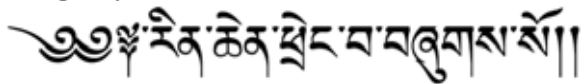


Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

16 October 2012

Based on the positive motivation that we generated when reciting the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, let us now engage in the practice of meditation. *[meditation]*

To secure a positive motivation, it is good to generate a strong and keen aspiration such as: For the purpose of benefiting all sentient beings, I need to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment myself. So I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

When this motivation is generated from the listeners' as well as the teacher's side, the teaching becomes more meaningful.

2.2.2. Causes for generating belief and faith in the limitless good qualities of buddhas

2.2.2.1. THE REASON WHY BUDDHAS' GOOD QUALITIES ARE LIMITLESS IS THAT THE CAUSAL MERITS ARE LIMITLESS (CONT.)

2.2.2.1.3. Brief presentation of the seven branches

The seven branches or seven limbs come up again and again in the lam rim teachings. In fact it is presented in most practices such as the *Ganden Lha Gyama* prayer that we have just recited. So can you list the seven limbs?

[Some students answer in very soft voices] There is no need to be embarrassed when it comes to explaining points of Dharma; in fact that's an opportunity to courageously proclaim the Dharma. If we are shy in engaging in Dharma then we will incur a great loss, whereas being embarrassed about engaging in non-virtue is a great gain. We need to know when it is appropriate to be embarrassed and shy.

So the seven limbs are?

Students: Prostration, offerings, confession, rejoicing, requesting to remain, requesting teachings, and dedication.

We need to understand that they are referred to as being the seven branches because they refer to the seven particular methods of accumulating merit and wisdom, in order to achieve enlightenment. This implies that if any of these branches are missing then it will not be possible to achieve enlightenment. If we take the analogy of a car, all of its essential features such as the wheels and so forth have to be intact in order for the car to run. If even one wheel is missing the car will not be able to function to take you to your destination. Similarly all of the seven branches of practice have to be intact if we want to reach the goal of enlightenment. It is also good to know that the seven branches are represented in different ways. For example, in general the set number for water bowls is seven, which is also a way to represent the seven limb practice.

The relevant verse in the text reads:

466. *Going for refuge with all forms of respect
To the Buddhas, excellent Doctrine,
Supreme Community, and bodhisattvas,
I bow down to all that are worthy of honour.*

So how many branches are covered in this verse?

Students: One. Two

One or two?

Students: Two, prostration and refuge.

The usual listing of the seven branch practice is as presented in the *King of Prayers*, from where it is derived. There are also other texts that present ten branches, which include refuge, the bodhicitta motivation, and faith. However, the ten branches can be subsumed into seven branches.

Some practices such as the Cittamani Tara practice, omit the beseeching not to pass into nirvana, because the objects of refuge in that practice are referred to as being in the sambhogakaya aspect, in which case the enlightened beings do not show the aspect of passing into nirvana. So since there is no way for an enlightened being in the sambhogakaya aspect to pass into nirvana there is no need to be beseech them not to pass into nirvana. That is why beseeching is omitted in the *Cittamani Tara Guru Yoga*.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse explains:

*Going for refuge with all forms of respect, to the Buddhas,
the excellent Doctrine of scriptures and realisations...*

This indicates that in addition to the Buddha refuge, the Doctrine refuge consists of the Buddha's realisations as well as his words (the scriptures).

There is no Dharma which is not subsumed into these two—scriptural and realisations. Having covered the first two objects of refuge, the Buddha and the Dharma, Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

*...the Supreme Community of ordinary and arya
beings...*

This is specifically indicating that the Supreme Community, the Sangha, consists of both ordinary beings and arya beings. Ordinary beings are those who have not yet obtained the state of arya. The Tibetan word for arya, *pakpa*, has a connotation of being superior, and that's why they are called superior beings. My personal interpretation as to why they are referred to as being superior is because they have transcended self-grasping.

Ordinary beings are dominated by self-grasping and create the karma to be reborn in cyclic existence again and again. Whereas when one obtains the arya state and becomes a superior being, then, as you have heard in previous teachings, one no longer creates any throwing karma. Because they are released from the bondage of self-grasping, no new throwing karma is created to propel aryas into rebirth in cyclic existence.

The reason why arya beings are released from the bondage of self-grasping is because they have gained the direct realisation of emptiness, which is the direct antidote to self-grasping. In meditative equipoise aryas are in single-pointed concentration on emptiness, which is a space-like meditative state where there is no hint of grasping at inherent existence. When they come out of that meditative equipoise into the post-meditative state, then although things may appear as truly existent, they have no belief in that appearance. As you will be aware, the analogy is that they are like magicians who see what they have conjured, but know that it is just an illusion. We need to understand that arya beings in both the meditative state as well the post-meditative state do not create any new karma through either self-grasping or grasping at inherent existence.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

...and also to the bodhisattvas...

Here, *bodhisattvas* specifically refers to those superior beings whose state of mind is the awaking mind and whose deeds are the six perfections. To such Sangha objects of refuge as well as the earlier objects of refuge, Gyaltshab Je's commentary says:

I bow down respectfully with my three doors to all that are worthy of honour.

We need to relate to a deeper understanding of this presentation. *Respectfully with my three doors* indicates generating a strong faith in, and respect for, the objects of refuge. Paying respect through one's **mind** means generating a strong conviction and faith in the objects of refuge by really thinking about their qualities. The outer sign of having developed strong faith is that the hairs on one's body will stand on end, such as when singing verses of praise. Paying respect through one's **speech** is uttering words of veneration, and paying respect through one's **body** is done with physical gestures such as prostration. So having developed respect in one's mind one goes for refuge, sings praises and bows respectfully to those who are worthy of honour.

Taking refuge refers to taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, with the clear recognition of what the Buddha, the Dharma and Sangha are. It is good to note that the actual Sangha refers to arya beings. However when four Sangha members are gathered together then, even if they are ordinary beings, they are said to be as worthy an object of refuge as the actual arya Sangha. It is good to keep this understanding in mind.

In simple terms, Nagarjuna is presenting us with very clear instructions on how to engage in a practice that allows us to accumulate a vast amount of merit, and which moves our mind very deeply. In fact the following verses are incredibly moving, and we can see that how incredibly kind Nagarjuna was in presenting us with these very practical practices. When I started reading these verses in preparation for class the other day, I was moved to tears by the profound way in which Nagarjuna presents his dedications.

Refuge was presented earlier in the text and so you will be familiar with what it entails. However, as presented in various practices, whenever an occasion for taking refuge occurs we need to be really mindful of what refuge entails.

We need to remind ourselves that the actual refuge is only complete when all the causes of refuge are intact. The cause for taking refuge arises from contemplating one's own dire situation as well as that of all other living beings. We are all alike, in that we are all trapped in the suffering of samsara and the lower realms. Contemplating the sufferings of samsara in general, and the lower realms in particular, generates the fear of having to experience that suffering again and again. Through that fear we realise that the objects of refuge, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha have the complete ability to free all other beings, as well as ourselves, from these sufferings of cyclic existence and the lower realm. The actual refuge is when we place the total reliance on the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha to protect us from the fears of the sufferings of samsara and the lower realms.

Generating refuge in this way, as explained in many teachings, is a really profound practice. We can accumulate so much merit and purify so much negative karma just with the practice of taking refuge, so we definitely should not underestimate its great value. In fact taking refuge forms the very basis of all other practices (such the seven limb practice). Therefore, as explained in this verse, based on that

refuge one offers respect through prostrations to the objects of refuge, the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, because they are worthy of honour.

As I have explained previously, while other traditions have one object of refuge, our Buddhist tradition has three objects of refuge. I have also explained the significance of this many times. So it is good to refer to that, and keep that understanding in the mind.

With respect to the words *I bow down respectfully with my three doors to all that are worthy of honour*, the Tibetan term translated as *worthy of honour* refers to those who are suitable objects to make offerings to, which are the objects of refuge. By making offerings to these suitable objects, the objects of refuge, one accumulates merit and engages in a great purification practice, which is the only way to liberate oneself. So, that is the meaning of *worthy of honour*.

Respectfully indicates prostration. As mentioned previously, we prostrate with our body, speech and mind. With strong faith in the object of refuge in our mind, we make a physical prostration by placing our palms together on top of our crown, at our forehead and at our heart. The Tibetan word for prostration has two syllables, *chag* indicating ridding ourselves of negativity, and *tsal* has the connotation of receiving the blessings of the object of refuge. One purifies the negativity of one's body, speech and mind, and having done that one obtains the qualities of the enlightened body, speech and mind.

Placing the palms together on top of one's crown indicates receiving the potential to obtain the qualities of the holy body; placing ones palms at the throat indicates receiving the potential to obtain the qualities of Buddha's holy speech and placing them at the heart indicates receiving the potential to obtain the qualities of the Buddha's holy mind.

In another version, when one places one's palms together on top of one's crown, it leaves us with the imprint to obtain the Buddha's crown pinnacle, or *Usnisa*; placing them at the forehead, leaves us with the imprint to obtain the Buddha's hair spiral; placing them at the throat, to obtain the Buddha's speech; and at the heart, the imprint to obtain the Buddha's mind. This is how we receive the blessings and it is the ultimate way to purify our negativities. When we engage in the act of prostration with that awareness in mind, even if it is just three prostrations, then it becomes really high level of practice. Too often we leave aside some really practical practice, preferring more profound practices. But in fact the very act of doing prostrations with that understanding and awareness and visualisation is, I consider, one of the most profound practices.

We need to have a proper understanding of why this practice can be so profound. As mentioned previously, when we develop the strong conviction of receiving the blessing of the enlightened body, speech and mind, it actually implants a very strong potential to obtain the enlightened body, speech and mind ourselves. For every moment that we engage in the practice, our mind is being implanted with the imprints and potential to obtain the purified body, speech and mind of an enlightened being. It is good for us to be mindful of this point, which I explained in detail during the lam rim teachings.

As I have also explained a number of times, the palms are placed together with the thumbs tucked inside, to represent holding a jewel. The two hands represent method and wisdom which are the two essential aspects of practice needed to attain enlightenment. When we place our palms

together, then that indicates the union of method and wisdom, through which one engages in the practice of creating the causes for obtaining the state of enlightenment. It is only through the union and inseparability of method and wisdom that that we are able to obtain the ultimate goal of Buddhahood.

The tantric explanations of the union of method and wisdom are much more profound. However, you can see how, with this brief explanation, the practice of prostration, which might look like a simple physical gesture, can become a really profound practice. There are so many details that one can contemplate, as a way to create the causes for enlightenment.

There are further elaborate visualisations one can do but, as the great masters have said, one profound aspect of the purification is to visualise around oneself surrounded by numerous beings that represent individual beings of ones previous lifetimes, in the aspect of humans. Then, as one prostrates all these beings also prostrate with you, and all the negative karma that one has created in each and every previous lifetime is purified at the same time. This very profound instruction by the great masters is good to keep in mind.

I went through these details when we studied *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, including an explanation of all the citations as well. These points are relevant to the seven limb practice being explained here. The teachings on *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* produced quite few students who are now able to present the Dharma to others. As a result of the teachings at that time, you have now gained so many tools and methods of presenting the Dharma to others.

The next verse in the root text reads:

467 *I will turn away from all ill deeds
And thoroughly take up all meritorious actions.
I will admire all the merits
Of all embodied beings.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Intact with the four opponent powers, *I will turn away from all ill deeds* that I have ever performed...

Again, this is a really profound practice. In order to engage fully in a purification practice we need to ensure that all four opponent powers are intact. In this one line Nagarjuna is exhorting (as opposed to commanding) us to engage in this practice in order to turn away from all the negativities that we have accumulated.

As I have taught this many times before, I want you to list the four opponent powers.

Students: Power of object or refuge, power of remedy, power of regret, power of resolve.

The teachings indicate that regret is the most essential one of the four opponent powers. That is because the stronger the regret the more likely it is that one will resolve not to commit the negative action again. When there is strong regret then resolve (along with the other opponent powers) will follow quite naturally. So how does one develop strong regret? It is by contemplating the ill effects of the non-virtuous deeds. What are the non-virtuous deeds? While there are many various forms of wrong deeds, they can basically be summarised as the ten non-virtuous deeds.

When one contemplates the prospect of having to experience the negative consequences of wrong deeds then regret will naturally arise. We think, 'Oh, I have engaged in a disgraceful deed that will completely ruin me. So I must do

everything possible to purify that wrong deed'. This is how the mind of wanting to purify negativity or non-virtuous deeds arises. We need to see how developing regret is dependent on thinking about the ill effects of negative deeds. I have previously explained how purification actually works; how it actually purifies negative karma. As explained in the *Abhidharma*, regret about having engaged in non-virtue is virtuous, whereas generating regret about virtuous deeds is non-virtuous. So that is another point we need to remember.

Having explained the need for confession, the next part of Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

...and thoroughly take up all meritorious actions such as that gained from generosity, morality and meditation. I will admire and rejoice in all the merits of all embodied beings, thinking, 'How wonderful it is, that they have such virtue'.

The point here is generating the mind of rejoicing. As indicated here, one rejoices in the positive deeds of noble beings as well as ordinary beings. As indicated in the lam rim, when it is set against the backdrop of our normal state of being completely intoxicated with delusions, engaging in some virtuous deed is an incredibly good deed. Contemplating this, one generates the thought, 'How wonderful it is that even ordinary beings have such virtue'. When one rejoices like that about the good deeds of ordinary beings, then that joy and happiness about their virtue serves as an antidote to overcome jealousy and contempt.

While all of these points are significant and profound, we need to go through the text a bit more quickly, otherwise we will not finish in time. The next verse reads:

468 *With bowed head and joined palms
I petition the perfect buddhas
To turn the wheel of doctrine and remain
As long as transmigrating beings remain.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Paying homage *with my five limbs*, such as a *bowed head and joined palms*, *I petition the perfect buddhas* not to remain long without teaching after obtaining enlightenment, but *to turn the wheel of doctrine, and to remain as long as transmigrating beings remain.*

As was explained earlier in the text, after the Buddha obtained enlightenment he remained in a meditative state without teaching for forty-nine days. It was only when the Buddha was requested to teach that he imparted his teachings. To this day we continue the tradition of requesting teachers to give a teaching.

