



question that the relationship will be a harmonious and a good one. Unfortunately many relationships are not based on that; while there maybe some goodwill and concern for the other, there also seems to be some practice of harm as well, either physical harm, or harm through manipulation and harsh words. If either party in a relationship engages in these harmful acts, then of course there will be ill will and unease in that relationship.

#### 1.1.1.1.3. *Summation (cont.)*

In our last session we left off at the last line of verse ten:

##### 10d. *Practice in brief is that*

As emphasised here, having identified the sixteen practices, if one engages in those practices then that, in brief, is what engaging in Dharma practice means.

#### 1.1.1.2. NON-EXISTENCE OF THOSE IN OTHER SYSTEMS

This refers to the non-existence of the sixteen practices we have just discussed in some other systems. This section is subdivided into three:

1.1.1.2.1. Harming self and others through entering a bad path

1.1.1.2.2. Persons who go on bad paths

1.1.1.2.3. Faults of entering a bad path

##### 1.1.1.2.1. *Harming self and others through entering a bad path*

What is implied here is that if one enters a path that lacks these principles then it will naturally be a path where one will engage in harming both oneself and others.

In relation to this the root text states:

11. *Practice is not done by just  
Mortifying the body,  
For one has not forsaken injuring others  
And is not helping others.*

In explaining the meaning of this verse, Gyaltsab Je's commentary first poses a rhetorical question: Wouldn't ascetic practices such as mortifying the body be a valid path? The commentary then answers this, relating it to the meaning of the verse, by explaining that merely enduring ascetic practices such as fasting or lighting your finger tips as an offering will not even be a cause for obtaining liberation, let alone even serving as a cause to obtain high status.

What you need to note here is the use of the words *by just* in relation to mortifying the body by fasting and so forth, as this is a very important point. One needs to really understand this point, otherwise there may be doubts about some Buddhist practices such as the *nyung nye* where we voluntarily fast and abstain from drinking, and vigorous practices such as prostrations and so forth. As the commentary emphasises, if the practices of mortifying the body by refraining from food and so on, are done without a pure motivation, which includes generating renunciation and bodhichitta, then the practice will not become a cause for obtaining liberation or even high status. Thus, it is important to understand this particular distinction.

As those of you who have done a *nyung nye* practice would know, taking the precepts involves generating a strong bodhichitta motivation first. Developing a strong bodhichitta motivation prior to taking the vows ensures that the practice becomes a cause for enlightenment. Without a good motivation it is questionable whether practices such as prostration and so forth are a real Dharma practice.

[In the English translation of the text it reads 'practice is not done' but the Tibetan text specifically uses the word

'Dharma', so perhaps we can combine these two meanings into 'Dharma practice'.] The reason why mortification is not a Dharma practice is explained in the last two lines of the verse. This is further clarified in Gyaltsab Je's commentary, which says that practices as such mortifying the body and so forth do not entail forsaking harm to others, and do not involve benefiting others. This relates back to the point that I made earlier about what true Dharma practice actually entails.

As the commentary further explains, mortifying the body in itself is not Dharma because it lacks any element of benefiting others or refraining from harming them. Indeed it can actually become a cause to be reborn in the lower realms. Also, one needs to understand that even though the heading specifically mentions Nihilists who are non-Buddhists, it actually has a broader implication. Whether one is religious or not, if one does ascetic practices without a proper motivation then, as explained here, it will not be a cause for liberation and enlightenment, and thus it is not Dharma.

With a proper motivation however, what may seem like extreme asceticism to some, actually can become a high level of Dharma practice. For example prior to becoming a monk, one of Geshe Ngawang Dhargye's students, called Kelsang, made an attempt donate his eye to someone else out of his altruism, but he didn't meet with the right conditions at that time to do it. Later he became a monk and after having received the lam rim teachings from Geshe Ngawang Dhargye, he went off to do retreat for a number of years. Soon after his retreat, he went to visit Bodhgaya where he engaged in the ascetic practice of lighting one of his fingers to make a light offering. He explained the details to me of how he wrapped some cloth around his middle finger and placed some dough in his hand, which was used as a container for oil in his palm, and his finger became the wick. He made the offering of light by burning his finger for two or three days. While he engaged in that practice, he of course had a proper motivation; otherwise it wouldn't have been a proper practice. However he told me that he had some reservation in actually approaching Geshe Ngawang Dhargye, for fear that he might be scolded. His fear was based on the passage in the teachings where it says to refrain from mortifying your body as a practice. However we all knew that he would be okay doing the practice because his motivation was pure.

##### 1.1.1.2.2. *Persons who go on bad paths*

This section identifies the type of person who goes on the wrong path. The relevant verse from the root text is:

12. *Those not esteeming the great path of excellent  
doctrine  
Bright with giving, ethics, and patience,  
Afflict their bodies, taking  
An aberrant path like a cow path.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary, the Dharma is referred to as *the great path of excellent doctrine*. It is a path that is radiant with the practice of giving (such as three types of giving), ethics (such as abstaining from the seven misdeeds), and patience (such as engaging the three types of patience). Anyone who does not hold these practices in high esteem and mortifies their body is someone who is on the wrong path. And just as an animal that goes on a wrong path leads many other animals to follow the wrong path as well, a person on a wrong path would lead many others astray.

When we look into the analogy of animals leading other animals astray, it is quite clear that wherever the head of the pack goes, even when they might jump into water, the rest of the herd just follow suit and also jump into the water. This is a good analogy to show also how one can be led astray if one mindlessly follows others. Thus, adhering to a proper path and practices is really important.

This explanation is cautioning us against the danger of both engaging in wrong practices and as well as following others who are engaging in wrong practices, i.e. those who are following a wrong path. This is also in line with what was explained earlier in the text. If you recall the characteristic of a suitable vessel, it specifies a person who has strong faith and wisdom.

As the older students would recall, Aryadeva in his *Four Hundred Verses* also explains the three qualities of a trainee, which is to have an unbiased mind, intelligence, and a strong interest.<sup>1</sup> These are the qualities of a suitable vessel, i.e. an earnest person who wishes to practice the Dharma.

An unbiased mind means having a mind that is free from the mere attachment to one's own system and having aversion towards other systems. Attachment to one's own system would be for example thinking 'just because the teacher says so, I have to agree' or 'because it is my religion I have to comply and so forth'. So, to have an unbiased mind means to have an open mind, and to investigate and use one's intelligence to find out the truth. Having an unbiased mind is necessary, however if one lacks intelligence one wouldn't be able to carry out the investigation properly. So the second characteristic is to have the intelligence or wisdom that enables one to properly investigate. If one lacks interest then one would not even consider doing the investigation to find out the truth, so the third quality is to have a strong interest.

As I mentioned earlier, and as explained in the teachings as well, when the students have these qualities intact then whatever is explained by an authentic teacher will be seen as an authentic teaching. One will be able to see the teacher's qualities as qualities and not as faults. From the teacher's side too when the teacher has all the appropriate qualities intact, then they will see the qualities of the students as qualities and not as faults. Seeing the qualities in each other is mutually beneficial as a proper way to engage in Dharma practice.

#### 1.1.1.2.3. Faults of entering a bad path

The first subdivision explained how entering a wrong path would harm oneself and others. The second explained the type of person who enters a bad path, and now the third subdivision explains the faults of entering a bad path. If there were no faults incurred by entering a bad path then we might wonder, 'Why is it such a bad thing?' So, this verse explains the faults of entering a bad path:

13. *Their bodies embraced by the vicious snakes  
Of the afflictive emotions, they enter for a long  
time  
The dreadful jungle of cyclic existence  
Among the trees of endless beings*

Gyaltshab Je's commentary clarifies the meaning of this verse. It begins by introducing the person who has the fault of entering the bad path, such as a Nihilist, who not only lacks faith in the Dharma but also actually enters a wrong path.

The analogy of animals such as cattle straying from the pack and entering into the thicket of forest with unpleasant thorns and so forth is used to describe the situation of being in samsara. Once they have gone astray it will be very difficult for them to return to the herd. Similarly, it is very difficult for beings who enter into the thicket of samsara to free themselves from that state, particularly from the lower realms such as the hell realms, where the suffering experienced is unimaginable.

What actually keeps beings in cyclic existence is holding onto wrong views such as the view of the transitory collections. By holding onto such wrong views, beings are dragged into the thickets of the unfortunate realms. Being completely immersed in that state is, as explained in the verse, being embraced by the vicious snakes of afflictive emotions. The vicious snakes are an analogy for negative emotions or delusions, particularly those relating to wrong views. It is these delusions that keep one in the thicket of samsara for long periods of time. Thus, seeing the disastrous result of holding onto such views, one needs to exert oneself to avoid entering a path that leads to suffering. As the commentary explains, it is by relying upon the authentic spiritual teacher that one will gain the means to avoid entering such a path.

In brief this verse is pointing out the fault of entering a bad path; the consequences of entering the wrong path are severe, and having entered the wrong path it is so very difficult to leave it. This implies that you need to rely upon an authentic teacher, one who will help you to avoid going into a wrong path.

There are some stubborn people who consider their opinion to always be correct; even when it is obviously not the correct way of thinking, they will be adamant in holding onto their own opinions. Similarly, you can see that when one is in the grip of the wrong view it will be very difficult to overcome it. So, at this time we can consider ourselves to be very fortunate to have found authentic teachers, who can guide us into avoiding the wrong path, by leading us into the virtuous path towards enlightenment.

#### 1.1.1.3. FRUITS OF WRONGLY ENGAGING IN THOSE PRACTICES<sup>2</sup>

The fruits or results of wrongly engaging in these practices is subdivided into three:

1.1.1.2.3.1. Fruits concordant with non-virtuous causes, a short life etc.

1.1.1.2.3.2. Fructification into a whole lifetime in a bad transmigration

1.1.1.2.3.3. Arising of fruits of virtue opposite from those

As explained in previous sessions, it will be beneficial if you can complement this text, particularly at this point, by reading the relevant section of the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*. By doing so you will gain a deeper understanding of what is being explained in the verses here.

