
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་གྱི་ལྷན་པོ་ལྷན་པོ་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

3 August 2010

As usual we generate a positive motivation for engaging in the meditation practice. [meditation]

In order to receive the teachings you may generate the bodhichitta motivation which is, 'For the benefit of all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put it into practice well.'

2.1.2.3.4. Refuting inherently existing things (cont.)

2.1.2.3.4.4 Refuting inherently existent moments

2.1.2.3.4.4.1 All moments as having parts

One way of refuting inherently existing moments is by establishing that all moments have parts. From the outline alone, one can get an inkling of what this is about. This is actually the logical reasoning that the Prasangika use to refute the views about partless phenomena held by other schools. The Prasangika first establish that functional things are impermanent; if they are impermanent then they possess parts, and so are not partless. Can you understand how establishing that something is impermanent also establishes it as having parts? Do you see the connection there? How would you explain that?

Student: It is produced, remains and then disintegrates.

Take the example of a book, which we would normally consider as being impermanent. We wouldn't call one page a book would we? No! So if one page is not a book, then how many pages are needed to establish it as a book? That is also something you may not be able to answer! It comes down to mere convention.

We take conventional things for granted, but if we look further we find that it is not so clear-cut. However one thing which should be clear—in order to establish something as a book it must have many parts. One page by itself does not make a book, which illustrates that for something to be considered a book it has to have many parts. A book is impermanent, and it has many parts.

The main thing to consider here is how the possession of parts establishes something as being empty of inherent existence, or as not being inherently established. Most Buddhist schools, apart from some of the Vaibhashika schools which posit partless particles, accept that both matter and functional things possess parts. The unique Prasangika view is that the possession of parts is the reason why things do not exist inherently. We need to understand the reasoning presented by the Prasangika, which shows how the fact that functional things have parts illustrates that things could not exist independently or from their own side, because they are dependent on parts.

The relevant verse reads:

69. *Just as a moment has an end, so a beginning
And a middle must be considered.
Thus due to this triple nature of a moment,
There is no momentary abiding of the world.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states, 'A moment is produced, it stays and disintegrates, and thus it is impermanent'. All impermanent phenomena have the characteristic of disintegrating the moment after they are produced. From the second moment they start to disintegrate, which is the characteristic of impermanence.

As impermanence is the reason that establishes the non-inherent existence of phenomena, it is essential that we get practical understanding of what impermanence is, rather than just leaving it at an intellectual level. We need to really take it to heart the full connotation of impermanence and what that implies, which is that things are constantly changing and don't last more than a moment. Understanding that things do not last even for a moment is of course a profound understanding of impermanence.

The very definition of impermanence implies that things disintegrate from the very next moment after they have been produced. Understanding impermanence at this level is of course a profound level of understanding. Whereas understanding impermanence at a grosser level refers to seeing things disintegrating at an obvious level, such as when death occurs, or when something is smashed with a hammer, or breaks down. That level of impermanence is quite obvious to us because we can actually see the transformation taking place!

It is said that when we reach a more profound level of understanding impermanence (i.e. that things are changing from moment to moment) or even just an inkling of that level of understanding, then that becomes a real impetus for practising the Dharma. Although I do not make any claim that I have that level of understanding myself, I definitely do believe, in accordance with the teachings, that the understanding of impermanence is a really profound impetus to practise the Dharma.

Those who have a profound understanding of impermanence are said to feel regret about wasting even a moment of their life, because they understand that each moment of their life is so precious. Once that moment is gone it cannot be retrieved, thus moment by moment our life is disintegrating. That understanding means that they feel regret if even a moment of their life is not used in a virtuous way to accumulate merit. Not using every moment is considered as a great loss, which would be a source of great regret. This goes to show that when one reaches an understanding of impermanence at that profound level, then it definitely becomes an impetus for considering every moment of one's life as precious, and thus to be used in the most optimal way to accumulate virtue and merit, by practising the Dharma. So you can see why it is really important for us to gain a greater understanding of impermanence.

One of the first topics in the Lam Rim teachings is death and impermanence, and the text explains how the awareness of death is a really strong impetus to practise Dharma, especially at our level. As ordinary people we get caught up in the affairs and pleasures of this life, to the point that all our activities are focussed on this life. When we consider our own impending death, then an awareness of the need to not be too attached to these worldly affairs arises, which leads to engaging in virtue and Dharma practice.

With a stronger awareness of our impending death, we will naturally become less attached to the affairs of merely this life and the practice of Dharma will naturally become a very joyous undertaking. Our mind becomes very relaxed when we don't grasp at the affairs of this life. In contrast, being

attached to the affairs of this life causes a lot of pain—the pain of separation from loved ones, separation from material wealth, not being able to acquire things that we wish for and so forth. All of these lead to strong attachment and clinging to the pleasures and concerns of this life. With a constant awareness of death the pain of separation naturally subsides. That creates a sense of peace and relief in our mind, so that the affairs of this life don't become our priority concern.

The main thing is to make sure that we try to maintain a virtuous mind at all times. That is the most essential task during our present life, because that can really help us at the time of death; at the very least a virtuous mind will help to secure a good rebirth in our next life. Although we may enjoy the benefits of wealth, it will not be of any help to us at the time of death. No teaching says that wealth can assist us to have a good rebirth in the next lifetime. However all teachings and all teachers unanimously agree that a virtuous state of mind will definitely secure a good rebirth in the next lifetime. That is why it is essential to protect and maintain a virtuous mind at all times.

The Lam Rim presentation of death and impermanence gives step-by-step instructions on how to contemplate death. One of the last stages is to realise that nothing but the Dharma will help at the time of death. Three main reasons why nothing but the Dharma will help at the time of death are that wealth cannot help us, our best friends and companions cannot help us, and even our own body cannot help us at that time. Contemplating these points is essential if we are to understand how the Dharma mind, or the virtuous mind, will assist and help us at the time of death.

The teaching goes into great detail in describing how wealth, our friends and even our physical body cannot prevent death, and cannot assist us at the time of death. As described in the Lam Rim teachings, the loved ones surrounding a dying person cannot prevent them from dying, or assist them in their journey to the next life. The only thing that can help is having a virtuous state of mind. So in this way, we can reflect on the importance of contemplating impermanence, in particular death.

In this section, *Precious Garland* is introducing the fact that impermanence itself does not exist inherently and is thus empty of inherent existence. Of the two truths impermanence is, of course, a relative truth. As explained in earlier teachings ultimate truth is explained within the context of the relative truth. It is said that all the teachings of the Buddha are given with the intention that we gain an understanding of the two truths, i.e. relative or conventional truth and ultimate truth.

As explained in the teachings, for example *The Four Hundred Verses*, the two truths, serve as the *basis* on which one practises the two essentials of the *path*, which are method and wisdom, from which one gains the *result* of obtaining the two main bodies of the Buddha. In this way the basis, the path and the result are explained. It is really important that we try to incorporate this main structure of the Buddha's teachings into whatever we are studying. In that way, we can understand the big picture, and incorporate this understanding into whatever we study and practice.

It is important that we familiarise ourselves with the topic of death and impermanence, in particular the main points to be incorporated into the meditation on death and impermanence. The three main points, as mentioned earlier, are that at the time of death our wealth cannot help us, our family and close friends cannot help us and our own body cannot help us. This is actually a very profound teaching in

itself. As we incorporate that understanding and practice into our life, it reduces attachment to friends, relatives, possessions and even our own body, while of course we strive towards overcoming attachment entirely.

We may not have reached the point right now of completely abandoning attachment to friends, relatives, wealth and our own body, however even a reduction in our attachment to just these three things really helps the mind to become less anxious and less worried. The mind naturally becomes calmer and more peaceful. This makes our practice of Dharma much more meaningful, more restful and will bring more quality into our current practice. But it is particularly at the time of death, which we will all eventually have to face, that we need to try to secure a peaceful mind. Then, if as a result of our practice now we can naturally maintain a state of mind where we are not attached to our relatives and friends, our wealth and our own bodies, there will be nothing to hold us back. There will be no fear, or anxiety at the time of death, thus we will naturally be very peaceful.

It is very logical to assume that the mind will be very calm and peaceful when there is no attachment to these things. Therefore as preparation for the time of death we need to incorporate this attitude into our practice now, so that we secure a peaceful and calm death. Otherwise, even before death, when we are ill or unwell we will accumulate extra mental pain if our mind is not calm and peaceful. In other words we will cause ourselves even more suffering. Therefore, at the very least, even though there might be some discomfort at the time of death, the mind can definitely be calm and peaceful. That will definitely benefit us.

When I encourage you to contemplate these points, I am not suggesting that you suddenly leave your work behind, give up all your material possessions, and go to a remote place to contemplate. That is not what I am suggesting. One can be engaged in normal activities, one's work or job or wherever one is, but the main point is to be mindful of these points, which is a mental activity that can occur regardless of where we are, or what we are doing physically. If we remember these points, then as we recall the main purpose of our life it will, in time, put things into perspective and bring about mental ease and comfort. That is the practical benefit of thinking in this way, which can be verified even by people who are not particularly Buddhist.

I have told the story before about how I once met two women in St Kilda, who I had not previously met. Apparently something had drawn them to come to me. One of them said, 'I have been diagnosed with cancer and I have been told that I have only two weeks to live, so how can I prepare myself? Can you help me by giving me some advice?' I asked her if she had any children to which she responded that she had children and a husband. The first thing I suggested to her was not to be overly concerned about her children and husband as they would be okay. I said, 'Just try to bring your focus inward on yourself and try not to be too overly concerned about the others. If it appeals to you, you could recite the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra', and immediately she said, 'Yes, I can definitely do that'. She had no hesitation in committing to saying the mantra, and I said 'This is a technique that will help you keep your focus within yourself', and she took that practice very willingly.

More than two weeks later, I received a letter from the friend who had brought her over to see me and in her letter she described how her friend had passed away very peacefully. I am not sure if she had recited the mantras before she passed away, however her friend said that she had shown the dying

woman a picture of me. Her friend had looked at that and smiled, and when she passed away, her face was radiant and smiling, very peaceful and calm. That seemed to be a result of the advice that she took to heart, which seems to have really helped her.

