
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

14 February 2010

In accordance with the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* that we have just recited, we can set our motivation. This consists of two most important elements:

- ∞ **Refuge**, which ensures that we are protected from following an incorrect path, and
- ∞ **Bodhicitta**, which ensures that we are protected from following the path of the lower vehicle.

These two elements of our motivation actually constitute the whole Mahayana path along with its fruits. Thus it is most beneficial. Now we will do the meditation practice. (*meditation*)

For us to be able to gather again like this is a great fortune. Thus it is important that we generate the right attitude for engaging in the study program. In particular we need to generate the strong intention of putting the Dharma into practice - that is what is most important.

A Dharma practitioner is one who is inclined to practise the Dharma. And if there is a strong intention to really put the Dharma into practice then, without doubt, the fruits of the Dharma will naturally be experienced.

As Dharma practitioners our initial concern is how to develop a strong intention to practise Dharma. How do we develop that enthusiasm and sense of joy in practising Dharma? This, of course, is explained extensively in the Lam Rim teachings.

We may assume that we are interested in and willing to practise the Dharma, but if we don't pay attention to developing a keen interest in practising the Dharma, coupled with the right motivation and a kind mind, then we will find that whatever practice we do will not carry much substance. Then we will either not be able to follow through with a practice, or be easily discouraged and give up. That is the consequence of not being able to implement a strong interest with a kind mind and right motivation. When these elements are missing the natural result is that the practice will begin to wane.

When we really examine our state of mind and our practice, we find that even though we can easily claim that we have an interest in practising the Dharma, or that we are actually putting it into practice, something is still lacking. We feel that something is missing, so it is worthwhile to really consider what is causing that to happen.

When we really check, we find that there is something that defiles or pollutes our practice. When we further investigate, we detect that it is concerns about merely this life that is polluting our practice. A strong concern for the welfare of this life pollutes and thus weakens our practice of the Dharma.

When concern for and attachment to this life's affairs become a priority then that naturally weakens our Dharma practice. So it is the particular attitude of strong attachment to the welfare of this life that actually prevents us from developing a pure motivation for our practice. We will be able to detect that very clearly if we really look into ourselves.

Thus, if we want our Dharma practice to be a proper undefiled Dharma practice that brings about good results, such as developing a compassionate and kind attitude, then it is really worthwhile to consider how to cultivate such qualities. The way to secure the best conditions to ensure a pure Dharma practice is summarised in the very first teaching of the Buddha, the Four Noble Truths.

Also as explained in Lama Tsongkapa's *Condensed Lam Rim Prayer*¹,

*This life which has leisure
Is more precious than the wishing jewel;
So difficult to find, it is as quickly gone as
lightning in the sky.
Thus realise that all worldly activities
Are like chaff in the wind,
And seize the essence of leisure and opportunity
day and night.
The reverend Lama practised like this;
Those desiring liberation should do likewise.*

In essence Lama Tsongkapa is explaining that we really need to acknowledge the rarity of this human life with its ten endowments and eight freedoms. The rare and precious conditions that we have now do not last long; as Lama Tsongkapa's prayer says, our life is like a flash of lightning in that it could end at any moment. So we need to bring to mind the impermanence of our life. While we have the opportunity, we need to engage in the practice of Dharma to make optimum use of this life and derive the greatest meaning from it.

The greatness of a precious human rebirth

It is really important that we contemplate these points. As explained in the prayer, having the conditions of the ten endowments and eight freedoms is what makes our human life more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel. The reason a human rebirth is more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel is because the very best such a jewel can do is eliminate poverty in this life. Although it can provide good food and shelter, it does not have much benefit beyond this life—in fact it will be of no use at all in a future life.

We can utilise this human life that we have now, with its ten endowments and eight liberties:

- ∞ To practise in order to ensure that, at the very least, we are free from an unfortunate rebirth in the next lifetime;
- ∞ The next best thing is that we can use the conditions that we have now to obtain liberation, so that we are free from the entire cycle of existence, and thus free from all suffering;
- ∞ The very best thing is to utilise the human life we

¹ This prayer is found on pages 36 to 40 of the prayer folder.

have now to obtain the complete state of enlightenment. This is the ultimate state of the perfection of all qualities and ultimate goodness, in order to be of benefit to all other beings. That is why this human life is incredibly more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel.

The precious human rebirth is hard to obtain

Having contemplated the preciousness of our human rebirth, the next point to consider is that we are incredibly fortunate to possess this human rebirth. If it was easy to obtain again in the future, then we might not consider it as being so critical to utilise it now. Thus it would not be an impetus to put our life into the practice of Dharma. However, as the teachings explain a human rebirth is also extremely difficult to obtain for three reasons.

a. The **causes** required to obtain a precious human life are difficult to obtain.

The basis of a human rebirth is practising morality, and engaging in the practice of generosity, coupled with making stainless pure prayers. When we consider our own life, and question our own ethical morality, are we confident that we are practising morality purely? Of course we all intend to practice morality and generosity, but we might find that it is not really a pure practice. How many of the ten virtues are we actually observing? How many of the ten non-virtues of killing and so forth, are we successfully avoiding? And how much do we engage in making stainless prayers?

And even if we do engage in the practice we might find that the purity of our morality and our practice of generosity is defiled with impure thoughts of clinging to the affairs of this life.

b. Obtaining a precious human life is difficult because of its very **nature**. The precious human rebirth is defined as having the ten endowments and eight liberties. What are the ten endowments? What the eight liberties? When we contemplate this we will find that it is extremely difficult to obtain such conditions again.

c. The third reason is that of **number**. Compared with the vast number of other beings, precious human rebirths are very scarce, and therefore rare. When we look around, even the animal world outnumbers the number of human lives. Precious human rebirths are definitely outnumbered by unfortunate rebirths. The teachings mention that there are numberless beings in the hell realms and so forth. So we really need to contemplate these points carefully.

The precious human rebirth is easy to lose

The third point to contemplate as an impetus to utilise our precious human rebirth is that having obtained a precious human rebirth, more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel, we might feel we can relax, thinking, 'Well, now that I have obtained this precious rebirth everything is OK, and I'll be fine'. However, as Lama Tsongkapa says, it is very easy to lose the precious conditions that we have right now. This is another crucial point.

When we contemplate how the precious human life is difficult to find but easy to lose, then that becomes the

impetus to practise Dharma. In order to emphasise how easy it is to lose this precious human life and how difficult it is to obtain it again in the future, Lama Tsongkapa mentions that we have found this human rebirth this one time. He is not, of course, indicating that having found it this time and we will never obtain it again. What is being emphasised is that because the conditions to obtain a precious human rebirth are so rare and difficult it is as if we have found it just this one time. This implies that once we lose it now it will be very difficult to obtain it again in the future.

We need to contemplate these points really carefully, taking time to go over them, and try to really generate a strong feeling. Then the reality of our condition will dawn and any defiled, impure states of mind mixed with the affairs of this life will naturally subside. Our mind will become much clearer and the motivation to practice Dharma will become very pure.

A further analogy that Lama Tsongkapa uses to illustrate the momentariness of the good conditions that we have now, is that it is like lightning; which means that within a flash it is all over.

Lama Tsongkapa goes on to mention that all the worldly affairs are like chaff, the husks of grains such as rice. Using an analogy of a husk for worldly affairs shows how there is no essence in them. Once the grain has been extracted, the husk can easily be blown away by the wind because it is very light and has no real substance to it. The real substance is the actual grain, whereas the husk is just an empty shell.

Worldly affairs are to be thought of in the same way; they have no real substance and thus no real essence. Contemplating this, we see why Lama Tsongkapa advises us to put the teachings into practice, and take essence of the precious human life day and night.

Taking the essence

The next question is how do we take the essence of this precious human life? What is the manner of taking the essence of our precious human life? Our precious human life can be utilised to obtain temporary goals, intermediate goals and ultimate goals, so we contemplate taking the essence with respect to each.

The **temporary** or **small goal** of taking the essence of our precious human life is to engage in the practice of morality and generosity in their purest form, thus creating the causes to obtain a good rebirth in the next lifetime. That is the very least way in which we can put our precious human rebirth to optimum use.

The **intermediate goal** of taking the essence of our precious human life is by engaging in the practice of the three trainings, thus creating the cause to obtain liberation, and so becoming entirely free from samsara.

The **ultimate goal** is to engage in the practice of bodhicitta and the practice of the six perfections, thus creating the cause to obtain enlightenment. This is the optimum goal that can be achieved with a precious human rebirth.

Creating the causes for the first goal is definitely within our reach; it is a matter of making a decision to engage in the practice of morality by living an ethical life and

engage in the practice of generosity. We can definitely avoid the ten non-virtues while practising the ten virtues. The practical effect of this practice is that it creates the cause for us to obtain a future rebirth. Then, if we haven't been able to obtain highest goal in this life, we still continue along that path in our next life. That is the practical approach to securing our practice from life to life. So we need to implement this practice in our daily life.

In addition by engaging in the practice of ethics and morality on a daily basis, day and night, we are also achieving the first stage of both the medium goal and the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

So we can see how much is condensed into these two verses from Lama Tsongkapa's prayer. There is so much material for us to contemplate and think about in our meditation practice.

The two lines at the end, 'The reverend Lama practised like this; Those desiring liberation should do likewise' indicate that we should practise in the same way as Lama Tsongkapa engaged in practice. As mentioned previously, there is so much depth to this verse; the whole path to enlightenment is explained in this it. When Lama Tsong Khapa elaborates on taking the essence of the precious human rebirth he is actually presenting the three scopes of the path to enlightenment—the small scope, the medium scope and the great scope.

We need to consider the main goal of the practice of the small scope and identify what the practices are. Then we need to consider the practice of the medium scope and the goals to be achieved in that scope. Likewise with the great scope and the goals to be achieved there. When we contemplate in this way, we can leave very strong imprints of the entire path to enlightenment on our mind. This is how we can develop a meaningful practice even in a short time.

I really encourage you to become familiar with this prayer and try to implement it in your daily practice. Then it will be even more meaningful.

Having indicated that this precious human rebirth is easily lost, the next verse from Lama Tsongkapa's *Condensed Lam Rim Prayer* states:

*You cannot be certain that after death
You will not be born in lower states of being.
To protect you from this fear, firmly take refuge
in the Three Jewels
And do not lapse from your precepts*

Once we lose this precious human rebirth and experience death, there is no guarantee that we will not be reborn in an unfortunate rebirth. Thus we must earnestly take refuge in the Three Jewels and abide by the law of karma. Here Lama Tsongkapa is explaining how taking refuge is related the practice of securing, at the very least, a fortunate rebirth the next lifetime, coupled with the practice of abiding by the law of karma. The *Foundation of All Good Qualities Prayer*² also includes this essential point. It would be very good to really read, recite and contemplate the meaning of both prayers.

In relation to my own practice I cannot boast of any high level practices, but I can definitely say that I have made many attempts to meditate on these points, by memorising the text while reciting it, and trying to really contemplate its meaning. Now while I can claim that I have made many attempts to meditate on the teachings, I cannot claim that I have gained any sort of profound realisation. Because my mind is so stubborn and unruly, it has been really difficult to subdue. However I feel that some sort of transformation has taken place. Somehow my mind feels happier and more relaxed compared to my youthful years.

