can see that we don't lack the means to accumulate merit. This is an essential point that we need to understand and adopt in everyday life.

The mere fact of having developed a bodhichitta mind is such that one can accumulate merit, even while asleep. I recall the winter debate session when we went to other areas of Tibet in order to compete in debates against monks from other monasteries. While some of us would be engaged in studying the text, thinking about and memorising certain points, other monks would say, 'okay, you can put your time into this text, I'm going to sleep with bodhichitta on my

mind! Of course one could never tell—maybe they were seemingly sleeping whilst actually meditating on bodhichitta. One would never know. Still it could be used as an excuse. A classmate of Geshe Ngawang Dhargye related a story about how a monk in his class, who was quite intelligent and good at his studies, would sometimes say ‘oh, I will take a nap with bodhichitta on my mind!’

Being winter it was a difficult time of the year, and our study was also difficult. Four monks would share one small room and we would have to stay up late studying the texts to prepare for the debate. We would have to assiduously study the text, memorise different texts so we would be able to quote them, and also formulate the debate itself, know how to answer a certain opponent in the debate and how to pose debate questions and so forth. So it was a really hard and difficult time.

There would be a teacher assigned specifically to accompany those monks participating in the debate; he would be in the middle surrounded by monks who were studying and participating in the debate. Khensur Rinpoche, who is in Adelaide now, would also have some other monks around him.

There would be a night debates which would go on very late into the night. But even after the debate had finished, we had to come back and recite from memory the text we had memorised earlier. Monks would be appointed to come and check if we were actually reciting those texts. When a monk called Rabga was cautioned about being asleep with his shawl over his head, his reply was ‘I’m not sleeping, I’m actually thinking about the points of the text’, and of course there was no way of proving otherwise!

Gyalsab Je’s commentary then concludes this section with:

The *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* states:

As understood by the distinction  
Between aspiring to go and actually going,  
So the wise understand in turn  
The distinction between these two.

As presented here, by the limitless merit accumulated with two types of bodhichitta, that of aspiring and engaging, one will quickly obtain the limitless results of enlightenment.

It is through the two types of bodhichitta, aspiring bodhichitta and engaging bodhichitta, that one accumulates unceasing merit, which then becomes a cause for enlightenment. One needs to understand the difference between aspiring and engaging bodhichitta. As explained in other texts, when one develops **aspiring bodhichitta** one does not need to make any pledge or vow to keep certain commitments. However **engaging bodhichitta** requires one to take a pledge or vow to adopt certain practices. Developing the mere wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings suffices for an aspiring bodhichitta attitude. If, along with that wish, one makes a pledge to adopt and engage in certain practices, vows or commitments, then that will suffice for the engaging bodhichitta attitude.

Knowing this distinction is helpful if one receives an initiation or a subsequent initiation in the form of a blessing. If one wanted to receive it in the form of a blessing, one need not take the engaging bodhichitta vows. One can merely develop the aspiring bodhichitta, which doesn’t entail particular commitments. Whereas if one were to take a full initiation, it requires one to take the engaging bodhisattva vows.

The great significance of taking the bodhisattva vows is that they are based on the genuine aspiration to achieve enlightenment. If one actually makes a commitment to engage in the practices and abide by the commitments, the vow that one makes will then become highly meaningful and whatever practice one undertakes from then on will become highly meritorious. In other words, the merit that one gains from virtuous activities arising from engaging bodhisattva vows is far more extensive than the merit we have accumulated with just aspiring bodhichitta. That’s why taking the bodhisattva vows is really significant.

Most of us have taken the bodhisattva vows, so it is good to be mindful and try to practice in accordance with the commitments. Since we have already taken the vows, we have the basis for accumulating great merit. The main thing is to try, at the very least, not to allow those vows to degenerate. In the event that this does occur, then one can restore them by taking the vows again. There are specific verses to be recited when taking the bodhichitta vows, but for those who do the six-session guru yoga practice on a daily basis there is a particular section that reaffirms the bodhisattva vows, so they can be restored then. So in that way we can reaffirm the bodhisattva vows on a daily basis.