To me it seemed to confirm that she took my advice to heart, and by having put it into practice wholeheartedly just in the last two or three weeks of her life, she actually gained benefit from that. So if someone actually benefitted from reciting a mantra for just three or four weeks prior to death, or even just brought to mind some advice about keeping the mind inward and focussed, and that actually helped her to have a peaceful and calm death, then those of us who have spent a great deal of time in practising would definitely have to assume that this would also be the case for us.

Indeed, it would be a very sad if that was not the case. If we have done so much practice and preparation, and don't receive any benefit at the time of death when we really need it, then that indeed would be very sad. It would be a pity to have practiced all this time and then at the very last stage when we need to be calm and peaceful, we start complaining and screaming, or make a nuisance of ourselves to everyone around us.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary says that the main point of verse 69 is that it establishes what impermanence actually is. He says, 'The nature of permanence is something that is produced, remains for a moment, and in the very next moment disintegrates'. This is in response to the assertion that part of a moment is inherently existent.

The commentary continues, 'If you say a part of the moment does exist inherently, then just as you would accept a moment having an end, likewise you have to accept a beginning and a middle of a moment too'. So this response is using their own logic against them saying, 'If you consider there is an end to a moment, then you would also have to accept that there is a beginning and a middle of a moment too'. Therefore a moment cannot be partless, and so it cannot be independently existent.

As the commentary states, because partless things do not exist, neither living things nor the environment of the world can inherently abide, even for a moment, because every part of its moments has the triple nature of a moment.

The main point of this refutation is that establishing that a moment is impermanent, naturally contradicts inherent existence, because inherent existence implies an independently and unchanging existence. So if a moment were to be inherently existent then it could not change, because it would exist independently without depending on anything else. Therefore establishing a moment to be impermanent implies that it too is changing from moment to moment and thus has the nature of a beginning, middle and end. Therefore it cannot be inherently existent. Do you get the point?

Having established in verse 69 that all moments have parts, the next verse refutes the inherent existence of that which has parts. The next verse refutes possibility that a thing that has parts is itself inherently existent, which is another assertion by the opponents.

**70. Also the beginning, middle and end
Are to be analysed like a moment.
Therefore beginning, middle, and end
Are also not [produced] from self or other.**

The opponents are accepting that a moment does have a beginning, a middle and an end, but that individually, each

(i.e. the beginning, middle and an end) is inherently existent. In relation to that, Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins by saying, 'If you say that the beginning, middle and end each individually abide inherently' this syllogism is presented: Take the subject 'the beginning, middle and end of a moment' – none can abide or be produced inherently, in any instance (which is the predicate)—because just like the moment itself, when analysed each instant is found to have parts of a beginning, a middle and an end as well (which is the reason).

This presents the reason why the beginning, a middle and an end of a moment are not instances that abide inherently, or are produced inherently. As Gyaltsab Je says, when you really think about it and analyse it, just as with the moment, each instance of the moment also has its parts—a beginning, a middle and an end.

Therefore contemplating and further analysing the subtlest moment of the existence of a thing, shows that because it has the nature of impermanence, it can be further divided into parts. In this way there is no ultimate functional thing that can be found to be partless, permanent, and inherently and independently existent.

Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary on the meaning of verse 70 by saying, 'Thus by refuting partless things in general, inherent existence is refuted as well'.

2.1.2.3.4.4.3 Refuting inherently existent things through the reason of their not being one or many

The next verse refutes the inherent existence of things with the reason that they cannot be inherently existent, because they are neither inherently existent one nor inherently existent many. This reason is based on the fact that if something were to exist, it has to exist either as one or as many. There is no third alternative—it is either a unity (of one) or it is many. So if something were to exist inherently, it would have to exist either as an entity that is inherently existent as one, or an inherently existent as many.

The verse reads:

**71. Due to having many parts there is no unity,
There is not anything without parts.
Further, without one, there is not many.
Also, without existence there is no non-
existence.**

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse with another syllogism: Take the subject 'a functional thing that is form'—it cannot be truly one—because it is an entity which has parts. This syllogism refutes the proposition that something can be inherently one.

In relation to this, the commentary further explains that there is no fault of the reason not being established, because partless forms do not exist anywhere. If there is a doubt that the reason could not be established, i.e. thinking that that there is no entity that has parts, there is no fault in thinking that the reason cannot be established, because partless forms do not exist anywhere.

Whatever the form or functional thing, it has to have parts. There cannot be a unitary single thing that has no parts to it. Therefore all entities have parts, all forms have to have parts and so therefore they cannot be truly one. In other words an entity cannot be truly or inherently established as one.

Then the commentary continues with a second syllogism: A form or thing—cannot be truly many—because it is not established as truly one. This is a pervasion, because without one there cannot be many.

You cannot establish a truly or inherently existent many because there is no truly existent one to begin with. So if there is no truly existent one entity or object, then there cannot be truly a multiple entity or object, because 'multiple' has to come from one. As Gyaltsab's commentary says: 'This is a pervasion, because without one, there cannot be many'.

Thus the logical reason why without one there cannot be many has been established.

If we were to say that there are two people then that implies that there are more than one. Which means in order to have two people there has to be one person to begin with. Without one person you cannot have two! In summary form cannot be an inherently existent one because it has parts, and form cannot be an inherently existent many because there is no form that is inherently one. The commentary states that using the example of form, the truly established existence of all phenomena is systematically refuted through the reason of there being neither one nor many.

The next qualm as stated in Gyaltsab Je's commentary refers to the forms' lack of inherent existence as being inherently existent itself. The qualm begins with the subject: 'If you were to say that the form's lack of true existence is inherently existent...' This is saying 'We agree that form itself cannot be inherently existent. But the lack of true existence of form must be inherently existent'.

The commentary goes on to refute this saying that form does not exist inherently, however the lack of inherent existence of form itself is not established inherently, because without the basis, there cannot be the dependent.

The reason why the lack of inherent existence of form cannot be inherently established or inherently existent is that form itself lacks inherent existence. The form itself is the *basis* and the lack of inherent existence of form is the *dependent*. What is being established here is that if the basis itself lacks inherent existence, then whatever is dependent on the basis cannot be inherently established as well. That is because whatever is dependent on the basis has to be related to the basis. Thus, because the basis itself, which is form, lacks inherent existence, that which is dependent on the basis, which is the lack of inherent existence or emptiness of form, also has to lack inherent existence.

The main point is that because form itself lacks inherent existence, the emptiness of form could not be inherently existent. Why? Because the emptiness of form is dependent on form. Thus, as Gyaltsab Je's commentary states, 'without the basis there cannot be the dependant'.

In the Buddha's teaching on the categories of emptiness there is the 'emptiness of emptiness'. That refers to the emptiness of emptiness rather than the inherent existence of emptiness.

The reason for going into this detail is because doubts about inherent existence can arise very easily. When one gets an inkling of how form itself lacks inherent existence, then the doubt, 'I wonder if the emptiness of form and the lack of inherent existence of form itself are inherently existent or truly existent' could easily arise. So in order to remove any possibility of inherent existence or true existence under any circumstance, what is being established here is that the emptiness or the lack of inherent existence of form is itself also empty, and therefore lacks inherent existence.

**72. If it is thought that though disintegration or
an antidote
An existent becomes non-existent,**

***Then how without an existent
Could there be disintegration or an antidote?***

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary: When a thing naturally disintegrates or is destroyed by an antidote such as when smashed by a hammer, if you think that its inherent existence has ceased to be, how can a thing's inherent existence naturally disintegrate or be destroyed by an antidote?

When a thing naturally *disintegrates* through aging or the process of decay, or when it is *destroyed by an antidote* that is used to bring about its destruction (*such as when smashed with a hammer*), has *the inherent existence* of that thing now been destroyed? As this qualm may arise it has to be refuted.

As the commentary explains, the destruction of the inherent existence of a thing is not possible because inherent existence itself cannot possibly exist. How can a thing's inherent existence naturally disintegrate or be destroyed by an antidote? That is not possible because inherent existence itself cannot possibly exist.

One might assume that when something, for example a vase, disintegrates either naturally or through other causes, then the inherent existence of the vase has also ceased. One could not possibly make that assumption because there was never any inherent existence in the first place. So to assume that its inherent existence has been destroyed when the vase itself is destroyed is a fallacy.

***73ab. Hence, in fact there is no disappearance
Of the world through nirvana...***

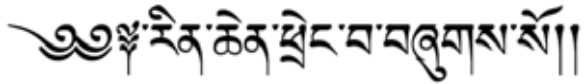
As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains: Thus when *nirvana* is obtained, it is not the case of that a *world*, which previously existed inherently, suddenly *disappears*, because there was never a time when it existed inherently.

Just like the earlier example of general phenomena it is further established here that when one obtains nirvana, it is not the case that one is leaving behind a samsara that is inherently existent, and that having obtained nirvana, the inherently existent samsara just suddenly disappears. That cannot be the case because samsara never existed inherently to begin with.

The doubt which may arise is that when one obtains nirvana, one has been freed from an inherently existent samsara. In order to remove that doubt, it is being re-affirmed that there was never an inherently existent samsara to begin with.

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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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

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Let us begin with our usual meditation. *[meditation]*

We can now generate the positive motivation for receiving the teachings. There is no more supreme a motivation than the technique for generating love and compassion in our hearts that we have just meditated on. Thus it is essential that we try to cultivate love and compassion in our everyday lives. The more we familiarise ourselves with love and compassion, the more it becomes part of our nature.

2.1.2.3.4.4.4 Reason for not holding the world as having an end

73cd. *Asked whether the world has an end
The Conqueror remained silent.*

74. *Because he did not teach this profound
doctrine
To worldly beings who were not receptacles,
The All-Knowing is therefore known
By the wise to be omniscient.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that the verse is referring to the non-inherent existence of both samsara and nirvana. It reads¹:

When some non-Buddhist followers who combine sixty-two wrong views about the non-inherent existence of both samsara and nirvana into fourteen extremes, asked the Buddha if whether there is an end to the self and the world, the conqueror remained silent.