As the text explains, having *petitioned the perfect buddhas*, one makes the request for the enlightened beings *to turn the wheel of the doctrine and to remain as long as transmigrating beings remain.* This profound request indicates the profound intention of enlightened beings. As His Holiness Dalai Lama often indicates, one of the verses that inspires him the most is the verse from Shantideva's text, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* which says, 'For as long as there are sentient beings remaining and for as long as there is suffering in the world, may I remain to alleviate that suffering'. As His Holiness says, this powerful verse indicates an incredibly noble intention—one is prepared to forsake one's own enlightenment in order to help sentient beings, for as long as there are sentient beings who remain and suffer in samsara. This verse in *Precious Garland* is making the same point.

For those who are not familiar with it, *paying homage with my five limbs* refers to doing prostrations by placing the

forehead, the two palms and the two knees on the ground. This is the ultimate way of showing veneration or respect. As indicated in the Buddha's life story, whenever he was requested to teach or some question was asked of him, a disciple such as Ananda would kneel down on the ground and bow down with all five limbs; which is an indication that this was the form of showing greatest respect to a great and noble teacher.

2.2.2.2. LIMITLESSNESS OF THE CAUSES BECAUSE OF ASPIRING TO HELP LIMITLESS BEINGS

469 *Through the merit of having done thus
And through the merit that I did earlier and
will do
May all sentient beings aspire
To the highest enlightenment.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Through the merit of having done the above-mentioned deeds and through the merit that I did earlier at all times in the past, that I am committed to engage in from now on and will ever do in the future...

This refers to all the merits one has accumulated in the three times, past, present and in the future. Then one dedicates that merit as follows:

...may all sentient beings possess the mind that aspires to the highest enlightenment.

Thus one makes that ultimate dedication of all the merits one could ever accumulate to the highest enlightenment for all sentient beings.

We need to understand that dedicating one's own merit to helping limitless sentient beings to generate their own aspiration to achieve enlightenment means that the merit that one accumulates from that dedication is also limitless. This wish to help limitless beings to achieve enlightenment can be in the form of dedication or an aspiration. As I have explained previously, there is a difference between an aspiration and a dedication, so you need to take note of that difference.

The next verse in this section of the text is:

470 *May all sentient beings have all the stainless
faculties,
Release from all conditions of non-leisure,
Freedom of action,
And endowment with good livelihood.*

From this, and the following verses one can gain of indication of how profound these aspirations are. So try to generate that thought of how incredibly beneficial they are. As explained in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

Because the objects of one's benefit are limitless sentient beings, the merit that is accumulated by focusing on that is limitless. And because the causes which is merit is limitless, one develops the conviction that the qualities of the Buddha are limitless. This reasoning is to be applied to the following verses.

As presented earlier in the text, by relating to the causes that are limitless, one can also infer that the qualities that are the result, has to be limitless as well.

May all sentient beings have all the stainless faculties, that which are uncontaminated; be released from all conditions of the eight non-leisures, have the freedom of action by not being under the control of others; and having abandoned wrong livelihood, may they be endowed with good livelihood.

These points are relatively easy to understand, so we can move onto the next verse, which reads:

471 *Also may all embodied beings
Have jewels in their hands,
And may all the limitless necessities of life
remain
Unconsumed as long as there is cyclic existence.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Also may all embodied beings, from the moment they are born, have jewels in their hands, and may all the limitless necessities of life remain unconsumed as long as there is cyclic existence.

This is a symbolic aspiration that no being is deprived of the necessities for their sustenance throughout all times.

472 *May all women at all times
Become supreme persons.
May all embodied beings have
The intelligence [of wisdom] and the legs [of ethics].*

This aspiration is also in line with Shantideva's text. In the past it seems that men were the ones who possessed the power to rule and that women were deprived of these advantages. So this aspiration is for woman to become supreme beings. These are actually very significant points about equal rights. Here, *supreme* indicates that woman will be endowed with the qualities of having the majesty of control over others. Of course in these days women would probably say, 'We are not deprived of these qualities'.

As Gyaltsab Je' commentary explains:

May all women at all times become supreme persons. May all embodied beings have the intelligence that comes from the higher training of wisdom, such as realising selflessness, and the legs of ethics.

The Tibetan word *kangpa* is literally translated as 'legs' but it can also be a term for a branch. When something is referred to as a branch, then that means that it is part of something. In this case it implies the higher training of concentration. So the term can be related to all three levels of higher trainings.

These incredible aspirations are, in themselves, an indication of what an incredible being Nagarjuna was. We can see there is not even a hint of self interest to be found in these aspirations. By reflecting on these aspirations we can get an insight of what kind of a noble being he was. Nagarjuna was, without any question, a great bodhisattva or even an enlightened being.

These are aspirations that focus on the welfare of all living beings. Without exception they encompass each and every living being. For example, although this verse is making the specific aspirations for woman to have majesty, it is an aspiration for all women; an aspiration without discrimination, which does not leave out some at the expense of others. The remaining aspirations are focused on all living beings to obtain the qualities of virtue and goodness. So in this way we can develop a keen of admiration for Nagarjuna.

With respect to our own personal practice, these points indicate the kind of aspirations we should generate in our mind, and how we should dedicate our merits. They are an indication as to how we should engage in a practice ourselves.

Would you consider having three discussion evenings on November 27, December 4 and December 11?

Students: Yes!

Thank you for your positive response. The topic for discussion will be generating bodhicitta with the technique of equalising and exchanging self with others.

As clearly explained in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, there are five stages involved in generating bodhicitta with this technique. They are:

- ∞ Meditating on how oneself and others are equal
- ∞ Contemplating the disadvantages of self-cherishing, using various reasons;
- ∞ Contemplating the great advantages of cherishing others, by various means
- ∞ The actual mind of exchanging self with others
- ∞ Based on that, how to meditate on giving and taking

These points are clearly presented in the lam rim teachings so you can bring the *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* with you to the discussion. Then you can refer to the text and discuss each point, which will be a way to familiarise yourselves with these essential points. Then when you put them into practice in meditation, it will be really beneficial.

As you are aware, prior to training in the actual technique of developing bodhicitta, one need to first be familiar and meditate on developing the mind of equanimity. Even though I don't recall it being explained specifically in *Liberation of the Palm of your Hand*, other texts explain how the equanimity generated in the equalising and exchanging self with others is more profound and surpasses the equanimity presented in the seven-point cause-and-effect sequence, where one meditates on abiding in equanimity, free from attachment to some and aversion to others. There is also the equanimity expressed in the four immeasurables, which is to generate the wish for other beings to abide in equanimity, free from attachment to some and aversion to others; and then meditating 'may they abide in that state'.

Although *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* does not clearly mention this difference between these three types of equanimity other texts do.

The **equanimity of Four Immeasurables** is an aspiration for other beings to be free from attachment to some and having aversion to others.

The **equanimity in the seven-point cause and effect sequence** is contemplating on how one needs to oneself generate the mind of equanimity, where one is free from attachment to certain beings who one consider close, such as friends and relatives, free from aversion towards enemies and indifference towards those who are neutral. In this sequence one meditates on developing the mind of equanimity, so that one views all beings as being equal. When one is free from being attached to some, hostile towards others and indifferent to the rest, then one is able to meditate on how all beings have been equally kind to one; which is then followed by the rest of the seven-point technique for developing bodhicitta.

The **equanimity of exchanging self with others** is where one develops the mind that views all beings being equal in wanting happiness and not wanting to experience suffering. On top of that, as some texts indicate, one needs to add the extra thought that all beings are equal in needing to accomplish happiness and get rid of suffering. This makes it

more profound. The Tibetan word *drub*, which means to accomplish and *sel*, which means to get rid of, indicate that the particular thought generated here is how all sentient beings are equal in needing to accomplish happiness and need to get rid of suffering.

However in *Liberation Palm of Your Hand*, the explanation of equanimity to be developed at this stage is just as we want to be happy and free from suffering, likewise others also wish for happiness and want to be free from suffering. What is explained is that no further reason is needed either than just as one wishes for happiness and wants to be free from suffering, others also are in the same state. Therefore the equanimity to be developed is that all beings are equal in wanting happiness and not wanting to experience suffering.

(In *Geshe-la's own words*) Because of thinking, 'I, 'I 'I'; 'I like this.' 'I don't like that.' 'I like happiness,' then attachment comes! 'I don't like suffering', and then anger arises. Then we create all this bad karma. All the time it's 'I, 'I, 'I'.

The point is that we don't need any further reason to understand why we want happiness and don't want suffering. It comes about naturally. Because of the fact that there is instinctive grasping at the 'I', there is the natural inclination of wanting to have happiness and not wanting to experience any suffering. No other reason is needed.

Coming back to the main point about how to conduct the discussion, it is good to engage in a thorough discussion on this topic on equalising and exchanging oneself with others. Don't be timid about presenting whatever you understand, thinking, 'Oh, others already know that, so there is no point in me relating it'. Thinking like that is, in a sense, crippling.

For the discussion, you need not be timid thinking about whether what one is saying is correct or not. After all we are studying because of the very fact that we do not have a full understanding. So regardless of whether you think it is correct, share your understanding with others, because that is a way to reinforce what one has understood or heard. If you are not too sure don't feel discouraged but present the material in the way you understand it.

You will recall that at the very beginning of his great work, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* the great master Shantideva said, 'I am not about to present anything here that has not been presented in the past. Furthermore I don't have any skill in rhetoric or great composition, so what I am presenting here is merely as a way to acquaint it with my own mind, and it might be of some benefit to others'.

In saying 'as a way to acquaint my mind with it' Shantideva is indicating that the reason he is presenting his composition and sharing it with others, is that it is a way of further familiarising his mind with the material.

Before the discussion, do the usual prayers and meditation, spend about an hour in discussion, and then you can have an hour of gossip! Actually it is nice to have a friendly chat over a cup of tea with your Dharma friends.

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Edited Version

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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བློན་པོ་ལྷན་པའི་སྐུ་ལྷན་པོ།

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

23 October 2012

With the motivation we have just generated, we can now engage in our practice of meditation. [meditation]

Now we can generate the positive motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings, in order to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

The following verses, while quite easy to understand, are actually very profound and moving aspirations. As we go through them, we will come to understand that they are all different ways of dedicating all of the merit that has been accumulated from previous practices, to the welfare of all sentient beings. It is also good for us to adopt these aspirations on a personal level. Then, whenever we get an opportunity to engage in practice, we can make our dedications in a similar fashion. As presented here, these aspirations are dedications of one's merit for the welfare of other sentient beings—that they may experience every goodness and wellbeing that they wish for.

2.2.2. Causes for generating belief and faith in the limitless good qualities of buddhas

2.2.2.2. LIMITLESSNESS OF THE CAUSES BECAUSE OF ASPIRING TO HELP LIMITLESS BEINGS (CONT.)

Verse 473 reads:

*473 May embodied beings have a pleasant complexion,
Good physique, great splendour,
A pleasing appearance, freedom from disease,
Strength, and long life.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains this very meaningful verse as follows:

May all embodied beings have a pleasant complexion, a pleasant body with a good physique, great splendour, a pleasing appearance, freedom from disease, strength and long life. In brief may they be endowed with the seven qualities of a high status.

As explained here, this is an aspiration for all beings to be endowed with a good complexion, a good physique and so forth.

These aspirations are really very profound, as they are motivated by a completely unbiased compassionate mind, which embraces all beings. The way in which Nagarjuna presents these aspirations implicitly shows the greatness of Nagarjuna himself - someone endowed with great compassion and bodhicitta. From these aspirations we can gain further insight to his greatness.

For our own personal practice, we need to acknowledge that these aspirations are focused on all living beings without discrimination. They are not just for those following the Buddhist tradition, rather they encompass all beings regardless of whether they follow any particular religion or not. As these dedications are directed at all living beings,

whatever their status may be, no living being is left out. By familiarising our own mind with these aspirations, we will also be able to view others without discrimination, free from being attached to some and feeling aversion to others. We really need to familiarise our mind with those positive attitudes, so that we are able to incorporate them into every aspect of our life.

The seven qualities of a high status are:

1. A good family lineage
2. Attractive physical features
3. Long life
4. Being free from illness
5. Good fortune
6. Having wealth
7. Having wisdom

If we are endowed with these seven qualities then we have the perfect conditions for spiritual practice and so forth. So dedicating our merits for others to be endowed with these seven qualities is a very meaningful dedication. If we wonder how to conclude any practice, be it meditation or any other form of practice, or wonder how to dedicate our merits, then this is the very way. Generating such aspirations and dedicating the specific merits of our practice to these aspirations is the ultimate dedication. As explained in the teachings, when we dedicate our merit to the ultimate goals of other beings, then the practice carries a lot of weight.

The next verse reads:

*474 May all be skilled in the means [to extinguish suffering]
And have liberation from all suffering,
Inclination to the Three Jewels,
And the great wealth of Buddha's doctrine.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

May all embodied beings be skilled in the means to extinguish suffering, and have liberation from all suffering; have an inclination to the three jewels by taking refuge in the causal and resultant refuges; and great wealth, through possessing the ten powers of Buddha's doctrine.

May all embodied beings be skilled in the means to extinguish suffering corresponds to the verse in Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, where he explains that while beings do not wish for suffering, they run towards it, creating the causes for their own suffering. Although beings wish to experience happiness, they destroy their own causes for happiness like they would destroy an enemy. The same points are being made here. Even though beings may not wish for any kind of suffering, if they lack the skill and means to extinguish the causes for suffering, then they cannot free themselves from suffering. These are very significant points.

As explained in the teachings, shunning negativity and adopting virtue is the way to extinguish suffering. But if one lacks the knowledge of that, then one may in fact engage in the opposite, by adopting negativity and shunning virtue. That is why Shantideva says that even though we don't wish to experience suffering, it seems as if we are voluntarily adopting its causes. Realising that, one generates the aspiration, 'May all beings be free from lacking the skills and knowledge to extinguish suffering, and may they adopt those skills and thus be liberated from suffering'.

Following that, the commentary gives a presentation of the way to be free from suffering, which is to rely on both the

causal and resultant refuges. I have explained previously that *causal refuge* refers to the objects of refuge that are the causes for one to adopt the means for accumulating virtue and shunning negativity, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of enlightenment oneself. Buddha Shakyamuni is the causal Buddha refuge, and by relying on Buddha Shakyamuni, his teachings or doctrine, and the Sangha, we create causes to achieve the ultimate goal.

