
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བཞུགས་མོ།།

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With a good motivation we will engage in the practice of meditation. [Meditation].

We can set the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching as a means to overcome and destroy the unruly mind and self-centredness within myself, and replace it with a mind wishing to benefit all sentient beings. Thereby I will put it into practice well.

1.2. Actual refutation of extreme views

1.2.3. Dispelling an objection that not teaching an end to cyclic existence is wrong

1.2.3.2. ANSWER

1.2.3.2.2. Example for the absence of inherent existence of going and coming

This follows from the earlier explanation which refuted the going and coming of inherent existence with logical reasons. Now the text gives an example to illustrate the absence of inherent existence of going and coming. It is good to note the systematic sequence of how the teachings are presented; sound and logical reasons are presented first, which are then clarified with examples. The verses that corresponds to this outline reads:

112 *Just as an illusory elephant,
Being only a bewildering of consciousness,
Does not come from anywhere,
Nor go anywhere, nor really stay,*

113 *So the illusion-like world,
Being only a bewildering of consciousness,
Does not come from anywhere,
Nor go anywhere, nor really stay.*

Verse 113 is a supplementary verse which is not actually part of the root text, thus there is no specific explanation on it in the commentary.

The example presented here is the one which is used in the following syllogism: The subject 'coming and going'-are not inherently established,-because they are interdependent originations, take for example an 'illusory elephant'. In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Just as an illusory elephant, doesn't come from anywhere nor go anywhere, the appearance of an actual elephant coming and going is present due to the bewildering of consciousness because of the magic spell. One must fully comprehend that there is no real or true staying [of an actual elephant] in the slightest.

As was explained earlier, when a magician conjures the appearance of horses and elephants, only the spectators under his spell will see the horses and elephants. Even

though the actual horses and elephants don't exist in reality, the spectators perceive them because of the spell.

It is good to understand the full implication of this analogy, which indicates that there are no real or true horses or elephants from the side of the object. This corresponds to ordinary beings perceiving true or inherent existence of phenomena, when in fact there is no true existence or inherent existence of phenomena in the slightest.

Ordinary beings perceive inherent existence because their consciousness is affected by the negative imprints of grasping to inherent existence. Therefore one must understand that even though from the side of the object there is no inherent existence, in the slightest, ordinary beings perceive it as such. Rather than being any fault in the object, it is due to the ignorance of the perceiving mind. That is how one needs to understand this illustration.

As explained in our last session, the analogy presents three types of beings: those who are under the influence of the magic spell where both the appearance and belief in the illusion are apparent; the magician himself who has the appearance but not the belief; the late-arriving spectators who are unaffected by the spell and therefore do not see the illusion and thus neither has the appearance nor the belief.

As explained previously, spectators under the influence of the spell who perceive and believe in the illusion are analogous to **ordinary beings** who perceive and believe in inherent existence. One needs to understand that it is the ignorance that grasps at inherent existence that causes ordinary beings to perceive inherent existence. In addition to the appearance of inherent existence, there is also the belief in that appearance of inherent existence.

But even though there is both appearance and belief in inherent existence, in reality it is false just like the magician's illusion, where there is not even the slightest truth of it actually existing in that way. What really needs to be understood here the cause for the appearance of inherent existence to sentient beings. Until and unless the very imprints of grasping at inherent existence are overcome, one will not be able to eradicate the mistaken conception of perceiving inherent existence.

Even though **an arhat** has abandoned the delusion of grasping at inherently existent self, they still have the appearance of true or inherent existence, and that is because they have not abandoned the imprints of grasping at inherently existent self. Thus, they still have that imprint in their mental continuum.

Therefore the only one who is completely beyond the misconception of adhering to the appearance of true existence is a **buddha**.

It is necessary to understand that the cause for perceiving and apprehending true existence is either the actual delusion of grasping at true existence itself (which is the case for ordinary beings), or due to the imprint of grasping at true existence which is within the continuum of arhats and bodhisattvas who are not in meditative equipoise focussing on emptiness directly.

1.2.3.2.3. THINGS ARE ONLY NOMINALLY IMPUTED

The verse that corresponds to this outline is:

114 *Thus it has a nature beyond the three times.
Other than as the imputation of a convention
What world is there in fact
Which would exist or not?*

The meaning of this verse is that while the going and coming of phenomena do not exist inherently, they do exist nominally, by mere label and imputation. As Gyalsab Je explains in his commentary:

What world or phenomena is there in fact, which would exist or not in accordance to the perception of worldly beings or inherently? There is not, because as with all the previous reasoning, other than as the imputation of a convention, it is beyond the inherent production and cessation in any of the three times.

This was elaborately explained in previous verses. At that time I reminded you how it is crucial to be able to understand the implication that although things are merely nominated and imputed, they do not exist from their own side. If one paid attention then, one will immediately understand the meaning of this verse, which is that the reason that things do not exist inherently is because they are merely imputed by conception.

1.3. Therefore the four extremes were not taught

The corresponding verse is:

115 *For this reason the Buddha,
Except for keeping silent, said nothing
About the fourfold format: having or
Not having a limit, both, or neither.*

As the commentary explains:

The Buddha kept silent and didn't teach anything in relation to the four extremes because things are beyond the four extremes. Thus, for this reason the Buddha did not teach the world as having an end, no end, both or neither.

Then the commentary presents the four extremes and those who actually abide with each.

The **first** extreme is:

The extreme of there being an end is asserted by the Nihilists who adhere to the belief that when the self of this life ends it does not go on to a future life.

The **second** extreme is:

The extreme of having no end is asserted by the Samkhyas, who adhere to the belief that the self of this life continues to future lives.

The self that the Samkhyas (one of the non-Buddhist schools) assert is an independent and permanent self. By asserting that a self is a unitary and permanent entity, the implication is that such a self continues on to the next life, and to future lives. So based on that assertion of a self there is no end.

The **third** extreme is:

The extreme of there being both an end and no end is asserted by some Jainas who adhere to the belief that the states of the self have an end but the nature of the self has no end.

Some, but not all, of the Jainas adhere to a belief that there are two aspects to the self: a self that has an end and a self that does not have an end.

The **fourth** extreme is:

The extreme of there being neither end nor no end, is asserted by the Buddhist proponents of a self, who say that there is a self that is utterly unpredictable as being either permanent or impermanent.

This is all in accordance with what we have studied previously.

We can go through these next stages quite quickly, because they have already been covered. Then we can spend more time on other points later on.

2. DIFFICULTY OF REALISING THE PROFOUND

This has three sub-divisions:

- 2.1. Reason for the difficulty of realising the profound
- 2.2. Reason why Buddha did not explain the profound to non-receptacles
- 2.3. Explaining the reason

2.1. Reason for the difficulty of realising the profound

This heading corresponds to the next two verses, which read:

116 *When the body, which is unclean,
Coarse, and an object of the senses,
Does not stay in the mind [as having a
nature of uncleanness and pain]
Although it is continually in view,*

117 *Then how could this doctrine
Which is most subtle, profound,
Baseless, and not manifest,
Easily appear to the mind?*

In his commentary Gyalsab Je explains the meaning of these two verses, beginning with verse 117:

This doctrine which is difficult to realise by unsuitable vessels and which is the essential supreme dharma of definite goodness, is baseless - to the perception of those who grasp onto signs...

When the verse says 'baseless' it is referring to the perception of those who grasp onto inherent existence; it is baseless 'to the perception of those who grasp onto signs' means that they grasp at inherent existence.

Gyalsab Je continues:

[It is] *subtle* and *profound* - because of its difficulty to realise...

The reason why it is subtle and profound is because it is difficult to realise.

[And it does] *not manifest*, because ordinary beings can not perceive it directly with their senses but need to rely on reasons...

One needs to understand that the reason why the doctrine does not manifest is because it has to rely on reasoning to be understood.

As Gyalsab Je concludes:

... thus how can this profound doctrine swiftly and *easily appear to the mind.*

Because of the profundity and subtlety of the doctrine, it cannot be easily apprehended by ordinary beings, as it requires reasons in order to be realised. One needs to understand here that emptiness is a phenomenon that needs to be realised through reasoning supported by valid quotations from the Buddha's teachings. We need to understand that emptiness is profound and subtle because we cannot directly perceive it with our senses.

Even so, if we apply the sound reasonings presented in the teachings supported by the valid quotations, it is possible for the subtle and profound to be realised. Thus it is worthwhile for us to spend time studying and understanding the reasons, as well as citations from the Buddha's teachings, that establish emptiness, and then to apply the reasons, and contemplate them again and again. That is the way to understand the profound doctrine.

Thus far the explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary has referred to verse 117, and now an explanation for the earlier verse is presented:

Why, even when the body, which is unclean because of constantly dripping with unclean substances; which is coarse because of being form; and easy to realise because of being a direct object of the senses...

The difficulty of realising the profundity of emptiness is illustrated with the example of the coarse body that is, in nature, obviously unclean. This unclean body can be directly perceived by ordinary beings.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

... although it is continually in view as being unclean however it does not stay in the mind as having the nature of uncleanliness. Thus, if it is not possible [for ordinary beings] to even realise coarse matter then it goes without saying that it would impossible for them to realise the subtle.

When we investigate the substances within our bodies, whether it is our own body or that of others, it is very clear that it is of an unclean nature. There is nothing really attractive or clean about the substances that make up our body. Yet although that is obvious we still seem to hold on to a perception of the body as being clean and pure, and we develop attachment to either our own body or the bodies of others. The mind is almost denying the obvious. Although it is obvious on one level that the body is unclean, part of our mind seems to make us believe that the body is of a clean and pure nature, which is the source of many delusions.

The implication is that if it is so hard for ordinary beings to be aware and mindful of such an obvious thing as the unclean nature of the body, then what need is there to mention the difficulty of being aware of the subtlety of emptiness, which is not obvious at all! As explained earlier, even though emptiness can be realised through reasoning and valid citations, it is difficult for ordinary beings to realise is because even the obvious is difficult to comprehend and understand!