The same lines of this verse are quoted in Chapter 5 of Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses*, where the sixty-two wrong views that are combined into the fourteen extremes are also explained.² These extremes refer to fourteen questions that some non-Buddhists asked the Buddha about whether certain things existed or not. When the Buddha was asked these questions 'the Conqueror remained silent'.

As the commentary continues,

If asked why, then it is because without an excellent basis, it is inappropriate to teach the excellent doctrine.

This can be understood to mean that without a basis one could not possibly talk about the characteristics of the basis. In relation to the questions posed by the non-Buddhists, the bases are inherently established persons and inherently established phenomena. The characteristics are whether persons and phenomena have a beginning or not, and whether they are permanent or impermanent and so forth. Thus, as the very bases of an inherently established self of persons and phenomena do not exist, there was no point in talking about their attributes or characteristics.

The commentary further explains:

Thus by seeing that they were unsuitable vessels for receiving the teaching on selflessness, and that the

aggregates are empty of inherent establishment, the Buddha did not specify a response.

Because the question is whether there is a self of a person or not and whether there is a self of the aggregates or not, the perfect answer would imply teaching the selflessness of persons and phenomena. However, because those asking the questions were not receptive to the teaching on selflessness, the Buddha did not respond to their questions. The verse says, 'he did not teach this profound doctrine to worldly beings who were not receptacles', which means that because they were not ready to receive that teaching, the Buddha remained silent.

Thus, says the commentary:

It is precisely because the Buddha did not teach the profound Dharma to unsuitable vessels by directly and entirely knowing what was appropriate to teach and not to teach, that the intelligent scholars are able to know that the Able One is omniscient. It is not that he lacks the knowledge to teach.

As mentioned here in Gyaltsab Je's commentary, the non-Buddhists used the fact that the Buddha did not respond to these fourteen questions as a reason to claim that the Buddha was not omniscient and all-knowing. They reason that 'the Buddha did not respond to our fourteen questions, because he didn't know the answer and therefore he could not be omniscient'.

However Buddhist scholars use that very same reason to prove that the Buddha is omniscient. As mentioned here in the commentary, it is due to the Buddha's all-knowing omniscient mind, which directly knows the capacity of sentient beings, and thus knows when it is appropriate to teach and when not to teach, that the Buddha did not respond to those fourteen questions. That, in effect, is proof that the Buddha is all-knowing and omniscient. As Gyaltsab's commentary mentions, the wise use such reasoning to counter the claims of the non-Buddhist schools (i.e. that the Buddha lacks omniscience), as proof that the Buddha is indeed omniscient. Furthermore, as the commentary states:

On other occasions the Buddha taught extensively on the emptiness of things.

The point to be understood from these explanations is that the Buddha teaches only in accordance with the needs of the disciples, and that the Buddha will teach a point when it is appropriate to teach that particular point. For example, as other texts explain, for those who would gain greater benefit by receiving a teaching of the existence of a self, the Buddha would mention 'there is a self of person'. Knowing that for some the teachings on selflessness would cause great fear and might even cause them to completely reject the Buddha's doctrine, the Buddha taught that there is a self.

Having appeased the person's mind in that way the Buddha would gradually lead them towards gaining the understanding of selflessness. That is the skilful way in which the Buddha taught – by fully knowing the capacity of the recipient. What we can learn from this, as I regularly emphasise, is that when we share our knowledge of Buddhism with others, we must also be careful about how we present it. Even though we may not have the clairvoyance that knows the other's background, understanding and level of intelligence, we may have some idea about how much they can handle and grasp.

Therefore it is really important that we are wary and careful about how we present Buddhism to others, and not just

¹ These quotes from Gyaltsab Je's commentary are not excerpts from a published text.

² See teaching of 31 October 2006.

'blurt out' everything that we know. Just because we have the knowledge, it's not OK to assume that we can present it to others. That is where one must be careful. Even in worldly affairs, we all know there are many things that are kept secret for a purpose, thus it is also appropriate that we keep some things to ourselves.

It is in this light that we gain an understanding of why the Buddha's teachings are divided into the four main schools of tenets, which range from a grosser level of views up to a subtler level of views. We can understand the need for different schools of tenets when we can see how together they form a gradual process of leading disciples to the understanding of the Buddha's teachings. These schools form the basis for presenting the Dharma with skilful means.

In relation to this, the Mandala Offering and the *Ganden Lha-gyama* prayer that we regularly recite include these lines, 'Please release a rain of vast and profound Dharma teachings precisely in accordance with the needs of those to be trained' Just as we wish to receive the teachings in accordance with our capacity and needs, so too other beings need to receive them in that way.

Also, when we relate to the presentation of the Buddha's doctrine in this way, we can develop a deep appreciation for his kindness, realising how the Buddha taught very skilfully in accordance with the needs and the capacity of sentient beings. From this we can also understand that there is no need to force any of the doctrine onto students. It should only be presented in accordance with the capacity of the particular student. Then it will not be burdensome to them, but will be taken up as a joyful practice, because it is a manageable practice.

If only one doctrine is presented to everyone, then we would have to be indoctrinated: you must do this and must not do that lest you go against the rules. Then things could become very heavy. So the reason why we can adopt the Buddha's teachings and be comfortable with them is because of the skilful means with which they are presented.

These points are very significant for us to contemplate because, as mentioned previously, they deepen our appreciation of the Buddha's teaching and enable us to recall the kindness with which he presented his teachings to us. When we really think about it, we see how the Buddha guides individual sentient beings towards the understanding of the Dharma, from very basic, slowly progressing through deeper and deeper levels to gaining a more profound level of understanding.

Thus the profound teachings are not forced on those who initially do not have the capacity to understand them. Rather, the views that the individual is capable of handling are presented first, which then slowly lead on to the acquisition of more and more profound views of the Buddha's teachings. From our own experience we can see how the basic views of the teachings are what initially attracted us, and as we gain further understanding of the teachings, we gain deeper and deeper levels of understanding. Through our own experience of having understood the teachings, we can see the great skill in the presentation of the teachings, and the great kindness in the way they are presented to us.

This is also how we can understand that ultimately the Buddha's teachings are based on love and compassion. In the very way they are presented, we can see the quality of his love and compassion and his great concern for others. Thus, the way in which the Buddha's teachings are

presented is very meaningful, and suitable for those who are following the teachings.

As the very essence of the Buddha's teachings is that they are based on love and compassion and non-violence, we can see that no one could deny that they are very appropriate teachings. Whether they are religious or not, there is no one who would disagree with the value of love and compassion, or the value of non-violence. That is something which everyone can accept and agree upon. So when we see that the Buddha's teachings are based on love and compassion and non-violence, then that too helps to deepen our appreciation.

As I regularly emphasise, we can see the value of love and compassion even when it is extended to animals. Dogs and cats may not intellectually understand what love and compassion are, but they definitely respond to it. There is no doubt about that. You can see that when the owner shows genuine love and care for their pet, the pet naturally and immediately responds to that, and that they enjoy and appreciate that love and compassion expressed in the form of genuine care. So they respond to that. They may not have an intellectual understanding, but they can feel it. Thus there is no question about the value of love and compassion for everyone, regardless of their understanding of it.

In the past have shared this story about the need to be skilful in presenting the teachings, and the need to be mindful of how much each person can accept, and how much they can grasp. Many years ago I was giving a teaching which included the disadvantages and faults of attachment. In those days I used to have a cup of tea with the students in the dining room after the teaching. One young lady, who would have been in her twenties came up to me and asked 'Is attachment really bad? Do I have to completely give up all attachments?'

I knew where she was coming from and what was bothering her. I felt that if I were to emphasise the need to abandon all attachment, she might have been put in a position where she would feel that she couldn't practise Buddhism, because she couldn't cope with trying to overcome all attachment. So my response to her was, 'Some small attachments should be fine to keep' [*Geshe-la laughs*] She was happy about what I had said at that time and thanked me. Of course a few years later, as she continued to come to the teachings and gained more understanding, she completely understood what my intent was at the time.

2.1.3 Summation

This is sub-divided into three categories:

2.1.3.1 Conquerors' descriptions of the profound

2.1.3.2 Faults of fearing the profound

2.1.3.3 Exhorting the king to realise the profound

2.1.3.1 CONQUERORS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PROFOUND

75. *Thus the doctrine of definite goodness
Was taught by the perfect Buddhas,
The seers of reality, as profound,
Unapprehensible, and baseless.*

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

Thus the doctrine of definite goodness is profound because it is difficult to fathom, unapprehensible because no extremes can be apprehended [i.e. the extremes of inherent existence] and baseless because it does not provide any basis for inherent establishment.

When realised and meditated upon, this doctrine brings to fruition the goals of all three vehicles. This was taught by the perfect Buddha, seer of all, in the *King of Concentration sutra* and so forth.

As explained here, the doctrine of definite goodness is, as mentioned previously, the teaching on emptiness. Therefore, as explained here, it is profound, unapprehensible and baseless. Therefore, when 'realised and meditated upon', this profound view of emptiness, brings about 'the goals of all three vehicles', which are the hearer, solitary realiser and the bodhisattva vehicles. So what needs to be understood is that all ultimate goals on the Buddhist path are obtained only through gaining the realisation of emptiness.

This is re-emphasising the earlier point that without gaining the realisation of emptiness, one cannot possibly obtain the goal of liberation. Thus in order to achieve even self-liberation, which is the goal of the hearers and solitary realisers, one needs to gain the realisation of emptiness. As mentioned in the commentary, these are explained extensively by the Buddha in the *King of Concentration sutra*.

2.1.3.2. FAULTS OF FEARING THE PROFOUND

76. *Frightened by the baseless doctrine,
Delighting in a base, not passing
Beyond existence and non-existence,
Unintelligent beings ruin themselves.*

77ab. *Afraid of the fearless abode,
Ruined, they ruin others.*

As Gyaltsab's commentary explains:

There are beings who are frightened by this doctrine that does not provide a base for the conception that grasps at inherent existence. [Trans: The literal word used here is 'grasping onto sign', but I have used the words 'inherent existence'.]

When the doctrine about the emptiness of inherent existence is presented to those who grasp at inherent existence, it makes them frightened. Because the doctrine on emptiness presents no base for the conception that grasps at inherent existence, it becomes a baseless doctrine which causes fear in the minds of those who grasp at inherent existence; the fear is of losing what they strongly hold on to.