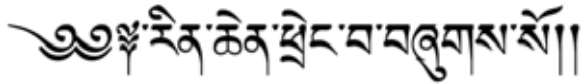
The ultimate means to please an enlightened being and the gurus is to develop a stronger bodhichitta attitude within ourselves. Based on this bodhichitta attitude tantra becomes a very profound and swift way to achieve enlightenment. In the Guru puja it says ‘quickly, quickly, may I achieve the state of enlightenment’. That ‘quickly, quickly’ attitude has to be based on bodhichitta, then liberating sentient beings from suffering and leading them to ultimate happiness. That is how it becomes such a profound and swift practice.

Developing a bodhichitta attitude in conjunction with tantric practices is also known as a ‘superior bodhichitta’, because it incorporates the attitude of achieving enlightenment very quickly. It is because of that intention that the bodhichitta attitude in conjunction with the tantric practice can also be understood as a superior bodhichitta attitude.

As I have regularly explained, it is good to be able to apply one’s understanding from the text and the teaching to one’s practice. For example, we do the Chittamani Tara practice quite regularly in the Centre, so we need to understand how the two types of bodhichitta are incorporated into that practice. For example, when it says ‘for the sake obtaining enlightenment...’ that is an aspiring bodhichitta attitude, then when one comes to the part saying ‘...for that purpose, I will engage in this practice’, then that incorporates the engaging bodhichitta attitude. This is also similar to the Vajrayogini practice, and indeed all other deity practices are also based on the same structure.

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



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

31 May 2011

As usual we can spend some time in meditation. So for that purpose we will adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture, and generate a positive motivation for the practice. [Meditation]

To set a motivation for the teaching, one can think along these lines: 'For the sake of all sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

### 2.1.3. Ease of attaining buddhahood by reason of having the four limitlessness'

In relation to this sub-heading, there are two verses:

219 [Bodhisattvas] stay for a limitless time [in the world];

For limitless embodied beings they seek  
The limitless [good qualities of] enlightenment  
And perform limitless virtuous actions.

220 Hence though enlightenment is limitless,  
How could they not attain it  
With these four limitless collections  
Without being delayed for long?

Having explained earlier that one needs to engage in the two collections to obtain enlightenment, one may feel disheartened, thinking that it is impossible to accumulate such merit. Nagarjuna reassures the king that the causes for attaining enlightenment are limitless, because in developing the attitude of benefitting limitless numbers of sentient beings, the merit that one gains is also limitless. By gaining limitless merit one will accumulate the causes for obtaining enlightenment with ease. These are points that we need to consider in relation to ourselves. As explained here, it is not that difficult to create the causes for enlightenment as there are various means for accumulating merit. The point is that when the causes and conditions to bring about a certain result are present, then the result will definitely come about. However, even though the causes and conditions are available to us, we cannot obtain the result if we don't implement those causes.

This reminds me of the time when Wayne complained that he didn't have a car. He said, 'Without a car it is difficult to get around. I need a car'. [Geshe-la laughs] So I said 'Well, if you have the money, you can buy the car', to which Wayne replied, 'I don't have the money, so I will have to borrow it'. I said, 'Well if you don't have the means to buy it now, don't even think about getting a car!' Wayne, you might recall that time when you came to my kitchen and said 'I have some difficulty'. When I asked what the difficulty was, you said, 'Well I need a car and I don't know how to go about getting one'. I said, 'Do you have the money to buy a car?' and you said 'No!'. When I asked, 'How do you plan to buy a car?', you said, 'I will have to get a loan from the bank'. Then I said, 'How much would you need to borrow?' and you said, 'Maybe \$9,000'.