The meaning of the analogy is that while it is obvious on one level that the body is unclean and produces unclean substances that constantly drip from its orifices, we cannot overcome our attachment to bodies. Why? It is

because we perceive it as being attractive and appealing. There is a faulty part of our mind that perceives the body as being appealing and attractive, and thus it is difficult to overcome attachment. So it is not surprising that ordinary beings cannot realise emptiness.

There is more in the commentary on this but I will move on.

2.2. Reason why Buddha did not explain the profound to non-receptacles

*118 Realising that because of its profundity
This doctrine is difficult for beings to
understand,
The Subduer, having become enlightened
[At first] turned away from teaching doctrine*

In explaining the meaning of this verse, Gyaltsab Je cites a quote from a sutra:

I have found this nectar-like-dharma;
That is profound, peaceful, free of elaborations,
luminous, and uncompounded.
Since no matter whom I explain it to, will not
understand it;
For the time being I will remain silent, and abide in
the forest.

This is what the Buddha proclaimed soon after he reached enlightenment. In the past I have explained that when the Buddha obtained enlightenment, he remained silent for forty-nine days due to the lack of receptive beings. As the historical account of the Buddha's life explains, it is only when the god Brahma requested the Buddha to turn the wheel of the Dharma that the Buddha began to teach. At that time most beings were very strongly influenced by Brahma, and so when Brahma himself made a request for the Buddha to teach, then a lot of people naturally followed suit and received teachings from the Buddha. So his initial reluctance to teach could have also been so that more beings would be benefited when Brahma makes the request for him to teach.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

For certain beings the Buddha turned away from teaching the doctrine for forty-nine days after he obtained enlightenment.

Here 'certain beings' implies that the Buddha would have taught at another level to beings of higher intelligence. Although the Buddha did not appear to teach ordinary beings, whose karma was not fully ripened at that point, he is however constantly teaching at all times. For example, at this time in our history we don't have the Buddha teaching in the *nirmanakaya* form (supreme emanation body), but of course in the aspect of the *dharmakhaya* (wisdom body), the Buddha is constantly teaching to various beings who are appropriate receptacles. Therefore we need to understand how the Buddha is constantly guiding and teaching beings. But for ordinary beings with limited karma, the appearance of the Buddha teaching doesn't occur.

Gyaltsab Je continues:

The reason for doing so is because the Buddha realised that the profundity of this doctrine which is free from all extreme fabrications is difficult for certain beings to understand.

As also mentioned previously, the fact that the Buddha did not teach in itself is a reason that validates the omniscience of the Buddha. It wasn't because of a lack of knowledge or ability that the Buddha did not teach, but because he knew that it was not appropriate. We need to understand that. Taking this advice on a personal level, we need to understand that just because we have the knowledge is not a sufficient reason to blurt it out to others who may not be ready to hear it. If others are not ready to understand the meaning then it will be of no benefit to them, regardless of one's understanding and knowledge of certain subjects. You may remember the story about a king in ancient India who, when he received teachings on emptiness, immediately misinterpreted the teacher as being nihilistic. He thought 'this teacher is nihilistic; he is denying everything and proclaiming that nothing exists', and ordered the teacher to be killed for fear of him spreading nihilistic views. Thus, such misunderstanding or misinterpretation can lead to grave faults.

2.3. Explaining the reason

Once again I draw your attention to how we can derive a lot of understanding from the sequence itself, as it is a very systematic way of leading and guiding the disciples. First the profound doctrine is introduced, and then it mentions that the Buddha initially didn't teach it, and now the reason as to why the Buddha didn't teach are being presented.

The three sub-divisions are:

- 2.3.1. Faults of misconceiving the profound
- 2.3.2. Example for the defects of misconception and the good qualities of correct conception
- 2.3.3. Advice to be conscientious about realising the profound

2.3.1. Faults of misconceiving the profound

One may wonder whether there would be a fault in misconceiving or misunderstanding the profound. The next two verses show how misconceiving or misunderstanding the profound emptiness could give rise to a grave fault.

The next two verses are:

- 119 *This doctrine wrongly understood
Causes the unwise to be ruined
Because they sink into the uncleanness
Of nihilistic views.*
- 120 *Further, the stupid who fancy
Themselves wise, having a nature
Ruined by rejecting [emptiness], go headfirst
To a terrible hell due to their wrong
understanding.*

In explaining the meaning of these verses, Gyaltsab Je's commentary first presents this objection:

Objection: If the profound were easy to realise then there would be no need to teach it, thus the very reason that it is difficult to realise is why it would be suitable to teach this doctrine again and again.

This objection arises from the earlier explanation that the Buddha did not teach the doctrine on emptiness because of its profundity. The objection is saying that if the profound were easy to realise then there would be no

need to teach it, but if it is profound and difficult to realise, then that in itself is the reason why it is suitable to teach it again and again.

The answer presented by Gyaltsab Je is:

Answer: It is not suitable to teach this doctrine to those who don't have the lineage or capacity to comprehend emptiness. Because they lack the lineage or capacity they are *unwise* and thus there would be the fault of *becoming ruined* and there is also the fault of being ruined from the pretence of being wise.

As explained previously, if emptiness was presented to unreceptive beings who are unintelligent and unwise then the misinterpretation that nothing exists would occur, and such a nihilistic and wrong view would lead to a great fault. The commentary is explaining the faults that arise in two types of beings. There are those who are **unwise and unintelligent** and those who have the **pretence of being wise**. The commentary explains how the first type are ruined:

The manner of becoming ruined as result of being unwise is that when emptiness is taught to them they would be wrongly understood that nothing exists. When such misinterpretation and misconception occur, the unwise will degenerate from the precious human rebirth as well as from liberation. Because of these *nihilistic views*, they will *sink into the uncleanness* of the lower realms, thus you must be extremely cautious about this point.

The second types are those who are actually unwise but have a false notion that they are wise and intelligent; this may apply to us! In this context it applies to those who have some vague understanding of emptiness, yet assume that their understanding is a profound one. Great faults will arise from such an assumption.

The commentary further explains this point:

The manner of becoming ruined from the pretence of being wise is that *further*, either by holding on to the misconception of nothingness or when things are presented as being empty of inherent existence, to claim that it is not genuine emptiness, but rather a deprecation of karma and its effect.

Thus those who have the pretence of being wise either misinterpret emptiness as to mean nothingness, or they claim that what is being presented 'is not genuine emptiness but rather a deprecation of karma and its effect'.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Thus, grasping onto the literal meaning of the Buddha's doctrine to understand it as the final meaning, *the stupid who fancy themselves wise, reject emptiness. Due to their wrong understanding, whoever has this destructive mind will go headfirst to the terrible hells*. Thus, although it is difficult for one to [swiftly & easily] gain belief in emptiness, it is best to maintain impartiality and refrain from deprecating the view of emptiness.

This last point is really a point for us to carefully consider. If we fail to fully understand or comprehend emptiness because of its profundity, then the next best

thing is to protect ourselves from deprecating or criticising the view of emptiness.

2.3.2. Example for the defects of misconception and the good qualities of correct conception

The next two verses, which correspond to this heading, read:

- 121 *Just as one comes to ruin
Through wrong eating but obtains
Long life, freedom from disease,
Strength, and pleasures through right eating,*
- 122 *So one comes to ruin
Through wrong understanding
But obtains bliss and highest enlightenment
Through right understanding.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Just as one comes to ruin even up to facing death, through the wrong eating such as overeating and consuming disagreeable foods...

This is of course very true. When people overeat, they may become really sick. They might get very severe diarrhoea for example, and lose a lot of fluids, maybe reaching a point of looking as though they were going to die. We have all encountered illness occurring as a result of to the wrong consumption of food; it can affect our health, even to a point of nearly facing death. The alternative, as explained in the commentary is:

... but obtains long life, freedom from disease, strength, and physical and mental pleasures through right eating.

So if one applies the correct method of eating, it will nourish one's body such as to obtain a long life free of disease, together with sound physical and mental health.

The commentary then relates this to the previous explanation about gaining the wrong understanding or misconception of emptiness:

Likewise, so one comes to ruin through the wrong understanding of emptiness.

Gyaltsab Je further explains:

Through the right understanding of emptiness when it serves as a means to enhance the understanding of interdependent origination, and thus because of the very reason of emptiness one gains a profound understanding and respect for the law of karma and it's effects, one will then obtain the bliss of high status and the highest enlightenment.

As explained here, having the right understanding of emptiness will definitely serve as a means to obtain all of one's temporary goals and the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

As explained earlier, having a wrong understanding of emptiness would definitely relate to deprecating the law of cause and effect and thereby ruining one's own precious human rebirth, as well as the ultimate goals of liberation or enlightenment. So that point can be applied here as well.

2.3.3. Advice to be conscientious about realising the profound

The corresponding verse is:

- 123 *Therefore having forsaken with respect to
this [doctrine of emptiness]
Nihilistic views and rejection,
Be supremely intent on correct understanding
For the sake of achieving all aims.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Because of the ramifications of the great faults of grasping onto a wrong understanding and the great benefits of gaining a correct understanding, therefore having forsaken nihilistic views and rejection with respect to this [doctrine of emptiness], be supremely intent and strive on gaining the correct understanding. The purpose is for the sake of achieving all aims of living beings.

As explained here, having understood the disadvantages and the faults of grasping at a wrong understanding, as well as the great benefits of the correct understanding of emptiness, one must forsake nihilistic views and the rejection of emptiness, and develop the supreme intent to strive to gain the correct understanding of emptiness. One needs to do that for the sake of all sentient beings. That is the whole purpose.

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Edited Version*

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of 'I' and our grasping at it. So it actually comes down to that.