These are things that we really need to contemplate and practice in daily life. The attempts that we make on a daily basis will definitely result in some transformation taking place. It is only by becoming familiar with the practices of the common paths, which means the small, medium and great scopes, that we become suitable vessel to practice the tantra. Lama Tsongkapa explained tantra in detail and with great profundity, and this is preceded by practice on the common path of the Lam Rim teaching.

Those of you who recently went to India to receive His Holiness's teaching on the Kalachakra, will recall how he emphasised very strongly, 'The Kalachakra is not the main thing that I am presenting to you here. It is the preliminary teachings that are of the utmost importance'. His Holiness was emphasising that we need to really pay attention to the preliminary teachings, which is called training in the common paths.

When we successfully engage in practice of those common paths then we can slowly become a suitable vessel for tantric practice. If we don't really implement this practice in our daily life then even though we may be sitting rigidly and assuming that we are doing our prayers or meditating, there is not much essence to be found. So it is really important that we pay attention to these essential points.

Taking refuge in the Three Jewels

We really need to consider the point that Lama Tsongkapa makes about there being no guarantees about our future rebirth. We may assume to have done our practice and we may have faith in the practice and the Three Jewels, but when we question if there is any guarantee of avoiding an unfortunate rebirth, we might find that it is hard to be confident that there is any such a guarantee.

As Lama Tsongkapa indicates, when we realise that there is no guarantee that one will not take an unfortunate rebirth in the next life then that is the time when it is most appropriate that we take earnest, strong refuge in the Three Jewels. We do that because they have the ability to protect one from an unfortunate rebirth.

When we actually engage in the practice sincerely and continuously over time, we will reach a point where we become more certain that there is now some sort of guarantee that we will not take an unfortunate rebirth. We won't have to rely on anyone else to tell us that, but we will develop that belief for ourselves. However, until we reach that point we really need to make sure that we engage in the practice.

² See pages 45-46 in the prayer folder.
Chapter 4

As the Three Jewels have the ability to protect one from an unfortunate rebirth in a future lifetime, we need to understand the manner in which the Three Jewels give that protection.

- ∞ The **Buddha** is the supreme being who is free from all negativities and endowed with all good qualities. He is the supreme guide who shows the path.
- ∞ The actual **Dharma**, is the realisation that is endowed in the mental continuum of an arya or noble being's mental continuum.
- ∞ The actual **Sangha** refers to the noble beings who are endowed with the Dharma jewel.

So how do the Three Jewels actually protect us? While the Buddha is an extremely compassionate being who shows us the path, he himself, as he said, cannot liberate us out of his own will. Rather we need to actually engage in the path ourselves. To pinpoint what is that actually protects us, it is whatever level of Dharma that we have developed within our own mental continuum.

Applying our understanding

There are, of course, different levels of Dharma practice. However on our level if we observe the practice of morality, adopting the ten virtues and discarding the ten non-virtues, then that is the Dharma that we develop within ourselves. It is that practice, which we have voluntarily engaged in, that will protect us from an unfortunate rebirth in the next lifetime. So this is how we need to understand the way in which the Three Jewels protect us on a practical level. It is directly connected with our own practice.

This is a crucial point. It is not sufficient just to have faith in the Three Jewels and pay respect to them. As His Holiness Dalai Lama emphasised in his recent teachings, it is the Dharma that we develop within ourselves which protects us. He emphasised this again and again, and as those of you who were there you would recall, he was directing this to the new arrivals from Tibet, who had made the arduous journey to India. He would look at them and say, 'Have you understood? Have you got the point'? He was really teaching in a very nurturing way so that the people would get the main point.

In essence His Holiness was emphasising that it is not sufficient to merely have faith in the Three Jewels and consider them as holy objects, imagining the Three Jewels somewhere above us while we make salutations, prostrate and pray to them. That is not how one will be liberated. Rather, the way to protect ourselves is by engaging with the Dharma jewel and cultivating it within ourselves by actually practising it. That is how His Holiness the Dalai Lama emphasised the practicality of the practice of Dharma, and how it actually works.

The main point is that as much as it is important for us to study and understand the Dharma, it is equally important to put it into practice. It is worthwhile to endeavour to put into practice whatever one has understood.

Conduct and View

His Holiness Dalai Lama gave very clear teachings about the essence of the Buddhadharma and now to put it into

practice. The essence of the Buddha's teaching, as His Holiness emphasised and explained in detail is:

- ∞ the **conduct** of Buddhism is non-violence,
- ∞ the **view** of Buddhism is that of interdependent origination.

These two summarise the essence of the Buddha's teaching.

His Holiness really clarified this point as a way to emphasise how one needs to abide by the conduct of non-violence, and the view that one needs to abide by is interdependent origination. Understanding interdependent origination then helps one to gain an understanding of emptiness, and also develop bodhicitta. In this way His Holiness was laying the very foundation for the high levels of practice that we aspire to.

The reason I am emphasising this here is that I am in the habit of regularly sharing certain points with you. Occasionally I might say, 'This is a very important point to consider, so try to keep it in mind', which is my meagre attempt to try to bring to your awareness some essential points of practice and so forth. Regardless of what I say, whether you keep it in mind or not, when His Holiness emphasises a point it is really worthwhile to pay attention to it.

In relation to conduct, i.e. non-violence, His Holiness further clarified that non-violence actually consists of two points, which are not harming others and actually benefiting others. Those two are condensed into the term 'non-violence'. As His Holiness said, non-violence may be one word, but when one actually engages in that practice it actually consists of not only not harming others but also benefiting others. When His Holiness clarifies this point in this way it gives much more weight to the meaning of non-violence.

It is really crucial that we implement an authentic, pure practice in our lives. As mentioned earlier, a pure practice is a practice that is undefiled by worldly concern, one that actually works to subdue one's unruly mind. The delusions are really very tricky; while we may feel that our practice is being effective in overcoming a particular kind of delusion such as attachment, anger slowly starts to creep in somewhere else. Then attachment may be replaced by anger. And if we initially feel like anger is a big issue and that we need to deal with it, when we begin have some sort of success in overcoming anger, we find that attachment might creep in very, very subtly. Then, before we know it we might become obsessed with attachment.

In this way we need to be extremely mindful of the delusions creeping in at any time, and try to develop a diligent mind, being watchful that our mind is not completely dominated by the delusions. To that extent we need to try to really be diligent, and be very wary of the delusions. As His Holiness Dalai Lama mentioned, when, as Buddhists, we believe there is a future life then we have gained something with that belief. Whereas if one does not believe in a future life, that can be a loss. So if there is a gain and we don't wish for a loss, then it is right that we practice the Dharma.

As Lama Tsongkapa advises, we need to strive for a subdued mind coupled with wisdom. He emphasises that a subdued mind and wisdom are equally important. While we may engage in methods of subduing our mind such as calm abiding meditation, if we don't actually engage in gaining wisdom then there can be great danger. Meditation may have a temporary calming effect, but if we lack of wisdom, then when delusion arises we fail to detect it for what it is. Then it may really overpower us. We have all seen people who may have been seemingly quite subdued, but when strong attachment arises then anything can happen, with disastrous effects.

Therefore we need to be mindful that we need to strive to gain wisdom. But if we just gain an intellectual understanding and fail to work towards subduing and calming the mind, then that too will hinder our practice. Therefore Lama Tsongkapa's advice is to practise subduing the mind in conjunction with gaining wisdom. This is clearly explained in the text *Meditative Stages*. As mentioned earlier, if we are not careful then we might end up at a point where we are voluntarily putting all our energy into non-virtuous deeds, while being hesitant when it comes to acquiring virtue. So if we were to reach that point then how could we ever assume to be real Dharma practitioners? That is something we need to be really mindful of.

Nagarjuna's advice

I would like to remind you of the great value of the text that we are studying. As you would recall, thus far in the text Nagarjuna has given much profound and practical advice that we can implement in our daily life. When you refer back to what we have already studied it should be an impetus for us to actually engage in the practice of Dharma. So we can really consider ourselves to be extremely fortunate to have this opportunity to engage in the practice of Dharma, and in particular to study such a profound text as this. It is extraordinarily valuable if we read the text and become familiar with it.

While we can acknowledge the great opportunity and conditions that we have now, it is important to ensure that we maintain these good conditions. If we just leave the good conditions as they are now, taking them for granted and making no effort to maintain them, then such conditions can be easily lost.

As Nagarjuna advised the king in the text, the wealth that you have amassed now is a result of your acts of generosity in a previous life. Although you may be naturally endowed with so much wealth now as a result of previous acts of generosity, you need to engage in further acts of generosity so that you will be able to secure sufficient wealth for the future.

That is just one example. We need to understand that whatever good conditions we experience now are, without doubt, the result of our past good karma. However, we need to ensure that we create further good karma or accumulate the merit to maintain and be able to utilise these conditions again. So is in this way that we need to be mindful of the need to make our practice an aid to add to our store of merit.

In the following study group sessions I will make an attempt to go through the text and explain it to the best of my knowledge. Those of you who have come to the study group are aware of what the commitments of joining the study group involve, and I encourage everyone to take that on board.

The main thing is that whoever comes to the study group and participates in it will, from the outset, be mindful of the purpose of gathering here. Not only is it to study for ourselves, but it is also to be of benefit and service to others. The motivation of gathering here is one of mutual benefit, which means coming with a kind attitude, and an attitude of helping rather than harming one's fellow students.

In fact, harming another Dharma practitioner is an extremely negative deed. If you harm them they may lose faith in the Dharma, or they may develop a wrong view. If one is the cause of that, then that is very, very heavy negative karma. One has to be really mindful of that. It is incredibly difficult for someone to actually come the point of coming here to study and so forth. So to cause them to lose interest or become distant would be very unfortunate.

The main thing is that if one comes with a good motivation, such as 'How can I help others? How can I assist others in the study group?' then with that sort of attitude, accompanied by nice, kind and pleasant gestures and a kind mind, we can all work in harmony. Then we can all benefit from it in a very meaningful way. So I encourage everyone to be mindful of this, and in that way we will continue with our study program.

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Edited Version*

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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

21 February 2012

Keeping in mind the essential meaning of the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer that we have just recited as a motivation, we engage in the practice of meditation.

[meditation]

We can now generate a positive motivation for engaging in the teachings, such as the following: For the sake of all mother sentient beings, in order to alleviate all their suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment, the state where all negativities have been completely purified and all positive qualities have been actualised. For that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice as best as I can.

With that type of motivation, whatever activity we engage in becomes very meaningful. Beginning with a motivation is a practice in itself, which is why it is really good to contemplate the motivation we use.

When reflecting on the aspiration to achieve the state of perfect enlightenment, which is a state of being completely free from all negativities and having completely acquired all positive qualities, we firstly need to acknowledge that the Buddha is an enlightened being who has all these qualities. Then we will naturally admire and genuinely respect the Buddha. Because he was able to achieve enlightenment, we can also feel encouraged to achieve that state ourselves and develop the aspiration to do so. With that aspiration our bodhicitta motivation becomes firm and stable.