Resultant refuge refers to one's own future state of buddhahood, where, having engaged in the practice and being released from the bondage of samsara, one actually becomes a buddha oneself. We rely upon the causal refuge now, and when that refuge is established within our own mental continuum and we obtain all the realisations, we ourselves become the objects of refuge, which is the resultant refuge (in relation to oneself). Furthermore, one generates the aspiration for other beings to be endowed with *wealth possessing the ten powers of the Buddha's doctrine*. We covered those ten powers previously.

The next aspiration reads:

475 *May they be adorned with love, compassion,
joy,
Even-mindedness [devoid of] the afflictive
emotions,
Giving, ethics, patience, effort,
Concentration, and wisdom.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates the verse:

May they be adorned with love, compassion, joy, even-mindedness devoid of the afflictive emotions such as attachment and hatred, giving, ethics, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom.

The first two lines of the verse refer to the four immeasurables, which are, as explained briefly in the past:

1. Immeasurable love
2. Immeasurable compassion
3. Immeasurable joy
4. Immeasurable even-mindedness¹

The meditation on the four immeasurables, begins by generating the bodhicitta motivation. Then one meditates on immeasurable love for all beings, immeasurable compassion, immeasurable joy, followed by immeasurable equanimity, which specifically refers wishing all beings to be completely *devoid of the afflictive emotions*. Gyaltsab Je's commentary specifically describes these afflictive motivations as *attachment* and *hatred*, which, at a subtle level, refers to grasping at true, or inherent existence. When one is free from that subtle grasping at the inherent or true existence of phenomena, one is released from the bondage of attachment, hatred and anger. That is to be understood as being part of the meditation on the four immeasurables.

The second half of the verse presents the six perfections: *giving, ethics, patience, effort, concentration and wisdom*. These are not just an aspiration but a form of practice, from which we can derive our personal practice. As mentioned previously, in the meditation on the four immeasurables one can expand on the four immeasurables by contemplating each point of love, compassion and so forth. That can then be followed by meditating on the six perfections. When thinking about the necessity of developing generosity, contemplate the meaning of generosity as being a mind having the intention to give, which serves as an antidote to miserliness. So as a way to quell miserliness one meditates

on cultivating generosity and further engages in the practice of ethics and so forth. Incorporating this into one's meditation is a very meaningful personal practice.

The main point is that while one adopts these points as one's own personal practice, the aspiration is that others are adorned with qualities of the four immeasurables and the six perfections. Of all ornaments, the best is the ornament possessing these qualities. When one's mental continuum is adorned with these qualities then, regardless of external status, there is no further need for any lavish external adornments, ornaments and so forth. Even if one is deprived of external ornaments, one's inner qualities will suffice as the best ornament. It is essential that we reflect upon this. We don't need to spend too much time and energy worrying about external ornaments such as jewellery, earrings and so forth—it's much better to spend time and energy on the qualities listed in this verse.

As mentioned in the teachings, one of the best ornaments to be adorned with is the ornament of patience. This is incredibly profound advice. With a mind dominated by intense anger, one's face and appearance becomes completely distorted, and beautiful external ornaments cannot hide that unappealing appearance. Whereas when we are adorned with the practice of patience we look beautiful. These are significant points to keep in mind.

The next verse is:

476 *Completing the two collections [of merit and
wisdom],
May they have the brilliant marks and
beautiful features [even while on the path],
And may they cross without interruption
The ten inconceivable grounds.*

Again, Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates the meaning of the verse

Completing the two collections of merit and wisdom, may they have the brilliant marks and beautiful features even while on the path. And may, the hearers and so forth cross without interruption the ten inconceivable grounds.

Here, *the brilliant marks and beautiful features* refers to the fact that bodhisattvas on the tenth ground receive a similitude of the marks and signs of the Buddha. Even though they have not yet achieved the ultimate state of enlightenment, they are adorned with the similitude of the marks and signs of the Buddha, because they are very close to achieving that state. As you will recall, we covered thirty-two major marks of a buddha earlier in the text in quite a bit of detail. However the text didn't go into much detail about the eighty minor marks.

You will recall that I mentioned at the time that it would be good to become familiar with these signs and marks as they come up quite regularly in various aspirations and practices. They appear here, in the form of an aspiration, 'May they be endowed with these signs and marks'. As with any other practice, when the topic of signs or marks comes up (as it often does) it is worthwhile to have some recollection of what the signs refer to. Even if we are unable to remember all of the details, just having some grasp of what they are referring to will make our practice much more meaningful and leave positive imprints on our mind.

As indicated here, even the similitude of the signs and marks on the tenth ground is a result of having accumulated the two collections of merit and wisdom. This implies that without the collections of merit and wisdom, there is no

¹ Other translations use 'equanimity', rather than 'even-mindedness'.

² In the root text the agitation caused by delusions has been translated

possibility of obtaining these qualities, let alone obtaining enlightenment. So if we wish for realisations along the path, as well as the ultimate goal of enlightenment, we have to engage in the practices of accumulating merit and wisdom. We need to understand that point.

The next verse reads as follows:

477 *May I also be adorned completely
With those and all other good qualities,
Be freed from all defects,
And have superior love for all sentient beings.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je begins his explanation of the meaning of the verse thus:

Having dedicated the merits of one's virtues, and so forth, for the sake of others, one will also be adorned with all good qualities oneself....

When we dedicate all our merits to the welfare of other beings, we may feel that we are deprived of obtaining good qualities for ourselves. However the teachings emphasise that through the very act of the dedication of one's merits and virtues for the sake of others, one will naturally be adorned with all good qualities oneself. This is another significant point to note.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

...Thus the aspirations that they may transform into the means to serve others are: *May I also be adorned completely with those previously mentioned qualities, as well as all other good qualities, not mentioned here but in the sutras, such as to be freed from all defects, and have superior love for all sentient beings.*

In addition to the qualities that are specifically mentioned here, there are others mentioned in the sutras in great detail. The aspiration is to be adorned with these qualities as a way to further benefit sentient beings. It is actually very meaningful to recite and contemplate these verses. Merely reciting and thinking about the meaning of, 'May I also be adorned completely with those and all other qualities, be freed from all defects, and have superior love for all sentient beings', can have a very good effect on our mind. It can release any ill-will or negative thoughts, leading to the experience of a more settled and calmer mind. To that extent, it can be a really good practice. These lines also have another very important implication. They are a significant way of protecting one's mind from developing pride, and the like, that could arise with the prospect of being adorned by good qualities oneself.

As mentioned previously, these verses are not complex or hard to understand. But if we don't actually try to incorporate them into our practice, then they won't really serve much purpose for us. In order to derive some worthwhile meaning from them we need to try to incorporate them into our practice.

The next verse reads:

478 *May I perfect all the virtues
For which all sentient beings hope,
And may I always relieve
The sufferings of all embodied beings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates the verse, as it is quite easy to comprehend:

May I perfect all the virtues for which all sentient beings have placed hope in, and may I always relieve the sufferings of all embodied beings.

As I regularly emphasise, the main point is for us to try to incorporate into our daily life aspirations such as, 'May I in

every way be of benefit to other beings' and 'May I serve to fulfil all their hopes and whatever benefit I can render them', and 'May I not be a cause for any harm to other sentient beings'. These summarise the main points, and developing such aspirations is highly meaningful for our daily practice.

When we familiarise our mind with these positive attitudes and develop the determination to be of benefit in every way to others, and not to become a cause for the slightest harm to other sentient beings, then that, in itself, becomes our ultimate protection. If, wherever we go, and whatever we do, we remind ourselves of this, then that very awareness of these attitudes, in itself, protects us from engaging in negativity. If we are about to generate a negative mind which may hurt or harm others, then reminding ourselves of this attitude will protect our minds. The more we familiarise ourselves with these attitudes, the more they become part of our daily mindset and a means to conduct ourselves in a positive light.

479 *May those beings in all worlds
Who are distressed through fear
Become entirely fearless
Even through merely hearing my name.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

May those beings in all worlds who are distressed through fear, of enemies, evil spirits, bad transmigrations and the like, become entirely fearless even through merely hearing my name.

The enlightened beings constantly generated such aspirations while they were engaged in practising on the path. These aspirations became the impetus for their practice, and acquiring all of the qualities on the path. As a mark of those aspirations having been fulfilled, we pray to these enlightened beings in times of fear, or difficulty, or problems, and we recite their names. Then, as a mark of their aspirations having been fulfilled, we receive the positive effects of being released from fears and dangers and so forth. So it is very important that we familiarise our mind with these aspirations, because they can also become an impetus for us to engage in the practice of Dharma, thus serving and benefitting other sentient beings in the future.

There are many among you who have confided in me that, in times of difficulty and problems such as sickness, or when your mind is weighed down and a bit depressed, you rely wholeheartedly upon Tara and recite the praises or pray to her. You definitely feel the positive effects, as your mind is immediately released from these tensions, anxieties, fears and depression. That it is definitely an experience that can be gained from doing this practice wholeheartedly, and with strong faith.

Also, many of you would be familiar with the aspirations of each of the seven medicine buddhas, as presented in the medicine buddha practice. Each of these medicine buddhas have generated these aspirations and then fulfilled them. When we relate our practice to the seven medicine buddhas and pray to them, we gain great benefit from that. Of course, the medicine buddha practice that we do regularly is the short sadhana. There is an extensive sadhana where the extensive aspirations of each of the medicine buddhas are presented in great detail. These aspirations are incredibly profound and vast in scope in their wish to relieve the suffering of sentient beings.

We can conclude the evening with this verse:

480 *Through seeing or thinking of me or only
hearing my name*

*May beings attain great joy,
Naturalness free from error,
Definiteness toward complete enlightenment,*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Through seeing or thinking of me or only hearing my name,
may beings attain great joy, naturalness free from error of
the delusions, and definiteness toward irreversible
complete enlightenment.*

One needs to relate to this as being a mark of the fulfilment of our aspirations. Thinking, 'May the mere *seeing* or merely *thinking* of me', refers to being endowed with qualities that will serve as a means to relieve sentient beings of their problems, just as we rely on the enlightened beings now. Merely by thinking of them and hearing the name of enlightened beings such as Buddha Shakyamuni or Tara, or various different aspects of the enlightened beings, *beings attain great joy*.

Naturalness refers to the state of mind that is free from agitation caused by delusions.² When the mind is agitated by various delusions, then it is not in its natural calm state. A mind that is chaotic and in complete turmoil, is not a happy mind. Therefore, when we find ourselves in such a state of mind, we can remind ourselves that we have the means to overcome that state, and then focus our mind on enlightened beings such as Tara or the Buddha.

We already rely on them, we already know how to conduct the practices, and we know how to recite some of the prayers, salutations and verses of praise to these enlightened beings. It is not as though we are deprived of these means. But if we don't apply them, then we cannot expect our mind to be restored to a naturally calm and free state spontaneously, without any effort! We have to resort to the practices and methods that we already know. If we lacked the means and the methods, then of course we would have no choice and we would be immersed in a negative state of mind, which might escalate and become even worse. But because we have the knowledge, it just a matter of resorting to that and putting it into practice.

Enlightened beings are endowed with the qualities of all these aspirations. If they had not fulfilled these aspirations then who has? Who better could we find than the very enlightened beings with whom we now have a connection? They are the ones endowed with the fulfilment of these aspirations. These really significant points are being presented as a way for us to further develop the strong conviction that by relying on these enlightened beings, we will gain tremendous benefit.

You will recall that if, at the crucial moment just before passing on to the next life, you are able to recall an enlightened being as your very last thought, you will be freed from the lower realms in the immediate next life. Even just hearing the names of enlightened beings, such as the seven medicine buddhas, can help those who are not too familiar with them, or who are unable to generate the remembrance of the enlightened being. It is quite a common practice to recite the names of the medicine buddhas in the presence of someone who is about to pass away. This is said to be very powerful, as merely hearing the names of the buddhas can help them to have a good rebirth. This text is the very source that confirms this to be the case.

As mentioned previously, the extensive medicine buddha sadhana includes the qualities that each medicine buddha has obtained as a result of having made specific aspirations while they were training and developing their realisations on the path. It is these very aspirations that encouraged and motivated them to practice along the path, thus enabling them to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment. Their enlightened state is thus a result of those aspirations.

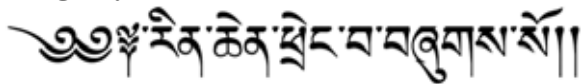
These aspirations of the medicine buddhas are very powerful in the sense that merely thinking about, or reciting, or even hearing their names is a very powerful means to protect the mind. As mentioned in the teachings, if one passes away while recalling the enlightened being (either through hearing the name or through their faith), then it is said that one will be protected from being born in the lower realms in the immediate next life. We may not be sure of the life beyond that, but one will definitely be protected from being born in the lower realms in the immediate next rebirth.

Trying to adopt a mind of Dharma, and gaining familiarity with it in this life through our practices and aspirations, is the basis for a good rebirth in the next life, where we can make further progress towards enlightenment. In each life, the familiarity gained in the previous life becomes the basis to further develop oneself. This is the practical way to view our journey towards enlightenment.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version
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² In the root text the agitation caused by delusions has been translated as 'error'.

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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

30 October 2012

Based on the motivation we generated during the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

The motivation that we can develop for the teaching is along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching, and put it into practice well.

Motivations such as this one, with its altruistic intention, are extremely important for our practice. They ensure that our motivation for doing the practice is not tainted with any self-interest, and that it will have the sole purpose of benefitting others.

2.2.2. Causes for generating belief and faith in the limitless good qualities of buddhas

2.2.2.2. LIMITLESSNESS OF THE CAUSES BECAUSE OF ASPIRING TO HELP LIMITLESS BEINGS (CONT.)

The remaining verses, as mentioned previously, are quite easy to comprehend and understand. Yet these verses of dedication at the end of the text also present some very significant points. For the last two years we have been engaged in a most wonderful deed! Many of you have attended the teachings without any break, and most have come quite regularly missing perhaps one or two sessions. I really acknowledge and appreciate that great interest and effort. It is really wonderful that you have put in so much effort!

The next verse reads:

481 *And the five clairvoyances
Throughout their continuum of lives.
May I always in all ways bring
Help and happiness to all sentient beings.*

As the verse is very clear Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates the verse:

*And the five clairvoyances, without degenerating
throughout their continuum of lives....*

The aspiration of the first two lines is that sentient beings obtain the clairvoyances *without degenerating throughout their continuum of lives*.