<sup>2</sup> Ed: The Tibetan uses the word fruit because of its connotation of ripening but the English word 'fruit' can only serve as a noun. Unlike the Tibetan language it cannot be adapted to another grammatical form in English. The word 'result', however, can be adapted and so is more flexible in English. Thus when we use the term 'result' it should be understood to have the connotation of fruit.

<sup>1</sup> See teachings of 16 October 2007, covering verse 276.

*1.1.1.3.1. Fruits concordant with non-virtuous causes, a short life etc.*

The root text states:

14. *A short life comes through killing.  
Much suffering comes through harming.  
Poor resources, through stealing.  
Enemies, through adultery*

The fruits or results concordant with killing are that in one's next life, one will have a short lifespan. Gyaltsab's commentary explains that by committing the act of killing, there will be different types of results experienced in the next lifetime. The most severe result is the ripening result, which is to take rebirth in one of the three lower realms. When the ripening result of killing has been exhausted in the lower realms, then in another lifetime, such as in the human realm, one will experience a short lifespan, which is the result that is similar to its cause.

The explanation of how a short lifespan as a human being is a result that is concordant or similar to its cause, is that the act of killing involves shortening another living being's life, thus the result in a future rebirth is that one's own lifespan will also be short. So, the result is similar to its cause.

There are further classifications, which will be explained further on in the text, where two categories of results that are similar to its cause are identified. In brief what is being introduced here is that the result of the act of killing is that when one is reborn as a human being in a future life, for example, one's lifespan will be short.

With respect to the second line of the verse, the commentary explains that when one harms others, one will receive much more harm in return.

Having engaged in the act of stealing, the third line says, one will be deprived of resources, or whatever resource one may have will have to be shared with others. That is the result or fruit that is concordant with the cause of stealing. Having to share with others does not refer to willingly sharing one's wealth with others. For example, in a divorce settlement even wealthy people may have to part with half of their wealth unwillingly. Of course if wealth was shared willingly, then that would be good a thing. Here, however, the implication is that resources would have to be shared unwillingly.

The last line states that the result of engaging in acts of adultery is that one will have lots of enemies. Gyaltsab's commentary explains that the result of engaging in act of adultery would be for example, having one's own spouse engaging in a relationship with one's enemy.

What we need to derive on a personal level from this explanation is to try to incorporate this understanding of karma into our practice. These explanations of the results of negative karmas should inspire us to refrain from engaging in negative karmas. Through understanding the effects of actions, such as a short lifespan, we will be inspired to practise refraining from killing, as we do not wish experience the result.

Likewise, no one wishes to voluntarily experience harm, so we need to understand that we have to avoid harming others, which is the cause. And if we do experience harm in this life we can immediately resort to understanding that 'the harm that I am receiving now is definitely a result of having harmed others in the past. So it is not an unjust punishment, but it is just the natural consequence of my own actions in the past'. Thinking in this way, and recognising

that one's own difficult circumstances now are the result of one's own past negative karma, actually becomes a very powerful purification. In this way one purifies one's negative karma, and one's state of mind will not be harmed, and there will be no sense of injustice or discomfort. Practising in this way is extremely beneficial.

We need to be able to understand that a short life is the fruit or result concordant with its causes, which is act of killing; that the fruit concordant to the act of stealing is poor resources; that fruit concordant with the act of adultery is enemies; while experiencing harm is the fruit that is concordant with harming others. This is quite clear, isn't it?

Deriving an understanding of these verses means that one actually needs to apply it to one's own practice. By reflecting upon the causes and effects, the law of karma, we need to subdue the eight worldly concerns within oneself. This means that when circumstances arise where any of our eight worldly concerns are affected, such as when others criticise us or seem to dislike us and so forth, then rather than allowing that to be a cause of distress and unhappiness, we can reflect that it is a consequence of our own past karma. Then one will be able to willingly accept these events as a means of purifying one's negative karma. Rather than being unhappy about experiencing negative consequences, one will actually be quite glad, as one is actually using up the negative karma that one has created in the past. Experiencing hardships becomes a means to exhaust one's negative karma, and so in that way one will be actually be glad about it.

Likewise when things are going very well then that can be another way of practising equalising the eight worldly dharmas. If things are going well that means one is using up one's good karma, so when one is experiencing the leisure of things going well, one becomes a little bit wary about that. This all comes about from an understanding of karma.

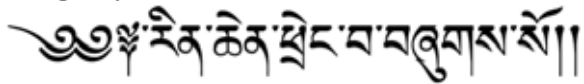
So when we do end up in having difficulties and hardships, if we practise in this way then it will definitely help to protect us from having a negative state of mind, feeling depressed and so forth. Rather one will utilise it for one's own practice. In this way it is worthwhile to experience some difficulties, as it will enhance one's practice. With a good understanding of karma whatever practice one does will become really meaningful.

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Edited Version*

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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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We set our motivation for the following practice along the lines of the refuge and bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited. [Prayer and pause for meditation]

## 1.1.1. PRACTICES FOR HIGH STATUS

### 1.1.1.3. FRUITS OF WRONGLY ENGAGING IN THOSE PRACTICES

#### 1.1.1.3.1. Fruits concordant with non-virtuous causes, a short life etc.

In the previous verses we covered the sixteen dharmas, which consist of the thirteen activities to be ceased, i.e. refraining from the ten non-virtues plus the three other improprieties which are consumption of intoxicants, engaging in a wrong livelihood and harming others; plus the three practices to engage in, which are respectful giving, honouring the honourable and generating love. Following that, we discussed the fruits of wrongly engaging in those practices, which consists of fruits concordant with non-virtuous causes and so forth. Under that heading it was explained how a short life is the concordant result of killing, and great suffering is the concordant result of harming etc.

However it is not just a matter of being able to list them properly. Rather, it is important to clearly identify what particular cause creates what particular type of result. We need to understand that if we don't wish to experience an unpleasant result, then we must avoid its relevant cause. The main point that is being presented here is the need to clearly identify the causes of different types of unpleasant results and then to engage in the practice of avoiding the creation of those causes.

It is a matter of actually putting what we learn into practice. Consider the negative consequences of killing, which we covered earlier. If one were to engage in the act of killing then there are three types of results that one would experience. The **ripening result** would be to experience intense suffering in an unfortunate realm such as the hell realms in a future rebirth. The **fruit that is concordant with the cause** is to have a short lifespan, accompanied by a lot of illness in a subsequent life. The next set of results are called the **environmental results**. With the act of killing, for example, the environmental result is that one will lack the necessary resources to sustain life such as adequate food, medicines and so forth. As explained in the teachings, we find that although some people have access to food, they are not able to sustain themselves with that. Likewise when sick, although there may be plenty of medicines available, whatever medicine they take does not really help to cure their ailment. So, by clearly identifying these instances to be the effects of killing, we need to resolve to make the commitment to never engage in the act of killing again.

That is how we need to understand the teaching and put it into practice.

The main point is that if one does not purify the negative karma that one had already created, then these results will definitely be experienced. So we need to resolve upon purifying the negative karma that we have created in the past, thus purification is an essential part of our practice.

#### 15. From lying arises slander.

*From divisiveness, a parting of friends.*

*From harshness, hearing the unpleasant.*

*From senselessness, one's speech is not respected*

This verse explains the results that are concordant with the causes of lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and senseless talk or gossip. The meaning is quite clear and self explanatory.

The first line *From lying arises slander* refers to the result of lying, which is to experience slanderous or critical speech from others. If, without any apparent reason one experiences criticism or slander, then by using our understanding of the teachings we will be able to immediately reflect upon that as being the result of having engaged in the negative act of lying in the past. Other texts that explain in great detail how every experience that one has now is a result of karma that one has created in the past are, *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons* and Shantideva's text, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. With a profound understanding of karma one will be equipped to accept unpleasant circumstances in life.

The way to apply this understanding to one's practice is, as mentioned earlier, to understand that when one does experience criticism from others, then that is nothing more than the result of the negative karma that one has created in the past. By thinking logically in this way, we are able to see that it is one's own past negative karma that is compelling the other to utter hurtful words, and that they don't do so of their own accord. In other words, the person uttering the words that hurt us is not doing that because they are inherently evil, but rather their actions have been initiated as a result of our own past negative karma.

Thinking in that light will naturally protect one from generating strong anger and hatred towards the other person, and one will definitely be able to practise patience with them. Indeed there are those who actually thank the other for allowing their karma to ripen in that way. I could relate many stories and incidents, not necessarily from ancient times, but occurring during my own lifetime. These would be incidents about those who practise to the point of thanking their abusers or critics for bringing their karma to light, allowing them to experience the results of their own negative karma and for providing the opportunity to understand the connection between action and result even more clearly.

Any situation where one experiences criticism or abuse or slander is an opportunity to be grateful and thankful for allowing one's karma to ripen now, and to be used up so that it will not have to be experienced with extreme sufferings in the future. When it ripens now, it is an opportunity to further develop one's practice, so one can

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indeed be grateful. If we practise developing that sort of attitude, it will protect us from feeling disturbed or unhappy, and if the mind is protected from being unhappy then there will be no reason to become angry.

If we really look into why we become angry it is because we have felt unhappy because of some hurt feelings. When the mind is not disturbed then there is no need for anger to arise in one's mind, and thus one will be able to practise patience effectively. So when others criticise us with what may seem unjust and critical remarks, then that is the time to pay great attention to our mind. It is when we are challenged that anger is most likely to rise in the mind, and if we give in to anger then the negative result of that will only further hurt ourselves, to the detriment of one's well-being. So in difficult situations like that we need to engage in the practice called equalising the eight worldly dharmas<sup>1</sup>.

Equalising the eight worldly concerns means exchanging our attitude of feeling glad when things go well for an attitude of wariness, because we know that we are using up our good karma, and exchanging our attitude of anger and hurt when difficulties and challenges arise for one of happiness, because we are using up negative karma. Thus we see the benefits of unpleasant situations and take them as an opportunity to practise equalising the eight worldly dharmas.