The particular meditation practice that we have just done consists of having the attitude of giving one's own happiness to other sentient beings and taking their suffering upon oneself. This meditation practice is in fact a practice to further enhance the basis of love and compassion that we already have within ourselves. From the Mahayana point of view, there is no way to engage in genuine spiritual practice without developing genuine love and compassion. So if we aspire to engage in real Dharma practice then we cannot do so without developing the feeling of love and compassion from the depth of our hearts.

The technique of taking and giving, *tong len*, is definitely a practice that is suitable for those who have the aspiration of not wanting personal gain or happiness for oneself, and a willingness to take on any kind of difficulties or problems.

With this practice, we are taking all the unwanted problems and sufferings from all sentient beings along with their various causes, including the very imprints of suffering. At the same time we give away all the conditions for our own happiness, which includes our physical body, our resources and wealth, as well as all our virtues. This practice is suitable for those who have a basic willingness to endure any kind of difficulties or problems, and who are willing to avoid engaging in worldly pleasures.

As I emphasise again and again, the way for us to engage in practice is to begin by acknowledging that the basis for practice already exists within us. We need to protect

whatever values and qualities that we already have and based on that make an attempt to increase and further develop those qualities. As we already have the basis of love and compassion, we need to try to really work on increasing that at a practical level, which is definitely within our capacity.

As I regularly try to remind you, if we ignore what we already have as a basis, and make attempts to do some higher form of practice, which we think has more value, then we are really missing the point. It would be fine if it was possible that we could immediately put some higher form of teachings into our everyday practice merely by hearing it. But that is not the case. Merely hearing some higher forms of practice will not, in itself, guarantee that we are able to practise it right away.

It is far better to be realistic and work on developing and enhancing the basis that we already have within ourselves. That is what we need to really work on. In particular, we need to really contemplate the qualities of love and compassion and relate them to our everyday life and the activities that we engage in. With an attitude of love and compassion things will always work out.

It is a fact that someone who is always endowed with love and compassion does not experience any calamities; any major difficulties or problems in life. Wherever they go, and whatever they do seems to go smoothly; they always have good relationships with others; and whatever activities they engage in are successful. That is sign of their genuine love and compassion.

When we see things going well for those who live their life with love and compassion, we can be inspired to be like them. None of us want problems and difficulties, we all want to have a good and meaningful life, without complications and problems with others, the environment and so forth. So if we can recognise that love and compassion contributes to freeing us from a problematic life, then it is worthwhile that we strive to develop and further enhance the love and compassion we have within us.

It is very clear that having wealth, enough clothing, enough to eat and drink, and sufficient shelter doesn't guarantee a meaningful, happy, problem-free life. There is a recent example of the death of a famous person in America [Whitney Houston]. What were the causes of her death? It was not because she was lacking fame and wealth. She was famous and had enough money, but even those very good conditions seem to have been problematic for her and she ended up, it seems, taking her own life. That she was dependent on pills and so forth clearly shows that having wealth, worldly fame and status doesn't guarantee a happy life. So we need to reflect upon the main causes for a truly happy life, which is having love and compassion for other sentient beings.

What we need to really reflect upon is that mental happiness definitely does not come from external conditions. While external conditions can definitely contribute to our physical comfort and happiness, they do not in themselves directly contribute to our mental happiness. It is thus very clear that mental happiness is to be cultivated within our own minds. We need to contemplate this point again and again.

The great master Asanga mentioned that the happiness that comes from wisdom is firm and stable. What Asanga was indicating is that the happiness that comes from profound wisdom is very stable and durable, and he exhorts us to work towards developing that inner wisdom.

The way to gain inner wisdom is through the practice of meditation, which is why meditation practice is extremely valuable in our everyday life. Through meditation practice we need to contemplate how to achieve the different states of happiness. In relation to the three goals that are presented in the teachings, we are responsible for creating the causes for happiness in our future life. Likewise, creating the causes for the happiness of liberation, for being free from samsara, is our responsibility. Finally, we are also responsible for achieving the everlasting state of ultimate peace and happiness, which is enlightenment.

In light of this the Buddha emphasised, 'I cannot bestow my realisations upon others; nor can I alleviate their sufferings like plucking out a thorn. The only way to help others is by showing them the truth of the path'. The Buddha was indicating that having received the methods and heard the teachings, we need to take personal responsibility for creating the causes for our own liberation and happiness. That is something that we really need to keep in mind

In one of my teachings late last year, I mentioned the recent comment that Geshe Pema Tsering made to me in Adelaide. He said, 'It seems we may never again have that the sense of joy and happiness that we had when we were living and studying in the camp at Buxador in northern India'. He was referring to the fact that even though our conditions with respect to food and clothing were very poor at that time and the external conditions were very harsh, we nevertheless had a true sense of brotherhood and a very happy state mind. The main point here is that it is clear that happiness does not depend on external conditions, but rather on our own state of mind.

Since we have gathered here to study the teachings, we all have our responsibilities. I take responsibility for explaining the text to the best of my knowledge and you, who have come to listen, have the responsibility of really adopting those explanations and putting them into practice. In this way, we can definitely create the causes to achieve something meaningful together.

However, we have to be realistic. We cannot assume that we will be able to free ourselves from samsara, or achieve enlightenment in this very life time. However, while creating the causes for liberation and enlightenment, we definitely have the ability to secure a good rebirth in our next life. Right now, with this precious human rebirth, we are enjoying the results of the merit that we have created in the past. So we need to take responsibility for creating more merit so as to secure a precious human life for our next life. Then we can continue to create the causes for liberation and enlightenment.

The practical way to begin to practice is by observing ethics and morality to the best of our ability. When we make a decision to actively practise morality in our life, then that serves as the basis on which we can overcome a very agitated mind. When that agitated mind is settled down through the active practise of morality, then that becomes a very conducive condition for us to practise meditation, and develop concentration. By practising *morality* we are able to overcome the **discursive conceptual thoughts** in our mind. Then by engaging in the practice of *meditation* and developing concentration, one overcomes the **gross levels of excitement and laxity**. Finally by engaging in the practice of *wisdom*, we overcome the **very subtle level of excitement and laxity**, which is the wrong view of grasping at truly or inherently existent phenomena.

As I have previously explained, through the process of adopting the practice of the three trainings (morality, concentration and wisdom) one first overcomes the discursive thoughts; followed by the gross levels of laxity and excitement; up to overcoming the very subtle levels of the misconceptions of grasping at true existence. If we engage in practice in this practical way then we will definitely reap the positive result of our practice. Now, of course, in explaining this I am encouraging you to practise in that way. Whether or not I am able to do this profoundly myself is questionable, however there is no harm in encouraging you to engage in the practice like this.

It is important to engage in practice, otherwise we could end up like the Tibetan saying, which goes, 'Even a fisherman can give an elegant Dharma talk'. This of course would be a case of hypocrisy. It is not sufficient to utter pious words if one is not practising oneself. This is a really important point.

Having read some material and listened to others, it is possible to give a reasonably good talk about it. However the difficulty is in actually practising the material oneself. We all find it difficult to put the good advice into practice. Nevertheless putting Dharma advice into practice is what we really need to be doing.

In summary, we can all manage, at the very least, to refrain from intentionally harming others. In addition we can be good moral person; meaning that we do not intentionally deceive or harm others, and that we cultivate genuine kindness, and help others by cultivating love and compassion within our hearts. Those are practices that we can all manage to do.

When those qualities of being courteous to others, saying nice words, using pleasant gestures and so forth, come about as a result of one's practice of Dharma, then that is appreciated by others. As I have mentioned previously, if you are living with a partner who may have not initially shared the same interest as you have in meditation, they will start to encourage you to meditate and practice when you begin to show positive qualities.

The main point is to really contemplate putting the most essential point of developing loving kindness into practice. Also to remind oneself not to fall into the category of that saying, 'Even a fisherman can give an elegant Dharma talk'.

3.1.1.1. REFUTING REAL FEELINGS OF PLEASURE

3.1.1.1.3. Extensive explanation

3.1.1.1.3.1. Refuting proofs of real pleasure

3.1.1.1.3.1.1. Refuting proofs for real mental pleasure

3.1.1.1.3.1.2. Refuting proofs for real physical pleasure

This has two subdivisions.

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.1. Refuting an aggregation of the five objects as a proof for real physical pleasure

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2. Refuting individual objects as proof of real physical pleasure

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.1. Refuting an aggregation of the five objects as a proof for real physical pleasure

The five objects are the objects of the five senses, namely form, sound, smell, taste and the tactile sense.

This heading is refuting the proposition that there is real or autonomous physical pleasure, by showing that the physical pleasures from the five objects cannot be experienced simultaneously. We derive a certain amount of pleasure from seeing beautiful objects, hearing beautiful sounds,

smelling nice scents, when eating or drinking tasty food or beverages, or feeling pleasant tactile sensations. However, these pleasurable feelings are not experienced simultaneously, i.e. the pleasure is only experienced with respect to one individual sense at any one time. If we were actually able to experience feeling from all senses simultaneously, then that could form a basis for saying that there is real physical pleasure. But, as will be explained, that is not the case.

The previous two verses, verses 349 and 350, refuted real mental pleasure. This was the first part of the section called Refuting Proofs of Real Pleasure. It is really important to contemplate the absence of real mental pleasure, in addition to this section on the absence of real physical pleasure. These points are part of the broader topic of Refuting Proofs of Real Pleasure.

The main point here is that the pleasures from the objects of the five senses are not autonomous pleasures. The method for refuting the existence of autonomous pleasures is to show that they are interdependent, which refutes the assertion that they are autonomous real pleasures. The first verse related to this is heading is:

**351. When [all] five senses, eye and so forth,
[Simultaneously] apprehend their objects,
A thought [of pleasure] does not refer [to all of
them],
Therefore at that time they do not [all] give
pleasure.**

In explaining the meaning of this verse Gyaltsab Je's commentary first states the opponent's position:

If someone says: the pleasure of the five objects are experienced simultaneously because the five senses can experience the form of an actor, the sound of a flute, the smell of *agaru*, the taste of honey and the tactile of a cloth.

The statement of the opponent having been presented, the objection (or refutation) follows:

Objection: That is not possible, because *when all five senses, eye and so forth, apprehend their objects, a simultaneous thought of pleasure does not occur to all of them. Therefore at that time they do not all give pleasure.* For without it being apprehended by a conceptual thought a pleasure cannot be known and the five objects and five sense pleasures cannot be apprehended by a conceptual thought simultaneously.

This is quite a profound explanation. If we carefully pay attention to it, we might actually be able see this fact for ourselves. It is not really the senses themselves that experiences pleasure but rather the subsequent conceptual thought that thinks, 'This is pleasurable'. For example, when we eat something, if we actually pay attention, we will find that it is only after having generated the thought 'This food is tasty' that we actually experience the pleasure of the food. However in the same moment that we are thinking 'This food tastes good', we cannot be simultaneously thinking about a pleasant sound, a pleasant sight, or a pleasant tactile feeling.

Thus what is being explained here is that the experience of pleasure is preceded by a conceptual thought, and furthermore conceptual thoughts of different sense pleasures do not occur simultaneously. Therefore the pleasures of the five senses cannot all occur at the same time. When we really analyse it, we can see from our own experience that this is true.