For as long as there is a grasping at the 'I', one will create both virtuous actions as well as non-virtuous actions. That is how karma is created. It is due to grasping at the 'I' that one creates both virtuous and non-virtuous karmas. What is virtuous and what is non-virtuous? It all depends on the state of mind. With good thoughts and a good attitude in the mind (i.e. genuine kindness and concern) one creates virtuous karmas and has good rebirths. Having a negative state of mind motivated by strong delusions, results in the creation of negative karmas, which are causes for bad rebirths. Thus good and bad actions create the causes for good or bad rebirths.

When we pay attention to what is being explained here, it will become apparent that it actually relates to how we function in our daily lives, and how all our activities and actions are based on the misconception of grasping at the inherently existing 'I', which is basically known as 'grasping at the 'I'. If we scrutinise and check the motivation in whatever activity we engage, it will be very apparent to us that it is fundamentally our grasping at the 'I'. The stronger the grasping at the 'I' the more one will create negative karmas.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains that until one gains the realisation or understanding of emptiness, one will continue to have a strong grasping at the 'I'. That is how we create the karmas to be re-born in unfortunate rebirths, and how all our activities become the cause of our suffering. Thus when one gains a profound understanding and direct realisation of emptiness, the grasping at the self or the grasping at the 'I', will naturally be reduced. With the realisation of emptiness comes the permanent cessation of the creation of intensely negative karmas. That is how we need to understand it.

Our actions are motivated by grasping at the 'I'. With opinions like 'this agrees with *me*' or 'this doesn't agree with *me*', there is a sense of the importance of the '*me*'. One will try to avoid anything that opposes what is not in one's own interests. There will be no hesitation in doing whatever it takes to try and prevent it. That is how we create a negative mind. With an attitude of 'because it is not favourable to *me* or *my* interests, *I* will not accept it', we create an aversion to whatever opposes our opinions or interests. Thinking 'this is what *I* am interested in, this is in accordance with *I* like, this is *my* opinion' indicates attachment to one's own interests and opinions, resulting in the creation of certain kinds of negative karmas. In both instances it is the strong grasping at the 'I' which is the motivator, and that is how we need to relate this to ourselves.

What is the nature of the 'I' that says, '*I* am interested in this, so therefore it is favourable for *me*' or 'this is not in accordance with *my* interests'? How does this 'I' appear to oneself? This is the main point to analyse. So when one scrutinises and analyses carefully, it will become apparent that the 'I' to which one relates (the referent 'I'), is an 'I' that appears to exist independently and self-sufficiently, which does not depend on or relate to anything else; an 'I' which really seems solid and independent. When relating to our interests and so forth, it is that kind of 'I' to what we refer.

1.2. Advice to strive for high status as long as emptiness is not realised

It is important to pay attention here to the sequence of the text. Having earlier mentioned that without realising

emptiness one will have to endlessly circle in cyclic existence, one may wonder, 'If I have not gained the realisation of emptiness yet, then what practices can I do?'. So this is a practical section that explains the necessary practices in which to engage, for those who have not yet gained the realisation of emptiness. Thus we can engage in the practices that will become the causes for obtaining high status.

The relevant verse reads:

125 *Therefore, as long as the doctrine removing
The conception of I is not known,
Take heed of the practices
Of giving, ethics, and patience.*

Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse in this way:

As you will circle in samsara due to the grasping to the self; *therefore, as long as the doctrine removing the conception of I is not known*; [Nagarjuna advises] *take heed* and pay respect to the sixteen practices of high status which include *practices* such as *giving, ethics, and patience*.

As explained earlier *the doctrine* refers specifically to the doctrine removing the conception of 'I', which is the doctrine that presents emptiness. Until that is known and understood profoundly, one needs to take heed and pay attention to the causes for high status, which are subsumed into the sixteen practices.

In his concise presentation, Nagarjuna's advice is to engage in the sixteen practices of high status, which include the practices of giving, ethics and patience. Of the various practices, it is said that the Buddha attributed primary importance to these practices.

- ∞ *Giving* is the main cause to acquire sufficient resources in order to further our practice. So having good conditions and plenty of resources is dependent upon the practice of giving. Therefore the practice of generosity is strongly emphasised in the teachings, and Nagarjuna emphasises that point here as well. So it is really important that we take these practices to heart and not underestimate the value of the practice of giving.
- ∞ The practice of *ethics* is the primary cause for obtaining a fortunate rebirth in the next lifetime. A fortunate rebirth is said to be based on the moral ethics that we observe now. That is also strongly emphasised here.
- ∞ The practice of *patience* is a primary cause for obtaining intact sense faculties and also good physical features.

So these three practices are therefore specifically emphasised in the text.

The sixteen practices are the very core practices needed to secure a fortunate rebirth in the next lifetime. As presented earlier in chapter one, the sixteen practices are divided into thirteen that are to be discarded or abandoned, and the three that we need to adopt.

The thirteen practices to be abandoned include the ten non-virtues. The actual practice is the abandonment of the ten non-virtues and the adoption of their opposites which are the ten virtues. Practising in this way is one of the causes of the human and godly states. In addition to these ten there are three other practices to be abandoned, which are abandoning wrong livelihood (and adopting the right livelihood); abandoning intoxicants such as alcohol; and refraining from harmfulness (and thus practising non-harmfulness).

The three practices to adopt are generosity, making offerings respectfully, and practising love.

It is good to refer back to these and try to remember the actual order of the practices. We may safely assume that we are practising them, but when asked to list what is it that we are practising, if we are not able to give an account of what they are, that would be inappropriate.

2. ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HIGH STATUS

This is sub-divided into three:

- 2.1. Achieving the causes for high status
- 2.2. Forsaking the causes of bad transmigrations
- 2.3. Summary: Abandoning non-practices and achieving the practices

2.1. Achieving the causes for high status

This has two subdivisions:

- 2.1.1. General exhortation to practise the causes for high status
- 2.1.2. Training in the special causes of high status

2.1.1. General exhortation to practise the causes for high status

This is further sub-divided into three:

- 2.1.1.1. Practising causes having five benefits
- 2.1.1.2. Practice is the best policy
- 2.1.1.3. Forsaking bad policies

2.1.1.1. PRACTISING CAUSES HAVING FIVE BENEFITS

The verses relate to this heading are very direct.

- 126 *A Lord of the Earth who performs actions
With their prior, intermediary,
And final practices
Is not harmed here or in the future.*
- 127 *Through the practices there are fame and
happiness here,
There is no fear now or at the point of death,
In the next life happiness flourishes,
Therefore always observe the practices.*

As his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verses:

For a Lord of the Earth [king] who performs any action of body, speech and mind, with the prior [thought] of Dharma, intermediary [thought of] Dharma, and final practices of Dharma, there will be no harm in this and future lives.

The *Lord of the Earth* refers to the king, to whom Nagarjuna is actually presenting these points, which are that *any action of body, speech and mind*, must have a *prior [thought] of Dharma, an intermediary [thought of] Dharma, and the final practices of Dharma*. Then *there will be no harm in this and future lives*.

We really need to be mindful of these points. The motivation for any activity that one engages in, needs to be preceded by a good thought and a positive mind, which is described here as Dharma. During the activity it is good to also secure a positive mind and when one completes the activity one should also have the positive mind of the Dharma. Thus the Dharma, or positive mind, needs to be present at all three times – prior to engaging in the activity, during the actual activity and at the completion of the activity. That will ensure the activity is a meaningful activity or real Dharma, and will cause no harm in this or future lives.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then explains the meaning of the second verse, which includes the five benefits indicated by the heading. By following the practice of securing whatever activity one does with prior Dharma, intermediary Dharma and final Dharma, that activity will be a virtuous activity

that causes no harm to other living beings. Therefore when one secures that virtuous activity into their life, there will be no harm towards other beings. To the king (who is the explicit disciple here) Nagarjuna says, 'if you engage in your practice in this way, then there will be no harm in this life and in future lives'.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je states:

Through the practices there is fame here in this worldly existence. By refraining from negativity, there are no regrets and thus there is mental happiness. Also since one is protected from the harm of non-humans there is no fear now and at the point of death, no fear of the lower realms. And in the next life, happiness of the higher rebirths flourishes. Because there are these five benefits, [Nagarjuna exhorts] therefore always observe the practices.

It is necessary for kings to be able to work with others, and for this it is important to be well known as having a good reputation. Such *fame* provides the conditions for a king to be able to work with others. If the king actually engages in *practices* that do not harm but actually benefit others, the good reputation of the king will naturally prevail.

Furthermore, *by refraining from negativity there are no regrets*. This is really very true. When one refrains from negativity, there is no need to have any regrets and *thus there is mental happiness*. A sense of regret weighs down the mind, so having no regrets will thus bring a sense of natural ease and mental happiness. Furthermore by engaging in virtuous deeds and refraining from harming others, *one is protected from the harm of non-humans*. So there is no fear now in this existence, and at the time of death there will be no fear of the lower realms. Then, the happiness of higher rebirths will flourish.

2.1.1.2. PRACTICE IS THE BEST POLICY

More literally, in Tibetan it says 'the supreme Dharma is the best policy'

The results of the practices listed in the last section are described in the next verse, which reads:

- 128 *The practices are the best policy,
It is through them that the world is pleased;
Neither here nor in the future is one cheated
By a world that has been pleased.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains that:

The Dharma practices for obtaining a high status are the best policy amongst all policies of kings. Thus, it is through the Dharma practice that the world is conquered and pleased. By a world that has been pleased, oneself and others will neither be cheated here in this life nor in future lives, thus rely upon this excellent doctrine.

This is very profound advice! It describes how much benefit would be gained if a king ruled a country in accordance with the practices described previously. Nagarjuna suggests that the king should avoid adopting bad or faulty policies and adopt the correct and virtuous policies. As explained here, if the king adopts faulty policies it will only cause others in the country to become displeased, which will adversely affect the reputation of the king himself. Furthermore the king would not earn the trust of his subjects. Conversely, if the king adopts virtuous policies, then due to *Dharma practice the world is conquered and pleased*. So the way to please and gain the trust of his subjects is to adopt the virtuous policies (which encompasses Dharma practices). When the world is pleased, the king, his subjects and others, *will neither be*

cheated in this life nor in future lives. This is the best way to rule.