When we really look into the factors that cause us to become upset or angry, we see that we normally blame the external situation of someone criticising us or making us feeling unhappy. But if we look beyond that, however, we will find that the blame does not entirely lie with the other. Indeed if we don't allow ourselves to feel unhappy about the situation we won't have become upset and angry. So we do have a personal responsibility for maintaining our own level of happiness and joy. When we get angry, that means that we have not protected our balanced state of our mind.

Engaging in the practice of equalising the eight worldly dharmas is not just a psychological game, as it has great significance for one's practice. Generating an attitude of being grateful and happy when facing difficulties, and being wary when things are going well, is really important, because if we were to actually give in to becoming annoyed and upset and angry, then that anger will be really detrimental to one's practice in general, as well as one's well-being. If we willingly accept unfavourable and difficult circumstances then anger will not arise. In this way we protect ourselves from anger. When things go well, we normally develop strong attachment towards that, so of course when things don't go well then we get upset because of our attachment. So, being wary of good situations prevents us from becoming overtly excited when things are going well. In fact it will help to reduce the attachment to that situation, and so become a practice of non-attachment.

Although it may seem that we are side-tracking here, this is, in fact, how we need to practise in relation to all of the points that have been raised. We will also be able to relate

these points to further practices that will be explained in the text. That is how we get the benefit.

As explained in the teachings, the ripened result of any negative karma is to experience rebirth in the lower realms, whereas the results that are similar to the cause, as well as the environmental results of negative karma, are experienced in a higher realm.

The second line, *From divisiveness, a parting of friends*, explains that the results concordant with divisive speech are that one will not be able to maintain friendships. The reason why it is a result that is concordant or similar to the cause is that when we look into the nature of divisive speech, we see that it inflicts harm on others. The very act of divisive speech separates friends and other companions, and where there already is separation, it will to make that gap even bigger. So because the act itself involves separating others, one will experience a similar result, which is that one will naturally part company with friends and partners.

Gyalsab Je's commentary explains that the third line, *From harshness, hearing the unpleasant* means that as a result of committing the act of harsh speech, one will be subjected to unpleasant words and unpleasant speech now. So the concordant result of having engaged in harsh speech in the past is being subjected to harsh speech as a result.

In his commentary Gyalsab Je explains that the line *From senselessness, one's speech is not respected* means that if one has the experiences of having one's speech not being respected by others now, then that is the result of having engaged in the act of senseless speech or gossip in the past. That is how the effect experienced now is similar to the cause.

When we think about senseless talk or idle gossip, we find that we talk about so many things that are really quite irrelevant to ourselves, such as politics or the affairs of others. It is all really quite meaningless and senseless, and it doesn't really contribute to the well-being of anyone. So because one's speech was quite senseless in the past, the similar result is that others do not respect one's own speech now. This explains the comments of those who say that others don't seem to pay attention to what they say and their words are not respected. It is good to relate that experience to the causes that one would have created in the past. As some teachers have commented, although the negative karma of senseless talk in itself is not very heavy, it is actually one of the most notorious means of wasting our time. If we really look into how we have spend our life so far, we would find that most of it has been spent in uttering senseless speech with idle gossip.

So far we have covered the effects that are similar to the causes with respect to the first seven of the ten non-virtues, the actions of body and speech. When we actually consider the practical benefits of refraining from the seven misdeeds (three of the physical body and four of speech) we see that anyone inclined to engage in this practice would naturally be considered a good, trustworthy person. We need to look into the practices of that person and see how they naturally make that person reliable and trustworthy. For example, if someone is

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<sup>1</sup> The eight worldly dharmas are: gifts or no gifts, comfort or discomfort, fame or notoriety and praise or criticism.

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known to always tell the truth then there is no reason for people to mistrust such a person, as trust will arise naturally. Likewise if partners in a relationship know that the other has made a commitment to refrain from sexual misconduct, then that brings a natural trust in each other. In this way we can see that in addition to long-term benefits, avoiding these seven non-virtues will bring great practical benefits to our life right now.

In any society, a person who is known to practise these virtues will naturally be held in high esteem. So the immediate practical benefits are also an impetus for us to actually engage in the practice willingly. This is particularly important for ordained people; if they are careful about avoiding the seven non-virtues then many of their vows and commitments are naturally protected as well. Ordained people have to avoid the four defeats, which are the defeat of killing, the defeat of stealing, the defeat of sexual activity and the defeat of lying. One is naturally protected from these four defeats when one pays attention to refraining from the seven non-virtues.

Having spent some time elaborating these points of how to engage in practice, we can relate these points to the verses to follow.

16. *Covetousness destroys one's wishes,  
Harmful intent yields fright,  
Wrong views lead to bad views,  
And drink to confusion of the mind.*

In relation to the first line, *Covetousness destroys one's wishes*, if one experiences difficulties in fulfilling one's wishes now, then the cause similar to that is engaging in the act of covetousness. Through engaging in covetousness in the past the natural result now is that one's wishes are not fulfilled.

As explained in Gyalsab Je's commentary, through engaging in *harmful intent* one will experience great fright or fear. It is explained in sutras that experiencing great fright is the effect that is concordant to the cause of harbouring harmful intentions. The commentary goes on to explain that the result of having engaged in *wrong views* in the past is to naturally hold onto corrupt views and to be deceitful person now.

As Gyalsab further explains, in accordance with lamas' explanations in the past, the result that is similar is further divided into two types 1) the experience that is similar to its cause and 2) the tendency that is similar to its cause. To this point we have been describing the **experience that is similar to its cause**, where for example, the effect similar to its cause of the wrong deed of killing is a short lifespan and so forth.

The **tendency that is similar to its cause** of killing would be, for example, having a natural inclination or wish to kill now. Having engaged in act of killing in the past one now has strong tendency to kill again. Likewise with stealing, some individuals have a natural tendency of wanting to steal, which is a result of having stolen in the past. As Gyalsab Je's commentary explains, the natural effect of being intoxicated is that one's capacity to think now is impaired. So having a condition of impaired thinking is the tendency which is similar to its cause of the past, *drinking alcohol*.

17. *Through not giving comes poverty,  
Through wrong livelihood, deception,  
Through arrogance, a bad lineage,  
Through jealousy, little beauty*

These are really quite easy to understand. As Gyalsab's commentary explains, by *not giving* or being miserly, the natural effect similar to its cause is experiencing poverty now. The commentary explains that this differs to the effect of stealing, which is to have poor resources. Next, as indicated in the verse, *is through wrong livelihood, deception* is experienced. Having engaged in an act of wrong livelihood that involved deception in the past, the effect of that is to have a natural inclination to deceive others now. *Through arrogance, a bad lineage* means that having willingly engaged in being arrogant in the past, one will be born in a bad lineage or in a family with a bad reputation. The last line, *Through jealousy, little beauty*, means that as a result of an act of jealousy in the past (which is not being pleased when things go well for others) one will experience having little beauty now.

The first two lines of the next verse also belong to this section.

- 18ab. *A bad color comes through anger,  
Stupidity, from not questioning the wise.*

As explained here, *bad color* refers to one's complexion, which is also related to the beauty of one's body. Now if one is reborn as a human, wouldn't we naturally want to be reborn with a good complexion that is appealing others? If, however, one were to have an ugly complexion now then that is due to having engaged of acts of anger in the past. *Stupidity*, as explained here, arises from not questioning the wise. So being somewhat stupid now is the result of not questioning the wise in the past, due to arrogance.

#### 1.1.1.3.2. *Fructifications into a whole lifetime in a bad transmigration*

The final two lines of verse 18 relate to the ripened effects of negative deeds.

- 18cd. *These are effects for humans,  
But prior to all is a bad transmigration.*

As Gyalsab Je's commentary explains, having just gone through the explanations of the effects earlier, if one were to question whether these are the only effects to be experienced from those negative deeds, then the answer is that this is not the case. As the commentary further explains, ill effects are not just experienced in the human realm, as one first has to experience the ripened result of one's negative karmas in one of the three lower realms, such as the hell realm, the animal realm or the hungry ghost realm. This order of presenting the three lower realms reflects the severity of the ripened result. Being reborn in the hell realms is the most severe or heaviest ripened result, whereas the medium ripened result is to be reborn in the animal realm, and the least severe result is to be reborn in the hungry ghost realm.

As the commentary indicates, this ordering of the ripened result is in accordance to the explanation given in the *Ten Grounds Sutra*. This is different from the explanation presented in the lam rim or the graduated path to enlightenment teachings, which is that the gravest

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ripening result is the hell realm, the medium result is the hungry ghost realm and the lightest result is to be reborn in the animal realm. As Gyaltsab explains in his commentary, the reason for presenting this order in the *Ten Grounds Sutra* is because the beings in the hungry ghost realm are of higher intelligence than animals, and because they have a higher intelligence they are more likely to be free from that realm sooner than those in the animal realm.

#### 1.1.1.3.3. *Arising of fruits of virtue opposite from those*

This heading relates to the fruits of virtue that are the opposite to the effects of the non-virtues. Basically the root text is presenting the fruits or positive results of virtue.

#### 19. *Opposite to the well-known Fruits of these non-virtues Is the arising of effects Caused by all the virtues.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that the fruits of virtue are the exact opposite of the negative effects of non-virtue that were explained earlier. This applies to the ripened result as well as the result that is similar to its cause, and the environmental result. On this point the commentary says that in brief one needs to reflect on the four characteristics of karma in general, which are the certainty of karma, the increase of karma, not meeting with the results of karma that has not been created, and definitely experiencing the result of karma which has already been created. These points are explained in detail in the extensive lam rim teachings, which discusses a twofold classification of karma into explaining karma in general, and explaining karma in particular. These four characteristics of karma are explained under the heading of explaining karma in general, so you can refer to that text for more detail.

1. The **certainty of karma** refers to the fact that if we create non-virtue or negativity, the result of that will definitely be negative or non-virtuous, and if we create virtue then we will definitely experience positive results of happiness. To be more specific, investing in virtue definitely produces happiness, just like a trader gets good results from a good investment in his trade. It is exactly the same.