My response to that was, 'It may well be the case that the car will be a wreck before you are able to repay the loan. It might seem very convenient to have a car because you can get around easily, but once you have a car, you wouldn't want the seat beside you to be empty. You would like to have someone sitting in the seat beside you, right? However if you are by yourself it is not all that difficult to get around. Even though you think a car will make things easier, having a car might cause more complications. You may have considered that. As a single person, it is easier to be without a car and to get around just by yourself.' Wayne just smiled then and went back to his room. With a limited budget, you have to settle for a second-hand car, which at some stage will need to be fixed, resulting in more expense. And if it irreparably breaks down, then you might have to consider buying another second-hand car. So whilst the intention is to bring about more convenience, it may in fact lead to further complications. That's exactly what happened to Andy!

This story illustrates that if one has the causes, then it is not difficult to obtain the wanted result. But without the causes, achieving the result becomes somewhat more difficult.

These verses from the root text indicate that there are many different ways of engaging in the causes for enlightenment, and that if one actually applies these means to acquire those causes, then it is possible to obtain enlightenment. As indicated here, and further elaborated in the following verses, there are many ways to engage in the two collections of merit and wisdom – it is just a matter of applying them to our practice.

It is with this intention that Nagarjuna gave very practical advice to the king on how to accumulate merit as a cause to achieve enlightenment. Even though these teachings were imparted explicitly to the king, we need to take them as personal instructions and implement them in our daily life. These are practices of a bodhisattva, so when we acknowledge how incredibly wonderful the deeds of a bodhisattva are, then we can appreciate the person who engages in those deeds even more. In fact it is mentioned in the teachings that through the mere recollection of a bodhisattva, we purify a lot of negative karma. These are really important points to consider.

When we contemplate their great deeds we develop admiration, respect, and ultimately, genuine veneration for a bodhisattva. To do that, we first of all need to understand that a bodhisattva has developed bodhicitta. Thus we begin by understanding what bodhicitta is. Having developed that bodhicitta a being becomes a bodhisattva. As presented extensively in the teachings, it is the development of bodhicitta which marks the entry into the Mahayana path. There are the five paths and ten grounds on which the bodhisattva embarks. At each stage they reach specific realisations. So we need to consider the means they use to engage in practice, which are primarily the six perfections and the four means of gathering disciples. By contemplating the nature of a bodhisattva, their realisations, their practices and their wondrous deeds, we begin to develop a great appreciation of how amazing a bodhisattva actually is, and develop the aspiration to become one ourselves.

When we think about the deeds of a bodhisattva at this level, then we get an inkling of the greatness of a buddha as well. An enlightened being is none other than the result of the practices of a bodhisattva, as the ultimate objective of the practices of a bodhisattva is to become enlightened. Without an understanding of the deeds of a bodhisattva, it is not possible to comprehend the majesty or greatness of an

enlightened being. So in order to appreciate and fully understand the greatness of an enlightened being, one first needs to understand bodhisattvas and their deeds.

The uniqueness of the Buddhist path lies in the fact that the Buddha was not a being who spontaneously arose without causes and conditions. Rather an enlightened being is a product of causes and conditions acquired on the path, such as the two collections. Having abandoned the negativities and acquired all the qualities in this way, the Buddha became the enlightened being who we now revere.

This section of the text indicates how through the four limitlessness', one is able to engage in the collections for obtaining enlightenment with ease. Gyaltsab Je's commentary on the two verses states:

*Hence even though enlightenment is limitless, how could they not attain it with these four limitless collections without being delayed for long?*

*Even though enlightenment itself is limitless, as explained in the earlier verses, there is no reason to think that bodhisattvas cannot attain enlightenment. Bodhisattvas can definitely obtain enlightenment with little delay through the means of the four limitless collections.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary goes on to explain:

*For [bodhisattvas] stay for a limitless time [in the world] for the sake of freeing limitless embodied beings from suffering, they seek the limitless [good qualities of] enlightenment and perform limitless virtuous actions that are combined in the two collections.*

This is a presentation of the four limitlessness. *Within a span of limitless time, bodhisattvas free limitless embodied beings; they seek limitless good qualities of enlightenment and they perform limitless virtuous actions.* These four limitlessness' combine the two collections of merit and wisdom. Basically, by collecting merit and wisdom in this extensive way, one creates the causes to obtain enlightenment. This is quite clear, and there should be no problem understanding it.