2.1.1.3. FORSAKING BAD POLICIES

Having presented the need to practise the best policy, the teaching now introduces the bad policies and what they are. The three sub-divisions of this category are:

2.1.1.3.1. Unsuitability of relying on bad treatises

2.1.1.3.2. Scorning reliance on bad treatises

2.1.1.3.3. Special policy for practice

2.1.1.3.1. Unsuitability of relying on bad treatises

The root text says:

129 *The world is displeased
By the policies of non-practice.
Due to the displeasure of the world
One is not pleased here or in the future.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains:

The world is displeased by the policies of non-Dharma practices, such as faulty policies of kings and the proclamation of violence as virtue and so forth. Due to the displeasure of the world, one is not pleased here or in the future; thus you must abandon faulty policies.

This is quite clear.

2.1.1.3.2. Scorning reliance on bad treatises

This following two verses relate to this heading:

130 *How could those with senseless deviant
minds
On a path to bad transmigrations,
Wretched, intent on deceiving others,
Have understood what is meaningful?*

131 *How could those intent on deceiving others
Be persons of policy?
Through it they themselves will be cheated
In many thousands of births.*

With respect to the first verse Gyaltsab Je explains:

How could those who don't have any sense of fulfilling the goals of other living beings and thus are possessed with senseless deviant minds and on a path to bad transmigration; who are wretched [because of possessing corrupt wisdom] and intent on deceiving others, have understood what is meaningful? They have not, because they engage in contradictory harmful actions.

The reason why people do not understand what is meaningful is because they engage in contradictory and harmful actions.

Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the second verse thus:

How could those intent on deceiving others with faulty royal policies, be persons of policy? They are not, because through it, only they themselves will be cheated in many thousands of births.

2.1.1.3.3. Special policy for practice

This heading can be read more literally as 'the policy of the supreme Dharma'.

The relevant verse is:

132 *Even if you seek to harm an enemy,
You should remove your own defects and
cultivate good qualities.
Through that you will help yourself,
And the enemy will be displeased.*

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

Even if you seek to harm an enemy, you should remove your defects and cultivate good qualities; as through that action you will only help or receive benefits yourself. Besides, the enemy who lacks inspiration for the Dharma will be displeased, and you will not incur the slightest misdeed.

2.1.2. Training in the special causes of high status

This section has three sub-divisions:

2.1.2.1. Training in the four ways of assembling students

2.1.2.2. Training in the four: speaking truth, generosity, peace, and wisdom

2.1.2.3. Relying on special associates who cause increase of virtue

Here again we can contemplate the profound advice and kindness of Nagarjuna.

2.1.2.1. TRAINING IN THE FOUR WAYS OF ASSEMBLING STUDENTS

This material is also explained in other teachings. Just as there are certain measures to conquer or subdue one's own mind, there are also specific practices related to gathering or assembling other students.

These four practices are presented in the verse itself, which reads:

133 *You should cause the assembling
Of the religious and the worldly
Through giving, speaking pleasantly,
Purposeful behaviour, and concordant
behaviour.*

The verse clearly and specifically states that the four ways of assembling students are *giving, speaking pleasantly, purposeful behaviour and concordant behaviour*.

Gyaltsab Je's explanation begins:

Through the four means of assembling, that is giving by engaging in the three types of giving;...

Here, we can see the importance of the practice of generosity. It is explained as the very first of the means to gather or assemble those who are earnest in practising the Dharma. The way to gather is through the act of generosity. We can note that the Christian tradition adopts this practice very well. The way the missionaries convert others is by firstly being very generous, which is how they attract followers, who are then converted.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

...speaking pleasantly on the topics of high status and definite goodness...

In this context *speaking pleasantly* clearly refers to the virtues and causes for obtaining high status and definite goodness. In other teachings, such as chapter 5 *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Shantideva explains that speaking pleasantly means speech that is meaningful and concordant with what was said earlier and later i.e. there is a direct relationship between the elements of the speech, and also that one speaks briefly i.e. not too much and to the point¹. As Shantideva also mentions in his text, speaking pleasantly includes even a simple greeting² - when someone comes, welcome them, and ask them if they are well and if they would like anything, whether or not they were tired along the journey, whether they are comfortable etc. In this way pleasant speech refers to daily activities like greeting someone or just relating to someone, whatever their circumstances.

¹ Verse 79

² Verse 36

As mentioned earlier, generosity is a way to make a connection with people. When you give something to another, they appreciate it and will naturally feel some affinity, kinship or closeness to you. So when they draw close, what Dharma does one need to present to them? What is most beneficial for them at the present and in the future? The temporary benefit for them is, as explained here, the presentation of the practices that create the causes for high status, and that temporary benefit is of the most use to them at the present. Then the ultimate benefit to relay to them is definite goodness. When they feel comfort and trust and so forth, then one can present what is the most beneficial for them. So initially, give something to relieve an immediate state of suffering and then present them with the method that will relieve all suffering. That is how the sequence works.

When speaking pleasantly, we do not need to immediately resort to a high level of practice. We can work at a very practical and personal level. The very act of pouring tea for someone and then sharing stories or experiences over the tea, benefits the other person. Engaging in pleasing and beneficial speech in this way will soothe the pain of others. So this method can also be very practical. If we engage in this seemingly mundane activity with a good motivation, it can actually become very beneficial and worthwhile. It is good to bear that in mind as we engage with others in such activities as having tea, a meal and so forth; these practices can still apply.

The next way of assembling students is *purposeful behaviour*. Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

...*purposeful behaviour* in causing others to practise what is beneficial...

It is not sufficient to just present the Dharma to the other person and then leave them to their own devices. We need to really help and encourage them to put it into practice by showing them examples. Then the person receives the actual benefit of what has been presented.

The last of the four ways of assembling students is to engage in *concordant behaviour*. The commentary states:

...and to engage in *concordant behaviour* by practising what one teaches others.

This is really a very important point. It would not be appropriate to impart advice and teach others how to practise in a certain way, if we then fail to practise it ourselves. That would not go down well with others at all. This point actually refers to those so-called teachers who are complacent, thinking that as long as they have something to say to others, then that is sufficient. For them, being a teacher is limited to giving advice to others, whilst failing to put it into practice themselves. But in order to be a real teacher and to inspire others, it is necessary to put into practice whatever one teaches.

This is very profound advice from Nagarjuna. This way of benefitting others is presented really well, in a very meaningful, logical and practical way. In order to benefit others, one first needs to develop closeness by helping them on a very practical level through generosity, by giving them what will be of immediate assistance. After gaining their trust through closeness, then speak pleasingly with them, which particularly relates to giving them the advice of the teachings, thus providing them with a temporary and an ultimate benefit. Then further exhort them so as to help them to engage in the practice, and in order to that put it into

practice oneself. That is the comprehensive way to assemble students.

Finally the commentary concludes with this exhortation to the king by Nagarjuna.

You should cause the assembling of the religious and the worldly.

Before we end the session tonight, let us spend a few minutes reciting the Tara mantra. Ani Rigtsal has gone to hospital today to have her knee surgery, so we can dedicate the mantras in order for her surgery to be successful. She saw me before going to the hospital and said that she was a little bit nervous, and asked me to recite some prayers for her. Of course I will do what I can, but I feel that it will also be good as a group to do some recitation together for her.

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travelling on the trains in India. When Indians travelling by themselves need to go to the toilet, if there are some Tibetans in the compartment they will ask the Tibetans to look after their bag, rather than entrusting it to other Indians! [Geshe la laughs]

The essential points presented from the meaning of the verse are that the supreme means to gain the trust of others is resorting to telling the truth. Likewise the main cause for the distrust of others is resorting to falsity (or uttering false words). Therefore these are the points to bear in mind. Along with these points one can also reflect upon (as detailed in other teachings) the many great benefits of telling the truth. manifold are the positive effects of telling the truth. So it is good to reflect upon those as well.

At this point, we need to relate this practice to the subjects already presented earlier in this text, such as those relating to the ten virtues and ten non-virtues. One of the ten virtues is 'telling the truth' which is the opposite of the non-virtue, 'telling lies'. As a means of implementing this in one's practice, it is good to bring to mind the ill-effects of telling lies and also the positive effects of telling the truth.

We now come to the second verse relating to this outline:

135 *What is not deceitful is the truth;
It is not an intentional fabrication.
What is solely helpful to others is the truth.
The opposite is falsehood since it does not
help.*

Here, we can again relate to the very skilful means by which Nagarjuna presents the material. Having advised on the benefits of telling the truth and the disadvantages of lying, Nagarjuna now elaborates by defining what truth and falsehood actually mean. We can also see how when Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verses he really incorporates the explicit meaning of the words in his commentary. So it is good for us to relate to that manner of thorough explanation.

The commentary explains:

Speech which is not deceitful is known as the truth, for it is not an intentional fabrication and is solely helpful to others. The opposite is falsehood, since, even if it appears to be truthful, it does not help. Thus, strive only to speak truthful words to others.

As very clearly mentioned here, the truth is known as words which are not deceitful (uttered in a way not to deceive others) and not an intentional fabrication. This also implies that if one intentionally fabricates one's speech, that would also not be the truth. So if one does not intentionally fabricate speech and does not intend to deceive others and the speech is solely helpful to others, one would be truthful. Falsehood is its opposite. Even if appearing truthful, when it is intentional or when it actually hurts another, it is considered a falsity.