This explanation of the characteristics of karma is said to be an essential point that we really need to reflect on deeply in order to really make our practice much more profound and meaningful. So it is important to really contemplate the first characteristic of karma, which is the certainty of karma. By thinking about the explanation and the many analogies given in the teachings, one will develop the determination to develop the state of mind of being certain that if one creates virtue then the result of that will certainly be happiness, and that there can be no other result than happiness. Determining that for oneself will be an impetus to create virtue.

Likewise by reflecting that if one creates non-virtue then the certain effect of that is suffering, one vows to avoid non-virtue. We need think about these lines so that we come to the point of not leaving our future to chance, such as by thinking, 'Oh well, things will work out fine', i.e. thinking that things will be fine regardless of what

one does now. It would be an enormous disadvantage if we didn't protect ourselves from a state of mind where we don't create the causes for our own happiness. We can definitely protect ourselves from such naive thinking by making sure we really understand this point about the certainty of karma, which is said to be an essential point of the teaching. The only possible conclusion as a result of thinking in this way is that one has to create virtue.

Having contemplated the meanings of the teachings on karma, we need to develop the conclusion, 'As I naturally wish for happiness, I must definitely create the causes, which is to engage in virtue, and because I do not wish to experience unhappiness or suffering I must definitely avoid creating non-virtue'. Our well-being really falls into these two categories, the things that we need to adopt and the things that we need to avoid that are detrimental to our well-being. The conclusion that follows is like a pledge, 'I have to create virtue for the simple reason that I wish for happiness, and I must definitely avoid creating non-virtue because of the simple fact that I do not wish to experience suffering'. It should be as simple as that.

When the path is presented as 'embracing what needs to be adopted and abandoning what needs to be discarded', it is really outlining the essential points of the practice.

2. The next characteristic of karma is that **karma increases**. The teachings explain that the propensity for karma to increase is much greater for inner phenomena than it is for external phenomena. With such an understanding one arrives at the conclusion to commit oneself to willingly engage in even the smallest virtue and to discard even the tiniest of negativity.

Gaining an understanding of the natural propensity that karma has to increase really overcomes the misconception that we normally hold, which is that if it is a small virtuous karma then there is no point in adopting it, because it is quite insignificant in relation to greater merit. If we think in this way, then it is all too easy for us to neglect the opportunity to accumulate even a small virtue. Likewise with negativity, we might think, 'Oh, it's actually something very small and minor', so we might give in to creating negative karma, thinking that a small negative karma will not cause much harm.

To be more specific, thinking that by creating a small virtue will not really benefit oneself in any way, and that a small negativity is very minor and insignificant, and that it will not harm oneself in any way, can be overcome by contemplating the fact that karma increases, and realising that even a small merit can increase to great merit and a small negativity can also increase into great negativity. That will compel us to avoid committing even the smallest negativity.

Indeed the sutras mention that one should not neglect small virtue as it will accumulate to extensive virtue, just as an accumulation of drops of water can fill a large pitcher! We can observe this natural phenomenon for ourselves. The Buddha used this analogy to explain how we need to adopt even the slightest virtues, which will accumulate into great virtue. This is really very sound practical advice for us, because right now we may not be able to create great merit or virtue. However, we do have the capacity to accumulate small virtues. I am relating



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this as practical advice - on my level I find that it is quite beyond me to be able to create great extensive merit, but I can manage to create small virtues and that is something that I stick to in my daily life. This is a good, useful approach for me, but I don't know how it is for you.

If we take one practice as an example, such as prostrations, we might think that doing many hundreds of thousands of prostrations would be quite unconceivable. However if we do a hundred prostrations a day, then over the span of 20 years or so, one will actually accumulate many hundreds of thousands of prostrations, just by doing that practice regularly. So we can see how practical this sort of advice really is.

To take another example, one of my own late teacher, Geshe Ngawang Dhargye's practices was to read few pages from the 8000 verses of the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* every day. It is said that by the end of his life he had completed more than 100 readings of the whole 8000 verses. Furthermore a quote from the Buddha explains that one should not commit even the slightest negativity, thinking that it is small and insignificant, because a small spark can cause a great stack of hay to ignite.

This is an analogy that we can all relate to. Who would have thought that the massive bushfire that caused so much destruction started from just a few sparks? Those who know about how a bushfire starts, know that regardless of the initial cause, it is when the sparks fly forward to the next part, which catches fire before the real fire gets there, and thus spreading the fire. So the big fire doesn't have to nearby at all, it is the small fires created by small sparks that are also dangerous. This analogy is really appropriate: the Buddha explained that even a small negativity needs to be discarded, because discarding even small slight negativities as a regular practice will, in the long run, be avoiding great negativity. Likewise engaging in small virtues as a regular practice will lead to the eventual accumulation of a great stock of merit. This is how we need to regard this practical advice on how to engage in practice.

3. The next characteristic of karma is that **one will not experience a result of karma that has not been created**. Everything that we experience is preceded by a cause. Without an initial cause one will not experience any type of result. This is clarifying that the cause of any unhappy experience was definitely created in the past by a non-virtue or negativity. Likewise the cause of a positive or happy experience is creating virtue in the past. Having gained such an understanding, the conclusion that one needs to reach is that one definitely needs to engage in purification practice by applying the four opponent powers.

4. The last characteristic of karma is that **karma that has been created will not dissipate of its own accord**. This means that once karma, either positive or negative, has been created, one cannot remain idle thinking, 'Oh, it will not carry through into the future, and produce results', because it is a fact that once karma has been created it will not dissipate. So the conclusion at this point is that as positive karma will not dissipate of its own accord, then if one engages in virtue one will definitely have to make it really complete with dedication and aspirational prayers.

Dedicating one's virtues makes a virtue a really complete virtue, which will definitely not dissipate. So, this is the conclusion that one needs to arrive at.

*Transcribed from tape by Su Lan Foo  
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Edited Version*

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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

13 April 2010

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Let us first engage in our usual meditation practice with an appropriate motivation. (*Pause for meditation*)

You can now generate a positive motivation for receiving the teachings such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings by freeing them from all suffering and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to first achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose, I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well'.

If one didn't understand what the word *bodhichitta* really means, then it would be hard to generate the motivation relating to it. Thus, until students get a clearer understanding of what *bodhichitta* actually implies; I usually refer to developing the attitude of love and compassion towards all sentient beings with the intention to achieve enlightenment for the purpose of benefiting all sentient beings. The usual translation of *bodhichitta* is 'awakened mind', which refers to the enlightened state of a Buddha's mind. However developing *bodhichitta* implies generating the altruistic intention to achieve enlightenment for the sake of benefiting all sentient beings.

The Sanskrit word *bodhichitta* consists of two syllables – *bodhi* and *chitta*. The word *bodhi* implies obtaining the two excellent qualities, i.e. that of having completely eliminated all negativities and the excellent quality of having acquired all realisations. The direct translation of the second word, *chitta*, is 'mind' i.e. the mind that possesses these two excellent qualities, which is the 'awakened' state of enlightenment.

The Tibetan word *jang-chub sem* is a direct translation which carries the connotation of each syllable of the Sanskrit. The word *jang-chub* carries the meaning of the two-fold excellent qualities of the Buddha, i.e. *jang* – literally meaning to clear away – implies the achievement of the quality of abandoning all negativities, and *chub* – literally meaning accomplishment – implies the quality of obtaining all realisations. Thus, *jang-chub* incorporates the meaning of the two qualities, that of abandonment and that of realisations. The word *sem* literally means mind, which implies the mind that possesses these qualities. So, *jang-chub sem* is the direct translation of *bodhichitta*. The Tibetan term conveys the actual meaning of the Sanskrit, however we don't seem to have an appropriate word in English that conveys the full meaning.

## 1.1.1. Practices for high status (cont.)

### 1.1.1.4. VIRTUOUS AND NON-VIRTUOUS CAUSES AND EFFECTS

#### Virtuous and non-virtuous causes

The verse from the root text is:

20. *Desire, hatred, ignorance, and  
The actions they generate are non-virtues.  
Non-desire, non-hatred, non-ignorance,  
And the actions they generate are virtues*

It is quite clear that the verse is explaining the three poisons of desire, hatred and ignorance and the actions generated by them, which are to be classified as non-virtues. Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that the verse has two 'ands'. The first refers to *desire, hatred, and ignorance*; while the second 'and' refers to *the actions they generate, which are non-virtues*. The commentary clarifies that not only are the three poisons themselves naturally occurring non-virtues, but the actions that they generate are also non-virtuous.

However this seems to be relating to a general presentation. Other teachings are more specific about which of the three poisons are non-virtuous by nature. Hatred is entirely non-virtuous, as there is no occasion where hatred can be a virtue. Generally it can be asserted that desire or attachment in the desire realm are *mostly* non-virtuous. However there are instances where attachment and ignorance can be a virtue. In other words, we can assert that an initial link of ignorance from the twelve links of interdependent origination doesn't necessarily have to be non-virtuous. For example the throwing karma that serves as a cause to take a rebirth in a higher realm would have been initiated by ignorance, however the actions causing one to be reborn in higher realms would have to be virtuous, as it is virtuous karma that serves as a cause to reborn in such a realm. But instances of ignorance, such as killing or stealing with the thought that there is no negativity involved and that it is acceptable to take the life of others and so forth, are entirely negative.

Thus, the implication of the verse is perhaps relating to the three poisons and their actions in instances where they are entirely negative. As I have mentioned in the past, these are points that we bring up in debate, to clarify what is virtuous and what is non-virtuous. With the example of the karma created to be reborn in the higher rebirths, it is said that the causal action or karma is non-virtuous, but the effect karma (the karma created at the time) would be virtuous, and the result is to be reborn in a higher rebirth. These are instances where there is a difference between the causal karma and the effect karma that are created at separate times.

Nevertheless, what we need to understand here is how the three poisons are, in general, the cause to be reborn in cyclic existence. Whether virtuous or non-virtuous, the three poisons are the main causes that propel any living being into cyclic existence. The primary cause is ignorance, followed by desire and hatred. As you will notice in the depiction of the wheel of life, at the centre there is a pig, a rooster and a snake, and they are all connected. The pig symbolises ignorance, the rooster symbolises desire and the snake symbolises hatred. They

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form a circle where each one connects to the next, illustrating how they lead to being reborn into cyclic existence.