## **2.2. Advice not to be lazy about accumulating the two collections**

This heading has five sub-divisions:

- 2.2.1. General teaching that through the two collections physical and mental suffering is removed
- 2.2.2. Removal of physical suffering by the collection of merit
- 2.2.3. Removal of mental suffering by the collection of wisdom
- 2.2.4. No cause for laziness about accumulating the two collections
- 2.2.5. The power of great compassion

### **2.2.1. General teaching that through the two collections physical and mental suffering is removed**

This heading indicates that more specific explanations will follow.

The verse relating to this is:

**221** *The limitless collection of merit  
And the limitless collection of wisdom  
Eradicate just quickly  
Physical and mental sufferings.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

One should not be lazy about accumulating the two collections for obtaining buddhahood...

The collection of merit is said to be an aid to remove physical suffering, whereas the collection of wisdom is said to be an aid to remove mental suffering. When we actually relate to

the practical benefits that can be gained from engaging in the two collections we will feel inspired, because we can see the direct benefit for ourselves. Thus we will become inspired to engage in the collections, rather than feeling lazy and despondent about it.

When the text indicates that the collection of merit eradicates physical suffering, we need to develop a bit more understanding of what that actually means. We can gain such an understanding when we relate to the three types of suffering.

The **suffering of suffering** is relatively easy for us to deal with. We alleviate the suffering of a headache, for example, when we take aspirin; when we are hungry we eat food and the suffering of hunger is removed, and likewise with thirst, cold and so forth. These are relatively easy types of suffering that we can immediately identify as a form of suffering, which makes it easier for us to try to eliminate the causes of that suffering.

We need to understand at a more profound level that the accumulation of merit does not refer to removing the temporary kinds of suffering that we experience. Rather it acts at a more subtle level on the other two kinds of suffering, the **suffering of change**, but most importantly, **all-pervasive suffering**. These two forms of suffering are said to be much harder for us to recognise as suffering.

Recognising the suffering of change is hard enough, but really understanding the all-pervasive suffering that we all possess, is even harder. Here we need to understand that the collection of merit works towards eliminating the very foundation of our suffering, which is all-pervasive suffering. So in that way, we begin to appreciate the relevance of the collection of merit and how it works on a very subtle and deep level.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further reads:

*...for the limitless collection of merit and the limitless collection of wisdom eradicate just quickly physical and mental sufferings...*

Having mentioned earlier that *one should not be lazy about accumulating the two collections for obtaining buddhahood*, the reason presented here is that both collections of merit and wisdom are *limitless*. They in turn, very *quickly eradicate* the *physical and mental sufferings* within oneself. Here we need to understand that one need not feel inadequate with respect to accumulating the causes for enlightenment.

Furthermore, one need not think that there might be some sort of limit to the time available to accumulate merit. As explained here, the ways and means of accumulating merit and wisdom are limitless, which indicates that the source is also limitless. Thus there is no limit to the acquisition of the causes. Because there are limitless ways to engage in the causes for enlightenment, specifically the accumulation of merit and wisdom, we need not feel inadequate about our efforts.

We can understand from this presentation that the collection of merit, in conjunction with purification, is the ultimate means for removing not only immediate suffering, but the suffering of the lower realms, as well as in future lifetimes. Thus engaging in purification practices, purifying negative karmas, and accumulating virtue and merit, is the means to remove all levels of physical suffering in this life and in future lifetimes. The accumulation of wisdom is the means to eradicate the more subtle psychological or mental forms of suffering. Basically, we all have this instinctive wish to avoid any kind of physical and mental suffering, so the



ultimate means to eradicate physical and mental suffering is through the accumulation of merit and wisdom.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further states:

It is fitting however to be lazy about accumulating causes for samsara, for they give rise to limitless sufferings.