We listed the five clairvoyances just a few sessions ago, and they were also listed in a verse earlier in the text. The significance of making aspirations to obtain the five clairvoyances is that they encompass the optimum way to benefit other sentient beings. When one obtains clairvoyance, particularly the clairvoyance of knowing the minds of others, then one is better able to offer benefit and help. When teaching, for example, one will be able to present advice and instruction in accordance with the mental disposition of all those who are listening, thereby making the instruction a very appropriate and personal one. Without such clairvoyance, there might be some for whom the teaching is suitable, but it might not be agreeable to others. It is said that when the Buddha taught, everyone heard exactly what they needed to hear to help their own mind. This

quality of the Buddha's speech is particularly associated with his clairvoyance.

Although we may not have achieved clairvoyance, it is significant to make an attempt to know the general mindset of the listeners. As people come from different cultural backgrounds, teachings or instructions will be far more beneficial if they relate to their cultural norms and so forth. Even if we have not achieved clairvoyance yet, we can definitely find out the general mindset of people who are new to Buddhist concepts.

I am relating this now for the benefit of the Monday evening presenters in particular, as a way to remind you how it is necessary and highly beneficial to keep in mind that the people who attend on Monday evenings are mostly very new to Buddhism. They may be people who just have an interest in Buddhism and, as they are new to the philosophy of Buddhism, we cannot assume that they will understand or accept everything. The best way to relate to this is to recall one's own attitude and state of mind when one was a beginner to Buddhism; some concepts took a long time to grasp as they were not easy to immediately relate to. Try to remember your own experience when relating to new people. You don't need to feel the pressure that you have got to present everything that you have prepared from the text books. Adapt to the audience and proceed gradually, allowing enough time for people to digest and understand the information. This is really important to keep in mind.

On that note, several years ago, because of my experience of being in the West, I was asked to give some advice to geshe who had recently come to the West. The suggestions that I gave to these geshe, along with the organisers, Centre Directors, Spiritual Program Co-ordinators and so forth, was that you need to take a gradual approach. When a geshe comes into a new environment and new culture, it is best not to rush the geshe to teach traditional texts right away. It is important to give them time to relax a bit and become familiar with the culture, which also gives the geshe the time and space to get to know the mindset of the students.

Of course from their side, the geshe are filled (and indeed bubbling) with information about the Buddha's teachings. Because of their studies and so forth they have so much information to impart. However, if that is presented all at once and over-enthusiastically, it might not really suit the people who are listening, and may overwhelm them. It might even be difficult for the translator to translate complex philosophical subjects right away. At the time when I was making these suggestions, some may not have considered that advice as significant, but after a month or so I received a letter saying, "That advice you gave was really useful and very beneficial!" So it was accepted!

Although the material being presented may be profound, if it runs counter to the normal perceptions and attitudes of individuals, we cannot expect them to readily agree with it. We need to understand that we cannot expect people to completely accept something that is too different from their usual way of thinking, and which might even be confronting for them. With that in mind, we need to take a gentler approach, skilfully presenting material that may potentially be sensitive or overwhelming.

The main thing is that we need to generate a good motivation with the sole intention of benefitting the other. With a good intention, then, rather than showing our breadth of knowledge and so forth when presenting the material, we will naturally be able to tune in to the other, determine how much can be presented, and then adapt to

the situation. In that way, our own mind will be settled and we will be more relaxed and less anxious about whether or not we are presenting the material in an appropriate way. So, the main thing is to ensure that we have a really positive intention, and a real wish to benefit others.

As I have also shared with you in the past, several years ago I was presenting the disadvantages of attachment at one of the teachings here. During those days I stayed back and had tea in the dining room afterwards. While we were having tea one evening, a young lady approached me and asked, 'Geshe-la, does one really have to give up all attachments?' [Geshe-la laughs] I immediately knew where she was coming from, and that giving up all attachments would have been too hard for her to accept. So my response was, 'Small attachments are OK! Don't worry, you can keep your small attachments!' [laughter] She was actually very pleased to hear that and she brightened up; so that was the suitable thing to say to her at that time.

Accepting attachment as being the root of all our problems will come gradually, based also on one's own experiences with rocky relationships. Without having had personal experience of the disadvantages of attachment, it would be hard to accept the need to abandon all attachments. But with some life experience, coupled with explanations from the teachings on how attachment has a lot of short-comings and pitfalls, one begins to accept the teaching as being very true.

With respect to the last two lines of verse 481, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

...May I always in all ways bring help and happiness to all sentient beings.

I have often encouraged you to try to develop this aspiration on a daily basis. As I have often shared with you in the past, every morning it is good to develop, even just for a moment, an intention such as, 'In every possible way, may I only benefit others, and may I not harm them in any way'. Now I find support for that from Nagarjuna himself!

As I have mentioned to you previously, I cannot in any way claim that I am a great meditator or a great practitioner. I usually say, 'I'm an example of a geshe who has done rigorous study, but who did not gain knowledge of the profound teachings, and has not been able to put it into practice'. However throughout the course of the day I constantly try to familiarise my mind with this thought, 'In every possible way, may I only benefit others and may I not harm them in any way'. Even if it is just for a few moments I try to think about it in my regular activities, when I am drinking tea or having a meal, or going out and about, or even just sitting down, these are the points I try to bring to mind. Even though I'm not able to do great and profound practices, this is one thing I feel that I am capable of doing – taking the initiative to contemplate how best I may contribute to the welfare of sentient beings. It helps my mind and that's why I find it so useful and beneficial. So for me this is a substitute for bodhicitta; even though I may not be able to generate bodhicitta, this is the next best attitude that I can try to familiarise my mind with.

Contemplating these points means really thinking about each word, as each one carries a lot of weight and meaning. *May I*, relates to the fact that 'I will take the responsibility myself'; *always* indicates at all times, not just when I feel like it; *in all ways* means not just in some ways, but in every way *bring help and happiness to all sentient beings*. So when we think about it, each word contains real profundity. The personal benefit we gain from this is that every time we

contemplate these points and their meaning, it helps to reduce the self-cherishing in our own mind, which comes from grasping at the self. Each time self-cherishing is reduced, it brings about genuine calmness and peace and so, to that extent, it has great personal benefit.

Furthermore, the attitude encompassed by this line serves as a basis for all other forms of practice. For example, when one has a genuine attitude of wishing to benefit and bring happiness to other beings, then one is able to practise the great profound practices of the six perfections – generosity, ethics, patience and so forth. In fact all practices of adopting virtue and avoiding negativity are based on this attitude of wishing to benefit other sentient beings.

The next verse reads:

482 *May I always without harm
Simultaneously stop
All beings in all worlds
Who wish to commit ill deeds.*

Again Gyaltsab Je's commentary simply reiterates the verse:

*May I always without harm simultaneously stop all beings
in all worlds who wish to commit ill deeds.*

Having this aspiration implies that if one has the capacity, then one should prevent others from engaging in negative deeds without harming them. If one is unable to stop them, then, at the very least, one should not assist them to commit negative deeds. This is really a significant point.

If we help others to commit negative deeds, then we will also incur the negativity. Whereas if we assist those who are engaging in virtue, then naturally we will also gain benefit, which then becomes a means for us to accumulate virtue as well. This is a really significant point. All too often we find ourselves in a situation where someone is committing a negative deed, and we may feel that, because they are a friend, we have to help them and we don't consider the consequences of their actions. But essentially, we would be assisting them as a non-virtuous friend, i.e. as a friend who helps them to create more non-virtue, which would be a great disadvantage.

These are really important points we need to keep in mind. When we are about to engage in a virtuous deed, we need to ensure that the activity of that deed is completely virtuous. For example, some may come here with the intention of hearing the teachings and do some Dharma practice, but even though they come here often, they still engage in non-virtuous deeds with others. It's as if they are coming here to intentionally make plans for a non-virtuous activity! These are things that I often notice, and it is a pity.

The next verse is about making the aspirations for oneself to serve as a benefit for all sentient beings.

483 *May I always be an object of enjoyment
For all sentient beings according to their wish
And without interference, as are the earth,
Water, fire, wind, herbs, and wild forests.*

484ab *May I be as dear to sentient beings as their
own life,
And may they be even more dear to me.*

These are similar aspirations those presented in the tenth chapter of Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

May I always be an object of enjoyment for all sentient beings according to their wish, and without interference, as are the earth, water, fire, wind, herbs, and wild forests. By being their spiritual friend, may I be as dear to sentient

beings as their own life, and may they be even more dear to me.

These aspirations of wishing to benefit other sentient beings are incredibly bighearted. The analogy used here is just as the four elements, *earth, water etc., herbs and wild forests*, and all natural good resources in the environment spontaneously and naturally serve to fulfil the needs for sentient beings, may I also become a source of natural benefit for sentient beings. This is implying that each and every sentient being has the merit to be able to utilise the natural things of their habitat, such as trees, crops, and other vegetation for their own benefit. Using that as an analogy, one is making the aspiration, 'Just like these natural resources, may I also serve to fulfil the wishes of sentient beings'.

Helping others as *their spiritual friend* can also relate to being a good Dharma friend as well. Aspirations such as, 'Just as their own life is dear to them, may they be more dear to me than my own life' are highly evolved aspirations to generate as way to benefit sentient beings, and they are really significant points for us to keep in mind.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary presents the next two lines of the root text under the following heading:

Aspirations to exchange self with others

Exchanging self with others is in accordance with the practice we do here regularly. The relevant lines read:

*484cd May their ill deeds fructify for me,
And all my virtues fructify for them.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates the verse, reading:

Aspirations to exchange self with others:

May their ill deeds fructify for me, and all my virtues fructify for them.

Again, these aspirations for practice are highly evolved. While older students may already be familiar with it, we need to be careful not to misinterpret what the practice of exchanging self with others means. It does not refer to physically exchanging oneself with others, but to exchanging the attitude of self-cherishing with the attitude of cherishing others. That is the main point.

Our general attitude is one of cherishing ourselves while neglecting others, or doing so at their expense. When one trains in this practice of exchanging self with others, one is attempting to change the attitude of self-cherishing to an attitude of cherishing other beings. Basically the practice is to lessen self-interest and to hold on to the attitude of cherishing other beings, because other beings are more important.

Along with this presentation, with which you will be familiar, the 'equalising' of the practice refers to developing an attitude of how oneself and others are equal in wanting happiness, and equal in not wishing to experience any suffering. On top of that, as mentioned in our last session, one needs to generate the attitude that oneself and others are also equal in having to develop one's own happiness and eradicate one's own suffering. That is the more profound connotation of being equal.

When the text states *May their ill deeds fructify for me*, it is referring to the suffering of other beings. The ripening result (or fruition) of ill deeds is suffering. Therefore when one generates the aspiration, *May their ill deeds ripen on me*, one is actually developing the aspiration 'May I experience their suffering'. The next line, *And all my virtues fructify for them*, relates to the ripened result of virtue, which is

happiness. Thus the line means, 'May they experience the happiness of the virtues I have accumulated'. This is the main point that is being presented here.

Furthermore, one can also derive an understanding of the difference between ill deeds and the results of ill deeds. Ill deeds are the cause that leads to future suffering. So the consequences of committing an ill deed will be suffering in the future. The ripening result of an ill deed created in the past, is the suffering that is being experienced now, in the present. Likewise with virtue: virtue is a cause to bring about the consequence of happiness in the future, whereas the actual experience of happiness at any time is the ripening of the result of virtue that has been created in the past. This is another point that we need to bring to mind.

As I have presented previously, the practice of giving and taking is an incredibly profound practice when it is done properly and wholeheartedly. One has to imagine, from the depths of one's heart, taking in the suffering of other beings, while at the same time nurturing a deep and genuine heartfelt intention to experience suffering on behalf of other sentient beings. Likewise when one gives one's virtues to others, one needs to again develop that keen intention of giving away one's virtues to be experienced as the result of happiness for other beings.

As mentioned previously, *tong len* is not an easy practice and requires a lot of mental strength, which comes with continuous training. To be able to engage in this practice fully and significantly, an individual has to have trained and developed their mind to the point where they are happy to experience suffering and unhappy about experiencing pleasure or any fleeting joy and happiness. However, even as trainees, if we do it wholeheartedly with the best of intentions, it will be really meaningful. If one does that practice even for just a few moments, visualizing the suffering of other sentient beings gradually entering into one and giving one's own happiness to other sentient beings, this can be an extremely profound meditation practice.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je presents the next verse under this heading:

Aspirations to benefit sentient beings until the end of samsara

*485 As long as any sentient being
Anywhere has not been liberated,
May I remain [in the world] for the sake of that
being
Though I have attained highest enlightenment.*

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

Aspirations to benefit sentient beings until the end of samsara:

As long as any sentient being anywhere has not been liberated, and even if one being is still in samsara, may I remain in the world for the sake of that being, though I have attained highest enlightenment.

This incredibly profound and meaningful aspiration is the same as presented in Shantideva's text, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. The aspiration and dedication is that, 'For as long as there are sentient beings in the world in samsara, may I also remain to benefit them'.

This is also in line with the prayer that is presented in the *Guru Puja*: 'Even if I were to remain for eons in the fiery hells of *avici*, for the sake of even one sentient being, may I not be daunted, and may I continuously benefit other beings'. From this one tries to develop a keen determination, 'I will forgo

my own personal liberation and remain in samsara in order to benefit sentient beings’.

These aspirations are also very meaningful on a practical level. They can actually bring us some solace. We might feel somewhat daunted thinking, ‘With my state of mind, I might be in samsara for many, many more lifetimes or even eons!’ But, because of these aspirations, we know that there are bound to be bodhisattvas and enlightened beings who will also be in samsara to continually benefit and help us. So the prospect of being in samsara may not be quite so daunting, because we know that there are enlightened beings that have vowed to remain in samsara to continually help us. Then perhaps things become a little bit lighter and easier to deal with, because we know that we always have access to their compassion and help.

A significant point to be understood from this aspiration is that the word ‘world’ in *May I remain in the world for the sake of that being*, refers to the cyclic existence of samsara. This is indicating that the implicit aspiration is, ‘May I remain in the abode of samsara’. In other words, abiding in the material, physical world rather than actually being in samsara.