It is also important that we relate the following presentation to the heading under which it falls: *training in the special causes of high status*. One must again remember that the very practices that are the causes for obtaining high status are being presented. Therefore in relation to truth and falsity, telling the truth is one of the particular causes of high status. Thus, by default,

resorting to falsehood would be a cause for unfortunate rebirths in the lower realms. This is how we need to incorporate the entire understanding of practices such as telling truth, being generous, training in peace, wisdom and so forth as these practices become the ultimate means to create the causes for opening the door to high status and closing the door to the lower realms. Until we are capable of adopting the practices for obtaining definite goodness, for the time being, the best we can do at our level is to prevent ourselves from being born into the lower realms while also creating the causes to obtain a fortunate rebirth in the next lifetime. This is why we must relate to this in a very personal way. By ourselves adopting practices such as resorting to being honest and truthful and refraining from lying and falsehood, we establish the means to feel at ease at the time of death. We will be at ease because free from strong regrets in our mind. Having engaged in ethical practices over our life and with no strong mental regrets we would be able to face the process of death and then go on to the next life. This is how we should relate to it.

The next sub-division is:

2.1.2.2.1.2. Training in giving

The verse relating to this is the following:

136 *Just as a single splendid charity
Conceals the faults of kings,
So avarice destroys
All their wealth.*

As the commentary explains the meaning of this verse:

Even if a king has many faults, just as a single splendid and great act of charity, would conceal his faults by making them less obvious. So too, avarice destroys all their wealth. Thus overcome miserliness and practice generosity.

The meaning here is quite clear. But still one needs to understand the full implication of what is being presented. Nagarjuna is again relating his advice to the king by explaining that while he may have many faults, if he were to resort to an act of generosity (being kind and generous to his subjects) then, through such great generous acts, his other faults would become less obvious (hidden or concealed). Because the act of generosity is well received by others it overrides other faults of the king. Thus Nagarjuna is basically pointing out the great benefit arising from the act of generosity. At the same time Nagarjuna also explains how the falsehood of miserliness, or having a strong desire for one's wealth, rather than having any actual benefit is a cause only to destroy one's wealth. Thus Nagarjuna explains the practice of generosity in a matter-of-fact way to the king: 'when you practise generosity, there is a great benefit such as concealing your faults and being appreciated by your subjects whereas, if you resort to avarice or miserliness, it will only destroy your wealth. Thus you should overcome miserliness and practice generosity'.

Now we come to the third sub-division in this category which is:

2.1.2.2.1.3. Training in peace

The verse relating to this is:

137 *In peace there is profundity.*

*From profundity the highest respect arises,
From respect come influence and command,
Therefore observe peace.*

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

When you overcome a distracted and reckless mind through complete restraint over your senses, there comes peace.

The first part of the explanation here deals with when one actually overcomes a *distracted and reckless mind*. A 'distracted and reckless mind' is a combination of a mind being distracted and prone to danger. If the mind is left unrestrained the danger of being influenced by delusions will lead to grave consequences. The actual means to overcome a distracted and reckless mind is through complete restraint over one's senses. There is a difference between protecting one's senses and restraint. Restraint from the very beginning does not allow the particular sense consciousness to be influenced by the object. For example, the moment a beautiful object is observed by the eye sense, the mind may feel an attraction towards it. At that point, if one does not restrain the attachment in the mind, there will be nothing to prevent the attachment from arising. Therefore, when coming into contact with a seemingly beautiful or attractive object, without applying sufficient restraint, attachment will naturally arise. If one allows attachment to arise, the consequences of becoming really obsessed with the object will manifest.

It is exactly the same with respect to the other senses. When we hear a beautiful sound, if we don't apply restraint, attachment to the sound may arise. This is the same for taste sense objects and so forth. If they are beautiful and appealing then attachment will arise; if they are unappealing then aversion will arise. This is how delusions arise in relation to the appearance of the object. If it appears as appealing or beautiful, attachment will arise whereas if it appears unattractive or unappealing, aversion will arise. This is true of all five sense objects. If one were to be influenced by either attachment or anger that will lead to the negative consequences of the mind becoming extremely distracted and reckless. The danger of recklessness occurs because of that influence. So in order to prevent distraction followed by recklessness of the mind, one needs to apply restraint over the senses. This is the point being presented here.

After having applied restraint on the five senses, one's mind will be protected from distraction and recklessness and, as a result, the mind will naturally become peaceful, whereby the mind rests in natural peace.

As the commentary further explains:

In peace, because it is difficult to fathom the mind, there is profundity and from profundity, the highest respect arises. From hard earned respect, comes influence and command. Therefore, observe peace.

Being in a peaceful state of mind is naturally a profound state, thus from that profundity one will gain the respect of others. In other words what is being implied here is that with a genuinely peaceful state of mind there also comes a natural dignity which itself becomes means to gain the respect of others. Through respect, one will have a positive influence and command over others. However,

as the commentary explains, the *respect* is hard earned, because it is dependent on restraint of one's senses which is not easy. Although it may not be easy, it is worthwhile to put effort in obtaining such a state. This is the essential point being presented here. Although it is not an easy task for the king, nevertheless the result and consequences of restraining one's senses would be highly beneficial. Because it is worthwhile to engage in this practice, Nagarjuna exhorts the king to train in obtaining peace of mind.

Here, by recalling the sequence of the advice presented explicitly to the king we can see how, on a personal level, it also relates to us. What Nagarjuna is really presenting are the essential causes for obtaining high status in the next rebirth. By so doing he is also presenting the practical benefits to be experienced in this very lifetime. Particularly in relation to the king's main task, which is to rule his subjects, Nagarjuna very skilfully presents these practices as essential means for gaining the practical benefit now, while, of course, at the same time, engaging in practices to obtain a high status. So, to consider the earlier points, Nagarjuna is telling the king to first engage in the practice of telling the truth (truthful words) which will naturally bring about the trust of his subjects. This exhortation for the king to engage in the practice of uttering truthful words is in relation to the practice of speech. Then he exhorts the king to practice generosity. The definition of generosity is "a mind wishing to give". So, the wish or intention to give is an act of generosity. Thus, generosity begins from a mental state. Therefore Nagarjuna exhorts the king to engage in the positive mental activity of generosity. The benefit of engaging in generosity is to gain a positive influence over other beings (his subjects). Then next, he exhorts the king to protect the mind from distractions and recklessness through the practice of restraining the senses. By doing this the benefit is gaining a peaceful state of mind, one associated with a natural dignity that subsequently becomes a very effective means for ruling subjects.

2.1.2.2.1.4. Training in wisdom

Nagarjuna presents another essential point, which is to practise *wisdom*. Having engaged in all of the earlier practices, it is essential to practise wisdom. The wisdom presented here relates to a 'good wisdom'. The corresponding verse reads:

138 *From wisdom one has a mind unshakable,
Non-reliance on others, firmness,
And is not deceived.
Therefore, O King, be intent on wisdom.*

The commentary explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

From the discriminating wisdom of knowing what needs to be adopted and discarded, one has a mind that is unshakable or moved by others; non-reliance on others, firmness in the mind, and one is not deceived by negative friends. Therefore, O king, be intent on adopting wisdom.

As the commentary explains, the specific 'wisdom' referred to here is a 'discriminating wisdom' which is the wisdom that knows what positive things need to be adopted and what negativities (delusions and so forth)

need to be discarded. Having personally gained such a discriminating wisdom, one's mind will be unshakeable or unmoved by others. This implies that until and unless one has developed such discriminating wisdom, one's mind will be vulnerable to the influence of others. We may assume that something is positive or good but as soon as someone tells us otherwise, we are easily led astray. Conversely, if we are easily led astray and easily influenced by others that means one has not really developed that discriminating wisdom within oneself. It is really true that having developed discriminating wisdom, one will have an unshakeable mind. Furthermore, non-reliance on others affirms the quality (or extent) of the discriminating wisdom. Having gained discriminating wisdom, one does not have to constantly resort to others. We would notice that if we were not too sure about something ourselves, then due to our uncertainty and doubt we would have to ask the advice of others. When we resort to others' advice, depending upon whom we are asking and the advice they are giving, whatever instructions they provide will easily influence us.

As a quality of a firm mind is not needing to rely upon others, one will therefore acquire firmness in the mind. Thus the positive consequences of not being deceived by negative friends will follow. This again is an essential point. 'Negative friends' refers to people who influence us to adopt unethical ways of practice and so forth. For example, we may know that telling the truth and not relying on falsity is a virtue and something to be adopted, however, through the influence of others we may be led astray in thinking that telling a lie is okay, and to deceive others is fine. So when we are influenced by someone to think in that way, at that moment, that person becomes a negative or non-virtuous friend. Likewise, we may generally know that engaging in negative acts such as sexual misconduct is not ethical. However, through the influence of others, we may resort to promiscuous sexual activity. Someone might tell us 'its okay to engage in promiscuous sexual activity.' When we resort to that and think 'that should be fine' we are again being led astray by a negative or non-virtuous friend. Thus adopting discriminating wisdom is the way to become protected from their influence. As Nagarjuna exhorts the king: "Therefore, O king, be intent on adopting wisdom".

It is by adopting discriminating wisdom so firmly that many great masters in Tibet were led to give up their life for that sake. Particularly at the time of the communist takeover of Tibet, and during the cultural revolution, many great lamas, learned geshes and monks and nuns were threatened with death unless they relinquished the dharma. Many were killed because they chose not to do so. They were empowered to not give up the dharma due to the firm discriminating wisdom they had internally developed. They considered the dharma more precious than their own life and had no hesitation in giving up their life for the sake of protecting the dharma. Alternatively, for those who would not have developed a sound discriminating wisdom, when the same choice of 'the dharma or your life?' was presented they may have readily tended towards giving up the dharma and keeping their life. The clear sign that discriminating

wisdom is firmly established in one's mind is when the dharma becomes more precious than one's own life.