The way the three poisons or delusions serve as causes to be reborn in cyclic existence over and over again is clearly explained in the teachings on the twelve interdependent links. The first link is the link of ignorance, which is explained as the main cause that initiates the actions that propel one into cyclic existence. This primordial ignorance referred to as the first of the twelve interdependent links will be explained further in the text, but in brief it relates to the grasping at the self, or the 'I'. When we consider how we create karma because of grasping at the 'I', we will notice that because of a strong grasping at the self or 'I', one naturally relates to things that are favourable to the 'I' and then attachment arises, while aversion and anger arise towards those situations or objects that are not favourable to the 'I'. That is how as a result of initially grasping at the self or the 'I', one develops attachment to some objects and anger or aversion to others, and thus create the actions which follow.

As states of mind These three delusions are called 'wrong consciousnesses'. I have previously explained this in detail. It is relatively easier to understand ignorance as a wrong consciousness but it is not so clear with attachment and anger. The mind of attachment perceives an object as being appealing based on an appealing attribute of the object. Likewise the mind of anger perceives an object as being unappealing and thus develops a dislike for the object. The anger is naturally based on unappealing attributes of the object. So the question arises 'how can it be a 'wrong consciousness' if it actually perceives attributes of the object?'

So, does attachment perceive the object as appealing?

*Students: Yes.*

Does it perceive the appealing attribute of the object?

*Students: Yes.*

So you all agree that there is an appealing attribute of the object, and attachment perceives that attribute as appealing. If that is the case, then attachment could not be a wrong consciousness as it perceives an attribute that exists upon the object! A correctly perceiving consciousness is a consciousness that perceives something just as it exists, right? So what is the conclusion?

*Student: The attachment consciousness embellishes the thought of the attribute, making it more attractive and then grasps at that appearance.*

If that is the case then attachment is actually perceiving an exaggerated form, which is embellished by the mistaken inappropriate attention. If that is what the object of attachment is, then we would have to say that it does not exist.

*Student: It does exist but as a projection.*

The conclusion needs to be that attachment does not perceive the actual appealing attributes of the object but rather only the exaggerated appealing attributes. For attachment to be a wrong consciousness, it has to perceive an object that does not exist. As the object of

attachment is the exaggerated appealing attributes which are merely superimposed by an inappropriate attention; then in fact it does not exist. Thus one has to conclude that attachment does not perceive the appealing attributes, but rather perceives something extra. If attachment were to actually perceive the appealing attributes that do exist, then the attachment could not be considered as a wrong consciousness.

It is the same with anger. If we were to ask 'are there unappealing attributes in the object of anger?', then the answer is 'Yes there are'. Does anger perceive that? No, rather anger only perceives the exaggerated unappealing aspects that are superimposed by the inappropriate attention. What appears as an object of anger actually does not exist, and thus anger is a wrong consciousness. So, the conclusion is that attachment does not perceive the appealing attributes of the object. What does it perceive? It perceives the exaggerated qualities that are superimposed by inappropriate attention; and that does not exist, does it?

When we get an inkling of why the teachings describe delusions as a wrong consciousness, then we can go further into the subtler implications of that. As every delusion is a wrong consciousness, then one may inquire, what is the inappropriate attention that superimposes qualities or faults upon the object? It actually comes down to the grasping at the self.

All delusions are initiated by the inappropriate attention that is grasping at the self or 'I'. With that understanding, ignorance can be understood as a wrong consciousness that grasps at inherent existence. What we need to note is that ignorance here does not refer to the general meaning of ignorance, but rather specifically to the ignorance that is a complete opposite of the wisdom realising selflessness i.e. the ignorance which perceives an inherently existent self.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains that virtue encompasses non-desire, non-hatred and non-ignorance and the actions that they generate. Here *actions* specifically refers physical actions and verbal actions. As Gyaltsab explains, the physical and verbal actions that are initiated by non-desire, non-hatred and non-ignorance are called virtuous actions.

One needs to also take note of the subtle implications of non-desire, non-hatred and non-ignorance. If we were to take non-desire in the general sense then there could be many different 'non-desire' states of mind, which are not necessarily virtuous. We need to understand that virtuous non-desire refers here to the optimum active state of non-desire, which is either, at best a state where all desire has been completely abandoned, or a state of mind that serves as an antidote to desire. Likewise non-hatred and non-ignorance refer to either the optimum state of mind that has completely abandoned hatred or ignorance or to a state of mind that serves as an antidote to hatred or ignorance.

These three states of mind, non-desire, non-hatred and non-ignorance, and the physical and verbal actions initiated by those minds are definitely virtuous. If we understand that the state of mind of non-desire is a mind that has abandoned desire or a state of mind that serves

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as an opponent or antidote for overcoming desire, then we have understand the specific meaning of non-desire.

We can relate these teachings to the techniques for overcoming desire, hatred and ignorance. For instance, a state of mind that is in meditation focussing on the faults of desire, is actually a state of non-desire, which actively serves as an antidote for overcoming desire. Likewise with hatred, where meditating on compassion is said to be an antidote for overcoming hatred or anger. Thus a mind that is completely immersed in compassion is a state of mind that directly opposes, and thus serves as an antidote to, anger. Non-ignorance is a state of mind meditating on selflessness or emptiness, thus opposing ignorance. We need to understand that non-desire particularly refers to a state of mind that opposes desire, and that non-hatred and non-ignorance refer to states of mind that specifically opposes or serve as an antidote to overcome those particular negativities. We can then relate that understanding to our personal practice.

### **Virtuous and non-virtuous effects**

The next verse refers to the effects of virtue and non-virtue:

21. *From the non-virtues come all sufferings  
And likewise all bad transmigrations,  
From virtues, all happy transmigrations  
And the pleasures of all lives.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that, as a result of non-virtuous actions, one experiences suffering in all the higher and lower rebirths of cyclic existence. As we have identified earlier, non-virtue is defined as that which has the potential to bring about a result of suffering. This verse is explaining very clearly that all suffering in both the higher and lower realms is a result of non-virtue. Thus the suffering that we experience is none other than the result of a previous non-virtue; there is no being or entity that causes us unnecessary suffering, other than one's own non-virtuous karma. Put simply all the suffering that we experience is caused by our own non-virtue.

Then Gyaltsab further explains that just as all suffering in the fortunate and unfortunate births is caused by non-virtue, so too all the suffering of the ripened results in the unfortunate realms is also caused by non-virtue.

In relation to the third line, *from virtues, all happy transmigrations*, Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that one experiences the ripening result of a fortunate happy transmigration as a result of virtuous karma. As the commentary further explains, all beings here on Earth, or in any other existence, experience happiness as a result of virtue they have created. By reflecting on the nature of karma, and how non-virtue creates all suffering and virtue creates all happiness, one needs to resolve to always, at every cost, avoid creating the causes for the suffering experienced in the unfortunate realms, or to experience any other kind of suffering. This means completely ceasing to engage in non-virtue, and to acquire the causes to experience happiness in all the fortunate realms.

### **1.1.2. The modes of practice**

Having explained the particular cause of suffering, which is non-virtue, and the cause for happiness, which is virtue, the question arises, 'how does one actually engage in practice to avoid suffering and achieve happiness?' So the teaching goes on to explain the actual modes of practice. These points are not too obscure or difficult to understand. It is really just a matter of putting them into practice on a personal level.

The verse from the root text relating to this heading is:

22. *Desisting from all non-virtues  
And always engaging in virtues  
With body, speech and mind -  
These are called the three forms of practice.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, by reflecting again and again on the cause and effect sequence of karma, one resolves to avoid all non-virtues created through mind, body and speech, and to create virtue as the cause for happiness. As explained here, these karmas are created by one's body, speech and mind. We create karma through our thoughts, which lead us to create karma through our physical actions and our speech. There is no other way to create karma than in these three ways.

As explained here, one resolves to intentionally avoid creating non-virtue through one's body, speech and mind, and to engage in creating virtue through one's body, speech and mind. This is the point where we need to reflect on the cause and effect sequence of karma again and again. As was explained earlier, it is necessary to reflect in this way over and over again in order to gain insight and a deeper understanding. If we reflect just occasionally, it won't have a strong effect on our mind. In order to bring about an absolute belief in the infallibility of karma, we need to reflect on it again and again. Without doing so, there is no way that one will enter the path that pleases the Buddha.

To get any benefit from the explanation here we must definitely pay great attention to these points and not take them lightly. The more we reflect on the infallibility of karma, the stronger the conviction in that infallibility will be, which will naturally encourage us to voluntarily take every opportunity to create virtue, and to at all costs try to avoid creating non-virtue.

Contemplating the infallibility of karma means contemplating how virtue is always a cause for happiness. If one were to experience unhappiness as a result of creating virtue, karma would not be infallible – it would be false because the cause does not correspond with the effect. Likewise if one were to create non-virtue and experience happiness as a result, then again karma would not be infallible, because the cause and effect do not correspond. Being infallible means that a cause always brings about its corresponding effect. There is never a time when you could create negative karma and experience happiness as a result, or create virtue and experience unhappiness and suffering as a result.

Thus the infallibility of karma needs to be understood as the certainty that virtue is always a cause for experiencing happiness, and that non-virtue is always a cause to experience unhappiness and suffering.

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Contemplating this again and again one will (as mentioned earlier) develop that strong conviction in one's mind. The result will be a voluntary and natural inclination to create virtue. And if we do create non-virtue, the mind will have the intention of wanting to take the next opportunity to purify any negative karma that one has created. By feeling 'what I have done was not right, and was an inappropriate action, so I must definitely try to purify that' there will be a sense of unease until one purifies that negative karma. Here one also needs to incorporate and apply an understanding of the four characteristics of karma, the certainty and the increase of karma and so forth.

As the commentary has explained, besides reflecting and contemplating on karma, the actual practice is to voluntarily engage in avoiding non-virtuous mental thoughts, non-virtuous physical actions and non-virtuous verbal speech. So one then adopts virtuous thoughts, virtuous physical actions and virtuous speech, which then become the actual practice. We can safely say that through abiding by these instructions one is living in accordance with the Dharma. What we also need to be able to specifically identify is that of the three modes of action, the mind is the primary one, because physical and verbal actions follow from intentions that are first generated in our mind. That is quite clear.