There is a difference between an individual who is in samsara, and who is merely in the abode of samsara. ‘Being in samsara’ implies that propelled by delusions and karma, one is reborn in samsara with a contaminated body. So existence in samsara with a contaminated body and contaminated states of mind is a result of delusions and karma. Thus one will naturally have to experience all the shortcomings of samsara—suffering, pain, samsaric pleasures and so forth. Moreover being in samsara is an uncontrollable existence.

Whereas the aspiration described here implies ‘to be in the abode of samsara’ meaning that out of aspirational prayers one comes to the physical plane of samsara, or the world, as a way to benefit sentient beings. But one is not actually of that world as one is not born into cyclic existence as a samsaric being influenced by delusion and karma.

An analogy would be that when we talk about Melbourne as a place, we are referring to this physical place here. Likewise, Australia as a country is a physical place. One may be in Melbourne, but not necessarily be a Melbournian and one may be in Australia, but not be Australian. Similarly, when one is not born with the condition of a contaminated body and contaminated states of mind, one can be in samsara and not be a samsaric being.

Another tangible and vivid example would be us setting in the gumpa right now. As ordinary beings, with contaminated bodies subject to the suffering propelled by the delusions and karma of the past, we are physically here in the gumpa. If we take the gumpa as an analogy of cyclic existence, then we are both in samsara with the contaminated aggregates, and in the abode of samsara at the same time.

The implication here is that if one is reborn in samsara out of aspirational prayers, then one is not confined by the limitations of the suffering and pleasures of samsara, because one is beyond that. But by being in the abode of samsara one can help and benefit the sentient beings that have a samsaric existence. This is a difference we need to understand. These aspirations are not just mere words, and they cannot be taken lightly. To make these aspirations with a deep and sincere feeling from the depths of one’s heart takes a lot of courage and profound understanding of the Dharma.

2.2.2.3. IMMEASURABILITY OF THE MERIT OF THOSE VIRTUES

Having explained the immeasurable causes of those virtues, the immeasurability of the merits of those virtues is now presented.

The next verse reads:

486 *If the merit of saying this
Had form, it would never fit
Into realms of worlds as numerous
As the sand grains of the Ganges.*

Gyaltsab Je’s explanation in his commentary reads:

If the merit of the previously mentioned seven branches and saying the dedications and aspirations had form, it would never fit into realms of worlds as numerous as the sand grains of the Ganges. Thus, by focusing on limitless sentient beings because limitless amount of merit is accumulated, one can develop the conviction that the qualities of the Buddha are limitless.

The merit that one gains from doing the practices that were presented earlier, such as the seven limb practice, and the dedications and aspirations that have been presented, is immeasurable. It is said that the realm of the world or the universe is be too small to accommodate the merit gained from those practices! By contemplating the immeasurable merit that is accumulated, one can develop the conviction that the results of that merit, which are the qualities of the enlightened beings, will also be immeasurable.

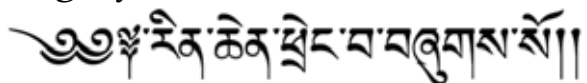
As I regularly emphasise, the significant point is that when we engage in dedications and practice, focusing on each and every sentient being, then because the number of sentient beings is limitless and we dedicate our merits to limitless sentient beings, it is naturally to be understood that the merit one accumulates will also be limitless. These are highly significant points of practice that we need to take as a personal instruction. Don’t take these aspirations lightly, but really take them to heart. Even as an aspiration, they are a profound practice because, if we practice sincerely and wholeheartedly, even for a short span of time, we can accumulate a great amount of merit. So these are very significant points of practice and instruction.

Because of the limitless amount of merit that is accumulated, one then develops a conviction that the qualities of the enlightened beings (the buddhas) are limitless. If we can follow the earlier part of the reasoning, then the second part of the reasoning naturally follows, which is that we can develop strong admiration and great faith in the enlightened beings, or buddhas, when we have insight into the great and limitless qualities with which the enlightened beings are endowed. This is how we need to understand the practice.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

6 November 2012

Based on the motivation we generated through the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

It would be good to generate a positive motivation for receiving the teaching—one which is based on overcoming all self-interest—and dedicate the purpose of the teaching to the sole benefit of other sentient beings: In order to liberate all beings from 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.

2.2.2. Causes for generating belief and faith in the limitless good qualities of buddhas (cont.)

2.2.2.4. SOURCES

The relevant verse reads:

487 *The Supramundane Victor said so,
And the reasoning is this:
[The limitlessness of the merit of] wishing to
help limitless realms
Of sentient beings is like [the limitlessness of
those beings].*

What is being established here is the limitless merit that one accumulates when one develops the intention to benefit all sentient beings. This is in line with the earlier explanations that the limitless qualities of the Buddha, as an enlightened being, are established through the causes being limitless. So if the cause for obtaining enlightenment is the limitless amount of merit that one has to accumulate, then the result will be limitless qualities.

We can see the very logical nature of the reasoning presented here. In order to develop the understanding that there are limitless qualities of the Buddha, we can refer to the limitless merit that has to be accumulated in order to achieve that enlightened state. From this we can derive the personal instruction that if one wishes to achieve the limitless qualities of a buddha, one has to accumulate a limitless amount of merit. Without establishing the cause, one cannot experience the result. So, if we wish to experience the result of limitless qualities of an enlightened being then we need to establish the causes by accumulating limitless merit. We need to see how this logical reasoning applies to our practice. As I regularly mention, the logic that is presented in the teachings is very profound, and we need to apply it to every circumstance in order to understand its deeper meaning in relation to our own practice.

While theistic traditions (those that believe that everything is created by God) have their own explanation of how to achieve salvation, we can safely assume that the earlier logical explanation is a unique Buddhist presentation. From the Buddhist perspective, the Buddha, who is a supreme enlightened being, did not just manifest out of nothing. Rather, at one time, the supreme enlightened being was just an ordinary person who, through engaging in various

practices and having entered the path, accumulated extensive merit, and gradually become an enlightened being. There is a very clear cause and effect sequence that leads to the ultimate state of enlightenment, which clearly shows that we too have the potential and opportunity to also achieve that state.

The understanding that we need to derive here is that, as mentioned previously, that in order to achieve the limitless qualities of a buddha one needs to accumulate limitless amount of merit. This will then give us the impetus to engage in the ways and means to accumulate such extensive merit. It can also remind us that whatever meagre practice we have done (perhaps some prostrations or making a few offerings) is very small in comparison to the limitless amount of merit one has to accumulate. Acquiring a limitless amount of merit implies hundreds of thousands of prostrations, hundreds of thousands of offerings, and practices of generosity and so forth. Through having engaged in these practices hundreds of thousands of times, one gradually accumulates a vast amount of merit over a long period of time, along with the realisations leading to enlightenment. Contemplating in this way will help us to overcome any sense of pride that we might develop as a result of doing some level of practice. We might feel, 'Oh, I've done quite a bit of practice' and a sense of pride may stem from that, which would be a hindrance to our practice. These are points we need to keep in mind.

On this note I recall an incident when, some years ago, I was staying overnight in Geelong. During dinner there was a man who kept glancing at me. Eventually he approached me and after greeting me he said, 'I personally don't follow any religion, but if I were to do so, it would definitely be Buddhism'. He went on to explain his reasons. 'From what I understand', he said, 'the Buddha was once a human being just like ourselves, who then achieved the great state he is in now, and I find that very appealing'. Actually, this man approached me three times—twice during dinner, and at breakfast on the following day. I felt that his fondness for Buddhism was based on really profound logic. I was astonished with his insight, based on the Buddha having once been an ordinary human being, which is exactly how it is explained in the teachings.

Buddha Shakyamuni was born a human being in a particular place, at a particular time, to a particular family and lineage. The history of the Buddha depicts him a human being just like us. He engaged in practices such as prolonged meditation and so forth as a human being which lead him to enlightenment.

I personally wonder if there other religions that base their teachings on an ordinary human being becoming a supreme being. In monotheistic traditions, it seems that there has always been the one and only predominant Supreme Being. Religions such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism agree that there is only one ultimate creator. I'm not too sure how Jesus Christ is regarded though. When I queried whether or not Jesus was God, I was told that Jesus is not considered to be God himself, but rather the son of God, in the form of a human. It seems that if Jesus was to be accepted as God, then there would have to be two Gods! Of course Jesus is a unique teacher in the Christian tradition, but there does seem to be this predicament about his divinity. Of course the Hindu tradition accepts of many manifestations of different gods, but most of the main religions believe in one ultimate creator.

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary on verse 487 thus:

There are citations and reasons to prove the limitless merit accumulated, for *the Supramundane Victor said so* in the Sutra Requested by the Householder Pechen, the King of Concentration Sutra and AkSayamati (Inexhaustible Intellect) Sutra and so forth....

Here Gyaltsab Je is citing sutras where the *Supramundane Victor*, i.e. the Buddha, mentioned that the limitless qualities possessed by the Buddha are a result of having accumulated limitless merit in the past. Essentially, the Buddha said, 'The qualities I possess now are not qualities I have always possessed from time immemorial. Rather they are results of having accumulated limitless amounts of merit in the past'.

Then Gyaltsab Je presents the reasoning:

...The reasoning is this: The limitless of the merit of wishing to help limitless realms of sentient beings is like the limitlessness of those beings....

This is a meticulously reasoned presentation. When we benefit sentient beings that are limitless in number, then because of the limitlessness of the object, one can logically assume that one will accumulate limitless amounts of merit. As I presented in earlier teachings, when meditating on extending love and compassion towards an infinite number of sentient beings, the merit one accumulates is also limitless and infinite. That is how we need to understand the value of focussing our practice on limitless sentient beings.

Again, we can reflect on how, as mentioned in the teachings, all sentient beings are unimaginably kind to us, because it is through these sentient beings that we are able to accumulate the vast amount of merit that becomes the cause for our own enlightenment. When we think about it in this way, we can see how all sentient beings are so extremely kind. As the teachings explain, we have to rely on sentient beings to accumulate merit in order to achieve our ultimate goals. So, we have no choice—whether we want to or not we have to depend and rely upon other sentient beings. As the Buddha himself mentioned, 'If you harm sentient beings, you are harming me, and if you benefit sentient beings, you are benefiting me'.

Then Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary on this verse thus:

...Otherwise, one would have to assert that there is no merit gained in benefiting one sentient being. But if there is, then it is logically proven that one accumulates limitless merit by benefiting limitless sentient beings.

These are very profound reasons which establish the source of the limitless amount of merit that one accumulates.

With these presentations, we can also develop a keen admiration for the author of the commentary as well. Using the profound explanations in the root text, Gyaltsab Rinpoche does not use too many more words to explain the meaning of the verses. Yet you can see how he has derived the essence of Nagarjuna's meaning with very systematic and logical reasoning. So we can really appreciate Gyaltsab Rinpoche's high level of knowledge and skill.

III. DEEDS UNDERTAKEN IN ORDER TO COMPLETE THE EXPOSITION¹

The third and final section of the text has five sub-divisions:

- A. Advice to generate inspiration for the practices and to observe the four practices
- B. Faults of not relying on a teacher and qualifications of a teacher
- C. The supreme fruit is achieved through excellent behaviour
- D. These doctrines are not just for monarchs but also for all others
- E. Exhorting the king to heed the advice

A. ADVICE TO GENERATE INSPIRATION FOR THE PRACTICES AND TO OBSERVE THE FOUR PRACTICES

This is sub-divided into two²:

1. Advice to generate aspiration
2. Advice to observe the following four practices

1. ADVICE TO GENERATE ASPIRATION

There are two verses relating to this heading, the first of which reads:

*488 These practices that I have explained
Briefly to you in this way
Should be as dear to you
As your body always is.*

As this is quite clear, Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates the verse:

The essence of these jewel-like practices derived from the oceans of teachings that I, Nagarjuna, have explained briefly to you, O king, in this way should be as dear to you as your body always is.

Nagarjuna is presenting the essence of the Buddha's teachings, which are the *jewel-like practices derived from the oceans of teachings*. Thus, Nagarjuna says, 'I have explained briefly to you, O king, that you should always hold this as dear to you as your own body or life'.

The next verse reads:

*489 Those who feel a dearness for the practices
Have in fact a dearness for their body.
If dearness [for the body] helps it,
The practices will do just that.*

Here Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary by posing a hypothetical question:

While it is reasonable to feel dearness for one's body, if one wonders why feel dearness for the Dharma to that extent? Those who feel dearness for the practices, out of necessity, have in fact dearness for their body....

Feeling dear about one's body should be for no other purpose than the purpose of the Dharma.

The commentary continues:

...That is because if one didn't feel dearness for the Dharma, there wouldn't be the slightest purpose in holding one's body dear....

If we don't hold the Dharma dear, then there would be no point in holding our body dear. The implication here is that we should hold our body dear for the purpose of practising the Dharma. We need to understand how our body in this present life is in fact extremely precious. The unique conditions we have with our present body are very rare and difficult to obtain, in particular the conditions that are

¹ The translation in the text is 'Conclusion' but this is a more accurate rendition of the Tibetan.

² These sub-divisions are not included in the text.

conductive for practising the Dharma. So, as explained extensively in other teachings, we have the potential to derive so much benefit if we utilise our human body in the right way i.e. for the Dharma. It would be an utter waste if we didn't utilise these unique conditions that we are experiencing now. Thus it is very reasonable to hold our body and life dear for the purpose of Dharma. However, one needs to be careful not to hold one's body dear out of attachment, which would be quite wrong.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

...If dearness for the body is a way to help it over many continuous lifetimes, then that which helps the body is Dharma, and the Dharma practices will do just that.

One needs to be very clear that holding the body dear is only in relation to a body being conducive to practising Dharma. This means that all the faculties are intact and that one has clear intelligence; in brief having all the qualities that are presented in the teachings. Since we have achieved the condition of having a precious human body, we need to hold our body dear in order to continually practise the Dharma in our future lives. So because the Dharma itself helps us to secure a precious human rebirth, it is logically presented here that we need to hold the Dharma dear.

As the commentary continues:

...Thus, it is reasonable to feel dearness for the Dharma if one feels dearness for the body, as you would want it to experience temporary and ultimate happiness, and the causes for obtaining that is the previously mentioned sixteen practices and listening to the profound.