As the commentary further reads:

There are those who, due to their strong grasping at the self from beginningless time, take delight in an inherently established base and thus assert inherent existence. Or there are those who find no choice but to assert the non-existence of a previously inherently established base.

Because of the familiarity over many lifetimes with adhering to the base that is established on inherent existence, the first type of being takes delight in grasping at an inherently existing base, and they therefore assert inherent existence. Then there are those who, when confronted with the lack of inherent existence, misunderstand that presentation. They feel that if things were not to exist inherently, then they have no choice but to assert that non-inherent existence must mean the cessation of a previously inherently established base. So for these people, something that was previously inherently established would cease to exist.

The commentary continues:

Such unintelligent beings ruin themselves due to their corrupt views. So when the emptiness of inherent existence is presented as the ultimate mode of existence, those who are afraid of the fearless abode

will not accept it and will abandon it. Having abandoned it, they will fall into lower rebirths.

This refers to the first type of being who grasps at inherent existence. When the lack of inherent existence or the emptiness of inherent existence is presented, they completely reject it, thinking 'this is not acceptable', and by condemning emptiness, they create the negative karma to be reborn into the lower realms. Thus through their misapprehension, the first type of being condemns emptiness itself and thus creates the cause to be re-born in lower rebirths.

The second type of being condemns the law of karma and effect, and thus also creates the cause to be re-born in lower rebirths. With respect to this second type of being, the commentary reads:

Some favour this view but misunderstand the meaning to conclude that all functional things must cease to be. [They misunderstand the lack of inherent existence as referring to functional things ceasing to exist]. Thus they condemn the law of karma and its effects, and claim that all phenomena are neither existent nor non-existent.

The views of the second type of being also arise from quite a subtle misconception. Other teachings explain that when the lack of inherent existence is presented, some mistakenly conclude that in meditation one must negate all coarse form, and that the negation of coarse form is emptiness itself. This is a danger. On a more profound level, if one is not careful to understand what the lack of inherent existence actually is, it is very easy for one to also reach this conclusion and fall into this type of wrong view. This is something that we need to be really mindful about, and to be careful about falling into adhering to that wrong view.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary concludes:

Thus they are ruined themselves and ruin others.

The commentary continues with a quote from another commentary

In his commentary on the *Ornament of Middle Way*, Shantirakshita says, 'The actual killing of animals such as birds and cattle and the like is merely a negative act of destroying a few beings with limited capacity for benefitting oneself and others...'

Here Shantirakshita is explaining how there can be some minor benefits from the act of killing for example birds or cattle, such as relieving the immediate suffering of hunger by consuming the meat and sharing it with others. Nevertheless, it is a negative act or deed.

'...However those who abandon the view of emptiness are harming the ultimate cause of Dharmakaya [the Buddha's truth body], which is like a lamp that illuminates the darkness of ignorance within all sentient beings. Thus those of you who wish for the ultimate goodness for yourselves must be careful of this point.'

The quote shows that although the act of killing animals such as birds or cattle is a negative one, there can be some minor benefit from that act. In contrast, however, abandoning the view of emptiness is a much heavier and more severe negative karma than killing animals and so forth. That is because abandoning the view of emptiness hinders the ultimate cause of Dharmakaya, that which serves as the ultimate means to benefit all living beings.

The quote from Shantirakshita says that realisation of emptiness serves as the 'lamp to illuminate the darkness of

ignorance of all sentient beings'. Here we need to incorporate our understanding of earlier explanations, which is that the wisdom realising emptiness is the only antidote to overcome ignorance. The only antidote to self-grasping is the wisdom realising selflessness or emptiness; and so without gaining the realisation of emptiness, one cannot possibly apply the antidote for overcoming the deep-rooted ignorance of grasping at the self. Without the realisation of emptiness there is no possibility of gaining liberation or enlightenment.

Therefore, compared with the negative karma of killing animals for example, abandoning the view of emptiness is a much more severe negative karma. That is because killing animals involve harming a limited number of sentient beings, whereas, if one were to abandon or condemn the view of emptiness, it is equivalent to preventing all sentient beings from gaining the means to remove the darkness of ignorance. So, condemning emptiness is indirectly equivalent to harming limitless numbers of sentient beings. That is the severity of the negativity of that act.

2.1.3.3 EXHORTING THE KING TO REALISE THE PROFOUND

*77cd. O King, act in such a way
That the ruined do not ruin you.*

In explaining the meaning of the verse Gyaltsab Je says:

Addressing the King, the author advises him to protect himself and others from ruin by developing the full understanding of emptiness in relation to the meaning of interdependent origination. If one were to deny interdependent origination, one will fall into the lower rebirths. The very reason for accepting interdependent origination in our system is a reason to accept the emptiness of inherent existence. It is in gaining the full understanding that cause and effect could not be established in the slightest way if things were inherently established, that one is led to the understanding of the two truths as being merely nominated and imputed phenomena.

We have touched on this point many times in the past, such as when we studied *Four Hundred Verses*. The main point here is that in our system, the understanding of emptiness should enhance the understanding of interdependent origination, and the understanding of interdependent origination should enhance the understanding of emptiness.

One of the main points about this relationship between interdependent origination and emptiness is that because there is a cause, there is an effect. When the cause is explained, it is presented as lacking inherent and independent existence, which indicates the possibility of the production of an effect. When an effect is presented as lacking interdependent and inherent existence, then that also presents the possibility of it being produced from a cause. In other words cause and effect and interdependent origination can be understood when the lack of inherent and independent existence is presented. That is how, on one level, the very presentation of emptiness enhances the understanding of cause and effect. Also, because of the fact that there is a cause and that there is an effect, things could not be independently or inherently existent.

I have taught on the relationship between emptiness and interdependent origination many times before, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama emphasises it again and again in his teachings. Thus it is good to refer back to the earlier

teachings and re-familiarise oneself with these points and try to gain a good understanding of them.³

2.2 Exhorting the king to train in the profound

We can leave the explanation of the sub-headings listed under this heading for our next session.

As some of you may be aware, I will be doing the annual White Tara retreat, so would you mind holding the next session as a discussion session? In addition to the retreat, the Tara puja that I have to do regularly falls on next Tuesday. So the retreat commitment as well as the Tara puja as well as the teaching might be a little bit too taxing for someone of my age [*Geshe-la laughs*]. Just as you experience anxiety and stress from your job or whatever so will I if I do too much! However stress when doing Dharma activities is much more worthwhile than stress from worldly activities.

When I have had an opportunity to do all of my commitments, then I naturally feel very calm and relaxed for the rest of the day. Whereas if I have not had time to do my commitments, then I feel a little bit apprehensive and unsettled during that day. Some years ago when I went to the teachings for the Kalachakra initiation in Canada, I had to make sure that I woke up at about 3.00 am in order to fulfil my commitments before going to the teaching session. By the time I had breakfast, lunch and dinner at the teachings it was around about 6.00 pm.

In the morning His Holiness would be doing the preparations for the initiations, which meant that we would be just sitting in the hall recited prayer mantras ourselves. Quite early one morning, I was sitting there quietly in the corner doing some mantras, when I suddenly felt something. When I opened my eyes, the attendant was trying to gain my attention as His Holiness was actually right there. His Holiness commented, 'Oh Gen-la, you seem to be here early today'. His Holiness was right there in front of me and I hadn't noticed!

So, would you like to have a regular discussion or do something different? If you want something different then my suggestion is to first do all the regular prayers, and the recitation of the verse for the Tonglen Practice. Then to do the *Tonglen* meditation for about 15 minutes, followed by a group discussion on that practice.

It would be good to discuss what love and compassion really means and try to get a really good understanding of the love and compassion that is to be cultivated in our daily lives. It is very important that one gets a good understanding of love and compassion. Some people say, 'I don't think I will ever be loved', which just goes to show that their understanding of love is mixed with attachment. If you're expecting some sort of love from someone, then you are expecting attachment rather than love. So consider presenting and receiving love. What is the love we are referring to? What kind of love is it? Discuss it to really define it well.

Maybe you could go into a bit more detail of what it is that you are taking in the practice, and when you are giving, and what you are giving. There is the taking and giving in the first round, and then the taking and giving of second and the third rounds as well. So what is the difference between each one? What is the difference in what you take? What is the

³ See 8 April 2008; also the Mahamudra teachings from 13 October 2009 to 24 November 2009.

difference in what you give? As mentioned previously, by gaining a good understanding of the practice, one can gain a good overview of the whole path itself. In other words, the entire structure of the path can be combined into the practice itself. Thus it is really worthwhile that we gain a good understanding of the Tonglen practice.

You would be aware that one of the study group commitments is to recite Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*, or *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, which can be the last Sunday in October, Sunday 31 October.

It is important to make it accessible to others. The recitation of the *Bodhicharyavatara* should be presented in the newsletter or posters as a joyous day of contemplation, recitation and meditation on the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, so that it can appeal to others who otherwise may not understand what it is about. That's the point of coming.

Someone new may be attracted to that presentation of how and what we are going to do, or to the title of the meditation. What incredible merit they would gain if they come and actually do the recitation, or just sit here and listen to the recitation of the entire *Bodhicharyavatara*. What an incredible imprint it would be for that person! So we need to present it in an inclusive manner, and conduct it in a way that is accessible to others, so that they can benefit from it.

There is also the question of what to call the next study group event. Calling it a 'Study Group Seminar' implies something very grand and exclusive, or that it is just for study group people. Just reading that, people could think, 'I wouldn't be welcome because I am not part of the study group'. Whereas if it is presented in a way which is inclusive, others will feel that they are welcome to come, and that it is joyous event that they could learn from. That will then open the doors for others. The point that I am trying to make here is to present the event in a way that is inclusive of others, and not exclusive to the study group.

The directors and managers and everyone who works so hard in the centre do so with intention to be of benefit to others. 'Others' means whoever we can reach out to. Therefore if the events we hold here are a means of benefitting others, then the hard work we do for the events serves its purpose.