Thoughts in our mind determine whether any physical action is positive or negative. As the teachings have rightly instructed, the supreme instruction is to always restrain one's mind, and then there will be a natural restraint on one's physical and verbal actions. To take a particular instance, we notice for ourselves that when we generate thoughts it is in relation to physical actions or verbal actions. We consciously think 'I'm going to do this action', 'I'm going to carry this through with physical actions' or 'I am going to say certain things'. The first thing we do is to generate a thought.

Having noticed that we have these thoughts that initiate physical and verbal actions, we can then apply that to our understanding of the mental factor called *intention*, which is defined as karma. We have explained how to understand and apply that definition to all three levels of mental, physical and verbal karma. To take a virtuous action, for example, when we are thinking about doing prostrations, our thought is accompanied by the mental factor called 'intention'. This mental factor of intention occurs simultaneously with every thought, and involuntarily influences us to do either positive or negative things. With the example of virtue, the mental factor which influences us to engage in virtue is called 'mental karma.' While we are engaged in the physical activity of doing prostrations we also have the mental factor of intention, which is the actual 'physical karma.' So when we talk about creating physical karma, the mental intention at that time is the creation of physical karma. Likewise with speech; when one utters words, the mental factor of intention at that time would be 'verbal karma.' This is how karma is to be understood as being a mental intention, which is an involuntary motivating factor that initiates thoughts at the time of physical or verbal actions.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then goes on to relate this to applying the sixteen dharmas that were referred to earlier, which consist of the thirteen that need to be abandoned and the three that need to be adopted. Reflecting on the sixteen dharmas, and then refraining from engaging in inappropriate or non-virtuous actions is referred to as engaging in the Dharma through the three doorways of body, speech and mind. With respect to physical actions this refers to the actions of abandoning killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. It is not just a matter of not engaging in these actions, but to also refrain from the motivation to engage in those actions i.e. intentionally avoid having the motivation to kill, steal and or engage in sexual misconduct. When one can practise on the level of avoiding even the motivation to do these negative actions, then one is appropriately applying the practice of the Dharma.

### **1.1.3. The fruits of practice**

The sequence of the text is really wonderful. Having described the actual practice itself, the fruits of those practices are presented in the next six lines.

23. *Through these practices one is freed from becoming  
A hell being, hungry ghost, or animal.  
Reborn as a human or god one gains  
Extensive happiness, fortune, and dominion*
24. *Through the concentrations, immeasurables,  
and formlessnesses,  
One experiences the bliss of Brahma and so  
forth.*

As Gyaltsab's commentary explains, *through* engaging in *these practices* of the sixteen dharmas, the result is that one will be free from being reborn as a *hell being* or as an *animal* or as a *hungry ghost*. Through being free from being born in these states, one will experience the *extensive happiness* of the fortunate realms such as being reborn in the human realm as, for example, a universal monarch or king, and then having the excellence of great *fortune and dominion* in that state.

As mentioned in the teachings, if one has practised according to these explanations, then there will be no regrets at the time of death. In fact there would be a great sense of joy in knowing that one will be free, and will not have to experience the suffering of the unfortunate realms. Thus, as explained in the teaching, the results of having engaged in this practice there will be no regrets at the end of this life and there will be a sense of great joy in one's mind. We know of people who peacefully and joyfully pass on to the next life, without having any sense of regret or fear of being reborn in unfortunate realms. As mentioned previously, the immediate result of engaging in the practices of, for example, the ten virtues, would be to be free from the causes to be reborn in the lower realms. The happiness to be experienced in the human realms would be to be reborn with great dominion, which refers (as Gyaltsab's commentary explains) to being reborn as a universal monarch or king, and thus experiencing the great excellences entailed in that.

Gyaltsab Je further explains that through further practice of avoiding the ten non-virtues, such as meditating on the four *concentrations* or the four *immeasurables* and

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*formlessnesses*, one will obtain *the bliss of Brahma and so forth*, which refers to the higher and better quality results of engaging in these practices.

To be more specific, the small benefit of engaging in these practices is to be reborn as a human being in the desire realm, the middling is to be reborn in the desire god realm and the most excellent and highest benefit is to be reborn in the form and formless realms as a god, such as Brahma and so forth.

We can all relate to these as being great results. The question is whether we want to have these results for ourselves. Since we have to die and have to be reborn, what would we choose for our future life? To be born in the lower realms or to have a higher rebirth? What would we naturally want? At this time we have the power to choose whether we want to go into a lower rebirth or a higher rebirth. As the great lamas of the past have mentioned, and as teachings emphasise, our situation right now is where we have the choice. It is a matter of choosing the most appropriate results for ourselves and then engaging in the practices to achieve that. Having the choice means that we have all of the appropriate conditions, we have all of the physical potential, and mentally we have all of the appropriate conditions and potential to choose the results we want.

## **1.2. Summation**

The two lines relating to the summary read:

*24. Thus in brief are the practices  
For high status and their fruits.*

As explained earlier, there are thirteen practices to be abandoned and three practices to be adopted. This explains the sixteen dharmas as well as their results.

## **2. CAUSE AND EFFECT OF DEFINITE GOODNESS**

We can leave this for our next session.

What we have covered so far is the cause and effect of high status. It is really important that we reflect upon the meaning of the presentation, so that we can derive personal instructions on the practices to apply in our daily lives. That is the real reason for studying—otherwise there is not much purpose. Since we wish to experience the results of a high status, and we understand the causes of high status, we can safely say that we will all go to the high status in the next life if we practice according to the teachings. That would be great!

I often feel that dying as a human and being reborn again as a human is in itself a great thing, because at least it is not going downward. To be more specific, to die as an Australian human and then be reborn as an Australian dog would not be so desirable would it? Some people might have seen a recent TV program showing a dog that seemed to talk like a human. Even while watching TV we can see a lot about the effects of karma.

I personally would like to make the choice to go to a higher rebirth. I am not sure if it will turn out to be successful or not, but at least I am making an attempt. We all have the opportunity and good conditions, which is good. Our life now is constantly diminishing, and day by day we get nearer to our next life. That is a fact. We can safely assume, except for maybe Anthony or Zoe and

some other young ones here, that none of us will be here after fifty years; for those of us over thirty, the chances of being here are very slim. Those who will be here in fifty years might remember this occasion! That will be in 2060, right? If you are still alive then, you will be quite an old person and you might remember what I am saying to you now.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version*

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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པོའི་བཀའ་སློབ་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་རྐྱེན་གྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ལྟར་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

20 April 2010

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With the appropriate motivation, we will do our meditation practice. [meditation]

As usual we set the motivation for listening the teaching along these lines, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, thus I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice, in order to first subdue my own mind'. This kind of motivation is highly beneficial.

We have covered the topic called Cause and Effect of High Status, which includes the practices that we need try to adopt in our life, which will make our life highly meaningful.

## 2. CAUSE AND EFFECT OF DEFINITE GOODNESS

This section has two main subdivisions:

- 2.1. How definite goodness is described in sutra
- 2.2. Exhorting the king to train in the profound

### 2.1. How definite goodness is described in sutra

This has three subdivisions:

- 2.1.1. Brief explanation of the Conqueror's description of definite goodness
- 2.1.2. Extensive explanation of definite goodness
- 2.1.3. Summation

#### 2.1.1. Brief explanation of the Conqueror's description of definite goodness

This section is further subdivided in three:

- 2.1.1.1. How definite goodness is described
- 2.1.1.2. [The difference between] generation and non-generation of fear for the profound meaning by the ignorant and the wise
- 2.1.1.3. The Teacher's saying that fear arises from conception of self

##### 2.1.1.1. HOW DEFINITE GOODNESS IS DESCRIBED

The relevant verse of the root text is:

25. *The doctrines of definite goodness  
Are said by the Conquerors  
To be deep, subtle, and frightening,  
To the childish, who are not learned.*

We have already described what definite goodness implies, however it is good to have a very clear understanding of what it really means if we were to incorporate it into our practice in our daily life. As described earlier, 'definite goodness' refers to liberation. So what does 'liberation' actually mean? We can't just feel satisfied with the word 'liberation'; we need to have a clear understanding of what liberation actually implies. Liberation is the state where one is free from the bondage of the delusions and karma that confine us to cyclic existence. Gaining this clear understanding, and aspiring to achieve that state, actually places a very positive imprint on one's mind, and also serves as a means to accumulate great merit and virtue.

We may have heard of accounts of beings called arhats or foe destroyers, who achieved liberation during the Buddha's

lifetime by relying on his instructions and teachings. We need to understand that the practices that are presented here are the same methods that were followed by those foe destroyers; they will lead any individual being to the state of liberation. The literal meaning of *arhat* is *foe destroyer*, which refers to destroying the ultimate enemy which are the delusions. Thus, achieving liberation means completely overpowering and eliminating the delusions within one's mind, and a being who achieves that state is called a foe destroyer.

Rather than relating to this material in an objective impersonal manner, we need to rely upon it as really profound personal advice on how to achieve the state of liberation oneself. As we go through the subject matter of the text, we find that it consists of very precise instructions that we should not take lightly. Rather we need to make sure that we incorporate them into our daily practice. If you think about it, it is really quite amazing that we have the right conditions now to be able to access the very same practices that the practitioners at the time of Buddha used to achieve the ultimate goal of liberation.

What we are studying now is indeed very profound and sacred teachings, which were followed by the great beings of the past to achieve the goal of liberation. So knowing that we are studying and putting into practice the very same instructions and practices followed by those great beings who achieved the state of liberation in the past, will really inspire us. That is because we can see that it is possible for us to achieve liberation too.