It is good for us to try and apply what is presented here as much as we can to our daily life. These points are really very essential and have practical benefit for oneself. Besides being actual dharma practice, even in a worldly context we can see that they are all very relevant. For example, relating to the last point, *developing wisdom* requires a firm and stable mind. Even in a worldly context, people would often say 'I don't think I could really be a friend of him (or her), because they are not very reliable'. Conversely, a reliable person would be considered a good friend because of their reliability, which is depended on their firm and stable mind. This is why when explaining the virtues of someone in a worldly context we use these terms.

2.1.2.2.2. *Summation*

The *summation* follows from having explained *the four individually*. The verse relating to this reads:

139 *A lord of humanity having the four
goodnesses
Truth, generosity, peace, and wisdom
Is praised by gods and humans
As are the four good practices themselves.*

The 'summation' refers to the four practices presented earlier. It summarises all of those practices and presents them again in their summary form. This we can see quite clearly from the verse: a *lord of humanity having the four goodnesses* are presented: *truth, generosity, peace and wisdom*. Someone who is endowed with these qualities is *praised by gods and humans*.

The commentary explains:

For the *lord of humanity* [king] who is endowed with the four goodnesses; which are *truth, generosity, peace and wisdom*; they are *praised by gods and humans* just like *the four good practices themselves*. Thus, strive to possess the four good dharmas.

This again relates to the king. Nagarjuna is exhorting the king to strive to possess the *four good dharmas*.

2.1.2.3. RELYING ON SPECIAL ASSOCIATES WHO CAUSE INCREASE OF VIRTUE

To mention again, it is good to relate to the sequence of how the teaching is presented. Having presented the *four essential practices*, the type of 'associates' upon whom needs to rely as condition for practising the four dharmas, is now presented. This again illustrates the very skilful way the teachings are conveyed.

This is further sub-divided into three:

2.1.2.3.1. Characteristics of special associates

2.1.2.3.2. Suitability of following special associates

2.1.2.3.3. Continuously meditating on the imminence of death

(This is the point where death and impermanence are also explained.)

2.1.2.3.1. *Characteristics of special associates*

A 'special associate' in this context would pertain to a special friend.

The corresponding verse reads as follows:

140 *Wisdom and practice always grow
For one who keeps company
With those who speak advisedly,
Who are pure, and who have unstained
wisdom and compassion.*

As the commentary presents:

It is advisable to associate with friends possessing the four characteristics that cause virtue to increase.

The commentary then presents the four characteristics.

These are: in relation to a king, avoiding flattering words and using words which are soothing and pleasant [*advisedly*]; having a *pure* mind with less desire and contentment; having the *wisdom* that knows all mundane and dharma activities; having less anger and endowed with the *compassion* to benefit others. If you were to associate with such friends who are unstained by the faults which are contrary to these characteristics, then *wisdom* as well as *dharma-practices* will *always* increase and *grow*.

Regarding 'avoiding flattering words' it is normal that when a person is facing the king they might be tempted to flatter him with untrue words in order to please and gain his favour. Or, because saying something that is true might cause the king angst, they might say something is true even though untrue. In either case the behaviour is not really appropriate because it is based on the wish to flatter the king. Instead words that are 'soothing and pleasant' to hear and beneficial for the mind are to be uttered.

As it was explained earlier that the king rely on special associates, now Nagarjuna explains the reason why it is suitable to do so.

2.1.2.3.2. *Suitability of following special associates*

We can leave the explanation of this for our next session.

It is good to understand the four practices that have been presented here and try to relate them to one's own life; to understand their significance and to really try adopting them in one's life to the best of one's ability.

While the volunteers bring in the tea, the rest of us can recite the Tara praises.

*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་ལྷན་པོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

23 November 2010

Based on the aspirations and motivation as recited in the *Refuge and Bodhichitta Prayer*, we generate the appropriate motivation and engage in the practice of meditation. [Meditation]

2.1.2.3. RELYING ON SPECIAL ASSOCIATES WHO CAUSE INCREASE OF VIRTUE

In the last session the summation or the abbreviated explanation of the four trainings was explained. It pointed out that in order to uphold one's training one needs to rely on special associates or virtuous friends who cause an increase of virtue. Under that heading there are three subdivisions:

2.1.2.3.1. Characteristics of special associates

2.1.2.3.2. Suitability of following special associates

2.1.2.3.3. Continuously meditating on the imminence of death

We have covered the first: *Characteristics of special associates*

2.1.2.3.2. Suitability of following special associates

The verse basically presents the characteristics or the sign of a virtuous friend under four particular features. As the verse reads:

140 *Wisdom and practice always grow
For one who keeps company
With those who speak advisedly,
Who are pure, and who have unstained wisdom
and compassion.*

Although the explanation of this verse was covered in our last session it is important that we generate a real good understanding of the points related here. Specifically this involves trying to recognise the qualities or characteristics of a virtuous friend in relation to oneself. As the text mentions, virtuous friends are personally important because they allow our virtues to increase. The importance of recognising virtuous friends is related to this. In relation to the four characteristics given earlier, the commentary discussed how, when one is relating to the king, one should avoid using flattering words and use instead words which are truthful but soothing and pleasant. So, as the connotation of the Tibetan word used in this first characteristic makes clear, one should first avoid flattering words because the implication is that if others want to help your virtue to increase, they should be truthful while also communicating the truth in a manner suitable or appropriate for our mind.

As the commentary explains, the second point refers to the importance of having a pure mind which in this context refers to *having less desire and having contentment*. Thus an appropriate virtuous friend should not only be truthful but also have less desire and more contentment.

The third point relates to wisdom. As the commentary explains, this refers specifically to the wisdom knowing all mundane and Dharma activities. So again here we can relate to the very sound advice that Nagarjuna is presenting to the king as the direct recipient. He is to have associates or

virtuous friends who have the wisdom that is knowledge of both the mundane and the Dharma. Likewise the king needs to be skilled in both aspects because he is interested in the Dharma and its practise as evidenced by Nagarjuna's bestowing of this teaching on him. And, in order to facilitate his Dharma progress he needs virtuous friends who are wise in Dharma practice and understanding. That is the basis. However, a virtuous friend of that kind would also have to have knowledge of the mundane because the king has a responsibility to rule his subjects. Knowledge of mundane affairs is necessary for that purpose. If such is lacking then he will be less able to deal with the mundane affairs of his subjects.

As the commentary details, the last point of the 'characteristics of a virtuous friend of the king' concerns how if you are to benefit others you must be endowed with less anger and have compassion. Once again these are vital points for the king's personal Dharma practice as well as his kingly duties of serving his citizens. If the king's associates have less anger this will influence the king beneficially in turn. Such is extremely important because, like others, the king is also open to influence and thus the influences need to be positive ones. Just as the king needs to have a positive and calm demeanour to rule his subjects successfully, so do we need such special associates in order to receive their positive influence. In the same manner, if we associate with someone who gets angry we will take that attribute upon ourselves. We will be influenced to likewise get angry. Because it is important for the king to have a positive and calm composure in order to successfully rule, it is thus important for his associates to have calmness and less anger. This is also something we need to reflect upon ourselves, as important features to possess oneself, which will assist us in helping others with whom we associate.

The commentary concludes in the explanation of the verse with:

If you were to associate with such friends who are unstained by the faults contrary to these characteristics, then wisdom as well as Dharma practice will always increase and grow.

This shows the importance of relying on such friends.

From the outline the next subdivision is:

2.1.2.3.2. Suitability of following special associates

Having defined the characteristics of a special associate or a virtuous friend, Nagarjuna now exhorts the king to rely upon such friends. When you have a special associate endowed with these special characteristics it is suitable and important to actually rely upon them. In order for the king's virtues to increase he must do this. It is suitable to rely upon them because then you would be able to get the actual benefit. This is the basis of Nagarjuna's exhortation which is extended in the next two verses:

141 *Rare are helpful speakers,
Listeners are very rare,
But rarer still are those who act at once
On words that though unpleasant are
beneficial.*

142 *Therefore having realised that though
unpleasant
It is helpful, act on it quickly,
Just as to cure an illness one drinks
Dreadful medicine from one who cares.*

Nagarjuna's use of very skillful means and sound reasoning is evident here. As the commentary explains the meaning of these verses (starting with Verse 41)

Even though it may sound unpleasant, it is advisable to listen to words that are beneficial. That is because it is rare to find helpful speakers,...

Up to this point in the commentary, the explanation deals with how it is suitable to listen to advice or to words that are beneficial. One of the main reasons for this is because it is rare to find speakers who are beneficial. In other words, there may not be many who dare speak the truth and tell beneficial words to you. Thus, it is quite rare. So when you find someone who is suitable, you should rely upon them.

As the commentary further explains:

...and listeners to beneficial words are very rare. But rarer still are those who by recognising the beneficial words, act at once on words that though unpleasant are beneficial.

According to the literal Tibetan translation, instead of "are very rare" we should say "are even more rare". Speakers who utter beneficial words are themselves rare but those who listen to those beneficial words are even rarer still. That is of course very true. We can see that no matter how much good advice we get ourselves, we seem to put it in one ear and throw it out the other. Good advice never seems to be retained. In our life this is very true. What is actually being explained here is the importance of recognising the rarity of speakers of beneficial words, those who listen to them and then implementing the advice, which is even rarer. In dependence upon appreciating such rarity we will see how such words, even when unpleasant, are actually beneficial for us. Thus, we should act on them accordingly. This is how the commentary relates to the earlier points.

The commentary now further explains the meaning of the second verse:

Therefore, O king, having realised that though other's words may be unpleasant but that it is helpful; investigate and act on it quickly. For example, just as to cure an illness one drinks dreadful medicine given by someone who cares.