The sixteen practices presented earlier in the text are based on ethics and so forth.³ Practising in this way, and listening to the profound teachings, is the way to secure a precious human rebirth over successive lives. So we need to really pay attention to this sound advice.

Other teachings explain the uniqueness of our precious human body, with its eight liberties and ten endowments, as being such a rare and precious condition. When we realise how precious our present conditions are, it becomes reasonable for us to hold this life dear. More importantly, we need to create the causes to obtain such good conditions again in the future. In accordance with the law of cause and effect we cannot expect to obtain these conditions in the future without acquiring the causes. It doesn't happen spontaneously or miraculously, so we have to create the causes. As explained here, the practice of Dharma is the ultimate cause to obtain a precious human life again.

To derive a broader understanding, we need to reflect upon the Lam Rim teachings. As you will recall, they explain the reasons for the rarity of our precious human rebirth in relation to the difficulty of creating the causes for obtaining that precious human rebirth, which comes down to the sixteen practices.

It takes so much effort and determination to engage in these practices, which don't come about naturally for us. We engage in these practices very rarely, let alone devoting all our time and energy to any of them. So this is a way to encourage us to actually engage in the practices and take them more seriously. When we hear these teachings, we might think 'Oh yeah. OK. The teachings make sense' and we are able to list the various causes and conditions in relation to our precious human life. But to what extent do

they actually move our mind so that we take them seriously and engage in the practice of Dharma? If we find that we are not very enthusiastic about the practice of Dharma, then we need to take what has been presented here to heart, as a way to encourage ourselves to practise Dharma. Ultimately, though, all of these explanations are ways to encourage us to engage in the practice of Dharma.

2. ADVICE TO OBSERVE THE FOLLOWING FOUR PRACTICES

As a way to encourage the king to engage in these practices, the next verse reads:

490 *Therefore pay heed to the [Dharma] practices as you do to yourself.*

Pay heed to achievement as you do to the [Dharma] practices.

Pay heed to wisdom as you do to achievement.

Pay heed to the wise as you do to wisdom.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary adds this further explanation:

Because the feelings of dearness for one's body and the Dharma are similar, *therefore pay heed to and cherish the [Dharma] practices as you do to yourself.* As that is dependent on achieving the Dharma, *pay heed to achievement as you do to the [Dharma] practices.* As achievement is dependent on acquiring the wisdom, *pay heed to wisdom as you do to achievement.* As acquiring wisdom is dependent on relying on a virtuous friend, *pay heed to the wise as you do to wisdom.* In this way train in the four Dharmas.

This is a meticulously explanation of how each practice is dependent on the previous one.

- ∞ We need to *pay heed to the Dharma practices*, just as we pay heed to ourselves.
- ∞ The Dharma practices are dependent on achieving the Dharma and therefore you need to pay heed to *achieving the Dharma as you do with Dharma practices.*
- ∞ Achieving the Dharma is dependent on *acquiring wisdom.* This implies that without having wisdom, we cannot acquire any achievements.
- ∞ Acquiring wisdom is dependent on relying on *a virtuous friend*, so we need to pay heed to that as well. Just as we pay heed to wisdom, we need to pay heed to a virtuous friend.

These are really significant points! If we wish to sincerely achieve results from our practice of Dharma we need to apply these four practices. Without paying heed to these practices, how could we possibly claim to be Dharma practitioners? If we spend our time and energy paying heed to the objects of attachment instead, then how could we possibly be paying heed to the Dharma? This is how we need to derive the essence of these instructions. We need to see how each practice is dependent on the other, so we must pay heed to all of them equally.

This is a meticulously explanation of how each of the practices is dependent on an earlier one. So having concluded that holding one's body dear is similar to holding the Dharma dear, then just as one cherishes oneself, one needs to cherish the Dharma practices. Because the Dharma practices are dependent on achieving the Dharma, one needs to pay heed to that achievement; as achieving the Dharma is dependent on acquiring wisdom, we need to pay heed to wisdom; as acquiring wisdom is dependent on relying on a spiritual friend, we need to pay heed to one's spiritual friend.

³ Beginning on the 9 March 2010

B. FAULTS OF NOT RELYING ON A TEACHER AND QUALIFICATIONS OF A TEACHER

The commentary breaks this down into two sub-headings:

1. The faults of not relying on a teacher
2. The qualities of a teacher

1. THE FAULTS OF NOT RELYING ON A TEACHER

As the next verse reads:

491 *Those who have qualms that it would be bad for themselves
[If they relied] on one who has purity, love, and intelligence
As well as helpful and appropriate speech,
Cause their own interests to be destroyed.*

We need to understand that there is a difference between the fault of not relying on a teacher, and the faults of disparaging a teacher, after having relied on one, which are clearly presented in the Lam Rim teachings.

The fault of not relying on a teacher refers to not understanding and not paying heed to the practices at all! If we do not receive the proper explanations and are not exhorted in the correct way to engage in the Dharma, we will not be motivated to engage in practice.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins:

Those who have qualms that it would be bad for themselves...

What is missing in the use of the word 'qualms' is the connotation of fear. The commentary specifically uses the word 'fear', so in this context, the fear of relying on such a teacher is similar to the fear generated by those who are not qualified recipients for hearing, for example, the teachings on emptiness. It would be incorrect to impart teachings on emptiness to listeners who are not proper recipients, because it could generate fear, which could result in having wrong views. A suitable recipient of the teachings on emptiness would be someone whose mind is amenable to receiving that level of teaching. Similarly, there might be those who fear relying on a spiritual teacher, and who are uncertain about whether it will be beneficial, because they do not really understand the significance of relying on a teacher. This is also why I remind the Monday evening meditation leaders to be mindful and careful in how they present the Dharma to new students.

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the qualities of such teachers:

...if they relied on one who has: purity free from the concerns of gain and respect or from wrongdoings; love for the disciples and the intelligence of being learned; as well as having non-obstructive knowledge of the Dharma...

Here, *purity* refers to being free from concerns of gain and respect or from wrongdoings, and *non-obstructive knowledge of the Dharma* refers to imparting the Dharma with the subtlest meanings, with no obstructions.

The commentary continues:

...and being courageously helpful with appropriate speech that instructs disciples with what is right and wrong; cause their own interests to be destroyed....

Appropriate speech refers to having the ability to impart specific instructions to the disciples, pointing out what is right and what is wrong; what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded.

In conclusion, Gyaltsab Je says:

...Thus, you must respectfully rely on a qualified virtuous friend [spiritual guide].

If you were to have qualms or fears about having to rely on a spiritual friend, then, as it mentions here, that *will destroy one's own interests* or goodness. So we need to rely on a teacher, otherwise certain faults will occur.

2. THE QUALITIES OF A TEACHER

The verse relating to this reads as follows:

492 *You should know in brief
The qualifications of spiritual guides.
If you are taught by those knowing contentment
And having compassion and ethics,*

493ab *As well as wisdom that can drive out your afflictive emotions,
You should realise [what they teach] and respect them.*

In explaining the meaning of the verse Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary with a rhetorical question:

If asked what kind of a virtuous friend does one need to rely upon? *You should know in brief* the five qualifications of spiritual guides. If you are taught by those 1) *knowing contentment*, 2) *not having desire for gain and respect* and 3) *having compassion* and 4) *ethics, as well as* 5) *wisdom, that can drive out your afflictive emotions*; thus when they give you instructions, *you should realise what they teach and respect them.*

A spiritual guide should have these five qualities:

1. Knowing contentment
2. Not having desire for gain and respect
3. Having compassion
4. Ethics
5. Having the wisdom of being able to dispel the afflictions in the disciple's mind

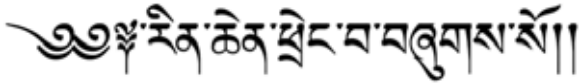
We can conclude this evening by reciting Lama Tsong Khapa's *Praise to Dependent Arising*, because today is an auspicious day on the Buddha's life. When the Buddha's mother passed away, she was reborn in the god-realm called the Gods of the Thirty-Three. This day celebrates the occasion when the Buddha ascended to that god-realm to give teachings to his mother. Having given the teachings, the Buddha then descended back to earth near Lucknow in eastern India.

The *White Umbrella Deity Sutra* lists the teachings that were given in the realm of the Gods of the Thirty-Three, and the sutra called *Pinnacle of the Victory Banner*, which is said to be the other teaching the Buddha gave in that realm. I have given these explanations in the past.

*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

13 November 2012

Based on the motivation that we have just generated in reciting the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [Meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of all mother 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.

B. FAULTS OF NOT RELYING ON A TEACHER AND QUALIFICATIONS OF A TEACHER

2. THE QUALITIES OF A TEACHER (CONT.)

492 *You should know in brief
The qualifications of spiritual guides.
If you are taught by those knowing
contentment
And having compassion and ethics,*

493ab *As well as wisdom that can drive out your
afflictive emotions,
You should realise [what they teach] and
respect them.*

Gyaltsab's commentary on these lines reads:

If asked: What kind of a virtuous friend does one need to rely upon? *You should know in brief* the five qualifications of spiritual guides. *If you are taught by* those 1) *knowing contentment*, 2) not having desire for gain and respect and 3) *having compassion* and 4) *ethics, as well as* 5) *wisdom, that can drive out your afflictive emotions*. Thus when they give you instructions, *you should realise* what they teach and respect them. *You will attain the supreme achievement of buddhahood, by following this excellent system* presented below.

These lines explicitly present the qualities of a spiritual guide. In addition to the qualities mentioned in the root text, Gyaltsab Je adds having less desire for gain and respect. In both the root text and the commentary, *knowing contentment* is the first of the necessary qualities, which is, of course, based on having less desire. This quality of having contentment is very important for a spiritual guide, because if they lack contentment themselves then how could they possibly encourage their followers and disciples to have less contentment. So this is a really important quality for a spiritual guide to possess. Having *ethics* is also extremely important; if the teacher is not ethical themselves, then it is very hard to encourage others to observe ethics. It is the same with *compassion*; it is essential to have compassion in teaching and imparting the Dharma.

Wisdom that can drive out your afflictive emotions, particularly relates to the wisdom realising emptiness.

The view of emptiness is the ultimate antidote for removing delusions from the minds of sentient beings, so it is essential that a spiritual guide has an unmistakable understanding of emptiness. Such wisdom is required in order to know the minds of the disciples, and how to present it unmistakably, in order to remove ignorance from the disciples' minds.

Here afflictive emotions particularly relates to the fundamental delusion, which is grasping at the self. That which serves as the optimum antidote for overcoming grasping at the self is the realisation of selflessness or emptiness. Therefore, having a profound understanding and, at best, a realisation of emptiness is essential. Knowing contentment, having compassion and ethics compromise the qualities of method, while realising selflessness or emptiness is the quality of wisdom. So in brief this is saying that the qualities of a spiritual guide are based on possessing both method and wisdom, which is essential in order to impart the unmistakable teachings to the disciples.

This section concludes by saying, '*You should realise* the qualities of the spiritual guide and having doing so, generate great respect for them'. Here, the connotation of respect is to abide by the advice and instructions given to help develop the mind. Thus it is essential to rely upon the teacher who has these qualities.

C. THE SUPREME FRUIT IS ACHIEVED THROUGH EXCELLENT BEHAVIOUR

We can see what will be explained in this section just from the outline. There is no other way to achieve a supreme fruit or the ultimate result than adopting faultless and excellent behaviour. So this very clearly presents the cause and effect sequence of Dharma practice.

This section is sub-divided into two:

1. Achieving the supreme fruit
2. Advice to perform the special deeds

1. ACHIEVING THE SUPREME FRUIT

The last two lines of verse 493 relate to this outline:

493cd *You will attain the supreme achievement
By following this excellent system:*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

You will attain the supreme achievement of buddhahood, by following this excellent system presented below.

This is saying that the excellent *supreme fruit of buddhahood* is achieved *by following the excellent system* presented here.

This sub-heading is further divided into three:

- 2.1. Extensive mode of behaviour
- 2.2. Condensed mode of behaviour
- 2.3. Very condensed mode of behaviour

2.1. Extensive mode of behaviour

494 *Speak the truth, speak gently to sentient beings.
Be of pleasant nature, compelling.
Be politic, do not wish to defame,
Be independent, and speak well.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary describes the qualities of proper speech in more detail:

To all sentient beings, speak the truth, speak gently and of pleasant nature, compelling i.e. words that are the cause for merit.

Proper speech means speaking *the truth*, and speaking *gently* with a *pleasant nature*, using words that have a soothing effect, and which are *compelling*. Proper speech uses *words that are the cause for merit*, implying that any speech with a basis of non-virtue is to be avoided. So here we can clearly see that any kind of gossip that involves criticising or ridiculing others and so forth, is non-virtuous speech, and is to be avoided. This is a very meticulous explanation of how our speech needs to become a cause for accumulating merit.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Be politic in presenting the Dharma to followers, i.e. that which is difficult to find, majestic and profound should be presented gradually, in stages, to those who are disciplined.

The literal meaning of the Tibetan word translated here as 'politic' has the connotation of being that which is profound. So the meaning here is ensuring that the presentation of the Dharma reflects its profundity. The commentary also explains that the Dharma should be presented in the proper sequence to those who are proper recipients for the Dharma. Hence the teachings are to be presented in a systematic and sequential way in order to guide the disciples.

Next, the commentary explains:

Do not wish to defame those who may be inferior.

This again, is very profound advice that we need to take to heart.

The commentary further explains:

When the senses engage in objects, don't allow them to be under the dominance of the delusions but rather *be independent*...

This is a very significant point that I regularly emphasise. If we train our mind in a formal way through the practice of meditation, in not allowing it to be influenced by the sense objects, then one will naturally become less and less prone to the influence of the desirous objects of the senses.

Gyaltsab Je then concludes his commentary on this verse with:

...and speak well, i.e. words that are not harsh.

Speak well, means using *words that are not harsh*.

So it is quite obvious that this verse relates particularly to having correct or proper speech.

The next verse under this outline reads:

495 *Be well disciplined, contained, generous, Magnificent, of peaceful mind, Not excitable, not procrastinating, Not deceitful, but amiable*

As the commentary thus explains the meaning of this verse:

Be well-disciplined, contained—free from being resentful—*generous, magnificent, of peaceful mind, not excitable* and steady, free from the laziness of

procrastinating, not being deceitful but amiable. Some commentaries explain that this verse refers to being firm in one's promises.