Not only is accumulation of merit (in conjunction with purification practices) essential if we are to obtain the causes for enlightenment, but it is also a way to lessen the immediate problems in our life. We enjoy unbelievably good conditions, so at this point we can derive greater meaning by incorporating our understanding of the Lam Rim teachings on the great purpose of the precious human rebirth. This then becomes a means to derive the essence of the teachings.

### **2.2.2. Removal of physical suffering by the collection of merit**

222 *The physical sufferings of bad transmigrations  
Such as hunger and thirst arise from ill deeds;  
Bodhisattvas do not commit ill deeds,  
And due to meritorious deeds, they do not have  
physical suffering in other lives*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

One should not be lazy thinking that one would have to experience limitless physical sufferings when accumulating the two collections, for the physical sufferings of bad transmigrations such as hunger and thirst, cold and heat and so forth, arise from ill deeds; bodhisattvas do not commit ill deeds, and due to meritorious deeds do not have physical suffering but only happiness in other lives.

The main point here is that one should not be disheartened about the effort and suffering that may entail in collecting merit, as it is the means to create causes to eliminate all future sufferings. A bodhisattva experiences no physical suffering because of the merit they have collected. So by contemplating that, one can remove the form of laziness where one fears the suffering that one will have to experience while accumulating the two collections.

The only reason why anyone experiences physical suffering is that they have engaged in negative deeds. Thus the negative karmic imprints are still within their mental continuum. Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, have overcome negative karmic imprints, and thus will not experience the result, which is suffering.

The main point to be understood and incorporated into your practice is that if you don't wish to experience suffering, then you should not accumulate the causes for suffering, which is negative karma. We need to be able to connect the experience to its cause; the experience of suffering is a result of the cause of having accumulated or created negative karma in the past. When we reflect on this and gain a deeper understanding of this connection, we will become very wary about accumulating negative karma, and in the event of having done so, we will immediately resort to purifying it. That would be the means! We all know how to purify negative karma with the aid of the four opponent powers. We should understand that if we don't purify negative karma whenever it is created, then it is immediately left as an imprint on our mind. For as long as we carry the imprints of negative karma in our mental continuum, we will be carrying the causes to experience suffering at any given time when the conditions are right.

We all understand that engaging in negative karma will leave imprints on our mind, which then become the cause

for experiencing negative results. Thus we need to purify the negative karmic imprints within our mental continuum by applying the four opponent powers. Now it is, of course, difficult for us to completely avoid creating some forms of negative karma, because some negative karmic imprints are very deeply implanted into our mental continuum. So even though it is not our wish, we sometimes find ourselves creating negative karmas. However when we notice that, then we can resort to purification practices, and in this way lessen the impact of the negative consequences. As we recall from previous teachings, even though negative karma has no redeeming qualities it can still be purified; so this is one good thing about negative karma! But it is up to us to apply the purification practices. If we have the cause of suffering in the form of a negative karmic imprint, then eventually we will have to experience that the result which is suffering. But if we don't have the causes in our mental continuum, then we will not have to experience the result.

### **2.2.3. Removal of mental suffering by the collection of wisdom**

This heading relates to the verse that reads:

223 *The mental sufferings of desire, hatred, fear,  
Lust, and so forth arise from obscuration.  
Through knowing them to be baseless  
They just quickly forsake mental suffering.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

One should not be lazy thinking that one will have to experience limitless mental sufferings when accumulating the two collections, for the mental sufferings of desire that comes from being attached to objects, hatred with intention to harm, fear of other kings and spirits, lust for things that belong to others and so forth arise from the obscuration of adhering to the four extremes and the ignorance of not knowing the meaning of reality. However bodhisattvas through engaging in the accumulation of the collections and knowing all phenomena to be baseless i.e. without any inherent base, root or reliance, they just quickly forsake [abandon] mental suffering.

This is the point where we can incorporate the understanding that we have gained from extensive explanations on the obscurations, particularly the ignorance of adhering to the four extremes and the ignorance of not knowing the nature of reality. That fundamental ignorance of grasping at inherent or true existence is the main cause of delusions such as attachment to objects, hatred with the intention to harm, fear of other kings and spirits; and lust and desire for things that belong to others. All of these vices arise from the fundamental basis of grasping at a truly-existent self.