To summarise, the first point of the objection is that pleasure cannot be experienced without being apprehended by a conceptual thought. The second point is that the five objects and five senses cannot be simultaneously apprehended by conceptual thoughts. As mentioned previously, we know from our own experience that if we are eating something, it is only when we pay attention to it, and we start to think, 'Ah, this food tastes really good', that we actually experience the pleasure of that food. And at the moment when think that the food taste nice, there is no way we can also think that a certain sound or tactile feeling or smell is pleasant. These thoughts cannot occur simultaneously.

So in this way you can understand that a real or autonomous pleasure is refuted by showing that all of the five sense pleasures cannot be experienced at the same time. The next verse continues the explanation:

**352. Whenever any of the [five] objects is known
[As pleasurable] by one of the [five] senses,
Then the remaining [objects] are not so known
by the remaining [senses]
Since they then are not meaningful [causes of
pleasure].**

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Whenever any of the five objects, forms and so forth, is known as pleasurable by one of the five senses, then the remaining objects are not known by the remaining senses, since the remaining objects are not meaningful [or autonomous] causes of pleasure.

This is basically re-emphasising the point made earlier.

The next verse provides further proof:

**353. The mind apprehends an image of a past object
Which has been apprehended by the senses
And imagines and fancies
It to be pleasurable.**

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

This is so, because the mind apprehends an image of a past object, which has been apprehended by the senses, and imagines and fancies it to be pleasure. It is not possible for multiple conceptual thoughts to generate simultaneously in one mental continuum.

This is a point emphasised in the text *Pramanavarttikakarika* or *Commentary on the Compendium of Valid Cognition*, by Dharmakirti, and it is a point that is raised again and again in debate in the monastery. It reminds me of when I was studying in Buxa, when this quote from *Valid Cognition* was presented in the debate. As I recall, Geshe Sonam Rinchen's explanation was that two conceptual thoughts of the same aspect cannot be generated simultaneously in one mental continuum. Later on, the late Khensur Urgen Tseten said 'Geshe Sonam's interpretation of this point was quite good, wasn't it?' I responded that my interpretation would be, two distinct aspects of the one omnipresent mental factor¹ could not occur at the same time. For example, two distinct feelings, such as pleasant and unpleasant feelings cannot possibly occur simultaneously within one mental continuum. Khensur Rinpoche didn't make any further comment. In any case, the main point is that it is not possible for a similar type but substantially different concepts to occur simultaneously in the one mental continuum.

This point in *Commentary on the Compendium of Valid Cognition* supports the explanation of the five sense

¹ The five omnipresent mental factors are feeling, recognition, intention, attention and contact.

pleasures not being able to be simultaneously apprehended by one conceptual mind. So, as mentioned previously, while experiencing a pleasant taste one cannot possibly simultaneously experience a pleasant sound and so forth.

This point also relates to an awareness to which an object appears but is not ascertained. The example is when you are excessively attached to a beautiful visual object; you cannot possibly hear a sound at the same time. We know through experience that if some sound occurs when we are excessively attached to a beautiful visual object, then we do not ascertain it at the time. That is because one is completely engrossed in the visual object of attachment at that moment. The main point, then, is that a conceptual mind can only ascertain the object that it is engaged with in that moment.

A further proof that a conceptual mind does not ascertain objects that it is not engaged with is, for example, someone who is not disturbed by external sound when they are in deep meditation. It is a fact that even sounds of things going on outside cannot disturb the meditator's mind when they are completely absorbed in single-pointed meditation on the object of meditation. This is proof that in order for the mind to ascertain an object there has to be a conceptual thought engaging with the object.

From our own experience, we know that it is only when we pay attention and think that the object looks beautiful, that we actually get a feeling of pleasure in relation to the beautiful object. Unless and until we actually pay attention to and think about the object as being beautiful we cannot possibly experience any pleasure from seeing that beautiful object.

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2. Refuting individual objects as proofs of real physical pleasure

This is further subdivided into two:

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.1. Actual refutation

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.2. Refuting proofs of real physical pleasure

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.1. Actual refutation

The relative verse reads:

**354. Also the one sense which here [in the world
Is said to] know one object
Is meaningless without an object,
And the object also is meaningless without it.**

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Also the one sense, such as the eye-sense, which here in the world is said to know one object, such as form, is meaningless without an object and the object [form] is meaningless without it [the eye-sense]. Thus they are mutually interdependent. If things do not exist by way of their own-entity then this could not exist, therefore meaningful [or autonomous] physical pleasure does not exist.

In order to establish an object there has to be a sense that perceives the object. For example, establishing form depends on an eye sense that apprehends it as form. And likewise the eye sense that apprehends form is dependent on the object form, so without form there cannot be the eye sense that apprehends form. For example, even though a form does exist for a blind person, they are not able to apprehend it because they do not have the eye sense. So clearly, in order to establish form as existent there has to be an eye sense that apprehends it. Therefore they are mutually dependent.

The explanation that an object and the sense that apprehends the object are mutually dependent, i.e. one cannot exist without the other, establishes that things cannot exist by way

of their own entity. Therefore, as explained in the commentary, the conclusion is that meaningful or autonomous physical pleasure does not exist. Here *meaningful or autonomous* can refer to existing from its own side or existing without depending on the senses. This is the main point being established here.

Those of you who attended His Holiness the Dalai Lama's recent teachings would recall that His Holiness also emphasised this same point when he explained the relationship between an object and the sense that perceives the object.

Let us recite the *Heart Sutra* before we conclude for the evening. While reciting the *Heart Sutra* it is good to reflect on its meaning, as it consists of the essence of the Buddha's teaching. So there is much to think about.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama also mentioned that, compared with the Chinese translation, the Tibetan version of the *Heart Sutra* contains some profound points. One thing he emphasised is that where the Tibetan version says 'the five aggregates also lack inherent existence' the Chinese translation doesn't have the word 'also'. This one word has a profound meaning for understanding the text.

His Holiness' understanding of other traditions and their texts is quite remarkable. The *Heart Sutra* is recited in Mongolian, Chinese, Vietnamese and even the Nepali tradition. It is amazing how His Holiness pays attention to all of the different aspects of the Buddhist tradition. Exhibiting his knowledge about the different traditions shows how he has assumed the great responsibility of preserving the Buddhadharma.

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Edited Version

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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

ཨ་མ་རྒྱལ་པོ་ལྷོ་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

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

28 February 2012

With the motivation that we generated when we recited the *Refuge and bodhicitta prayer*, we can now engage in meditation practice for a few minutes.

[meditation]

It would definitely be beneficial to adopt a daily meditation practice such as the one we have just attempted to do. Using this meditation technique further develops and enhances the basis of love and compassion that we all have within our heart. The *tong-len* meditation is a most essential and meaningful practice with which we need to familiarise ourselves.

We should not consider this practice as merely imaginary as, if we do it sincerely, it imbues our mind with love and compassion. Then whenever an opportunity arises to help others, feeling compassion will be easier and more spontaneous.

If everyone actually practised developing love and compassion, then our world would indeed be a better place. The more people who practise love and compassion, the more benefit it brings to the world. On a personal level we can see that the more we familiarise our mind with developing love and compassion, the gentler it becomes. When love and compassion become an intrinsic part of our being, then wherever we go and whatever we do that sense of love and compassion, which in essence is a genuine concern for others, will always be present.

The result will be a genuinely relaxed and calm state of mind. Others immediately relate to someone who is genuinely happy too, because it brings about a good effect for them, so it has benefit for others as well as ourselves. There is no doubt about the great value and benefit that the practice brings to our daily lives.

As I regularly mention, the best way to develop a harmonious relationship with others, particularly those with whom we associate most closely, is to generate a genuine concern for the other, with a happy mind ourselves. After having meditated for many years, and done a lot of research, the Buddha found that the best way to benefit sentient beings is by developing bodhicitta.

Furthermore, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama emphasised recently in his teachings in India, even if we may have not yet developed the bodhicitta attitude, we can try, at the very least, to familiarise our mind with the attitude of wishing to benefit others. That genuine wish to benefit others should be at the forefront of our mind. As His Holiness mentioned, having the wish to benefit others will bring about a genuine sense of well-being. When I regularly think about the best way to benefit others, what I have understood, is that at the most basic level familiarising ourselves with the attitude of wishing to benefit others is the best way to begin helping others. One can further enhance that with love and compassion and then, of course, develop bodhicitta.

Developing bodhicitta is the optimum way to benefit other sentient beings. Even a semblance of bodhicitta or just an attitude of wishing to benefit others, is a very, very valuable state of mind. With only that attitude in mind, there is no room for any harmful intention to arise.

There is no-one who would not appreciate the value of someone who wishes to benefit them, as no-one wants to be harmed and everyone wishes to be happy. All sentient beings are alike in that they all naturally wish to be happy and do not wish to experience any suffering, or harm from others. So when we have secured the attitude of wishing to benefit others, we have secured a kind of a guarantee not to harm others, and to possibly be only of benefit to others. That is why other beings will definitely appreciate us.

When we think about someone who is trustworthy, what are the qualities on which we base that trust? It is when we are confident that their only wish is to help us and not hurt us that we consider them as a true friend. We can all understand this, even on a basic mundane level. When we have to determine whether someone is a good person, these are the qualities that we rely upon.

In contrast, when someone is considered as a bad or evil person, it is based on the perception that they intentionally harm others and have no intention to benefit and help others. Such a person is considered to be bad company. When parents and teachers advise their charges, 'Don't go near that person', their advice is based on that reason. Rather parents advise their children, and teachers their students, to associate with people who have the qualities of an intention of helping and not harming. These are points that we need to keep in mind.

3.1.1.1.3.1.2. Refuting proofs for real physical pleasure

This has three further subdivisions

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.2.1. Refuting inherently existing consciousnesses

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.2.2. Refuting inherently existing objects

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.2.3. Refuting inherently existent senses

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.2.1. Refuting inherently existing consciousnesses

The relevant verse reads:

355. *Just as a child is said to be born
In dependence on a father and a mother,
So a [visual] consciousness is said to arise
In dependence on an eye sense and on a form.*

Older students would already know about what the term *consciousness* relates to, and what types of consciousnesses there are. However, to refresh your memory there are six types of consciousnesses. They include the five related to the five sense consciousness, the eye, nose, ear, tongue and body or tactile consciousness, to which is added the mental consciousness, and these are called the six primary consciousnesses.

To understand this sub-division, we first need to understand that consciousness itself is not being refuted, as we all know that the six consciousness do exist. What is specifically being refuted is *inherently* existent consciousnesses. This section specifically refutes the assertion that consciousnesses exist inherently, by showing that there is no inherently existing eye consciousness, no inherently existing ear consciousness and so forth.

This point also applies to the *Heart Sutra* in which it says, 'There is no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind' etc. We need to understand immediately that this

refers to there being no inherently existent eye, no inherently existent ear, no inherently existent nose and so forth.