These qualities are quite easy to relate to. Having a *peaceful mind*, indicates that one needs to have a calm mind. *Not being excitable* refers to having a steady mind. Being *free from the laziness of procrastinating* is obvious. We need to be very mindful to develop each of these qualities, which all relate to observing our own states of mind.

2.2. Condensed mode of behaviour

496 *Be gentle like a full moon.
Be lustrous like the sun in autumn.
Be deep like the ocean.
Be firm like Mount Meru.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins:

Be gentle and noble like a full moon.

The full moon has a soothing quality, and using it as an analogy indicates that we need to adopt the qualities of being gentle and noble. When the *moon is full* it is at its most fully developed phase, unlike the partial phases which is not fully developed. So the full moon represents a fully developed state of mind in relation to kindness and so forth. When such qualities are fully developed then one naturally gains nobility.

The commentary then reiterates the verse:

Be lustrous like the sun in autumn.

The *sun in autumn* has rays that have the most comfortable temperature, and the analogy here is to *be lustrous like the sun in autumn*.

The commentary continues:

Don't let others disturb you and let your mind *be deep like the ocean*.

The analogy of the *ocean* is used because the depths of the ocean are not easily disturbed by external elements. It is used as an analogy to show how we need to adopt a state of mind that is not easily disturbed or influenced by others.

Gyaltsab Je then exhorts us:

Don't let your qualities decline, but *be firm like Mount Meru*.

We need to firmly hold onto the qualities we have acquired and adopted, and not be easily influenced by external distractions and so forth. Adopting such a mind is analogous to Mount Meru, the king of mountains, which cannot be shaken by external factors.

These are really very significant points of advice that we must to try to adopt. They remind us to avoid being easily influenced by others.

2.3. Very condensed mode of behaviour

The next verse reads:

497 *Freed from all defects
And adorned with all good qualities,
Become a sustenance for all sentient beings
And become omniscient.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with:

Freed from all defects such as attachments and so forth, and adorned with all good qualities such as faith...

Even though not specifically mentioned here, *such as faith* refers to the seven qualities of an arya, or noble being, which are:

1. Faith
2. Hearing (many teachings)
3. Ethics
4. Giving
5. Knowing shame
6. Knowing embarrassment
7. Having wisdom.

These seven qualities are listed many times in other teachings. At the end of *The Jewel Rosary of the Bodhisattvas*, which I have taught in the past, there is a list of these seven qualities of an arya or noble being. Towards the end of this text there is some very pungent advice: 'When you are in a gathering, watch your speech; when you are alone, watch your mind'.

It is essential to check our speech when we are with others. As you know, when we engage in gossip and so forth, then that is when we are most likely to use speech that can be harmful to others. So, as mentioned earlier, we need to be mindful of our conduct in respect of the qualities of our speech. Likewise, when we are alone we have to watch our mind, otherwise we can become consumed with all sorts of negative states of mind. This is really pungent advice.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

...become sustenance, bringing benefit and happiness for all sentient beings, and become omniscient.

Become sustenance, bringing benefit and happiness for all sentient beings, and become omniscient, is a very significant point for contemplation and practice. Even as an aspiration it is incredibly meaningful and powerful, and so it is a very significant point. This concludes the very condensed advice.

D. THESE DOCTRINES ARE NOT JUST FOR MONARCHS BUT ALSO FOR ALL OTHERS

The verse which relates to this reads as follows:

498 *These doctrines were not just taught
Only for monarchs
But were taught with a wish to help
Other sentient beings as befits them.*

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

Except for some exclusive cautionary advice to the king, *this doctrine* – the Precious Garland – *was not just taught only for monarchs but was taught with a wish to help other sentient beings*, monastics as well as householders, *as befits them*, so that they may also become enthusiastic with training in the paths to obtain high status and definite goodness.

Nagarjuna is renowned as having been exceptionally kind in the way he presented the Buddhist teachings, in such a manner that they benefit a whole range of different beings. Nagarjuna's collected works include treatises on medicine, the sciences, logic and mathematics. So we can see how he covered a range of topics that benefit so many

people in so many different ways. He truly was incomparably kind!

Nagarjuna explicitly mentions that, except for some *cautionary advice specifically for the king* (relating to his status as a monarch, and how he should exercise his powers properly), the main body of the treatise is not just for *monastics* but also for *householders* or lay people. It was composed with an intention to benefit all, that *they may also become enthusiastic with training in the paths to obtain high status and definite goodness*.

Many of the presentations within this text, specifically, the presentations of how accumulating a particular set of causes will bring about a particular type of consequence or a result, can be classified as part of Nagarjuna's scientific works. That is because they use the same methodology as science, a methodology based on logic. Nagarjuna applies the cause and effect logic used in relation to external factors to inner factors in a very systematic and logical way. Indeed, it is said that many consider the Buddhist teachings to be more like a science than a religion, because it is based on logic and systematic explanations.

E. EXHORTING THE KING TO HEED THE ADVICE

This is sub-divided into two:

1. Suitability of continuously thinking of the welfare of others
2. Suitability of adopting virtues

1. SUITABILITY OF CONTINUOUSLY THINKING OF THE WELFARE OF OTHERS

The verse relating to this heading reads:

499 *O King, it would be right for you
Each day to think about this advice
So that you and others may achieve
Complete and perfect enlightenment.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of the meaning of this verse reads:

O King, it would be right for you to think about this advice, on how to obtain high status and definite goodness *each day, so that you and others may achieve complete and perfect enlightenment*.

Here the advice to the king is that *it would be right for you to think about this advice each day*. The king is being exhorted to keep in mind all the advice that was presented earlier, and to think about it, not just occasionally, but each and every day. In summary the advice is about how to *obtain high status and definite goodness*. "Contemplating these points each day also has the ultimate purpose for you, *O king*, as well as those you may be guiding, or to whom you are imparting knowledge, *so that you and others may achieve complete and perfect enlightenment*". This is most compassionate and profound advice.

At a personal level this advice is to remind ourselves that whenever we attempt to engage in practice, we should commence with a proper motivation, i.e. we are not doing this practice just for ourselves, but for the benefit of all sentient beings. This motivation is followed by the practice itself and then the dedication at the end, where one dedicates the practice and virtues to the ultimate goal

of benefitting others. This is how to conduct our daily practice.

Nagarjuna is exhorting us to use every possible moment to contemplate how to achieve high status and definite goodness, which basically relates to a virtuous state of mind. Furthermore, we need to adopt a mind of virtue; at every opportunity, we have to try to remind ourselves of the need to have a virtuous mind. Then, having reminded ourselves of that, we need to recall that being in a virtuous frame of mind is for the sake of our own ultimate goodness as well as for other sentient beings. This is a very meticulous presentation. Nothing is omitted, and every aspect of the Buddha's teaching is included. So there can be no doubts about who this teaching is intended for – it is for everyone.

The essential point we can derive from this explanation is that engaging in practice occasionally doesn't bring about the desired result. We need to maintain a continuous form of practice, rather than having bursts of engagement in practice followed by none at all. It is much more practical to adopt a practice one is able to maintain, for it's a continuous stream of practice that will lead us to the ultimate goal.

2. SUITABILITY OF ADOPTING VIRTUES

The last verse of the text reads:

500 *For the sake of enlightenment aspirants should always apply themselves to ethics, supreme respect for teachers, patience, non-jealousy, non-miserliness, Endowment with the wealth of altruism without hope for reward, helping the destitute, Remaining with supreme people, leaving the non-supreme, and thoroughly maintaining the doctrine.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation opens with the line:

Aspirants of the Dharma should always apply themselves.

This is followed by a presentation of what is to be applied. If we consider ourselves Dharma practitioners, then we can check how much of the following we actually apply to our daily life.

Gyaltsab Je begins with a question:

If asked: For what purpose? *For the sake of enlightenment.*

This is explaining the motivation, or the intended purpose of the practice.

The commentary continues:

If asked: What should they apply themselves to? To abandoning the seven non-virtues and accompanying virtues such as observing *ethics*; ...

Abandoning the *seven non-virtues* refers to the first seven of the ten non-virtuous deeds, which are: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle gossip. The *accompanying virtues* include avoiding the three non-virtuous states of mind. These are said to be extremely important practices, which serve as a basis for our ethics, as well as other practices. How much do we avoid the seven non-virtues, and how much do we practice virtue? In a systematic way Nagarjuna is

advising us how we need to conduct ourselves as aspirants of the Dharma. First he indicates that we should always apply ourselves, and *if asked, 'For what purpose?'*, the answer is *for the sake of enlightenment*.

The commentary continues:

...having supreme respect for teachers which is the root of the path...

This indicates that relying on a proper spiritual guide is an essential basis for engaging in following the path. The Lam Rim teachings begin by explaining how relying on a spiritual guide is the root of the path, followed by an explanation of how to rely on the spiritual guide.

The next virtue is:

...patience...

Patience is, as regularly mentioned, most essential for our practice. As presented in the teachings, without patience one is not able to maintain one's Dharma practice, so an essential element of one's Dharma practice is patience. As I regularly remind you, the definition of patience is not allowing the mind to become disturbed in the face of suffering or any harm.

The commentary continues:

...non-jealousy with the excellences of others...

In relation to the *excellence of others*, or the good things they have acquired, one needs to adopt a mind of refraining from *jealousy*. Jealousy is, as I also remind you regularly, one of the factors that brings us a lot of mental pain and which makes us feel very uncomfortable and unhappy. So to protect ourselves from this unhappy and painful state, we need to overcome jealousy.

The next virtue is:

...non-miserliness...

Non-miserliness relates to one's own wealth and excellences. If one does not avoid miserliness, that too can cause uneasiness and mental pain, resulting in an unhappy state of mind.

So in relation to the excellences of others, one has to adopt non-jealousy, and in relation to one's own wealth, one has to practice non-miserliness.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

...endowment with wealth of altruism; and without hope for reward helping the destitute who lack food and clothing...

This is very significant advice. We need to use the *wealth of altruism* – helping others *without hope for reward*. In other words, we should help others without any ulterior motive, being free from self-centredness and self-interest. *Helping the destitute, who lack food and clothing* relates to those who are destitute from the material point of view. Helping those who are in such an impoverished state is really quite significant.

As the commentary continues:

...remaining with supreme people even if they are not spiritual teachers and masters; leaving or discarding non-supreme people...

In contrast to supreme beings, *non-supreme people* have a negative influence on others. Another term we use for people who influence us to engage in non-virtuous acts or

deeds is negative friends. Basically they are friends who influence us to engage in negativity.

It seems that we don't have an exact English equivalent for the Tibetan word *digpa* which is usually translated as negative karma, unwholesome deeds or negative deeds. But there is a difference between negativity and negative karma.

[There was a general discussion of a variety of possible terms. Sin was suggested but some felt it had too many overtones. Also if we replaced 'negativity' with 'sin' then we would be talking about sinful friends, which may have a connotation that they are evil. Geshe-la commented that if non-virtue is the opposite of virtue, then just being the opposite of virtue does not necessarily mean that it is negative or bad. If negative is the opposite of something how can we relate it to negative karma. He felt that 'bad friends' worked but wasn't sure about 'negative friends'.]

There is quote from the sutras that summarises the Buddha's teaching:

Do not commit any evil (*digpa*),
Engage in all virtue,
Subdue one's mind,
This is the teaching of the Buddha.

In any case the advice here to *discard non-supreme people* refers to friends that influence you to engage in negativity and non-virtue. Thus 'non-supreme' relates to bad friends who mislead you. 'Non-supreme' can also have the connotation of just being the opposite of 'supreme'. In this case, as I'm non-supreme, do you want to discard me as well? *[laughter]*. A virtuous friend is someone who is virtuous and who encourages others to adopt virtue and engage in good deeds. A non-virtuous friend is one who misleads you and influences you to adopt unwholesome deeds.

However, one needs to be mindful not to misinterpret this advice to mean that you must give up compassion for negative friends. It does not indicate that one should abandon love and compassion for those evil or non-virtuous beings. In fact, these beings who are completely under the influence of delusions are the very beings that are the objects of our compassion!

We know from our own experience that if we see someone who is engaging in evil and unwholesome deeds, we feel, 'How unfortunate that they are engaging in such negative deeds' because we know the grave consequences they will have to experience. So based on that, we must feel great love and compassion for them, rather than feeling hostile. So the advice is to avoid bad friends so we will not be influenced by them, but not to abandon love and compassion for them.

The main point here is not to adopt the conduct of non-virtuous friends; in other words we need to avoid negative and unwholesome influences. There are many stories of non-drinkers who go out with those who drink all the time, and who end up drinking as well. And once it becomes a habit it is very hard to overcome. There are many other instances where one can be influenced by the negative, unwholesome actions of others. If one associates with these people too frequently then it is possible that we will be influenced by their ill-behaviour, so we need to protect ourselves from that. If we find ourselves

becoming acquainted with those who are engaging in unwholesome, negative deeds, and see ourselves being influenced by these actions and deeds then we are falling short in protecting ourselves. So it is best if, from the very outset, we try to protect ourselves.

The commentary concludes:

...in brief, thoroughly maintaining the doctrine of the buddhas.

The text concludes with:

The fifth chapter of the Precious Garland, An Indication of the Bodhisattva Deeds, is finished.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary ends:

The fifth chapter of the Precious Garland of Advice for a King, an Indication of the Bodhisattva Deeds, a teaching on the conduct of all monastics and householders, is finished.

While the actual body of the text is completed, there is a fourth subdivision included in the commentary, which we can complete next week.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བློན་པོ་ལྷན་པའི་སྐུ་མཆོག་གི་སྐུ་མཆོག་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

20 November 2012

Based on the motivation we have generated during the refuge prayer, we can now engage in the practice of meditation.

It is good to know the difference between generating a motivation and acting upon an already generated motivation. One implication of generating a proper motivation is the intent to transform one's mind from otherwise a state of mind that is influenced by delusions or negative emotions, into a positive state of mind. This also implies that we need to avoid having any self-interest in our intention to engage in virtuous activity. Even though one is inclined to engage in virtue, one has to transform any self-interest into a bodhicitta attitude, which is done by reminding oneself that the practice is to be dedicated for the purpose of benefitting all sentient beings, not just oneself. So, that is what generating a positive motivation means.