These are again very essential points relayed with reasonings and examples. We must realise that others' words (of advice) even though unpleasant to hear, are personally helpful and thus should be acted upon quickly. Upon hearing them we investigate their meaning, comprehend their beneficial value and then respond accordingly, without any delay. As explained by the commentary, the analogy of foul-tasting medicine illustrates the point: just as to cure an illness one drinks dreadful medicine given by someone who cares. When medication is prescribed for an illness we may have, it might not be very tasty or pleasant. In fact, most times it is not at all tasty and is unpleasant to take. However, because we realise it has been given to us with loving care and will benefit us, although unpleasant, we will willingly take it in order to be cured. We can relate these points to how we define an enemy. As His Holiness explains, 'it is not just from the harm that one receives from the other that one would justify or define one as being an enemy'. As far as harm goes, even doctors may cause us pain from their treatments. However we don't consider a doctor or someone who nurses us as an enemy, but rather someone who doesn't care for us. So the basis upon which we consider someone else the enemy is not just the 'pain' but rather the harmful intent of the other person that defines them as being an enemy. Because someone has a

harmful intent we consider them an enemy and because someone has beneficial intent we consider them friend or someone who cares for oneself. These are also related points to understand.

Thus we can relate the explanations under this heading to our own daily lives in terms of how we recognise virtuous friends and special associates and how we might rely upon them. The next subdivision from the outline is:

2.1.2.3.3. *Continuously meditating on the imminence of death*

What is being related here is generating the awareness of impermanence and death.

The verse which relates to this reads:

143 *Always considering the impermanence
Of life, health, and dominion,
You thereby will make intense effort
Solely at the practices.*

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Life and health are constantly surrounded by many destroyers such as hostile enemies; therefore *always consider the impermanence of one's life and dominion*. Having thought about death and impermanence again and again, *you thereby will make intense effort, solely at the practice of Dharma*.

Here the main point concerns what we regard as precious: which is our life as well as our health. Just because we are living now is not a reason to assume that death will not come; and just because we may have good health now is not a reason to assume that death will not come. The reason that death is imminent is based on the fact that our life is constantly being depleted or exhausted. Considering health, we may be in relatively good and sound health now but that is no guarantee that an illness will not become a cause of death at any given moment. Therefore by reflecting upon these realities, Nagarjuna is exhorting the king to really examine and question the validity of the belief in the permanence of oneself and of one's dominion. On a personal level, one must realise that one and one's wealth are equally changing constantly. They are in the nature of changing from moment to moment, thus there is no point being attached to them. As Nagarjuna is exhorting the king, the benefit of "having thought about death and impermanence again and again" will become an impetus for us to really put one's mind into the practice of Dharma and to be determined in the practise. This is how Nagarjuna encourages the king.

The presentation of death and impermanence here is basically the same as presented in the Lam Rim. For example, consider Nagarjuna's point raised here to the Lam Rim point where it mentions there are many factors that contribute to our death and very few factors that sustain our life. It is really the same point because, as the commentary explains, the king's life and health are constantly surrounded by many destroyers such as hostile enemies, for as a king, he is more prone to having enemies who wish to invade his nation and destroy him. So it is as if the king is constantly surrounded by the causes of his own death. Bringing that sort of reality to mind will make the king aware of the fact that his life is quite fragile. Likewise, in relation to the king's health, even though he may be healthy and strong with stamina, Nagarjuna is reminding the king that such is not a suitable reason to think 'I am invincible and will not die.' The fact of reality is that the causes for death can happen at any time. We have many examples of how having sound health is not a factor preventing death. We have seen people,

relatively in good health, actually die before someone who is supposed to be ill and sick.

In relation to someone I personally know myself, a relative of someone had gone out to play golf in the morning and he was in sound health and everything was fine. During the golf game when he hit the ball, he fell unconscious and was pronounced dead soon afterwards. So in the morning he went out sound and healthy to play a sport, but by the end of the day he was pronounced dead! This is one instance that came to my notice not long ago, but there are many similar instances. We can see so many people who go out in the morning all ready to face the day in sound health and by that evening they will face death. This happens on a regular basis. These are the facts and realities of the situation. So in relation to oneself, these are also points for us to consider and thus determine what's really important in our life. For us, while we may enjoy good health now, we should also remind ourselves that this is not a reason to be complacent [Geshe-la laughs] and to think that one is okay and that there is no rush to practise Dharma because one is in good health.

One of the points mentioned in the teachings about death and impermanence is that there is no certainty as to the time of death. That also relates to the fact that there is no fixed order as to who will die first. Conventionally, we may assume that older people die first and the younger ones follow, but in fact and reality this is not the case at all. Some younger people die way before some older people do. Therefore there is no specific order as to who dies first. It is not the case that the older people will die first and eventually the younger ones will follow. There is no fixed order like that. So these are yet further points to consider about the fact and reality that there is no certainty of when death will happen. Even though death is certain itself, there is no certainty of the time of death. It could happen at any time in one's life.

The reason these realities are presented is to impel us to practise the Dharma. That is the main point. By relating these points to our own personal Dharma practice we will notice their real force and then really feel the imminence and inevitability of our own death. Then naturally, as we bring that reality to mind, it definitely has an effect of reducing strong attachment to our immediate status and possessions and so forth. This is the reference of the line: *"the concerns for this life naturally subside"*. More awareness and contemplation of the benefits of a future life will arise and become dominant and apparent to oneself. To the extent that it reduces strong attachment to the affairs of this life, it definitely gives a genuine sense of calmness and peacefulness in one's mind. It actually has this positive affect. Now in relation to reducing attachment to one's possessions (which was also mentioned previously), we must not misinterpret this to mean that in order to be a Dharma practitioner or spiritual practitioner, one needs to get rid of one's things or not care about one's possessions. It doesn't mean that. We can still use our possessions and wealth and so forth, but the main point here is to reduce attachment to one's possessions. The stronger the attachment we have to our possessions, wealth or status, the more anxiety it causes in our own mind. It makes our mind restless and anxious. So in order to be free from that, reducing attachment to our possessions and so forth will certainly help. This is the practical benefit and a way to deal with this advice.

We can consider another practical outcome of not having strong attachment to one's possessions and wealth, particularly in relation to money. During the recent financial crisis, we would have noticed those who out of a desire to make more money invested in situations that were unstable and unreliable. When their plans fell through they lost everything. The cause of this was the intention of wanting to increase whatever they had. In contrast, those who had less desire and contentment secured whatever money they had by keeping it in a bank, even though with low interest. They felt: 'its fine, I don't need to worry too much about getting more interest'. In this way, due to being content and having less desire they still have their money now. This is also a very practical example of how reducing strong desire to possessions and wealth has real advantages.

In another of his texts called *The Friendly Letter* Nagarjuna explains explicitly that the purpose of wealth is to have satisfaction. That is the purpose of wealth. Then he goes on further to explain how one gets satisfaction from *contentment*. When you develop contentment, then you get satisfaction. Therefore, in that particular context, Nagarjuna is not implying 'get rid of your wealth' but rather he points out the purpose of wealth: which is to get satisfaction. He then explains how 'the manner of getting satisfaction is by developing contentment'. So we can relate that to the same points made here.

To relate a particular instance; recently I went down to the St Kilda sea baths with Geshe Sonam and we encountered someone who was about to bathe, who was just sitting on the edge of the pool. Geshe Sonam happened to engage in a conversation with him and spoke at some length. Later Geshe Sonam related to me their discussion. He had told Geshe Sonam that he had reached a point in his life where he felt that he had accumulated sufficient amount of money which he intended to invest. He felt that was fine for him. He even quit his job and was feeling quite happy and satisfied that his invested money would help carry him through the next stage of his life. But then he said 'now at this point, I have lost all of that money and I have also lost my job, so I am left with nothing right now!' thus he was lamenting.

The main point we must draw from the meaning of the verse, is that one needs to really consider impermanence and death because that becomes a real impetus for making one's Dharma practice more genuine and stable. It is not sufficient to just occasionally think about death and impermanence, but to constantly be mindful and aware of it. This becomes the basis for us to really practise soundly. As one of my own teachers, Khensur Ugyen Tsetan Rinpoche would advise: "take refuge and contemplate on death and impermanence. If you do that regularly, it will be good for you and your mind". That was really a practical and sound advice.

I've had some very intimate conversations with Khensur Rinpoche and our conversations were never on mundane things. There was always some Dharma context, particularly from Khensur Rinpoche's side. He would never engage in 'worldly talk'. Once he asked me 'what do you meditate on?' and I responded by saying 'well I try to meditate on bodhichitta'. To that Khensur Rinpoche replied 'perhaps that is good, but your bodhichitta might be just left on mere words, skimming the surface. So maybe it is more appropriate to meditate on death and taking refuge'. Being very open and frank in the conversations I responded that 'yes, it may be on the surface and merely with words, but it does seem to have some affect on my mind'. At times I

would spend more than two hours in conversation with him. Even though he would normally spend most of his day doing his prayers, when we engage in lengthy conversations at the end he would say 'today we had a very good and worthwhile time discussing the Dharma'. He was always very happy and joyfully assisted me in the talk of Dharma.

We now come to the next sub-division from the earlier category which is:

2.2. Forsaking the causes of bad transmigrations

This is sub-divided into two:

2.2.1. Brief explanation

2.2.2. Extensive explanation

The first:

2.2.1. Brief explanation

This is covered in the next two verses:

144 *Seeing that death is certain*

And that, having died, you suffer from ill deeds,

You should not commit ill deeds

Though there might be temporary pleasure.

The commentary explains the meaning of verse 144 first, which reads:

Death is certain, thus *having seen that death is certain and that having died, you suffer from ill deeds*, experienced as completing karma in a happy rebirth and both completing and throwing karma in an unfortunate rebirth; *you should not commit ill deeds, though there may be some temporary pleasures.*

Here the explanation deals again with the topic of death and impermanence presented in the *Lam Rim* teachings, specifically, the first point of death meditation: that death is certain. Having taken that into account and accepted the reality, one needs to consider what comes next – after death you suffer the ill-deeds of either a happy rebirth or an unfortunate rebirth. Therefore, when at the end of the verse it mentions “*you should not commit ill deeds, though there may be some temporary pleasures*” you must recognise how, in committing some negative or ill deeds there might be some temporary enjoyment or pleasure but regardless of that, due to the negative consequences for our future life, we must resolve to abandon and not engage in those negative deeds.