The presentation in this text refutes the assertion that the sense consciousnesses are inherently existent, which is the view held by non-Buddhist schools of thought as well as the lower Buddhist schools, from the Svatantrika downwards. All of these schools of thought assert that consciousnesses exist inherently. The view that is being presented here, is that of the highest Buddhist school—the Prasangika or Consequentialist Buddhist school—who refute the assertion that there is an inherently existing consciousness.

In his commentary on the meaning of the verse Gyaltsab Je begins by stating the assertion that is being refuted.

If you say: Objects and senses do exist by way of their own entity, because their result, which is consciousness, exists.

The reasoning that the opposing schools use is that *the object and the senses* (referring to the sense faculties) *exist by their own entity, because the result, which is consciousness, exists.*

An object and a sense faculty are necessary conditions for a consciousness to arise. Thus, for example, the eye consciousness exists because there is a visual object and an eye sense faculty. These are the conditions necessary for an eye consciousness to manifest. So the eye consciousness arises as the result of a sense object and a sense faculty being present.

Now, of course, this is accepted in all Buddhist schools. However the lower Buddhist schools from the Svatantrika down say that because the object and the sense faculties exist inherently, the result, which is consciousness, has to necessarily exist inherently too. So the reason why they assert an inherently existing consciousness is that as the object and the senses exist inherently, the result, the consciousness, also exists inherently.

To understand the Prasangika objection to, or refutation of, this assertion we need to understand that in stating that the sense object and senses exist inherently, the Svatantrika and the lower schools assert that things exist independently, i.e. that the object and sense exist independently without the need for any other factors or conditions for their existence.

The Prasangika refute that view by showing how both objects and senses are dependent on other factors and conditions for their existence.

Gyaltsab Je explains this in his commentary:

[Refutation:] *Just as a child is said to be born in dependence on a father and a mother, so a visual consciousness is said to arise in dependence on an eye sense and on a form.* Thus, consciousness cannot exist inherently because it is dependent on an eye sense and a form. For example it is like the interdependent connection between child and their parents. Thus the syllogism of interdependent origination is presented here.

The very fact that *a visual consciousness arises in dependence upon the eye sense and the form*, is the reason why an eye consciousness cannot exist inherently. So the sense consciousnesses cannot possibly exist independently, because a sense consciousness depends on an object and a sense faculty (eye, ear, nose etc.). The analogy used here is that a child is dependent on its parents. If a child were to exist inherently, then that would imply that the child exists independently, and thus not be dependent for its existence on either the father and mother, which is absurd. It is impossible for a child to exist without depending on the parents as a cause.

The main point here is that the *sylogism of interdependent origination*¹ is used as to prove that, in this case, the eye consciousness lacks inherent existence, because it is dependent on other factors. It is said that this syllogism with the reasoning of dependent origination, is an extremely profound reasoning. All Madhyamika texts consider this reason [referred to as the king of reasonings] as one of the best to prove the lack of inherent existence. Thus it is considered a very precious reasoning.

In order to understand these points, we need to be able to get a good understanding of the logic presented here. Then we will be able to relate this understanding to other presentations as well. We particularly need to understand the distinction between the higher and lower schools and how the Prasangika contradict the lower schools' view. The lower schools and the Prasangika both agree that consciousness arises from its causes. However the lower schools reason that because consciousness arises from its cause, which is inherently existent, it must also be inherently existent. The Prasangika, to which Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti belong, use this very same syllogism as their reasoning to refute inherent existence.

To go over the reasoning again, the schools such as the Svatantrika, reason that because the object and the eye sense are inherently existent (which they assume to be the case), the resulting eye consciousness also has to be inherently existent too. The Prasangika use the same reasoning to assert that because the eye sense consciousness is dependent on an object and the eye sense faculty, it must lack inherent, independent existence. So we need to understand how the syllogism is used on both sides, but as proof of completely different points.

We, of course, come from the tradition where we assume that Nagarjuna's logic is best, and that his word is the final word. But rather than accepting his work at face value, we need to really understand how the logic and reasoning works. It is only when we have really thought about it and really understood how the logic works that we get a true sense of the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena. We need to become really familiar with the logic so that it becomes our own personal understanding.

If we want to enhance our understanding of emptiness so that we can eventually be able meditate on emptiness, we need to gain the correct understanding of emptiness from the outset. It is, of course, rightly presented as being a very profound subject, in part because those who present the opposing view that establishes inherent existence are also great masters, such as the great masters of Svatantrika tradition, Bhavaviveka and Kamalashila. They have such a great understanding, but their presentations were refuted by Nagarjuna and later by Chandrakirti. So we need to thoroughly understand the view of the masters of other schools, and how these views are refuted. As their views are refuted in Nagarjuna's presentation we need to have a really sound understanding of them, because if we don't, we won't get the correct understanding of emptiness.

Without the proper understanding, if we attempt to go off to do some meditation on emptiness, we may achieve some sense of vacuity, where temporarily we have no conceptual thoughts in our mind. However if, at that point, we assume that we have understood emptiness, it can be detrimental to actually gaining a correct understanding of emptiness.

¹ In general form this syllogism is: Take the subject [any phenomenon] —it lacks inherent existence— because it is a dependent arising.

Without a clear understanding of emptiness, it is very easy to fall into one of the extreme views. If we have not made an attempt to meditate then this might all seem theoretical, and we may not really see the significance of gaining the correct understanding. But if you are sincere, and wish to make an attempt to get a realisation of emptiness, then getting the correct understanding first, is of paramount importance.

If we were to take the passage from the *Heart Sutra*—there is no eye, no form and so forth—literally, and meditate on a sense of vacuity, or absence of forms and feelings and so forth, it is apparently possible to reach a state that is quite pleasant, as temporarily there are no disturbing thoughts in one's mind. Some years ago Ven. Gyatso and I went to St Kilda Pier where we met someone who said that he lived in a boat at the marina. He mentioned to us that he meditates on emptiness and that when he meditated he had a sense of vacuity—that there was nothing, and that gave him a really nice feeling.

We can't blame someone who does not have a correct understanding of emptiness for experiencing that sense of nothingness. However we are also in the danger of arriving at the same point if we only have a partial understanding of emptiness. Without the correct understanding of emptiness we can easily fall into the trap of meditating on nothingness, which is more like nihilism rather than actual emptiness.

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.2. Refuting inherently existent objects

There is a very profound logic in the presentation of these sub-divisions. We have just completed the refutation of the assertion by the lower schools, which is that consciousness is inherently existent because the object and senses exist inherently.

The next refutation focuses more specifically on refuting inherently existent objects. Those of you who were at the recent teachings of His Holiness Dalai Lama will recall how His Holiness presented this logic very, very clearly. When this logic is clarified by great masters like His Holiness, who have a profound understanding of emptiness, we gain a much better understanding ourselves.

When we understand how the logic is presented, it enhances our own intelligence which we can utilise in every aspect of our life. Whenever we do something, even mundane activities, we need to have sound intelligence and good reasoning. When there is some sort of debate and someone has to be refuted, if the opponent is known to be an intelligent person, someone who is of equal intelligence has to be sent to engage in the debate. It can't just be anyone who says clever things.

This goes to show that intelligence is really of paramount importance in whatever we do, and especially when presenting the profound teachings of the Buddha. When it is presented with sound logic and reasoning, we gain a very concrete and stable understanding, not a wishy-washy semblance of an understanding of emptiness.

Nagarjuna is considered to be great scholar and master because of, amongst other things, his clear and accurate use of logic. Within the Buddhist tradition, Nagarjuna is considered to have been extremely kind in presenting us with so many different works that are suitable for different occasions. In addition to his philosophical works on Buddhist tenets he also composed works on medicine and the arts and so forth. Furthermore Nagarjuna's advice was directed to a wide range of people. He gave essential advice to the lay community as well as the ordained community. He also gave specific advice to lay people of high status,

such as text we are studying, which gives advice to the king about how he should govern the country and so forth. Then there are other works of Nagarjuna that relate to the general populace as well. In the text we are studying there are many parts which relate to how the general populace should conduct a meaningful life. So in every aspect Nagarjuna provides so much profound advice.

Referring back to his use of logic, in presenting the profound meaning of emptiness Nagarjuna initially refutes non-Buddhist schools in order to establish the Buddhist view as a correct view. Within the Buddhist schools there are those who have not reached the correct understanding and who still hold a lesser view of emptiness.

Even though none of the Buddhist schools would openly challenge Nagarjuna and contradict him, Nagarjuna presents very sound reasoning and logic to show the profound view, lest the others fall into an incorrect understanding of emptiness. So he helps them to gain the correct understanding.

This sub-division, Refuting Inherently Existent Objects, follows the earlier refutation of consciousnesses. The verse that relates this heading reads:

356. *Past and future objects
And the senses are meaningless,
So too are present objects
Since they are not distinct from these two.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins by explaining the view of the other:

If you say: Consciousness does exist inherently because it apprehends an object [that exists inherently].

Then the commentary provides a refutation of that assertion.

[Refutation:] *Past and future objects and the senses are meaningless* for nothing is obtained when they cease. A present that is not related to past and future cannot be established.

In order to establish an object there has to be a consciousness that perceives the object. Thus, when the object is established it is either related to a consciousness that has already perceived an object, or to a consciousness that will perceive the object in the future. However the consciousness that perceives the object in the past has already ceased, and the future is yet to be established.

Furthermore, when we look at the present, we cannot establish a present that is not related to either the past or the future. Therefore if the object is not related to the past or the future, the present object cannot be established. So in other words, how can an inherently existent object be established?

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Thus, wouldn't it be the case that a non-inherently existent present would have to depend on its past and future? That would have to be the case. If you claim that the present exists at the time of past and future, then *present objects will be meaningless too, since they are not distinct from these two.*

Here, the very establishment of the object is being questioned. How do objects exist? There cannot be an object that does not depend on the past and the future. What we consider to be a present object relates to both the past and the future. But if the present object exists in the past and the future then there is no reason to establish it as a present object, because it already exists in the past and will exist in the future. So if the present is not distinct from the past and

the future, there is no point in establishing a present object. Thus the conclusion is that there cannot be an independently inherent existing object in the present, because the object that exists now is an object that is dependent on the past and the future. So it cannot be an inherently existent object as it is not independent.

The next assertion to be refuted refers to the present consciousness perceiving a present object with a sense faculty. It is asserted by the opponent that both exist inherently.

The refutation of that assertion is presented in the next verse:

**357. *Just as due to error the eye perceives
A whirling firebrand as a wheel,
So the senses apprehend
Present objects [as if real].***

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of the verse as follows:

If you say: Since a present consciousness is apprehending a present object, thus sense and object exist inherently.

[Refutation:] *Just as due to error the eye perceives a whirling firebrand as a wheel, so the senses apprehend present objects as if real.* The senses, objects and consciousness equally lack inherent existence, for they merely appear to exist [inherently] to a mistaken consciousness.

Even though an object is perceived in a certain way by a consciousness, that doesn't mean that it has to necessarily exist in that way. This is explained with the analogy of someone rapidly whirling a fire on a stick which from a distance looks like a wheel of fire. But even though it is perceived as a wheel of fire there is, in fact, no real wheel of fire. It is only perceived like that because of the condition of the firebrand being whirled around very quickly. This analogy is an example of a mistaken eye consciousness that sees a wheel of fire, when in fact a wheel of fire does not exist.