Referring to the teachings in this way can also generate a stronger faith within us. For example when reading the *Vajra Cutter Sutra*, we notice that it begins by describing where the Buddha was residing at that particular time, and which particular disciple requested the sutra. In this way it gives an account of what actually took place at that time. The sutra gives us a vivid image of the time of Lord Buddha and his disciples, and when one reads it with that approach then it can really summon strong inspiration and faith, to the point where one's hair stands on end. Because of their vividness we can relate to the sutra very directly rather than thinking that it occurred in some distant mythical time that does not relate to us right now.

For older students who have been coming regularly to the teachings, this material will not be a cause for fear or doubt. Rather it will be very easy to relate to, because the points in the teaching have already been explained in great detail in the teachings on the lam rim, the *Bodhisattvoacharyavatara* or *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, as well as the *Madhyamaka* or the Middle Way teachings. So when we refer to the verses, we will have an immediate affinity with them, which will confirm what we have studied in the past. If we put them in practice then, we will be able to establish a clearer understanding and leave a strong and firm imprint in our mind.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that the Dharma that serves a cause of obtaining definite goodness is the wisdom realising selflessness, which is divided into the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena. For ordinary beings, those who have not heard or who have no affinity with these teachings, this is a very subtle topic that cannot be understood by the awareness that understands conventionality. So it is very difficult for ordinary beings to fathom the depth and profoundness of the objects perceived by the wisdom realising selflessness.

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Because these teachings are so *subtle* and *deep*, they are very *frightening to the childish*, who have not heard these teachings previously, or who have no affinity with them. That was explained by the Buddha himself. The understanding of the doctrine on the profound emptiness and its relationship with interdependent origination, is the cause for achieving liberation.

What is being pointed out here is that when one gains the wisdom realising emptiness, one has successfully developed the causes for achieving liberation. This implies that without developing the wisdom realising emptiness within one's mental continuum, one cannot possibly achieve liberation. Gyaltsab Je's commentary clarifies that when the verse mentions the doctrine or Dharma of definite goodness it is referring to the wisdom realising emptiness. Thus the wisdom realising emptiness is referred to as the doctrine or Dharma of definite goodness.

As Gyaltsab's commentary explains, the wisdom realising emptiness can be divided into two categories, the wisdom realising selflessness of persons, and the wisdom realising selflessness of other phenomena. The wisdom realising selflessness or emptiness is so deep and subtle that it is frightening for those who have not heard any teachings on it or who have no affinity with these topics, thus they are referred to as child-like.

#### 2.1.1.2. [THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN] GENERATION AND NON-GENERATION OF FEAR FOR THE PROFOUND MEANING BY THE IGNORANT AND THE WISE

The verse relating to this heading is:

26 *"I am not, I will not be.  
I have not, I will not have"  
That frightens all the childish  
And extinguishes fear in the wise.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary poses this rhetorical question: What is the manner of emptiness causing fear for the childish and extinguishing fear in the wise? Why is that so? Here 'the childish' refers to ordinary beings. Of course, this is not to say that all ordinary beings will necessarily have fear of emptiness but, in general, this is usually the case.

In answer to his rhetorical question, Gyaltsab's commentary explains that when the meaning of emptiness is presented to some childlike beings, who lack the intelligence to understand it, they interpret it to mean that there is no person or self in this lifetime, thus there is no way to obtain a self in future lifetimes. So the first line, *I am not, I will not be*, indicates that as a person does not exist now, it could not exist in the future.

Likewise when the selflessness of phenomena is presented, then the childish, unwise beings will interpret it to mean that there are no aggregates now, and as there are no aggregates now then there is no possible way to obtain the aggregates in a future lifetime. So the lines, *I have not, I will not have*, refer to the wrong conclusion of the childish, which is that there are no aggregates now or in the future. With such a misinterpretation of selflessness, a childlike being will develop a nihilist view. Thus, the prospect of the 'I' not existing now nor in the future, and the aggregates, including their body, not existing now nor in the future, instils great fear in their mind.

Earlier in our teachings we heard of the story of the king who completely misinterpreted and misunderstood a teaching given on emptiness, and ordered that the scholar who gave the teaching on emptiness be killed, because the

king thought the teacher was misleading people. This verse is referring to the same point; for those who are not ready to understand what selflessness or emptiness implies, their wrong interpretation leads a completely nihilistic view that instils great fear in them.

This misinterpretation can also occur all too easily amongst people now, even for those who have some level of understanding and make the attempt to meditate on selflessness or emptiness. Failing to understand the correct implications of selflessness, becomes a very easy way to fall into the extreme of having the view of a nihilist. The misinterpretation arises from not being able to clearly distinguish the object of negation. It crucial to understand what it is that does not exist (i.e. the object of negation) when things are said to have an identity of selflessness. Not being able to clearly identify the object of negation leads to the fault of misinterpreting the selflessness of 'I', or the selflessness of phenomena such as 'my aggregates', to mean that they do not exist at all. It is really very easy to fall into this fault.

It is explained in the *Heart Sutra* that 'form is emptiness and emptiness is form'. With the second statement 'emptiness is form' one needs to incorporate the understanding of emptiness in relation to interdependent origination. Thus while form is empty, emptiness itself is related to form. By stating that 'emptiness itself is also form' the *Heart Sutra* establishes the conventional existence of form. Without the clear understanding of how the non-existence of the object of negation actually establishes the nominal or conventional existence of the object itself, one will, very likely, be led into the extreme nihilistic view that nothing exists. If one were to meditate on emptiness based on the misunderstanding that nothing exists, then one has definitely missed the point and will be led astray from obtaining the correct view. So it is very important that one has a really clear understanding of what selflessness, or emptiness, actually implies.

The misunderstanding and misinterpretation is quite common these days, as we find many people saying, "Oh, Buddhism sounds very nihilistic, for they keep saying that 'this doesn't exist' and 'that doesn't exist' and so forth". People who claim this show that they are completely ignorant of the implications of selflessness or emptiness. Thus, we also need to be very careful to gain a clear understanding from the very beginning ourselves.

It is really crucial to gain the correct view of emptiness from the point of view of the Prasangika Madhyamaka school, which is the highest Buddhist school. In order to understand the selflessness or emptiness of any phenomena—persons or aggregate—one needs to be able to refute the object of negation which is an inherent existence of persons or aggregates. For an example, when the *Heart Sutra* says that form is emptiness, it is implying that form is empty of any inherent existence, while the second clause 'emptiness is form' means that even though form lacks inherent existence, form definitely does exist nominally or conventionally. Therefore, although form lacks inherent existence it does exist conventionally, as a manifestation of its emptiness. In other words, while it is empty of inherent existence it still exists conventionally.

This is said to be the crux of the Prasangika point of view. It is really the most essential point, and if one misses this point then one has missed the whole presentation of the Prasangika view. If, however, one can understand this point then one has understood the crux of the Prasangika point of view. I have explained this to you on many occasions, as we



have studied the various topics on this teaching. His Holiness also keeps touching on this point again and again in every teaching that he gives, i.e. that phenomena lack inherent existence while at the same time existing conventionally as dependent originations. So this is something we really need to contemplate well in order to get a very clear understanding. Then there will be no confusion.

In relation to this, the *Heart Sutra* says at the beginning that Shariputra asks Avalokiteshvara, 'How does a son of good family engage in the practice of the profound view?' to which Avalokiteshvara explains that a son or daughter engages in the profound view by seeing that form lacks inherent existence, and likewise with the rest of the aggregates. The line where Avalokiteshvara replies that form is to be seen as lacking inherent existence and so forth also applies to all other phenomena, which is the main point of the *Heart Sutra*. If one incorporates that understanding when one recites the *Heart Sutra* then it will be a great source of understanding and inspiration.

Gyalsab Je's commentary explains that the wise person who has gained a profound understanding of suchness or emptiness, understands clearly that cyclic existence can be completely abandoned, and that liberation is definitely possible. Unlike the fears of the childish, there is no fear in those who have a clear understanding of emptiness. They won't be frightened with the prospect there is no self and aggregates. Rather there will be a great understanding that it is precisely because the self lacks inherent existence that it is possible to achieve a state of liberation free from all delusions. That understanding will be definitely achieved by the wise.

Understanding emptiness serves as the means to see the definite possibility of abandoning cyclic existence and obtaining liberation, because with a clear, unmistakable understanding of emptiness or selflessness, one will be able to clearly see that grasping at the self can definitely be overcome. The main point here is that with the profound understanding of emptiness, one naturally will be able to see that there is an antidote for overcoming grasping at the self, and when grasping at self is understood as something to be completely eliminated from one's mental continuum, then naturally the state of being free from all delusions, which is state of liberation, will be seen to be attainable.

### 2.1.1.3. THE TEACHER'S SAYING THAT FEAR ARISES FROM CONCEPTION OF SELF

This fear, as the Buddha said, actually arises from the conception of the self. The verse relating to this reads:

27. *By him who speaks only to help beings,  
It was said that all beings  
Have arisen from the conception of I  
And are enveloped with the conception of mine*

Gyalsab Je's commentary explains in that the lines, '*It was said all beings, have arisen from the conception of I*', the Tibetan word for living being is *kyegu*, literally means 'that which posses the nine attributes'. As the commentary explains, the nine attributes of an individual being are the five aggregates and the four elements. The five aggregates, as explained previously, are the aggregate of form, the aggregate of feeling, the aggregate of discrimination, the aggregate of compositional factors and the aggregate of consciousness, and the four elements are the elements of wind, earth, fire and water. In any case, the main point is that ordinary beings have a distinctive sense of 'I' and 'mine'. The reason why the aggregates are called the contaminated aggregates

has been explained in earlier teachings; the term 'contaminated' has the connotation of having to repeatedly acquire these aggregates again and again. The contaminated aggregates possessed by ordinary beings arise basically from the conceptions of 'I' and 'mine', which all ordinary beings instinctively have.

With respect to fear in any given situation, if we to look into what it is that we fear, then there is the distinct notion of 'what will happen to me?'. If we investigate further how we perceive ourselves at that time, we will notice that we have a misconception of the 'I'. We will notice that we perceive the 'I' to be a self-sufficient and inherently existent entity that is unrelated to anything else. The misconception of an inherently existent self or 'I' is that it exists independently without relating to anything else. It is as if the 'I' exists solidly and independently by itself, and it is this very misapprehended 'I' that we grasp at. So, all our doubts and fears are a natural consequence of really believing in and holding onto such an inherently, self-sufficiently and independently existing 'I', which in fact does not exist at all.