The commentary explains that whenever one commits negative deeds or negative karma, the experience is suffering. In a happy rebirth the experience of suffering is a *completing karma*. So the explanation here is that while the *throwing karma* to be reborn human may have been virtuous, the completing karma (based on ill deeds) will ripen in that human life as suffering. This is why we see examples of humans whose whole life seems to be consumed by suffering, where so many difficulties and problems arise one after the other. There are so many misfortunes, so many things going wrong. Even though reborn as a human there is so much suffering experienced as a result of that past-life negativity. The suffering indicates that while the throwing karma had been virtuous, the *completing karma* was non-virtuous. This is how we need to understand it. What is being explained here is that even if one were to be reborn in a higher rebirth, the fact that one has to experience suffering continuously is a result of having created negative karma. That is why suffering is experienced even in a happy rebirth. In an unfortunate rebirth it due to both completing and throwing karma being non-virtuous that suffering is caused. In other words, by being reborn in an unfortunate rebirth, if both the completing and the throwing karma have

been non-virtuous, then the result is suffering in an unfortunate rebirth. That is how the suffering is experienced from the result of ill-deeds.

As the commentary then further quotes from a sutra:

As stated in the sutras:

O King, do not commit the act of killing,

For all beings cherish their life dearly.

If you yourself wish to have a long life,

Refrain from even the thought of killing.

Thus, even though it may cause a slight temporary discomfort, because ultimately there is benefit, it is best to perform virtuous deeds.

This is actually quite clear. In the sutra the Buddha is exhorting a certain king to not commit the act of killing because life is something most precious and dear to all living beings. All beings cherish their life very dearly. Also one should not commit an act of robbing or taking away something very dear to other beings. Considering this further we see the benefit for oneself. If you wish to have long life, then refrain even from the thought of killing. This is how the Buddha exhorted the king to refrain from the act of killing and even from the thought of killing. This quote might also be the source for the advice to liberate animals. We have a tradition of liberating animals. It is considered as a very good practice for increasing the life span of those to whom we dedicate the merits.

145 *Sometimes no horror is seen*

And sometimes it is.

If there is comfort in one,

Why do you have no fear for the other?

The commentary reads:

Sometimes the horrible effects of a bad deed are not seen until the next life, and sometimes they are seen in this life. If comfort is taken because the effects are not seen, why do you have no fear of those actions when the effects are seen? It is appropriate that you generate fear.

The king, as a direct recipient of this advice, is being exhorted to be wary of committing ill-deeds, even those for which the results might not be currently seen. This is because the effects of certain ill-deeds may not be experienced immediately in which case they might not cause fear inclining us to desist from performing such actions. In other words, understanding that ill-effects are caused by negative actions gives reason to avoid committing even those negative actions for which the suffering results are not immediately apparent. The reason why Nagarjuna presented this advice in this manner is because we can underestimate the ill-effects of certain actions, precisely because we can't see their effects. Therefore, not seeing any negative consequences we may rationalise: 'its okay, there is no negative effect from doing this'. But if one regularly resorts to committing these negative deeds, then the ill-effects will definitely occur in the next or subsequent lives. On the basis of understanding this, while there might be no immediate fear, one must nevertheless resolve to not commit such actions now. That is the main point. It also relates to the earlier point concerning how even though there is some pleasure in committing some ill-deeds now, by contemplating the negative consequences for a future life, one must avoid committing such deeds. The context is similar. Therefore Nagarjuna is mainly advising the king that one must refrain from negative deeds at all costs because of the eventual negative consequences for oneself, even if not now obvious. It is thus appropriate to develop

this 'fear' which would have us wary of committing negative deeds at all times, irrespective of the current visibility of the consequences. To give a clear illustration we can relate to our own personal life. We would not even consider committing certain deeds for which we know the consequences to be grave. If we robbed a bank we would definitely go to gaol. Being punished in this way is an obvious outcome. That is an obvious outcome of such negative consequences in this very lifetime. Knowing these we will naturally become hesitant about committing such deeds. On the other hand, if it is a matter of taking something small without asking, with the justification that it is only small, or they wouldn't know or mind it, then we mightn't have much hesitation taking that small thing. However, taking without permission, still constitutes an act of stealing even if minor. It is thus a negative or ill-deed. So, we may feel compelled to take something small, thinking that there will be no ill-consequences. What Nagarjuna is stressing is that the very fact that it is an ill-deed means that negative consequences will follow; so reflecting upon that we should refrain from negative deeds.

2.2.2. Extensive explanation

From the outline the next couple of verses are explained under the heading of *Extensive Explanation*. There are four main sub-divisions:

2.2.2.1. Stopping attachment to intoxicants

2.2.2.2. Stopping attachment to gambling

2.2.2.3. Stopping attachment to women

2.2.2.4. Stopping hunting

In relation to the actual Tibetan word, it could mean actual hunting or gathering animals for the sake of profit, by eventually slaughtering them for their skin and so forth. In either case it relates to slaughtering animals. Again, Nagarjuna goes into detailed explanation of how to refrain from these vices such as intoxicants, gambling and so forth as a means to create the causes for one's future rebirth.

We can leave the explanations for our following sessions.

Next Tuesday apparently coincides with the anniversary of Lama Tsong Khapa's passing away. Then the following Tuesday will be a discussion for you with the exam the following week. Then I think that is it, the end of the year.

A few verses further on in the chapter, what comes up in the explanation is introducing the special marks of the Buddha, the enlightened being, particularly the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks. Actually, these are very important to familiarise ourselves with and understand. When we do certain practices relating to a deity, it mentions in brief that the enlightened deity is 'beautified with all the signs and marks of an enlightened being'. So as we recite these lines in our practice, in order to gain some sort of affinity with what it relates to, it would be good for us to study and gain familiarity with at least some of the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks - to recognise what actually they are. So even if one cannot remember all of them distinctively, to study and become familiar by reading about them will mean we have some idea when we do our practices. To that extent, it has a significant benefit for oneself. But it also has the benefit of generating admiration and faith, by relating to the qualities of an enlightened being.

So, in the text, the thirty-two major marks are explained in detail, quite explicitly. However the eighty minor marks are not explained in much detail. Nagarjuna explains to the king 'I won't go into much detail with those'. However we do have other texts, translated in English, of all of those marks

and signs. So it is good for us to prepare a bit during the break; to read and become familiar so that when we come upon a reference we will have some basis of knowing what is meant. So in relation to the particular features of the Buddha-like signs, one of them with which we will be familiar from images is the spiral hair on the forehead. It is said that when pulled, this spiral hair can expand for a certain distance and when let go, it spirals back onto the forehead. Each of individual hair of the Buddha is said to spiral clockwise, which includes the hairs on the Buddha's body. There are particular causes for obtaining this feature and a specific significance of having this feature. So it is good to study and understand what all of that signifies.

Also that spiral of hair on the Buddha's head is what also makes the *ushnisha* - the crowning top-knot. In relation to the protrusion on the Buddha's head, when young kids in my home town got into fights there was a saying 'if you are not careful I will bash you on the head and make it like the Buddha's protrusion'. [*Geshe-la laughs*] So it was a remark to scare somebody else off. 'If I bash you on the head you will get a big bump that looks like the Buddha's protrusion'. That was one of the remarks to scare someone off.

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Edited Version

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Discussion

Block: 7 Week: 5 (7 September 2010)

Week 1 (2 November)

1. a) Give the syllogism (subject, predicate and reason) relating to 'coming and going'.
b) Explain the syllogism.
2. Name and explain the four extremes.
3. How is it possible to understand the subtle and profound doctrine, which ordinary beings cannot perceive directly with their senses?

Week 2 (9 November)

4. Explain how karma is created.
5. The causes for high status are subsumed into the sixteen practices.
a) Which three practices are specifically emphasised in this text?
b) What are the sixteen practices?
6. What will ensure that any activity that one engages in is a meaningful activity or Dharma and will cause no harm in future lives?

Week 3 (16 November 2010)

7. Explain verse 134
*Just as by themselves true words
Of kings generate firm trust
So their false words are the best means
To create distrust.*
8. Define truth and falsehood.
9. a) Describe the process that leads to a distracted and reckless mind.
b) What are the results of having applied restraint?

Week 4 (23 November 2010)

10. 'Speakers who utter beneficial words are themselves rare but those who listen to those beneficial words are even rarer still. Explain.
11. Death is certain. Having taken that into account and accepting the reality, one needs to consider what comes next. Discuss in relation to completing and throwing karmas.

Exam

Name:

Mark:

Block 7

Week 6: (14 December 2010)

1. a) Give the syllogism (subject, predicate and reason) relating to 'coming and going'. [3]

b) Explain the syllogism. [4]

2. Name and explain the four extremes. [4]



3. How is it possible to understand the subtle and profound doctrine, which ordinary beings cannot perceive directly with their senses? [4]

4. Explain how karma is created. [4]

5. The causes for high status are subsumed into the sixteen practices.

a) Which three practices are specifically emphasised in this text? [3]

b) What are the sixteen practices? [8]

6. What will ensure that any activity that one engages in is a meaningful activity or Dharma and will cause no harm in future lives? [3]

7. Explain verse 134 [4]

**Just as by themselves true words
Of kings generate firm trust
So their false words are the best means
To create distrust.**

8. Define truth and falsehood. [4]

9. a) Describe the process that leads to a distracted and reckless mind. [3]

b) What are the results of having applied restraint? [2]

10. 'Speakers who utter beneficial words are themselves rare but those who listen to those beneficial words are even rarer still. Explain. [4]

11. Death is certain. Having taken that into account and accepting the reality, one needs to consider what comes next. Discuss in relation to completing and throwing karmas. [4]