For as long as there is ignorance in one's mind, it will be the cause of mental suffering. Then the teaching goes on to explain that a bodhisattva quickly abandons all mental suffering through engaging in the accumulation of the collection of wisdom, knowing that all phenomena are baseless and without inherent existence. When the fundamental cause of all suffering (the ignorance of grasping at a truly-existent self) is overcome, then having gained that wisdom, all the results (all forms of mental suffering) will be eliminated. That is what is to be understood here.

Gaining the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness overcomes all of one's misconceptions, and thus eliminates the suffering that is a consequence of those misconceptions. This has been extensively explained many times in the past, but I will review the main points here. When a bodhisattva,

who has gained the realisation of emptiness, perceives an attractive or beautiful object, it is not as if the object doesn't appear as attractive to them. In fact the beauty and the appealing features and attributes of the object still appear to the bodhisattva. However, due to the understanding that it does not exist in the way that it appears, the bodhisattva knows that the appearance is not the reality of the actual object, so attraction and attachment to the object will not arise for a bodhisattva.

Ordinary beings, on the other hand, feel an immediate attraction and develop a strong attachment, because of their total belief in their perception of the object. Bodhisattvas do not have the same belief in the appearance of the object, which is how attachment is overcome. Likewise, for ordinary beings an unappealing object would be a cause for aversion or anger because of their total belief in the negative or unattractive attributes of that object.

Despite an object having the appearance of unappealing features or attributes, a bodhisattva will know that it doesn't exist in the way that it appears. As a result of this understanding, aversion or anger towards the object will not arise. Attachment and anger are overcome when the negative emotions related to desire or hatred for an object do not occur. Thus bodhisattvas do not create any new negative karma and thus do not experience any mental agony or mental suffering.

As ordinary beings, we have a total belief in the appearance of objects, and so we develop strong attachment or aversion towards those objects, which in turn creates a lot of mental suffering. As the teachings explain, the primary cause of our mental suffering is the superstitious mind. Superstitious mental misconceptions arise when one fails to understand the actual reality of phenomena. When these misconceptions are overcome by gaining the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness, then all mental suffering will naturally subside.

To gain a further understanding of this, one can incorporate the explanations in the Lam Rim. As you will recall, one develops a heart-warming love for other sentient beings by seeing them as being appealing. Due to their wisdom, when a bodhisattva meditates on the appealing nature of sentient beings, they don't develop even the slightest attachment to sentient beings. Here the referent wisdom is the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness. We need to incorporate that understanding into what is being explained here.

As people will be aware, next Tuesday will be a discussion session, and the exam will be on the following Tuesday, 14 June. I'm assuming that most people will be here, as His Holiness' teachings in Melbourne will be finished by then, and His Holiness will be in Canberra. Although some people might be going to Canberra, we can still have the exam then.

As I regularly mention, the discussion is to be conducted by sharing your understanding and knowledge. If you have gained any understanding or knowledge from the teachings, then that is the time to present it. If someone has a question to ask about the teachings, then, if one has gained some understanding, that is the time to share your understanding. Otherwise there is not much use having that knowledge. Sharing is a way to help others as well as gaining a better understanding of the teachings.

It is explained in the teachings that there is incredible benefit in sharing one's knowledge with others so that they gain some understanding of the Dharma. Imparting even a part of the knowledge of the Dharma to someone else is implanting the seed of enlightenment in their mind stream.

Gaining just one aspect of understanding the Dharma serves as a basis for gaining the ultimate knowledge of the Dharma, which is an enlightened mind. So sharing knowledge of the Dharma implants the seed of omniscience in the other person's mind. That is the great benefit that the other gets, while we gain extensive merit. With this understanding one will appreciate the explanation in the teachings that generosity of the Dharma is a much greater deed than generosity with material aid.