Announcing that the next session is the discussion is not of course an announcement that you are exempted from attending. Everyone should be coming regularly. In the past we had an attendance roll for the study group and we used to mark those who didn't come as being absent. Wah, a very joyful and very nice person who has now passed away, used to tick the attendance sheet very diligently and very well.

Sometimes Wah seemed to be a bit deprived of proper shoes and clothes, so I bought him some shoes once, and some other clothes. Even though I didn't have much money, I gave him \$100 and \$50 a few times. When we were living in St Kilda, I made an exception and allowed him to come and make his tea in my kitchen and he would also come once in a while to warm up his food. But then there would be times when I was quite busy in the kitchen, and he would come in and hang around a bit. He was sometimes a bit of a nuisance. *[laughter]*.

When he made his coffee, he seemed to be shaking. He would offer to massage my back because I suffer from back pain. He would say 'it would be good to just put some oil on it', but I didn't want any oil *[laughter]*. He would warm his hands first and then try to massage me, but of course without oil there was a lot of friction. *[laughter]*

He was a very nice person. One of his commitments was that he would go to church every Sunday! Even though he considered himself Buddhist, he still wanted to go to church, and I thought it was good that he kept that up. Then he would go to the city, perhaps twice a day, to the library to read books. Later on he couldn't travel about too much, so he had to stay in a nursing home. Some of the older students such as Allys, Vanessa, Carol and Adele went to visit him a few times and helped him out a bit, which was very good. If he had an appointment, Vanessa would take him in her own car.

Adele said that later on she had to tell him 'we have stop the kissing on the cheek', because she felt that he was starting to get too close! He must have been 93 when he passed away. He didn't suffer too much but as his health deteriorated, he started having a bit of difficulty with his eyesight. His son had passed away, and there was a daughter who I never saw. So when he passed away, George Farley helped by paying \$800 for the funeral. So all in all, Tara Institute, together with the students, took quite good care of him. It was one of Tara Institute's good deeds.

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Edited Version
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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བཀའ་ལྟོས་པའི་གསུང་རྒྱུ་ལོ་ལོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

24 August 2010

Based on the motivation that we generated earlier when we recited the refuge prayer, we engage in meditation. [pause for meditation]

You can make a roster of those who wish to lead the meditation prayer. Then you will know who is leading each week, and those who are leading later can practise before they come, so that they are properly prepared.

My style is that I like to see that everyone shares responsibility, and that everyone does something. Some time ago I also started a tradition where everyone greets each other and asks, 'how are you', and exchanges names if they haven't met before. That was my way of trying to get everyone to know each other and become good friends. We haven't done that for a long time.

There are occasions where, although we have been together for some time we don't really know each others' names. When I ask someone for the name of another person, they can't recall it, and of course if I haven't been told the names of others then I can't be expected to know them. There are definite benefits if one greets others personally.

When we exhibit a sense of companionship then we set a good example for new people who come to the centre. The harmonious atmosphere will naturally attract others and just through observing that we are friendly towards each other, they may then develop an interest in the Dharma.

With new people we always need to be mindful about not giving too many instructions, such as indicating that they need to follow the prayers. That won't help those who come with a lot of doubts and questions in their mind. Just leave them to sit comfortably, and when they feel ready they may wish to do the prayers and so forth.

Some years ago I went to the hot springs and at the sauna I happened to be sitting next to a mother and daughter. I'm not sure about the age of the mother but the daughter said she was about 20 years old. For some reason both of them seemed to be happy about my presence, and it was very easy to have a conversation with them.

In our conversation naturally it came about that I told them that I lived at Tara Institute, so they heard about Tara Institute in that way. They told me that they lived in Mt. Martha, and while they would definitely like to visit the Institute they confessed that they had some difficulty in going to a centre because of past experiences. They said that they had experienced a very strict centre, which had asked them to make a promise not to go to any other centre. [Geshe-la laughs]

I reassured them that there are no such obligations or rules whatsoever at Tara Institute, and that it is a centre

where you are free to come or go, with no restrictions or obligations. I suggested that they come to Monday evenings. I am not sure if they did, and by now I probably wouldn't even recognise them. The main point is that we need to consider these issues.

2.1.3.3. EXHORTING THE KING TO REALISE THE PROFOUND (CONT.)

It is good to use the outline itself to get some understanding of what will follow. 'Exhorting the king to realise the profound' may sound quite grand, but in ordinary language it means that Nagarjuna is indicating to the king that even though he may be the ruler of many subjects, he should not take pride in his status and feel that he is exempt from working to gain the realisations of the profound teachings. Even the king needs to work on realising emptiness if he wishes to obtain liberation!

With respect to this the two last lines of verse 77 read:

77cd. *O King, act in such a way
That the ruined do not ruin you.*

I think we covered these lines last time, but I will go over it again.

Gyaltsab's commentary states:

Addressing the king, the author advises him to protect himself and others from ruin by developing the full understanding of emptiness in relation to the meaning of interdependent origination. If one were to deny interdependent origination, one will fall into the lower rebirths.

The very reason for accepting interdependent origination in our system is a reason to accept the emptiness of inherent existence. It is in gaining the full understanding that cause and effect could not be established in the slightest way if things were inherently established, that one is led to the understanding of the two truths as being merely nominated and imputed phenomena.

As the commentary specifically mentions, the essential point to understand is that in our system the acceptance of interdependent origination serves as the reason to accept emptiness. The commentary explains that if one were to accept the possibility that inherent existence can be established, then there is no way that cause and effect could also be established. Thus one must realise that both truths are merely nominated and imputed phenomena. That is what is being presented to the king.

As explained many times previously, one of the main points to be understood is that the very lack of inherently existent phenomena, establishes the interdependent origination (or the cause and effect) of phenomena, while the understanding of cause and effect (or the interdependent origination of phenomena) establishes the lack of an inherent, intrinsic nature of phenomena. It is really essential to understand how establishing the lack of inherent existence of phenomena in itself establishes the interdependent origination of phenomena. Likewise when phenomena are established as interdependent originations then that in itself establishes the lack of inherent or independent existence of phenomena. This is the main point.

As explained many times, this understanding is the crux of our Prasangika-Madhyamika system. When the *Heart*

Sutra says, 'Form in empty and emptiness is form', it is emphasising the point that while form is empty of inherent existence, that very fact of being empty of inherent existence establishes form to be nominally or conventionally existent. The *Heart Sutra* is stating that establishing the emptiness of inherent existence enhances the understanding of how it is also interdependently existent, whereas when things are established as being of interdependent origination, one gains the understanding that it therefore lacks inherent existence.

How does one gain the understanding of the implication of the *Heart Sutra*, which is that because form is empty of inherent existence form is therefore an interdependent origination? These are points that might not be immediately obvious, but if one thinks about it again and again, the inter-relationship between emptiness and interdependent origination will begin to dawn upon oneself.

This essential point was confirmed during my recent retreat, when I had very vivid dream that some of us were together and His Holiness was amongst us. In the dream Samdup Tsering¹ was present and he was trying to explain something about the study program in relation to having difficulty in printing the material, and I was thinking, 'What is he trying to relay to His Holiness?'

At that point His Holiness asked me, 'Do you teach the Lam Rim?' and when I responded that I was teaching it regularly, he said, 'That is very good; it would also be good to give the students advice based on the Lam Rim'.

Then His Holiness asked some of the students: What is the meaning of 'through interdependent origination one should gain an enhanced understanding of the meaning of emptiness'? It wasn't clear in my dream whether the students were able to reply [laughter]. I could see Clare at the back, and I was hoping she would give an answer, but in my dream there seemed to be no answer coming forth. [laughter]

Regardless of the meaning of the dream, I felt that my retreat went very well. I had quite a number of other vivid and significant dreams as well.

2.2. Exhorting the king to train in the profound

This has two major subdivisions:

2.2.1. Setting the scene

2.2.2. Two selflessnesses

It is good to get some idea of what will be presented just from the outline itself. So 'Exhorting the king to train in the profound' implies exhorting the king to gain the profound understanding of emptiness. The two subdivisions include 'setting the scene', followed by an explanation of the 'two types of selflessness', which is the two types of emptiness. It is good to get that understanding.

2.2.1. Setting the scene

78. *O King, lest you be ruined
I will explain through the scriptures
The mode of the supramundane, just as it is
The reality not partaking of dualism.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Addressing the king, Nagarjuna states that through logic and citation in accordance to the definitive scriptures, he will present the mode of supermundane reality just as it is—that which does not rely on the two extremes.

The meaning of the mode of supermundane reality, or profundity is explained here as that which is free from the two extremes, which indicates emptiness. This profundity which does not rely on the two extremes is presented through logic and citations, in accordance to the definitive scriptures. What is being implied here is that the ultimate intention of the Buddha's definitive teachings is the presentation of that which is free from the two extremes, i.e. emptiness.

The commentary continues:

If asked what is the purpose for doing so, it is explained in the line from the verse, 'O, King lest you be ruined'.

Nagarjuna explains the ultimate intention of the Buddha through the use of logic. He does so by relying on the Buddha's teachings, scriptures and citations through his own intelligence and wisdom, without relying on any other humans. Therefore Nagarjuna's presentation of logic is unequalled. Besides relying on enlightened beings such as Manjushri, there is no evidence that his works rely on any other ordinary human being. This confirms that Nagarjuna's profound understanding and wisdom has been gained from authentic sources. Thus, lest the king be ruined by being misled with false or corrupt views, Nagarjuna presents the profound Middle Way view that is free from both extremes directly to the king.

79. *This profundity endowed with meanings
drawn (from scriptures)
And beyond ill-deeds and meritorious deeds
Has not been tasted by those who fear the
baseless—
The others—the Forders—and even by our own.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of verse 79:

This profundity which is endowed with great meaning, is drawn from the scriptures and surpasses all negative as well as meritorious deeds that are the causes of samsara.

This is explaining that the profundity, i.e. the profundity of emptiness which is endowed with great meaning, is drawn from the scriptures and surpasses all the negative and meritorious deeds that are the causes of samsara. This indicates that both meritorious as well as negative deeds are causes of samsara. The result of negative deeds would be, for example, an unfortunate rebirth in the animal realms. Rebirth in the animal realm is caused by negativity, whereas the causes for our own existence as humans are meritorious deeds.