Using that analogy, the commentary explains that *the senses, the objects and consciousness all equally lack inherent existence; although they appear to a mistaken consciousness as inherently existent, in reality they lack inherent existence.*

I have explained these points several times in the past so of course older students will be already familiar with this. However there may be people who are not familiar with this understanding, so we can use another analogy of a mistaken consciousness perceiving inherent existence.

Take the example of a close friend who appears in the distance. We instinctively perceive them as being independently existent, i.e. they appear to exist from their own side. What doesn't appear to us are the conditions that contribute to the existence of our friend; rather they appear as inherently and independently existing from their own side. When the friend first appears to our eye consciousness our mental consciousness apprehends that appearance, and believes that the appearance is true. This is what is called grasping at a self.

As explained in the teachings, all our mistaken views are caused by grasping at a self that appears to be independently existent, and then the mental consciousness actually grasping at that appearance. In relation to the appearance of a friend, we need to understand how the person appears to us and how we totally believe in that appearance. We don't question the validity of that appearance, rather we totally believe in and grasp to that

appearance, and thus apprehend an inherently existent friend.

If we question why we have that appearance of inherent existence to begin with, the answer presented in the teachings is that it is because the imprint of the false perception has been implanted in our consciousness from time immemorial. So we have a strong imprint in our mind that serves as a condition for us to have that mistaken appearance. Due to the influence of the imprints in our mind, we first have a mistaken appearance, and then the consciousness apprehends and believes in that mistaken appearance. It is this combination that causes us to grasp at an inherently existent self.

The analogy used in the teachings is the spectators who are under the influence of a magician's spell. They perceive the illusory objects, such as horses and elephants that the magician conjures. The conjured horses and elephants appear to them due to the influence of the spell, and they believe that they are real and actually existing. However, the latecomers will not see the magician's illusions, because they are not under the magician's spell.

Using that analogy, it is explained that ordinary sentient beings, due to the influence of their imprints, have a mistaken appearance and strongly belief that things exist inherently. Whereas those who have the correct understanding of emptiness, will still have the appearance of inherent existence, but strong belief in the appearance will not be present. In their mind they will know that even though things appear to be truly existent, or inherently existent, they do not exist in that way.

It is very important that we remind ourselves again and again, that whatever we perceive is like an illusion, and that it does not exist in the way that it appears to us. Reminding ourselves like this again and again is really crucial for gaining the correct understanding of emptiness, and essential for our Dharma practice.

Otherwise if appear as being inherently existent; when something beautiful appears as being inherently beautiful, we will begin to grasp at it. By totally believing in an inherently beautiful object, we develop strong attachment to the object. For example, when a beautiful vase appears to us, there is, of course, a vase that does exist, but what appears to us is an inherently, independently existent beautiful vase. As we totally believe in an inherently existent, independent vase, we longingly desire to possess that vase. But such a vase is totally non-existent. So we need to really train our mind by constantly reminding ourselves that things do not exist in the way that they appear to us. Rather they are just like an illusion.

We need to gain a good understanding of this point made in the teachings: in meditative equipoise the appearance is *space-like*, while in the post-meditative state, the appearance is *like an illusion*. These are the crucial points that we need to understand.

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.3. Refuting inherently existent senses

There are three sub-divisions.

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.3.1. Refuting inherently existent senses and objects through refuting inherently existent elements

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.3.2. Refuting inherently existent elements

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.3.3. Therefore forms are not inherently existent

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.2.3.1. *Refuting inherently existent senses and objects through refuting inherently existent elements*

The verse that relates to this sub-division reads:

358 *The senses and their objects are regarded
As being composed of the elements.
Since the elements are meaningless individually,
These also are meaningless in fact.*

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

If you say: Sense and object exist inherently because their cause – the elements – exists.

[Refutation:] The senses are meaningless in existing inherently, for *the senses and their objects are regarded as being composed of the elements. Since the elements are meaningless, lacking inherent existence individually, these [sense objects] also are meaningless, lacking inherent existence in fact.*

The opponent asserts that *the senses and their objects* exist inherently *because their causes*, which are *the elements*, exist inherently. The refutation shows how the elements also lack inherent existence, by showing how they cannot exist individually by themselves. The way elements act as a cause is when they are combined, and as a combination they depend on each other. So the way to refute inherently existent elements is by showing that if elements were inherently existent, then each individual element would be able to independently function by itself. If they were independently existent, they would function independently, but that is not the case.

The commentary shows that *since elements are meaningless, meaning that they lack inherent existence individually, the sense objects are also meaningless, lacking inherent existence in fact.*

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.2.3.2. *Refuting inherently existent elements*

The next verse explains how the elements individually lack inherent existence.

359. *If the elements are each different,
It follows that there could be fire without fuel.
If mixed, they would be characterless.
Such is also to be ascertained about the other
elements.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

If the elements are each individually different, it follows that there could be fire without fuel. If mixed, they would be inherently characterless. As such they do depend on each other. Such is also to be ascertained about the other three elements.

If you assert that *the elements* are *individually* inherently *different*, then it would logically have to *follow* that there would have to be *fire without fuel*. Fire would be independent and inherently existent, and thus would not depend on the other elements such as the wood, which consists of the other elements. If fire were to be inherently existent then it would have to exist by itself without depending on the other three elements, which are the components of the fuel. However, that goes against the obvious fact that in order to have fire you need to have fuel.

If the elements were mixed, implying that if they were inherently mixed, then *they would have to be inherently characterless*, but *they do depend on each other*. It is absurd to be inherently different as well as inherently combined together.

3.1.1.1.3.1.2.2.2.3.3. *Therefore forms are not inherently existent*

The relevant verse is:

360. *Because the elements are thus meaningless in
both these ways,
So too is a composite.
Because a composite is meaningless
So too are forms meaningless in fact.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Because the elements are thus meaningless, lacking inherent existence in both these ways—individually and collectively—so too is a composite meaningless. Because a composite is meaningless, so too are forms meaningless, because they lack inherent existence in fact. Thus, the cause for meaningful [or autonomous] physical pleasure does not exist as well.

This is a summary of the main refutation of the main assertion that there is real physical pleasure. The refutation is that:

- ∞ Because the elements lack inherent existence, both individually and collectively, the composite of them is meaningless.
- ∞ Because the composite is meaningless then forms are also meaningless, because they do not have true or autonomous existence as they lack inherent existence.
- ∞ Thus the conclusion is that physical pleasure cannot exist autonomously or inherently.

Transcribed by Su Lan Foo

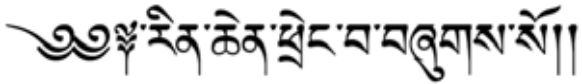
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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

6 March 2012

Bearing in the mind the motivation that we need to cultivate for the practice of meditation, we can reflect upon the meaning of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* that we have just recited. Everyone is aware of the physical posture needed for the practice of meditation, so we can adopt the appropriate physical posture as well. Although we are fortunate in having all the physical and mental conditions for the practice of meditation, whether we put them into practice or not depends on ourselves. Since we already have the right conditions, it is our responsibility to actually engage in meditation if we are to subdue our own minds. We can now begin the meditation. [meditation]

It is really worthwhile to engage in a daily meditation practice just as we have done so now, as a means to enhance the seed of love and compassion that we already have within us.

3.1.1.1. REFUTING REAL FEELINGS OF PLEASURE

3.1.1.1.3. Extensive explanation (cont.)

3.1.1.1.3.2. Refuting the entity of real pleasure

We need to bear in mind that the real pleasure that is identified here as the object of refutation refers to inherently existent pleasure, pleasure existing from its own side, or independently. If someone were to ask, 'Is there pleasure?' then the correct answer is, 'Yes, there is pleasure'. But what is being refuted here is the existence of independently or inherently existent pleasure. The term 'emptiness' refers to the negation of inherent existence of all phenomena, so we need to apply this understanding whenever emptiness is mentioned in the teachings.

Time and again, the teachings remind us how we have the misconception of seeing objects that we perceive as being inherently existent. We totally believe in that mistaken appearance and then grasp at as being inherently existent.

When we relate to pleasure, it appears to us as if the pleasure actually exists from its own side, as if it is an independently existent, solid, concrete pleasure. When we strongly believe that pleasure exists from its own side, then our attachment or grasping at the pleasure increases. So we need to train our mind in understanding that pleasure does not exist in the way that it appears to us, but rather in dependence on name and mental imputation. In other words, we are merely labelling pleasure as pleasure on a suitable base to be labelled pleasure.

Apart from the name and label there is no truly existent pleasure from its own side, so the more we familiarise ourselves with this understanding the more it helps us to definitely reduce strong grasping, and longing for pleasurable experience. In that way our understanding actually helps us to reduce our attachment, and thus the pain and complications arising from attachment are also reduced. When we gain the actual realisation of emptiness, we will be able to subdue our mind and free it from the control of the delusions such as attachment. Meanwhile, even just a correct intellectual understanding can also help

us to reduce strong attachment. So to that effect it is good for us to really see the significance of this presentation.

We need to gain a good understanding of how things actually exist in mere name and label through mental imputation. When it is explained that a label is merely imputed upon a valid base, this negates existence from its own side. This is completely opposite to how things appear to us. When we see a beautiful object, the quality of beauty appears to us as existing from its own side, as actually existing on the basis on which the label 'beauty' is imputed. We don't perceive it as being merely labelled, or merely imputed on a base. Rather we see it as existing from its own side, and when we totally believe that the beauty truly exists from its own side, our attachment to the object increases. So, we need to really understand how beauty exists in mere name and label.

It is also important that we gain the correct understanding of what is being refuted. The Prasangika point of view does not refute the existence of beauty altogether. If the question is whether there is beauty, then the answer is 'Yes, beauty does exist, but not independently from its own side'. However, as mentioned earlier, when we perceive beauty in an object, it appears to our ordinary minds as existing from its own side. As explained in the teachings, if beauty actually existed from its own side, or independently, then we would have to be able to find it when we search for that beauty in the object. However with thorough analysis of the basis of imputation, there is no possible way that we can find beauty existing independently from its own side. Based on that analysis we arrive at the correct understanding that beauty does exist, but not independently, and that beauty exists merely as a name and a label imputed by our mind.

At this point we need to understand that 'mental imputation' does not mean that we can impute any label on any object. In order to remove that doubt, the teachings explain that a name and label can be imputed only upon a valid base. When a name and label is imputed upon a valid base, that object actually needs to be able to function in accordance with the label. For example, when the label 'person' is given to a valid base, i.e. the parts of a person, which are the five aggregates, there is actually a person that exists conventionally and functions as a person. However that person does not function ultimately or independently. Likewise, when the name and label 'clock' is imputed upon a suitable base, it has to be able to function as a clock. So when we refer to this clock on the table, it does exist and function conventionally by giving us the correct time. Thus, it has to be understood that a name and label can be only imputed upon a valid base. So that when the name and label is imputed, the basis actually functions in accordance with that label.