We will now recite the *Eight Verses of Mind Training*, dedicating it to Alan's late mum. As mentioned previously, we visualise Amitabha Buddha in the space before us. Then through the rays of light coming from Amitabha Buddha's heart, we visualise that Alan's mum's consciousness has been drawn up to the pure land. So with that visualisation, we can recite the *Eight Verses of Mind Training*.

For my part, I have done practices for Alan's mum. I was prompted to do that when Vanessa mentioned that it is traditional to bring flowers to show one's condolences. She went on to say that it might be better to give the flowers directly to me to do the practices for Alan's mum. So with that offering of flowers, I did a self-initiation practice.

Alan, you would not know that this happened. So, perhaps it would be appropriate for you to thank Vanessa for making the offering of flowers towards the practices for your late mum.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright  
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Edited Version*

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## Discussion (07.06.2011)

### Week: 1 (10 May 2011)

1. Explain what the term *stainless prayers* refers to. What does *stainless* actually mean? [4]
2. a) While there are particular causes for all of the eighty minor marks, what is the concordant cause for all of them? [2]  
b) After having practiced for a long time, we might even complain, ‘Why am I not closer to becoming enlightened? Why am I not a Buddha yet?’ This is because...? [2]

### Week: 2 (17 May 2011)

3. Give an explanation of the four lines of the refuge prayer. [4]  
**‘To the Buddha, the Dharma and the supreme assembly,**

**I go for refuge until I reach enlightenment.**

**From the merit that I accumulate from generosity and so forth,**

**May I attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.’**

4. What won’t help us and what will help us unfailingly at the time of death? [4]
5. How can simply using the word ‘I’ help one’s practice? [2]
6. **Verse 211: ‘If the causes of all things are small  
But they produce extensive effects,  
The thought that the measureless causes of Buddhahood  
Have measureable effects should be eliminated.’**

- a) What are the four attributes of karma? [4]
- b) What does Verse 211 particularly relate to? [2]

### Week: 3 (24 May 2011)

7. Name the further two subdivisions of the form body and give an explanation of each. [4]
8. a) Explain the supreme emanation body. [2]  
b) Explain the truth body. [2]
9. Give the syllogism that indicates the collections of both merit and wisdom. Give a brief explanation. [4]

### Week 4 (31 May 2011)

10. a) On a more profound level what does the accumulation of merit refer to? [2]  
b) What can we understand from this presentation, as the ultimate means to remove all levels of physical suffering in this life and in future lifetimes? [2]  
c) What is the accumulation of wisdom a means to? [2]

# Exam

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

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

## **Block 3**

**Week 6:** (14 June 2011)

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1. Explain what the term *stainless prayers* refers to. What does *stainless* actually mean? [4]

2. a) While there are particular causes for all of the eighty minor marks, what is the concordant cause for all of them? [2]

b) After having practiced for a long time, we might even complain, 'Why am I not closer to becoming enlightened? Why am I not a Buddha yet?' This is because...? [2]

3. Give an explanation of the four lines of the refuge prayer. [4]

**'To the Buddha, the Dharma and the supreme assembly,**

**I go for refuge until I reach enlightenment.**

**From the merit that I accumulate from generosity and so forth,**

**May I attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.'**

4. What won't help us and what will help us unfailingly at the time of death? [4]

5. How can simply using the word 'I' help one's practice? [2]

6. Verse 211: **'If the causes of all things are small**

**But they produce extensive effects,**

**The thought that the measureless causes of Buddhahood**

**Have measureable effects should be eliminated.'**

a) What are the four attributes of karma? [4]

b) What does Verse 211 particularly relate to? [2]

7. Name the further two subdivisions of the form body and give an explanation of each. [4]

8. a) Explain the supreme emanation body. [2]

b) Explain the truth body. [2]

9. Give the syllogism that indicates the collections of both merit and wisdom. Give a brief explanation. [4]

10. a) On a more profound level what does the accumulation of merit refer to? [2]

b) What can we understand from this presentation, as the ultimate means to remove all levels of physical suffering in this life and in future lifetimes? [2]

c) What is the accumulation of wisdom a means to? [2]