Even though they differ in status, however both realms are equally in samsara. Because of the causes, one is considered unfortunate because it is characterised with more unpleasant experiences, while the human realm is a fortunate realm because of less severe suffering.

¹ Samdup Tsering was Geshe-la's translator from 1985 to 2001.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Because of fear of the baseless, this has not been tasted by non-Buddhist such as the Tirthikas² and even some proponents of the Buddhist system.

Gyaltsab Je indicates that the profound meaning of emptiness is drawn from the scriptures, and completely surpasses all negative as well as meritorious deeds, which are cause of samsara. This indicates that when one gains the wisdom realising emptiness directly, one will not create further causes to be reborn in samsara.

There can only be two causes of samsara—meritorious karma and negative karma. When one gains the direct realisation of emptiness, one goes beyond creating the projecting karma to be reborn in samsara. 'This great profundity...has not been tasted', indicates that this understanding has not been gained by non-Buddhists such as the Tirthikas, and even some proponents of our own Buddhist system. That is because of fear of the baseless. As mentioned previously, lacking the base of inherent establishment causes such fear that they are unable to gain the understanding of emptiness. So, says Nagarjuna to the King, I am presenting to you the meaning of this great profundity that is the Middle Way.

This also shows that the king, who is receiving the teaching from Nagarjuna, is clearly a receptive vessel for receiving the profound teachings on emptiness.

2.2.2. Two selflessnesses

This is presented under two sub-headings:

2.2.2.1. Selflessness of persons

2.2.2.2. Selflessness of other phenomena

At this point I would particularly like to ask older students what is the difference between the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena? I have presented this many times, so I would like to resort to your wisdom.

Student: The basis is different but the quality of emptiness is the same. In one the basis is the person, and in the other the basis is phenomena.

Why is there no difference between the emptiness of each?

Student: Because the quality is the same while the base of each is different.

It should be explained in terms of what is being refuted. That's maybe what you are attempting to explain but you haven't quite come to the point yet.

Student: Refuting that they exist independently from their own side, without relying on being designated.

In the Prasangika system there is no difference in subtlety between the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena. If one were to present the differences in terms of coarseness and subtlety, where would the difference arise from? How would a difference of coarseness and subtlety be established?

The way in which other Buddhist systems establish the difference between the coarseness and subtlety of the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena

has been explained many times. For example, the Svatantrika Madhyamika school assert that the selflessness of person and selflessness of the phenomena differ in terms of their coarseness and subtlety.

The Consequentialist or Prasangika-Madhyamika school posits that there is no difference in coarseness and subtlety, however there is difference in the ease with which each is realised. One is easier and the other is little bit more difficult to realise. Do you recall that difference?

Student: For the Svatantrika-Madhyamika coarse selflessness is emptiness by way of being empty of being substantially existent and self-sufficient.

I have explained this in detail previously³, but I will go over the main points again. According to the Svatantrika system there is a difference between coarseness and subtlety of selflessness of person and selflessness of phenomena. As we have indicated, for the Svatantrika the selflessness of a person is coarser and the selflessness of phenomena is more subtle. They posit that *selflessness of person is that which lacks a self-sufficient and substantially existent person*, whereas *the selflessness of other phenomena is the negation of that which exists from its own side, without being dependent on a conception labelling it*. When the existence of phenomena that are labelled from their own side is negated, then that is the selflessness of phenomena. Therefore in the Svatantrika system not only is one easier to recognise than the other, but there is also this difference coarseness and subtlety.

In the Prasangika system there is no difference in the coarseness and subtlety of the selflessness of person and selflessness of phenomena, but the selflessness of person is said to be relatively easier to realise than the selflessness of phenomena. The reason why there is no difference in subtlety and coarseness is because the object of negation is the same for both selflessnesses, i.e. what is being negated is inherent existence of person and inherent existence of phenomena. Thus the lack of inherent existence of person is the selflessness of person, while the lack of inherent existence of other phenomena is the emptiness of phenomena. It is said that gaining the understanding of selflessness of person is easier than gaining the understanding of the selflessness of other phenomena. If you refer back to earlier teachings, of course, it will become clear for you.

Thus the way to present the lack of coarseness and subtlety of the selflessness of person and other phenomena lies essentially in there being no difference in the object of negation. While the base is different, what is being refuted is exactly the same. When inherent existence based on a person is refuted, then one establishes the selflessness of person. When inherent existence of the aggregates of the person is refuted then the selflessness of other phenomena or the aggregates is established. Thus there is no difference in the object of negation, as what is being negated in both cases is inherent existence.

Our Prasangika system posits the selflessness of person as the lack of inherent existence within the person, or the

² The Sanskrit term for Forders

³ Specifically in the teachings on Tenets, 2 October 2001, 23 October 2001, and the Madhyamaka teachings from 11 March to 25 March 2003.

lack of a person existing from its own side, or the lack of the characteristics of a person or a truly existent person. These are synonyms, and one needs to understand that they all mean the same thing. It is the same with all phenomena other than the person.

To begin with, it is good to gain a sound understanding of the difference between a self of person and the selflessness of a person. Grasping at the self of a person is apprehending a person as being inherently or independently existent or, as mentioned previously, truly existent. That apprehension of a person existing inherently or truly or self-sufficiently is called grasping at the self of person. So when one gains the understanding of the lack of inherent existence of a person, then one has gained the realisation of the selflessness of person.

The selflessness of person is the lack of inherent existence, or the lack of true existence, or the lack of a self-sufficiently substantially existent person. So first we need to be able to clearly distinguish between the self of person and the selflessness of person.

It is good to meticulously investigate so as to gain a good understanding of the selflessness of a person, and how a person would have to exist if there were to be a self of a person. How would the person exist? One thing we need to be clear about from the very beginning is that the term 'selflessness of person' doesn't suggest that a person has no self. That is not what is being indicated. One must not misinterpret the selflessness of person as meaning the lack of a self of a person.

The term 'selflessness of person' indicates that there is no inherently existent self of a person, and thus there is no independently existent person. Therefore when one gains an understanding of how a person lacks inherent or independent existence, that understanding should naturally imply that if a person could not exist independently or inherently, then the only way for a person to exist would have to be by depending on causes and conditions. Thus the understanding of the interdependent origination of a person arises.

When a person is understood as existing in dependence on causes and conditions then that understanding should induce the understanding of how a person lacks intrinsic or independent existence. So, that is how the two understandings of the selflessness or emptiness of a person, and the interdependent origination of a person, mutually support each other.

This discussion has been in relation to the headings 'selflessness of person' and 'selflessness of other phenomena'. The very presentation of the headings indicates that one first needs to gain a good understanding of what 'selflessness of person' actually means.

In gaining an understanding of what selflessness of person means, one also needs to get an understanding of what a self of person means. In fact without clearly understanding that how a person would exist if it did have an inherently existent self, then the lack of inherently existence, which is the selflessness of a person, cannot be understood. Therefore one needs to understand that as well.

To gain the wisdom realising selflessness one needs to be able to negate the self as apprehended by the erroneous view. Thus one needs to have an understanding of what the grasping to the self of person means, and how the person would have to exist if there were a self of a person. Therefore in order to gain the realisation of selflessness one needs to have an understanding of the misapprehension of grasping at the self. Only by negating that misapprehension can one gain the actual realisation of selflessness.

Therefore, as indicated in the teachings, the object of both the grasping at a self and the wisdom realising the selflessness of person is the same, i.e. a person. So therefore there is no difference with respect to the object on which both are focusing. However, the two apprehensions directly oppose each other.

The view that grasps at a self of person, based on the object which is a person, views the person as being inherently or independently existent and existing without depending on any other causes and conditions. Therefore, that is the wrong view or misapprehension that grasps at a self of person.

The wisdom realising selflessness is based on the same object, which is the person, but views the self as lacking any inherent existence or independent existence. Therefore the object of focus is exactly the same, but the apprehension of the object is completely different.

On this note we will leave the actual explanation of the headings for our next session. You should prepare by reading the relevant material, as means to gain some understanding prior to the teaching.

Transcribed by Su Lan Foo

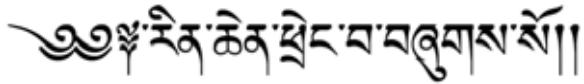
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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

31 August 2010

With a motivation in accordance with the refuge and bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited, we can engage in meditation practice. (*Meditation*)

As usual we generate a positive motivation for receiving the teachings.

2.2.2. The two selflessnesses

This heading has two subdivisions:

2.2.2.1. Selflessness of person

2.2.2.2. Selflessness of phenomena

2.2.2.1. SELFLESSNESS OF PERSON

Again there are two subdivisions:

2.2.2.1.1. Presenting a summary

2.2.2.1.2. Presenting the individual meaning of the terms.

2.2.2.1.1. Presenting a summary

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that a person does not exist from its own side at all and is thus mainly imputed by conception. This is in accordance with the earlier explanation that a person is merely nominated and imputed by conception, and that other than that a person cannot exist inherently from its own side.

At this point the commentary introduces the notion that a person is a mere label or a name designated upon one or more of the five aggregates. Older students will already be familiar with this terminology, but for the benefit of new students and also older students who might like to refresh their understanding, the term 'selflessness of person' does not imply that there is no self of a person. That has to be understood. What selflessness does refer to is the lack of an inherently existent self of a person.

When the selflessness of person is presented, the implication is that the person lacks a particular type of self, i.e. a self that exists independently or inherently without depending on other causes and conditions. Such a self of a person does not exist. Being clear about that at the outset will make it easier to understand the following presentation.

When selflessness is mentioned in the teaching one needs to immediately understand that it does not mean that a person lacks a self. That is not what is implied; a person does have a self, i.e. there is a self of a person. One needs to understand that the term selflessness refers to the lack of an independently existent self; a self that does not depend on anything else and which exists intrinsically from its own side. Such a self of person does not exist, and that is what selflessness means.

Thus, as Gyaltsab Je's commentary indicates, a person does not exist from its own side in the slightest way. One also needs to understand that this is synonymous with a person lacking inherent existence, or a person not existing by its own characteristics. In other words, a person that is established inherently, from its own side, or by its own characteristics, does not exist in the slightest way.