The verse relating to this outline reads:

361. Also because consciousnesses, feelings,
Discriminations, and compositional factors
Altogether and individually are without
essential factuality,
[Pleasures] are not ultimately meaningful.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse by first presenting the assertion that is to be refuted:

If you say: Because feelings, consciousness, discrimination, and compositional factors occur simultaneously, they exist inherently.

Of the five aggregates, the form aggregate was the subject of the previous verses, and here the remaining four aggregates,

listed as feeling, consciousness, discrimination and compositional factors, are asserted as occurring simultaneously.

The five aggregates are.

- ∞ The form aggregate, which relates to our physical body.
- ∞ The aggregate of feeling determines whether we have pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings or neutral feelings.
- ∞ The aggregate of consciousness refers to our primary consciousnesses.
- ∞ The aggregate of discrimination is a specific mental function that identifies aspects of an object, such as its shape and colour and so forth.
- ∞ The compositional factor encompasses all of the other functions that do not fit into the other four aggregates, such as our negative emotions of anger, jealousy, and hatred and positive emotions such as love and compassion and so forth.

Gyaltsab Je then presents the refutation of this assertion.

[Refutation:] That is not possible, *because consciousnesses, feelings, discriminations, and compositional factors*, altogether and individually are *without essential factuality*. Thus, pleasures are *not ultimately meaningful*.

The five aggregates either combined together or individually, are without essential factuality. This means that, just like the elements, the five aggregates cannot exist inherently, either combined together or individually. *Thus*, the conclusion is that *pleasures are not ultimately meaningful*, indicating that they cannot exist ultimately or inherently.

The refutation of the five aggregates existing inherently either as a combination or individually uses the same logic as that used to refute the elements, which was presented last week.

3.1.1.2. REFUTING INHERENTLY EXISTING PAIN

Just as with pleasure, the answer to the question, 'Does pain exist?' is that, 'Yes, pain does exist'. What is refuted here then is inherently existent pain. So while pain does exist, inherently existent pain does not exist.

As the relevant verse reads:

**362. *Just as lessening of pain
Is fancied to be pleasure in fact,
So destruction of pleasure
Is also fancied to be pain.***

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Having negated that desirable objects are causes for meaningful pleasure, by establishing their nature and reasons, the negation of undesirable objects as causes for inherently existent suffering is now being established.

Just as the text refuted the assertion that the pleasure caused by a *desirable object* is *meaningful* or inherently existent, this presentation refutes *inherently existent suffering* caused by *undesirable* or unpleasant objects.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Just as lessening of the feeling of pain is fancied to be meaningful pleasure in fact, so destruction of pleasure, where one does not experience the slightest manifest pleasure, is also fancied to be inherently existent pain. However, pain does not exist inherently even in the slightest, for it is merely a dependent phenomenon.

As explained in the past, what we experience as pleasure that is none other than the lessening of pain. When there is a lessening of pain then that is experienced as pleasure. The

Tibetan term for what is translated here as 'fancied' also has the connotation of taking pride in what is considered to be pleasure. So the text is explaining that the pleasure we take pride in is none other than the lessening of pain.

In the event where pleasure is removed, we experience pain and we don't experience even the slightest manifest pleasure. And we perceive the pain as being truly or inherently existent pain. But, *inherently existent pain does not exist even in the slightest, for it is merely a dependent phenomenon.*

As with all other refutations of inherent existence, this refutation of inherently existent pain is based on the fact that it is an interdependent phenomenon, and thus it cannot exist inherently.

3.1.1.3. RESULT OF THE REFUTATION

What is the result of having refuted the inherent existence of pleasure and pain? Do we gain anything? This is explained in two subdivisions.

3.1.1.3.1. Liberation through realising emptiness

3.1.1.3.2. Identifying the mind realising emptiness

3.1.1.3.1. Liberation through realising emptiness

The verse relating to this reads:

**363. *Thus attachment to meeting with pleasure
And attachment to separating from pain
Are to be abandoned because they do not
inherently exist.
Thereby those who see thus are liberated.***

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je states:

As mentioned previously, both desire and the object of desire lack inherent existence. *Thus*, by meditating on the emptiness of inherent existence, *attachment to meeting with pleasure, and attachment to separating from pain will be abandoned, because they do not inherently exist.*

Thereby, having abandoned desire one does not create any karma, *thus those who see this are liberated*. It is when one sees interdependent origination as being free from all extreme fabrications that one is liberated. Thus, you must strive to realise emptiness.

Here Gyaltsab Je is very compassionately encouraging us to gain the realisation of emptiness, for all of the reasons that have been presented earlier. *Attachment to meeting with pleasure, and the attachment to separating from pain* arises as a consequence of adhering to the misconception that pleasure and pain are inherently existent. That attachment will be abandoned when one meditates on the emptiness of inherently existent pleasure and pain.

Thereby as mentioned here, *having abandoned desire one does not create any karma, thus those who see this are liberated*. When one ceases to create karma, one will obtain the state of liberation, being free from the karmic consequences of attachment to pleasures and the lessening of pain. Here, not creating any karma refers particularly to not creating the propelling karma to be reborn in cyclic existence. One would still create other karma, but the particular karma of being propelled into cyclic existence, or samsara, will be abandoned.

Having exhorted one to realise emptiness, the next question presented in the text is: How do we identify the mind that realises emptiness? What is that mind? What type of mind realises emptiness? In this way we can see Nagarjuna's skilful method in presenting the teaching very systematically with logical reasons. He presents the material just as one

would educate young children—an important point being clearly presented, followed by another to point to back that up, and so on.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, identifying the mind realising emptiness relates to the misconception held by some that emptiness means not seeing anything at all. The doubt that arises here is: Why is it called the mind realising emptiness? Is it because it sees nothing or is it because things are merely imputed? The fundamental question to be answered is: Do you call it the mind realising emptiness because things are merely imputed, and if not why is it called the mind realising emptiness?

3.1.1.3.2. Identifying the mind realising emptiness

As explained in the commentary the mind realising emptiness is mind of an arya being in meditative equipoise, which realises emptiness directly, thus overcoming the very root of ignorance (i.e. grasping to the self), as well as all the misconceptions that are present with that ignorance. The actual realisation of emptiness is when those misconceptions are completely removed. Thus one must guard against the misconception that negates actual existence, establishing nothingness. Some non-Buddhist schools, such as the Forders, reached that very conclusion i.e. that they would reach a state of mind of nothingness. They assert a state of no-consciousness as being the highest state of realisation. There is a great danger in making that assumption.

The verse that relates to this reads:

364. What sees [reality]?

*Conventionally it is said to be the mind
[For] without mental factors there is no mind
[And hence minds and mental factors] are
meaningless, due to which it is not asserted
that they are simultaneous.'*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

If asked: *What sees* reality then?

[Response:] The mind that sees ultimate reality does not itself exist ultimately, for *conventionally it is said to be the mind* of meditative equipoise characterised by the absence of dualistic appearance with respect to emptiness, and which is produced and disintegrates moment by moment.

Older students will be familiar with this point, as I have explained it in detail many times previously. However, as a reminder, what is being identified here is how the mind perceives emptiness directly in meditative equipoise, which, as mentioned here, is characterised by the absence of dualistic appearance. As explained many times previously, the absence of dualistic appearance refers to the absence of three appearances:

- ∞ The appearance of subject and object as being separate
- ∞ The appearance of true existence
- ∞ The appearance of conventional existence or conventionality.

All of these three appearances are absent for the mind in meditative equipoise that is directly realising emptiness. The only thing that appears to the mind in meditative equipoise meditating on realising emptiness is emptiness. Nothing else but emptiness appears to that mind.

However the mind that realises emptiness directly is itself a conventional truth, or conventionality. Even though the mind is realising an ultimate truth, the subject itself, which is the mind realising emptiness or ultimate truth, is itself a

conventional phenomenon. That is because it is a mind that is produced and disintegrates moment by moment.

Furthermore, a mind that perceives the mind that directly realises emptiness, apprehends it only as a conventional phenomenon. What appears as ultimate is only emptiness, so conventional phenomena cannot appear as being the ultimate to a mind that sees the conventional.

The main point here is that the mind itself is a conventional truth. Thus while the meditative equipoise single-pointedly perceiving emptiness sees the ultimate, that mind itself is not the ultimate. Although it is a mind characterised by the absence of dualistic appearance with respect to emptiness, it is itself produced and disintegrating moment by moment, and is thus a conventionality.

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

That mind is merely a dependent arising and does not exist inherently. For *without mental factors there is no mind and no mind without mental factors and hence minds and mental factors are meaningless.*

Furthermore, mind cannot possibly see itself, just as the tip of a finger cannot touch itself, and *it is not asserted that two separate minds could possibly be simultaneous.*

Basically this is refuting the assertion that there is a separate mind that knows the mind because the mind has the ability to see itself. *Furthermore, no two separate minds could possibly exist simultaneously,* refers to the mind and the mental factors. As the mind functions in relation to its mental factors, the mind and mental factors are dependent on each other and so cannot arise distinctively and simultaneously in the one mind. They are always dependent on each other.

The main point this subdivision is to clearly identify the actual mind realising emptiness.

3.1.2. Both Lesser Vehicle practitioners and Great Vehicle practitioners equally realise subtle emptiness

This is explained in two subdivisions:

3.1.2.1. Necessity of realising subtle emptiness even to attain liberation

3.1.2.2. Difference between the Lesser Vehicle and the Great Vehicle

3.1.2.1. NECESSITY OF REALISING SUBTLE EMPTINESS EVEN TO ATTAIN LIBERATION

The Tibetan word, *teg pa* translated here as 'vehicle' has the connotation of being able to hold or carry. So the terms 'Lesser Vehicle' and 'Great Vehicle' refer to the size of the load that can be carried or held.

The Lesser Vehicle is referred as such because it holds primarily one's own purpose, which is self-liberation. Whereas, the Great Vehicle upholds the aspiration and determination to liberate all sentient beings from sufferings. So the distinction between the Great and Lesser vehicle relates to the number of beings to be liberated.

The point here is that regardless of whether one is inclined to practise the Great Vehicle or the Lesser Vehicle, one needs to gain the realisation of emptiness in order to be liberated. Without the realisation of emptiness there is no way a practitioner of the Great Vehicle, can liberate themselves, let alone liberate others.

At a personal level, if one wishes to be liberated there is no other way than to gain the realisation of emptiness. As there is no-one who does not wish for liberation from suffering, and everyone naturally wishes for liberation, we need to

understand that the ultimate method for gaining liberation is through the realisation of emptiness.

The significance of this presentation is the importance of understanding that one needs to gain the realisation of subtle emptiness. This implies gaining the most subtle realisation of emptiness as presented by the Prasangika or Consequentialist school, i.e. the emptiness of things existing from their own side or inherent existence. One needs to gain an understanding of that level of emptiness, in contrast to the emptiness that is presented by the lower schools.

The verse that relates to this explanation reads:

365. *Knowing thus correctly, just as it is,
That transmigrating beings do not exist in fact,
One passes [from suffering] not subject [to
rebirth and hence] without appropriating
[rebirth],
Like a fire without its cause.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Knowing thus correctly, just as it is, that transmigrating beings do not exist inherently in fact, one passes from suffering not subject to rebirth and hence without appropriating rebirth, like a fire without its cause.