As explained in the teachings, such an 'I' does not exist, thus we are holding onto a false identity, so to speak, because the perception of an inherently existent 'I' is a wrong conception. Now the question is, does the 'I' exist or not? Does a self exist? The answer is the 'I' or self definitely does exist. The perception of a self in general is not false, therefore not a wrong conception. However the perception of an independent and inherently existent 'I' is a wrong conception, which actually leads to all of the problems, fears and doubts that we experience.

If we really think about it, the 'I' that we hold onto, and all the fears and doubts associated with it do not actually exist in the way that they appear to us. When one realises that what we are holding on to doesn't actually exist then, as a result, the sense of clinging onto it will also definitely loosen. Then all fears, problems and everything else relating to that false 'I' will naturally fade away too. So you can just imagine the great sense of relief and liberation that one will achieve when one gains the correct understanding of how the 'I' actually exists, which is that it is empty of inherent and independent existence.

As Gyalsab Je's commentary further clarifies, all the fears of ordinary beings arise from the misconception of 'I' and 'mine'. The Buddha presented the teaching on emptiness in order to liberate beings from that misconception and thus liberate them from all fears and sufferings. As the Buddha explained, the fears arise from that misconception of 'I' and 'mine', and he presented the teachings on emptiness as a means to achieve freedom from those fears, and thus show the way to liberation. As explained previously, on many occasions, if the question is whether the self or 'I' exists, the answer is yes, an 'I' does definitely exist. Isn't there an existent 'I' when we say, 'I go', 'I sleep' or 'I eat'? It would go against our experience if we were to deny the existence of an 'I'.

When the teachings present selflessness, it is referring to the perception of an 'I' that is an independently or inherently existent 'I', that eats, sleeps and does other things, which does not exist. It is an independently or inherently existent 'I' that does not exist. So the object of negation is the inherently existent 'I' that does not exist. To give an example that I have used previously, when someone asks us to go and fetch the clock, the question is, does the clock actually exist? The answer is that the clock definitely does exist, but our perception of it is that it is an independently and

inherently existent clock. Even though we may not be conscious of it, if we really think about it, an independently and inherently existent clock is what appears to our mind. When we go to fetch the clock, we are subconsciously thinking about fetching a clock that is independently and inherently existent. In fact an inherently and independently established clock does not exist—it is a completely non-existent. So the perception of an object, such as a clock, that appears to us as existing independently and inherently, is the object of negation. When we are able to successfully understand that such an independent clock does not exist in any way, and is completely non-existent, yet it also exists conventionally, then we have touched the main point of establishing a clock that does exist but not inherently.

Identifying the object of negation is essential. In his *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* Shantideva said that without identifying the object of negation there is no possible way to successfully refute that object of negation. One must clearly identify the object of negation in order to establish a clear understanding of emptiness. Likewise the understanding of emptiness as a means to remove our fear is explained in the *Heart Sutra*:

Therefore, Shariputra, because there is no attainment, bodhisattvas abide relying on the perfection of wisdom, without obscuration of thought, and so are unafraid. Transcending perverted views, they attain the end, nirvana. All buddhas existing in the three times, relying on the perfection of wisdom, fully awoken to the highest, perfect enlightenment.

One needs to reflect on this again and again, as it is the crux of the matter.

As you would be aware, the next session is the discussion session, and it is good for you to really engage in that session. The main topics of discussion can be around the clear identification of what selflessness means, and the opposite of that, which is the self of person. What does a self of person imply? If there were to be an inherently existent self then what would that imply? What does selflessness imply? What does the self of phenomena or the aggregates imply? What does the selflessness of the aggregates or phenomena imply? It is important to really clarify and distinguish between self and selflessness to gain a good understanding of their meaning.

How does grasping at a self serve as a root cause of samsara? What is samsara itself, and what does it mean to be free from samsara? How does one actually engage in practices to free oneself from samsara? Contemplating these points will be very, very effective for one's understanding and practice.

It is good to relate to the main logical reasoning or syllogism that is given in the teaching to gain the understanding that grasping at the self is a misconception that can be eliminated. It is precisely because it is the possible to eliminate that misconception that liberation is possible. To really understand how grasping at the self serves as the reason that makes liberation possible, we need to gain an understanding of the possibility of achieving liberation. The reason given for that possibility is because grasping at the self is a delusion or misconception that is adventitious. In other words the nature of our mind is not polluted, to the point of being inseparable from that delusion of inherent existence. Because the delusion is adventitious, it is possible to overcome it.

So each point is backed up with a further reason. It is good to understand that there is a possibility of completely severing cyclic existence, because the root cause of cyclic

existence or samsara, which is grasping at the self, can be eliminated. Why can grasping at the self be eliminated? Because it is adventitious, thus it is separable from the mental continuum. Further, because it is a wrong conception, it is not based on valid cognition as it does not have valid basis. If it were not a wrong conception, then it would be difficult to overcome, because it would be based on a solid foundation. Whereas all misconceptions, because of the very fact that they are a misconception and do not have a valid basis, can be overcome. What overcomes that misconception is the valid cognition that directly opposes that misconception, which is the perception of selflessness, or emptiness. So, the wisdom recognising emptiness directly opposes the wrong conception of grasping at an inherently existing self. It is because there is this opposing force, a valid cognition that serves as an antidote to overcome misconception, that it is possible to eliminate it. With this sound, solid reasoning the possibility of attaining liberation is not just a wishful thinking or mere imagination, but a reality and fact.

Having identified the grasping at 'I' and 'mine' as being a cause for the samsaric existence of ordinary beings, the next verse explains how the conception of 'I' and 'mine' is actually a misconception, and not true but in fact false. Because it is false, it can be overcome, thus one can overcome the fears that those misconceptions produce. If this misconception of 'I' and 'mine' was based on truth and reality then we couldn't do anything about our fear, because it would be based on reality. However, because the source of the misconception that causes fear is false, fears and so forth can definitely be overcome.

In our everyday life many of our fears, what we might call paranoia, are based very much on our superstitious mind. We just assume bad things are going to happen. Many doubts and superstitious thoughts cause a lot of fear. Sometimes we can actually realise for ourselves 'I am just afraid because of my paranoiac, superstitious mind'.

For example, when we were very young we might have been fearful about going in a dark room, because there might be a ghost in there. That is clearly a superstitious fear. Of course, later in life we realise that a dark room does not automatically imply that there is a boogie man in there. Nevertheless the fear that was generated when we were a child was very real fear and the discomfort that we felt as children was real. That fear, based on unreality and untruth, does cause real suffering in one's mind.

As children in Tibet, our parents used to warn us to be quiet otherwise the owls would call us, meaning that they were summoning a ghost to call us. Our parents would say, keep quiet otherwise the owl is going to call you. When you think about it, the hoot of an owl is actually quite a sinister sort of sound, especially at night!

*Transcribed from tape by Su Lan Foo*  
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**DISCUSSION****Block 2****27 April 2010****Week: 1 (30 March 2010)**

1. Why is self- mortification not a Dharma practice? [4]
2. What is the great path of excellent doctrine? [3]
3. *Verse 13. The bodies embraced by the vicious snakes  
Of the afflictive emotions, they enter for a long time  
The dreadful jungle of cyclic existence  
Among the trees of endless beings.*

- a) Give an example of a wrong path.
- b) In brief what is verse13 pointing out?

**Week: 2 (6 April 2010)**

4. What does equalizing the eight worldly dharmas mean? [4]
5. What are the results concordant with the following non-virtues? [13]
  - Divisive speech -
  - Harsh speech -
  - Senseless speech or gossip -
  - Covetousness -
  - Harmful intent -
  - Wrong views -
  - Drinking alcohol -
  - Not giving -
  - Wrong livelihood -
  - Arrogance -
  - Jealousy -
  - Anger -
  - Not questioning the wise -

6. What are the four characteristics of karma in general? [4]

**Week: 3 (13 April 2010)**

7. It is relatively easier to understand ignorance as a wrong consciousness but it is not so clear with attachment and anger. Explain why attachment and anger are considered wrong consciousnesses. [4]
8. What does virtuous non-desire, non-ignorance and non-hatred refer to? {4}
9. As the commentary has explained besides reflecting and contemplating on karma;
  - a) What is the actual practice? [3]
  - a) Which is the primary mode of action and why is it the primary mode? [3]

**Week: 4 (20 April 2010)**

Go to page 4, half way down the first column. Geshe Doga posed a series of questions to be discussed, which refer back to the fourth week's commentary.

"The main topics of discussion can be around the clear identification of what selflessness means, and the opposite of that, which is the self of person."

10. All our doubts and fears are a natural consequence of what?

# Exam

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

Block: 2

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

Week: 6 (4 May 2010)

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1. Why is self- mortification not a Dharma practice? [4]

2. What is the great path of excellent doctrine? [3]

3. *Verse 13. The bodies embraced by the vicious snakes  
Of the afflictive emotions, they enter for a long time  
The dreadful jungle of cyclic existence  
Among the trees of endless beings.*

a) Give an example of a wrong path.

b) In brief what is verse13 pointing out?

4. What does equalizing the eight worldly dharmas mean? [4]

5. What are the results concordant with the following non-virtues? [13]

Divisive speech

Harsh speech

Senseless speech or gossip

Covetousness

Harmful intent

Wrong views

Drinking alcohol

Not giving

Wrong livelihood

Arrogance

Jealousy

Anger

Not questioning the wise

6. What are the four characteristics of karma in general? [4]

7. It is relatively easier to understand ignorance as a wrong consciousness but it is not so clear with attachment and anger. Explain why attachment and anger are considered wrong consciousnesses. [4]

8. What does virtuous non-desire, non-ignorance and non-hatred refer to? [4]

9. As the commentary has explained besides reflecting and contemplating on karma;  
a) What is the actual practice? [3]

b) Which is the primary mode of action and why is it the primary mode? [3]

10. All our doubts and fears are a natural consequence of what?