In presenting selflessness Gyaltsab Je first quotes this verse from Nagarjuna's *Sixty Verses of Reasoning*:

Since the Buddha has stated
That the world is conditioned by ignorance,
Does it not stand to reason
That the world is [the result of] conceptuality?

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

This verse explains that the five compulsory aggregates of the world are conditioned by deluded ignorance. This in turn influences the mind to apprehend things as existing from their own side. This is how one creates karma that produces suffering.

The commentary explains that in the line *the world is conditioned by ignorance*, the term 'world' actually refers to the five compulsory aggregates, which are the contaminated aggregates. The contaminated aggregates are said to be created by deluded ignorance. As specified here, the deluded ignorance then influences the mind to apprehend things as existing from their own side. In other words deluded ignorance taints the mind so that it perceives things as existing from their own side. Even though things lack inherent existence, the deluded ignorance influences the mind to apprehend things as existing from their own side or inherently, and through that one creates the karma which then serves as the cause for all the sufferings we experience.

As I have explained many times previously, grasping at the self, or more specifically grasping at an inherently existent self, is the cause of samsara. That is the key point that Gyaltsab Je is making. So it is good to really understand the implications of what 'grasping at the self being the cause of samsara' really means. What does it actually mean?

First of all, in relation to oneself, samsara is none other than the condition of being within the domain of, or under the control of our own contaminated aggregates. It is because we have the contaminated aggregates that we experience various types of sufferings. All the unpleasant and unwanted experiences that we experience are the natural consequence of possessing the five contaminated aggregates. So, being in samsara means possessing and being under the control of the five contaminated aggregates.

Having understood this, we then need to understand what the causes of the five contaminated aggregates are. As presented in the scriptures, grasping at an inherently existent self is explained as the cause of our contaminated aggregates. So, we further investigate what grasping at a self means. What does grasping at a self imply? As explained in the teachings, grasping at a self has two aspects: first there is an appearance of an inherently existent self, and secondly we have the apprehension of an inherently existent self. So, grasping at the self arises through the combination of appearance and apprehension i.e. the appearance of inherent existence and the total belief in that appearance.

If we relate this on a personal level, how do we appear to ourselves? If we actually think about it, it becomes clear that we have an instinctive natural apprehension of our self as being a somewhat solid entity that exists in its own right. It is a self that is not dependent on the aggregates but a very concrete 'I' or 'me'. When we think about ourselves in relation to any activity such as what we are going to do, what we are going to eat, who we will interact with and so forth, it is always in relation to our apprehension of our self as being a very solid entity that exists from its own side. Because we apprehend the appearance of our self in that way, we believe that is how we actually exist. That grasping

at the concrete appearance of ourselves is called grasping at an inherently existent self.

It is the same with the way others appear to us – they appear to us as being an entity that exists in and of itself, in a very solid and independent manner. When we bring someone else to mind, we really believe in that solid independent appearance. Thus grasping at a self of person can refer to grasping at one's own self or grasping at the self of others. There is the specific wrong view called 'the view of the transitory collections', which refers to viewing oneself as being inherently existent, but in general apprehending oneself and others as being inherently existent is grasping at the self of a person.

With respect to grasping at phenomena, if someone says, for example, 'bring the vase from my room' we immediately have an image of a vase that exists in and of itself, very solidly and very concretely. From the very first moment of recalling the image of the vase, up to the point of fetching the vase and bringing it here, we have no doubt that is a vase that exists inherently and independently from its own side. So, that very concrete apprehension of the inherently existent vase that we ordinary beings have is the object of negation.

Due to that misapprehension of the appearance of a self of person and phenomena as existing inherently and the grasping at that misapprehended appearance, we create karma. We engage in actions under that misapprehension of inherent existence and thus we create the karma to obtain the contaminated aggregates, which then serve as a basis for us to experience the various types of sufferings in samsara. That is how we need to understand grasping at the self as being the root cause of samsara.

It therefore follows that when we understand how the cause of samsara is created, we also get an inkling of how that process can be circumvented. By ceasing to grasp at an inherently existent self, one will naturally stop creating karma, and in particular the propelling or projecting karma that is the cause for being involuntarily reborn in samsara. This is how, as the teaching explains, when you realise selflessness or emptiness directly, you will not create any new projecting karma to be reborn in samsara involuntarily.

It is worthwhile to become very familiar with this explanation and to relate it to one's own experience. Try to see how this wrong view of grasping at the self influences whatever we do. When we investigate and analyse our perception in relation to whatever we do, we will find that it is always based on perceiving the object as being inherently existent. And because it seems that things automatically appear as being inherently existent, it may seem as though we have no control over our perceptions.

However even though things may appear to be inherently existent, they are in fact dependent on many causes and conditions. When something appears to be beautiful, for example, we cannot deny the attribute of beauty. The object is definitely beautiful, but there is an initial misconception of that beauty as being independently and inherently existent—it appears as beautiful from its own side. The attribute of beauty doesn't appear as being the result of many causes and conditions. So, along with the misconception of perceiving beauty as inherently existent, another deluded mental state called 'inappropriate attention' further exaggerates the quality of beauty upon the object. It is the perception of that exaggerated attribute or quality that causes strong attachment for the object to arise. And that attachment to the object then leads us to engage in non-

virtuous actions. We need to understand how it all boils down to that misapprehension of beauty as existing from its own side independently and inherently. Then we can apply that understanding to everything that we perceive.

Coming back to the self, it appears as if our existence is independent and inherent. Of course we do have a self of a person, but because of our misapprehension that the self is independently and inherently existent, we have a very strong sense of identity and we grasp at that. This leads to strong opinions about ourselves, as in 'I like this', 'I don't like that', 'I want this', and 'I don't want that', which all arise from that initial misconception of the self.

Of course it is not wrong to want or need something. In general we can say that we need things and we have to do things, but the fault lies in perceiving the 'me' that wants something or doesn't want something as a self that is independently existent, and which exists from its own side. Due to that misapprehension of the self, strong grasping and thus strong opinions arise. As a result of our very strong grasping and opinions negative states of mind arise—attachment to things that we like and want, and aversion or anger towards those things we don't like or don't want. Then, due to the influence of attachment and aversion we engage in actions and thus create karma. The imprints of that karma then become the causes for our future existence in samsara. It is really important to relate this to our own perceptions. To personalise our understanding in this way is a really effective practice.

One of the points I am emphasising here is how, by grasping at the self, we create karma, which then becomes the cause for samsara, and that the converse is that the realisation of selflessness or emptiness is the main cause that destroys the causes of samsara within oneself. Using the same logic, one can understand that just as grasping at the self is the cause of all delusions, the reverse of that is that the wisdom realising selflessness or emptiness is an antidote to delusions, which serves to destroy them. This is how one understands that emptiness or selflessness is the antidote for overcoming all delusions.

With this understanding we can get an inkling of how, as explained in the teachings, when a bodhisattva gains the direct realisation of emptiness they don't create any further causes of samsara, and in particular how the direct realisation of emptiness serves as an antidote for overcoming the delusions in the mind. As explained in the teachings, while the attribute of beauty will appear to a bodhisattva, they will not develop even a fraction of attachment towards that being. As explained in the teachings, the reason attachment does not arise is because of the bodhisattva's wisdom.

We need to understand that while the attribute of beauty does appear to a bodhisattva, it does not cause attachment to arise in them. Why? It is because of the bodhisattva's wisdom, in particular the wisdom realising emptiness. While that may be bit beyond our capacity to fully comprehend right now, we may still be able to see some degree of truth in these statements. When we understand from the teachings that the beauty that appears to us is mostly an exaggerated form of beauty, which does not really exist at all from its own side, because it is dependent on causes and conditions, then even at our level that can help to prevent a 100% strong belief in that object of beauty. It can actually help to reduce the strong attachment one feels towards the object.

It is the same with anger; if at a moment of intense anger, when an object appears to be unappealing and completely at

fault, if we actually apply the understanding that the faults do not actually exist from its own side, then that very understanding will help to reduce anger towards the object. When we understand that things do not exist as they appear, then that reduces both anger and attachment. It is when we begin to see the relevance of this view even on this level, that we see the need to gain the actual realisation of emptiness.

We can also get an understanding of the following statement in the teachings about the benefits of realising emptiness: 'Individuals with lesser merit will not even have a doubt about emptiness, but for individuals who generate even a doubt about emptiness, it will serve as a basis to shatter the very foundations of samsara'. So when we get an inkling of a doubt about emptiness, and the possibility of gaining the wisdom realising emptiness, we will be able to see how that actually shatters the very foundation of samsara, because it serves as antidote to slowly overcome the ignorance within oneself.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further states:

In realising that things do not exist in the way that they are conceptualised, one must however not deny the [actual existence of] person and aggregates. When the mode of apprehension of ignorance is refuted one realises that things are merely nominated and imputed by conceptuality.

As explained in the commentary, when one realises that grasping at inherent existence is the cause of samsara and so therefore things do not exist in that way, one must however not deny the actual existence of things; specifically persons and aggregates. One needs come to the understanding that although the mode of apprehension influenced by ignorance is refuted or negated, things do in fact exist as merely nominated and imputed phenomena. Although persons, aggregates and all other phenomena exist as merely labelled and imputed by conceptuality, they do however exist. If one comes to that realisation then one has not missed the point. This is further emphasised by Gyaltsab Je with a quote from *Four Hundred Verses*:

Apart from conceptuality
Desire and so forth have no existence.
Who with intelligence would hold [that there are]
Real things [imputed by] conceptuality?

I will not go through the explanation of the verse now, but will leave it to you to investigate the meaning for yourselves.¹

As explained previously, when the mode of apprehension through ignorance is refuted one realises that things are merely nominated and imputed by conceptuality. One needs a thorough understanding of this point.