Knowing thus correctly means knowing without any fault, to the subtlest level, that *transmigrating beings do not exist inherently in fact*. Emptiness is classified into the emptiness of person and the emptiness of other phenomena. Basically, when the emptiness of person and the emptiness of phenomena are realised correctly without any error, then *one passes from suffering, not subject to rebirth and hence without appropriating rebirth*. *One passes from suffering not subject to rebirth* refers to the fact that once the cause of rebirth, which is the ignorance of grasping at a self, is removed, one passes beyond, which means abandoning the cause to ever be reborn again uncontrollably in samsara.

For an arhat, that means overcoming the very seed of ignorance, which is the grasping at a self. Because the arhats lack any grasping at a self through gaining the realisation of emptiness, they have removed the seed that is the very cause of samsara. So there is no cause for them to reborn again in cyclic existence. Thus they are liberated. But although they have removed the seed of ignorance they have not abandoned its imprint.

Whereas on the Mahayana path, at the level of path of meditation on the eight ground (when the delusions have been completely eradicated), the arya being will not be reborn again in samsara as a result of grasping at true existence or grasping at a self. Not *appropriating a rebirth* means that they will not be reborn again in cyclic existence, and from then on, cyclic existence completely ceases. The analogy used here is *like a fire without its cause*. Just as there cannot be fire without its cause, likewise rebirth is not possible without the cause for appropriating rebirth. That is how the rebirth in samsara ceases completely.

The essence of this explanation is that the way to achieve the cessation of the causes for samsara is to completely overcome their root cause, which is the misconception of grasping at a self. That misconception is overcome by applying an appropriate and powerful antidote. As explained in the teachings that antidote is the mind that focuses on the same object as the mistaken mind that grasps at a self, but with a diametrically opposed apprehension.

The misconception that grasps at the self focuses on the self, and the mind that realises selflessness also focuses on the self, but they are the antithesis of each other. While the mind

that grasps at a self focuses on the object of the self, apprehending the self to be inherently or truly existent, the mind that realises selflessness, which has the same object of focus, the self, apprehends it as being totally empty of inherent existence. Both minds focus on the same object but have diametrically opposed apprehensions of that object which is the self or person.

That misconception that grasps at the self is the cause for samsara, so when that grasping at the self is overcome, then the cause for samsara is naturally eliminated. Then there is no cause to propel one into another rebirth in samsara. The powerful antidote that achieves this result is the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness, which completely destroys the apprehension of a truly existent or inherently existent self.

We can see from our own experience that all our desires and aversions arise because of an initial strong grasping at the self. Our strong attachment to what we want or aversion towards what we don't like, plus all of the other delusions propel us to create karma. The stronger our notion of a self or a stronger sense of 'me', the more we enhance the importance of that 'me' and 'I'. Then, in response to that strong grasping at the 'I', we create negative karma through our actions of body, speech and mind. It is that combination of our grasping at the self and the karma that we create that propels us into samsara.

By grasping at what is satisfactory to ourselves, and feeling aversion to that which opposes us, we create the karma that propels us into samsara. So one needs to understand clearly that it is only when one gains the realisation of emptiness that one is able to overcome the subtle grasping at a self.

The misconception of grasping at a self is grasping at a truly or inherently existent self. So when one realises that a truly or inherently existent self does not exist in any way, one gains the realisation of selflessness or emptiness.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

This presentation clearly shows that even hearers and solitary realisers can have the realisation of subtle emptiness. As it is mentioned in the sutras, 'even those who wish to train on the hearers ground' and so forth....' and 'If you wonder how the Tathagata transforms a hearer'....' Also presented in the hearer's scriptures there are passages such as, 'Forms are likened to foam/' and so forth.

There are presentations of emptiness in the scriptures that are presented to hearers. However one needs to understand that the scriptures that are intended solely and uncommonly for the hearers do not have a presentation of emptiness, whereas the scriptures that are intended for both hearers and bodhisattvas do have a presentation of emptiness.

As mentioned here, in the hearer scriptures there are passages such as 'Forms are likened to foam', and feelings are likened to water bubbles and so forth. In the hearer's scriptures there are examples of each of the five aggregates—form, feeling, discrimination, consciousness and compositional factors. Each one of the analogies indicates the non-inherent existence or emptiness of the five aggregates. Thus forms are likened to foam which is not very durable, and disintegrates very easily; feelings are like water bubbles, which can burst any moment; discrimination is like a mirage; consciousness is like an illusion; and compositional factors are like the plantain tree, which doesn't have any essence.

This explanation of emptiness with these analogies is presented in the hearer's scriptures. And it is also explained

in the Madhyamika, or Middle Way teachings, and in the commentary on bodhicitta and so forth. The main point that one needs to understand is that the presentation of emptiness is not directed to the hearers who adhere to the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika tenets, but to hearers who are adherents of the Prasangika view. The conclusion we draw here, is that in order to realise emptiness it is necessary to adhere to the Prasangika view of emptiness.

3.1.2.2. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LESSER VEHICLE AND GREAT VEHICLE

This section is a response to the valid question: What difference, then, is there between the Lesser Vehicle and Great Vehicle? In the Middle Way school there is a clear presentation that when the hearers and solitary realisers realise emptiness and then further enhance their understanding of emptiness they gain arhatship, which is the final goal of the Lower Vehicle.

On the Great Vehicle path, the bodhisattva path, when one reaches the eighth ground of the bodhisattva there is a cessation of the causes for rebirth in samsara, and they are free from the control of delusions and karma. However, while an arhat will remain in that blissful state of liberation, in a blissful meditative state, the bodhisattvas intentionally choose to be reborn in samsara. Because of their aspiration to benefit all sentient beings, they continuously choose to be reborn in samsara again and again, until all beings reach enlightenment. Without understanding this difference, one may question the distinction between the Lesser and Great Vehicle.

The following verse relates to this point:

**366. *Bodhisattvas also who have seen it thus,
Seek perfect enlightenment with certainty.
They make the connection between lives
Until enlightenment only through their
compassion.***

In presenting the meaning of the verse Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with an assertion:

If you say: This was presented for the sake of obtaining the Mahayana liberation.

Then it presents the refutation:

[Refutation:] This is not so because *bodhisattvas* also, *who have seen emptiness thus, seek perfect enlightenment with certainty.* 'Bodhisattvas also' implies that hearers see emptiness.

The commentary continues with another assertion:

If you say: What difference is there then between the Great and Lesser vehicles and that there would be no cause for the bodhisattva to remain in samsara?

Bodhisattvas vow that they will remain in samsara until all sentient beings are free of samsara. So if they have achieved the cessation of the causes to be reborn in samsara then how can they actually come back to samsara?

As the commentary explains:

[Response:] There is no fault as such because *they [bodhisattvas] make the connection between lives until enlightenment only through their compassion;* and not by taking rebirth under the control of karma and delusions.

Even though bodhisattvas have removed the cause to be reborn involuntarily and uncontrollably in samsara, out of their compassion they vow to come back to samsara as a way of benefitting sentient beings. If they lacked compassion then when they reached the state where there is no more

suffering there would be nothing to stop them from remaining peacefully there, without having to bother about this complicated place called samsara. However the reason why they are compelled to come back to samsara again and again in order to benefit all sentient beings is their great compassion for sentient beings.

This point is emphasising the preciousness of compassion. As the Madhyamika teachings mention, compassion is important in all three instances, in the beginning, in the middle and at the end. For the bodhisattva, at very beginning this compassion compels them to practice on the bodhisattva path to reach enlightenment. In the middle when they have removed the cause of samsara, and have no more suffering, they voluntarily come back to samsara to benefit sentient beings. And even at the end, when they are enlightened, they continue to benefit sentient beings out of their compassion.

Bear in mind that next Tuesday is the discussion evening. It is the time for you to really revise the material and have a good discussion amongst yourselves, as a way to further your understanding of the presentation here. It will be very good to do the discussion with a sincere wish to benefit each other. On the following week there is the exam. Again, it is good for you to come and to write your answers, and in that way familiarise your mind with the material. It will be good to do that well.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo
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Edited Version*

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Discussion (13.03.2012)

Week: 1 (14 February 2012)

1. Why is the human rebirth more precious than a wish fulfilling jewel? [2]

b) How can we utilise this human life that we have now, with its ten endowments and eight liberties? [3]

2. The precious human rebirth is hard to obtain. The teachings explain a human rebirth is extremely difficult to obtain for three reasons. List these three reasons and give a brief explanation of each. [6]

3. What is the essence of the Buddha's teaching, as his Holiness emphasised and explained in detail? [2]

Week: 2 (21 February 2012)

4. Geshe la gave an explanation of the practical way to begin a practice. Explain this practice. [6]

5. " In explaining the meaning of this verse (vs. 351) Gyaltshab Je's commentary first states the opponent's position: If someone says: the pleasure of the five objects are experienced simultaneously because the five senses can experience the form of an actor, the sound of a flute, the smell of *agaru*, the taste of honey and the tactile of a cloth." In the refutation of this statement there are two points to understand. What are they? [4]

6. Verse 354. *Also the one sense which here [in the world
Is said to] know one object
Is meaningless without an object,
And the object also is meaningless without it.*

a) Explain this verse. [4]

b) What conclusion follows, as explained in the commentary? [2]

Week: 3 (28 February 2012)

7. What are the conditions for an eye consciousness to exist? [4]

8a) The Prasangika say the sense consciousness cannot possibly exist independently. Why? Give an analogy.

b) Give the general form of the syllogism of dependent origination. [3]

9. a) Give the analogy used as an example of a mistaken eye consciousness. [4]

b) Using that analogy what does the commentary explain? [4]

10. Give the summary of the main refutation of the main assertion that there is real physical pleasure. [5]

Week: 4 (06 March 2012)

11. a) 'The Prasangika point of view does not refute the existence of beauty altogether. If the question is whether there is beauty, then the answer is 'Yes, beauty does exist, but not independently from its own side'. However, as mentioned earlier, when we perceive beauty in an object, it appears to our ordinary minds as existing from its own side.' As explained in the teachings what would happen if beauty actually existed from its own side or independently? [4] pg. 1, col 2, para 2

b) Based on analysis what understanding do we arrive at? [4]

12. The misconception that grasps at the self focuses on the self, and the mind that realises selflessness also focuses on the self. Discuss. [4] pg. 4, col 1, last paragraph

Exam

Name: _____

Mark: _____

Block 1

Week 6: (20.03.2012)

1. Why is the human rebirth more precious than a wish fulfilling jewel? [2]

b) How can we utilise this human life that we have now, with its ten endowments and eight liberties? [3]

2. The precious human rebirth is hard to obtain. The teachings explain a human rebirth is extremely difficult to obtain for three reasons. List these three reasons and give a brief explanation of each. [6]

3. What is the essence of the Buddha's teaching, as his Holiness emphasised and explained in detail? [2]

4. Geshe la gave an explanation of the practical way to begin a practice. Explain this practice. [6]

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b) Based on analysis what understanding do we arrive at? [4]

12. The main point here is that the mind itself (directly perceiving emptiness) is a conventional truth. Explain [4]