Whereas acting upon a motivation means that one's mind is already imbued with love and compassion and bodhicitta, and so there is no need to purposely generate a motivation in order to transform the mind from a non-virtuous state. Rather within that virtuous and positive frame of mind we engage in the practice. It is good to note what generating a motivation actually implies. So we can now see the difference between already having a good motivation and generating a good motivation.

As mentioned earlier, we have already set our mind with the proper motivation, based on the prayers that we have recited. In particular through the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer we have generated what is called exceptional refuge which is the Mahayana refuge, i.e. refuge combined with the bodhicitta attitude, which encompasses the Mahayana path. So, this is the optimum motivation that one can generate.

Being familiar with generating and adopting the appropriate motivation is an essential asset for one's practice, as it makes any virtuous activity or practice, whether it be meditation or prayers, so much more meaningful. Whenever we are inclined to engage in practice, our motivation is the basis that ensures our practice is fruitful and most meaningful. That is why it is really significant to think about the proper motivation. We can now engage in the practice of meditation.

[meditation]

It would be really meaningful and worthwhile to incorporate a meditation practice, such as the one we have just attempted now, into our daily life and make an attempt to stabilise our mind. Otherwise our focus will be scattered in every direction. So we need to exert some effort in order to stabilise our mind and, within that, generate a kind mind. That is a most worthwhile

objective of meditation practice. If one wishes to be happy it is essential we have a kind mind. This implies that without a kind mind, there is no possibility of having a happy mind.

In our last session, the actual body of the text from the root text *The Precious Garland* was completed.

At this point Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The fifth chapter of the *Precious Garland of Advice for a King, an Indication of the Bodhisattva Deeds*—a teaching on the conduct of all monastics and householders—is finished.

This summarises the essential point of the whole text, in which Nagarjuna very compassionately gives very meaningful and practical advice, not only for the benefit of the king, but for all monastics and householders, or lay people.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary goes on to explain:

In most printed copies of this text, the name of the fifth chapter is not mentioned. However it is obvious from all the previous chapters that it is reasonable for the name for this chapter to be mentioned as well. The great and superior being Nagarjuna presented the chapters of the treatise with a hundred verses each, with a sum of five hundred verses for the body of the text. Thus it is not tenable to assert that the earlier chapters are presented with a name whilst the fifth chapter isn't.

Here Gyaltsab Je explains that even though the name of the fifth chapter is not presented in most printed copies of the text, each of the chapters has one hundred verses and Chapters 1 to 4 conclude with the name of the chapter, so the obvious conclusion is that Chapter 5 would also have the name of the chapter at the end as well.

Gyaltsab Je goes on to explain:

Because the meanings of the words in this text are clear and easy to comprehend, the commentary is thus considered complete. However a more extensive explanation of how to practise the paths leading to high status and definite goodness, and an extensive presentation on Nagarjuna's reasonings to establish the view of emptiness is presented in Je Rinpoche Losang Drakpa's *Lam Rim (Graduated Path to Enlightenment)*, as well as in *Madhyamaka-Karika (Root Knowledge of the Middle Way)* and *Madhyamakavatara (Entering the Middle Way)*. Thus I have not further elaborated the meanings in this commentary.

Gyaltsab Rinpoche states that the words of the text are clear and easy to comprehend. Of course, for a great scholar like Gyaltsab Rinpoche it might be easy to comprehend, but it is not so easy for us! So when he says that the commentary is considered complete, he is implying that he has not left out any parts of the text, and that he has presented a comprehensive commentary on all of the words of the root text. This is in contrast to other commentaries which might provide an elaborate explanation of one part, but leave out other parts. However in this commentary on Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*, as Gyaltsab Je himself mentions, and as we have

found throughout the text, he has explained the meaning of every verse.

Gyaltsab Je however lists other treatises that give more extensive explanations of the two main points of *Precious Garland*, which are how to practise the paths leading to high status and definite goodness and Nagarjuna's reasonings that establish the view of emptiness. These two main points are presented extensively in Lama Tsong Khapa's *Lam Rim*, which we have covered previously. When you refer to the texts, you will find that they contain really extensive explanations of how to obtain high status and definite goodness.

The lam rim also contains a very clear and extensive logical explanation of the view of emptiness. It also explains the method of generating bodhicitta through the method of exchanging self with others, the Tong Len practice, which is the topic of your next few discussion sessions. It would be good to refer to these explanations and base your discussions around them. Then further clarifications can arise from that.

As Gyaltsab Je further explains, the two main points of *Precious Garland* are also presented in the *Madhyamakakarika (Root Knowledge of the Middle Way)*, which is an incredibly profound teaching including very meticulous and logical explanations on the view of emptiness. The *Madhyamakavatara (Entering the Middle Way)* and Lama Tsong Khapa's commentary on that, '*Illumination of the Thought, An Extensive Explanation of Chandrakirti's 'Entering the Middle Way'*' also have very extensive explanations. I have taught the *Madhyamakavatara* in past years, and by referring to those texts and familiarising yourself with those explanations again and again, you will gain a clearer understanding of emptiness.

Thus far the main headings in Gyaltsab's commentary on this text have been: 1) The meaning of the name 2) salutation of the translator, 3) The presentation of the treatise, and 3) the meaning of the end. We come now the fourth subdivision.

IV. THE MEANING OF THE END

The fourth, the meaning of the end, is subdivided into two categories: 1) the author of the treatise and 2) the translator of the treatise.

So this section has two parts:

1. The author of the treatise
2. Translator of the treatise

1. THE AUTHOR OF THE TREATISE

Here ends the *Precious Garland of Advice for a King* by the great master, the Superior Nagarjuna.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Here ends the *Precious Garland of Advice for a King*, which comprises the entire doctrine of Buddha Shakyamuni on sutra and tantra, composed by the great master, the Superior Nagarjuna, who had been prophesied in many sutras and tantras.

Following his reiteration of the words from the root text, Gyaltsab Je adds: *Here ends the Precious Garland of Advice for a King, which comprises the entire doctrine of Buddha Shakyamuni on sutra and tantra, composed by the great*

master, the Superior Nagarjuna, who himself had been prophesied in many sutras and tantras. Here prophesied refers to the prophecy by the Buddha, in many tantras and sutras, that the great master Nagarjuna would be the one who would reveal and clarify the main intent of Buddha Shakyamuni in his teachings. So in this way we can see that Nagarjuna was not just an ordinary being, but a supreme being prophesied by the Buddha himself.

2. THE TRANSLATOR OF THE TREATISE

Next, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reiterates the colophon relating to the translation process.

It was translated by the Indian professor Vidyakaraprabha and the Tibetan translator and monastic Bel-dzek. Consulting three Sanskrit editions, the Indian professor Kanakavarman and the Tibetan monastic Ba-tsap Nyi-ma-drak corrected translations and other points that did not accord with the unique thought of the Superior Nagarjuna and his spiritual son [Aryadeva]. It was printed at the great publishing house [the Potala in Lhasa].

I mentioned when I gave the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings that the three prominent masters of the Middle Way teachings all happen to have *Drakpa* in their name, which literally means renowned. These three are *Dawa Drakpa* (Chandrakirti) who is the author of the root text; *Lobsang Drakpa* (Lama Tsong Khapa) who composed *Illumination of the Thought* as a commentary, and *Nyi-ma-drak* the translator of *Madhyamakavatara*, who is also the translator of this text. So, these three masters, true to their name, are indeed renowned masters.

CONCLUDING VERSES

Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary with seven verses, the first of which reads:

I have presented a brief explanation on this elegant treatise,
A supreme jewel that removes the poverty of all migratory beings,
That comes from the excellent collections of oceans of scriptures,
Of the superior being - Depon Sangpo.

Here *superior being* can refer to Buddha Shakyamuni. Thus the *excellent collections of oceans of scriptures*, includes the sutras and tantras of the Buddha. This treatise is *a supreme panacea that removes the poverty of all migratory beings*, and overcomes all suffering.

Gyaltsab Je begins by saying that he has presented a brief explanation on this elegant treatise. Compare this with those who boast of their work saying, 'Oh, I've done a great thing! I have composed an extensive commentary'. In saying that he has presented a brief explanation Gyaltsab Je is implying that he does not have the capacity to provide an extensive explanation of these very profound teachings. This shows his great modesty.

The second concluding verse reads:

Oh how fortunate to have had this opportunity,
To contemplate the meaning properly with logical reasonings,
And to accomplish it accordingly and slightly acquaint myself with,

This path that definitely leads to high status and definite goodness.

Again, Gyaltsab Je is being very modest. He says he has been very fortunate to have had this opportunity *to contemplate the meaning properly with logical reasonings, and to accomplish it accordingly, and slightly acquaint himself with this path.* The implicit point here, that we need to try to adopt, is to acquaint ourselves with these *teachings, which are a path that definitely leads to high status and definite goodness.*

Gyaltsab Je's next verse indicates that he was encouraged to compose this text, alluding to his spiritual guides who are named later. It reads:

Not to decline from the intention to spread the
Buddha's teachings,
Beautified with glorious majesty and generosity,
And endowed with faith and discernment,
The exhortation [to compose this] was made
with a gift.

The author is indicating here that he was exhorted to compose his commentary with the intention to spread the Buddha's teachings, which is *beautified with a glorious majesty and generosity and endowed with the faith and discernment* that is wisdom.

Next is:

I respectfully prostrate to the two venerable
gurus,
Endowed with compassion for all that abide in
the ocean of samsara,
Who had given me the eyes to perceive the
vastness,
Whereby, my intention to travel to the supreme
state has increased ever more.

Here Gyaltsab Je is prostrating *to his two venerable gurus, Rendawa and Lama Tsong Khapa, from whom he received the teachings.* This is further explained later.

Then comes a verse seeking forgiveness for any mistakes, which reads:

Although I present this with the strength of
enthusiasm and discernment,
However the intent of the Superior is deep and
profound and thus difficult to fathom,
Hence, whatever errors and mistakes there may
be [in this commentary],
It is suitable for those who are endowed with
Dharma eyes, to be patient.

Although this commentary was composed *with the great strength of enthusiasm and discernment* based on logic, reasoning and wisdom, *the ultimate intent of the Superior Being (the Buddha) is deep and profound, and thus difficult to fathom.* Because of its profundity, it is really difficult to fully understand the subtleties within *Precious Garland, hence whatever errors and mistakes there may be in this commentary, it is suitable for those who are endowed with Dharma to be patient.* Gyaltsab Je is thus seeking forgiveness for any mistakes that he may have made when composing his commentary. Basically he is saying, 'Please don't be upset or angry if there are any mistakes'.

The next verse is a verse of dedication, which is common to all authors of all treatises. Gyaltsab Je's dedication is:

From whatever virtue there may be from this
endeavour,

I dedicate to my mothers who have nurtured me
from beginningless time,

May the darkness of the evil spirit of grasping at
phenomena be cleared away,

And the light of the meaning of reality increase.

The author is basically dedicating the virtue of all of his work on this composition, on which he has expended so much energy and effort, to all *mothers who have nurtured him from beginningless time.* This indicates that Gyaltsab Je has not omitted any living being from his dedication. He prays that *the darkness of the grasping at truly existent phenomena, presented here as analogous to an evil spirit, which causes one all of the suffering, be cleared away, and that the light of the meaning of reality (i.e. understanding suchness or emptiness) increase* in the minds of all sentient beings. This is an extremely profound dedication.

It is really good for us to try to incorporate a dedication such as this into our own daily practice, and dedicate whatever practice we do towards all sentient beings, remembering their kindness from beginningless life times. This would be an optimum way to make our dedications.

The last of these concluding verses, and the final part of the dedication reads:

May I never be separated from this profound
doctrine,
May I sever all the fetters of attachment to
objects,
And having leaped over the wall of cyclic
existence,
May I enter the supreme state of fearlessness.

This is an extremely profound way of presenting a dedication at a personal level.

May I never be separated from this profound doctrine, refers to the presentation of supreme advice and instruction. It is said that one of the main things that binds us to samsara is the attachments that we have in cyclic existence. So for as long as we have attachment to the pleasures of cyclic existence, there is no way we will be able to be free from it. This is very profound.

In order to be free from samsara, *May I sever all the fetters of attachment to objects.* We can take leaping *over the wall of cyclic existence* almost literally. There is a barrier (or wall) between our own existence now and that of liberation and that barrier is cyclic existence. Using that as an analogy, 'May I be able to leap over this barrier of cyclic existence, to enter the supreme state of fearlessness'. *Fearlessness* refers to the state of liberation and ultimately, enlightenment, which is the ultimate goal.

Then the commentary reads:

This text called *The Precious Garland of Advice to the King* presents the essence of the meaning in a very clear and concise way.

In one of his earlier dedication verses Gyaltsab Je mentioned that he had been exhorted to compose this commentary. In this next part, Gyaltsab Je introduces those who exhorted him to compose the text.

Tri Namkai Wangpo exhorted me to compose this text, and the source of these teachings was Lama Tsong Khapa, and Lama Tsong Khapa's main guru Rendawa.

So, the two venerable gurus that he mentioned in the earlier verse, are the Venerable Rendawa, and Lama Tsong Khapa. Rendawa was an incomparably great master from the Sakya tradition who was Lama Tsong Khapa's main teacher. Lama Tsong Khapa had such great veneration for Rendawa, that he composed the *Mig me tse wai* verse that we recite regularly for him. Originally it had Rendawa's name in the last line, but Rendawa offered it back to Lama Tsong Khapa by saying 'This praise is actually suitable for yourself'. So he returned the praise to Lama Tsong Khapa, inserting Lama Tsong Khapa's name in lieu of his own. This is the background to the praise that we regularly recite to Lama Tsong Khapa.

Thus we conclude the text. I must acknowledge that the teachings have been incredibly very well attended. So well done. Over the last two years, most of you have attended almost every class, which is really remarkable.

Now we should not idly think 'I have completed the text' and put it aside. In addition to the explanations we have gone through, you have received transcripts on a regular basis that have been so kindly supervised by Adair and her team. Thus we can use the textbook itself, the commentaries and the transcripts as a basis to familiarise ourselves with the text again and again to further enhance our understanding. Then we need to try to practise what has been presented.

The text itself, along with the commentary, presents the whole range of practice very clearly. Nothing is missing, so with the proper aspiration and determination we can put it into practice. Furthermore, this is a text that can be used as a basis to present advice and instruction on Buddhism to others.

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