I have mentioned previously that statement 'Form is empty, emptiness is form' in the *Heart Sutra* really encapsulates the main point that is being emphasised here. 'Form is empty' means that form is empty of inherent existence, while 'emptiness is form' implies that that very nature of form being empty of inherent existence implies that form does exist nominally. That presentation in the *Heart Sutra* very skilfully leads beings to understand that while form is empty, implying form is empty of inherent existence, they do not get the false understanding that form does not exist all. This is achieved with the words 'emptiness form'. That is a skilful way of guiding sentient beings to the

understanding that while form lacks inherent existence, it does exist nominally or conventionally.

2.2.2.1.2. Presenting the individual meaning of the term

This has two subdivisions:

- 2.2.2.1.2.1. Unsuitability of the six constituents as the person
- 2.2.2.1.2.2. Refuting an inherently existent person through a fivefold analysis

2.2.2.1.2.1. Unsuitability of the six constituents as the person

We covered the meaning of the next two verses when we studied the Mahamudra, which used the following verse extensively.²

80. *A person is not earth, not water,
Not fire, not wind, not space,
Not consciousness, and not all of them.
What person is there other than these?*

The verse begins with a list of the six elements—earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness. In this verse Nagarjuna explains that while a person is not any one of the six elements, it is also not the collection of the six elements. Rather, a person is defined as a mere label designated upon the collection of the six elements. So here 'person' does not refer to just any person, but specifically to a person who possesses the form aggregate.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary,

A person is merely imputed upon the collections of six elements, apart from that a person is not any of the six elements, not the collection nor completely separate from them.

A person is merely imputed upon the collection of the six elements indicates that we are dependent on the six elements for our existence. That is very clear. For example, without water there is no possible way for us to exist. We need to drink to maintain the fluids in our body. The fire element is symbolised in the warmth of our body, and if we aren't warm enough we can die, and without a consciousness we will not even be a person. The last element is space, which refers to the spaces within our body. So, for example, if we eat too much and don't leave some space in our stomachs then we find that it is hard to breathe and move about. In fact it is actually due to space that we are able to drink and eat. If there was no space we would not be able to consume anything, so we can understand how the space element is essential in that practical sense. Even our hair wouldn't grow if we didn't have space

Just as it is clear that we definitely rely upon on all six elements for our continuing existence, it is also quite clear that a person is not just water or fire or earth and so forth. As the commentary reads:

A person is not earth, not water, not fire, not wind, not space, not consciousness, indicates that the person is not any of the six elements. *And not all of them* indicates that a person is not the collection of the six elements. *What person is there other than these* indicates that it is just not possible for a person to be a separate entity from these six elements.

Thus, in summary, a person is labelled or imputed upon the collection of the six elements. But that doesn't mean that the person exists within the six elements. This will be explained

¹ Covered in the teaching of 22 May 2010.

² Specifically 6 October and 13 October 2009, and more generally 1 September 2009 to 13 October 2009.

in the next verse. So is it clear how, as the teachings present, a person is imputed or designated on the six elements?

81. *Just as a person is not real
Due to being a composite of six constituents,
So each of the constituents also
Is not real due to being a composite.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse with this syllogism:

The subject 'a person'—is not established ultimately—because it is imputed upon the collection of the six elements.

So here he is reiterating that while the person is merely imputed or designated upon the six constituents, the person does not actually exist inherently from its own side. To further explain this, the commentary presents a second syllogism:

Just like the person, the subject—each of the six elements is not established ultimately—because the person is imputed upon the collection of many parts.

This syllogism indicates that the subject, which is the person, is not established ultimately, which implies that the person does not exist from its own side, or inherently. That is because the person is imputed or designated on the collection of the six elements. Therefore the reason is that if a person were to be imputed or designated on the collection of the six elements, then because there are six elements, there would have to be six different parts to a person. Therefore a person could not exist ultimately, meaning a person could not exist from its own side. The reason presented here that being dependent on many parts in itself is proof that a person could not exist independently from its own side.

If we can gain some understanding of what is being presented here, then the following verses, which are an elaboration of this will be much easier to grasp. So it is good to review the basic presentation to get a sound understanding of it.

As usual next week will be the discussion session. It will be good for you to conduct the discussion in a meaningful manner. This means that you clearly explain to each other the topics under discussion. So try to develop good explanations. Having a good discussion implies that those with more knowledge will share their understanding with those who have lesser understanding, or who are still learning, with an intention of wishing to benefit them so that they gain a better understanding of these points.

That also implies sharing with kindness, and in a compassionate way, which means explaining with patience and not putting others down, so that they feel inadequate or inferior. That would be unfortunate as it would cause people to withdraw. In the past I have heard of people coming to discussion and feeling left out thinking, 'Oh, those who know it explain too quickly, but I still haven't got the point'. We need to be careful to ensure that does not happen. It takes time for newer students to understand the material, and it is difficult for them to comprehend everything at once.

When I was studying in Varanasi in my younger days I met a very great scholar called Khensur Nyima, who was former abbot of Drepung Monastery. He had come to Sarnath, the university where I was studying, for a holiday. It happened that the place where I was residing had a very good water pump so Gen Nyima-la came over to take a shower at my place. Before taking his shower he came into my room and commented that he had heard that I was zealous student. Later we went outside and sat in the sun for a while. One

thing that I regret now is that although I had some not-so-good tea in my room I felt that it would not really appropriate to offer that to him. Later I was told, 'Oh, that was a mistake, you should have offered the tea because it is known that Khensur Rinpoche accepts any food or drink'.

In our conversation Khensur Rinpoche asked me about the well-being of an ex-abbot of Sera Je Monastery, Khensur Lobsang Wangchuk, who was also a prominent scholar. So I explained that Khensur Lobsang Wangchuk was busy teaching the younger students, and spending a lot of time teaching the new students. Khensur Nyima immediately put his palms together and said, 'Oh that is really great. That is a mark of a good teacher and a great deed. I find it is very difficult to teach new students because you have to teach the basics over and over again'. In debates there are particular terms such as, 'it pervades', 'there is no pervasion', 'I accept' and 'I don't accept' and so forth. The meaning of these terms, what they imply and how to use them has to be taught from the very beginning, which is considered quite tedious. So Khensur Nyima's comment about what a great deed that was shows that spending time with new students is indeed a very good deed, as the deed of teaching takes time and a lot of energy and so forth.

After our regular recitation of the *Heart Sutra*, we can recite the *Eight Verses of Mind Training*. We just got news of one of our members; Jack Haynes has passed away, so we can pray for him.

I have a feeling that he passed away in a good state of mind, because a few days ago after Ven. Michael went to visit him, he sent a message back acknowledging the prayers and all the advice. He said that he would keep that advice in his heart and that he constantly remembered me praying for him. That acknowledgement shows that his mind was in a good place. He also personally thanked me for keeping him in my prayers, and emphasised that he had kept my advice in mind, and believed in it 100%. That is good sign. The fact that he said that just three days ago, and then passed away so soon after, shows that he had a good state of mind.

Actually just a month ago, soon after he was diagnosed with the disease he came to see me and we had a long meeting. At that time he said, 'Even though I have been diagnosed with this illness, I really don't have any worries'. He commented, 'Getting this news of my illness has confirmed that love and compassion is really the essence. That is something that very clear—really it all comes down to just love and compassion. That is the basis and the very essence of everything, and it has dawned upon me very clearly now'.

It might be considered unfortunate that he passed away so soon, because when he came to teachings I noticed that he was really quite zealous, and on the verge of really gaining some understanding about the way to go forward.

Transcribed by Su Lan Foo

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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Discussion

Block: 5 Week: 5 (7 September 2010)

1. Why is it important to become familiar with the meditation on death and impermanence? What are the main points to incorporate in that meditation?
2. Is a thing like a cup truly one and/or truly many? Give reasons.
3. It is said that emptiness is an ultimate truth. Does it mean that emptiness exists ultimately or inherently? Explain.
4. When the non-Buddhists asked the Buddha if the world has an end, the Buddha remained silent.
 - a) Why did the Buddha not answer them? Did Buddha not know, or if he knew, why did he not teach the non-Buddhists so that they could know?
 - b) On a personal level, what implications can we take from this when we try to explain Buddhism to others, and how does it relate to love and compassion?
5. The Heart Sutra says, 'Form in empty and emptiness is form.' What is the essential meaning?
6. Explain what is meant by the selflessness of person and the selflessness of other phenomena for the following two Buddhist Schools. Comment on their views of subtleness or grossness of the selflessnesses mentioned.
 - a) The Svatantrika School
 - b) The Prasangika School
7. Buddhists say that the self of person does not exist. Why do you think do the teachings advise that we should imagine how such a self of person would exist if it did?
8. Explain what the term 'selflessness' means and what it does not mean.
9. Explain what contaminated aggregates are and what they have to do with samsara.
10. From a Buddhist perspective, is it wrong to want or need something? Give reasons for your answer

Tara Institute Study Group 2010 – 'Precious Garland'

TEST

Name:

Block: 5
Week: 6 (7 Sep 2010)
Assigned: 14 September 2010

Mark:

1. Why is it important to become familiar with the meditation on death and impermanence? What are the main points to incorporate in that meditation? [5]

2. Is a thing like a cup truly one and/or truly many? Give reasons. [4]

3. It is said that emptiness is an ultimate truth. Does it mean that emptiness exists ultimately or inherently? Explain. [3]

4. When the non-Buddhists asked the Buddha if the world has an end, the Buddha remained silent.

a) Why did the Buddha not answer them? Did Buddha not know, or if he knew, why did he not teach the non-Buddhists so that they could know? [3]

b) On a personal level, what implications can we take from this when we try to explain Buddhism to others, and how does it relate to love and compassion? [3]

5. The Heart Sutra says, 'Form is empty and emptiness is form.' What is the essential meaning? [3]

6. Explain what is meant by the selflessness of person and the selflessness of other phenomena for the following two Buddhist Schools. Comment on their views of subtleness or grossness of the selflessnesses mentioned. [6]

a) The Svatantrika School



b) The Prasangika School

7. Buddhists say that the self of person does not exist. Why do you think do the teachings advise that we should imagine how such a self of person would exist if it did? [3]

8. Explain what the term 'selflessness' means and what it does not mean. [2]

9. Explain what contaminated aggregates are and what they have to do with samsara. [4]

10. From a Buddhist perspective, is it wrong to want or need something? Give reasons for your answer. [4]
