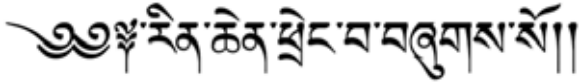


Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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We have the great fortune to gather again - old friends and Dharma students - so I'd like to take the opportunity to welcome you: Tashi dalek! It's nice to see you again.

It is necessary for all of you to be familiar with the discipline that Study Group involves. We have four classes followed by a discussion in the fifth session, and then an exam in the sixth week. It is good for you to be aware of the necessity for coming to all of those sessions and making the commitment to do so. Also, part of the discipline of the Study Group is to try to attend all of the sessions during the course of the year.

The most important thing, however, is to set a positive motivation for receiving the teachings. Most of you would be familiar with how to set a positive motivation. However it is good to remember that the real reason for studying and practising the text is to develop a kinder and gentler mind and attitude; whatever practice and study one does should be towards that end. If, as time passes, one finds that one's mind has become gentler, a bit kinder and calmer, then the study or practice has served its purpose. Furthermore we need to pay attention in generating a happy mind.

The way to accomplish a happy and kinder mind is to remove or abandon whatever negativities there may be in one's mind-stream, and to adopt even the smallest positive qualities. This procedure will eventually lead to a state of being free from all negativities and acquiring all positive qualities. Reaching such a state of being free from all negativities and endowed with all positive and supreme qualities is not something that just comes about suddenly from somewhere above. Rather it is a step-by-step procedure that we need to follow in order to reach that goal.

Another part of the curriculum of the Study Group is to do a bit of meditation prior to each session. We won't do the meditation this evening, but will leave it for our subsequent sessions. The meditation that we will adopt will be the *tong-len* practice, which literally translates as 'giving and taking' in English. One can base this meditation on verse 95 of the *Guru Yoga* which I have explained two or three times before. It would be good to memorise the verse so as to retain it in your memory. After reciting the verse together we go into individual meditation. I have taught the tune previously as well [*Geshe-la chants the verse*].

D'e-na je-tzün la-ma t'ug-je-chän
Ma-gy'ur dro-wäi dig-drib dug-ngäl-kün
Ma-lü d'a-ta dag-la min-pa-d'ang
Dag-g'i de-ge zhän-la tang-wa-yi
Dro-kün de-d'ang dân-par j'in-gy'i-lob¹

The tune is basically, the same tune as the tune of the seven-limb prayer of the Guru puja. However the tune I used now is a simpler version. You should take note that the last line of the verse is repeated twice to fit the melody. Having familiarised yourself with the meaning of the verse, you come to understand

¹ And thus, O venerable compassionate Gurus, we seek your blessings,
That all karmic debts, obstacles and sufferings
Of mother beings may without exception ripen upon us right now,
And that we may give our happiness and virtue to others
And thereby invest all beings in bliss

that it is a means to instil love and compassion, which is said to be the very basis of the Mahayana teachings. Thus, when reciting the verse one thinks about its meaning, and generates a sense of love and compassion towards all living beings.

The text that we are going to cover in our following sessions is called *Precious Garland*. The full Sanskrit title involves the cause and effect sequence of how to develop high status and definite goodness. Here 'high status' relates to obtaining a precious human re-birth and 'definite goodness' relates to obtaining liberation and enlightenment. Those who have the commentary can refer to that. The commentary on the root text will be the one composed by the Tibetan master Gyaltsab Rinpoche. In fact, there are only two existing commentaries on the root text, Gyaltsab Rinpoche's commentary and that by the Indian master Mipam Shyinyin. Some other commentaries do exist, but they have not been able to be brought out of Tibet. The second commentary by Mipam Shyinyin is actually quite brief and doesn't cover a literal explanation of the verses of the root text. Gyaltsab Rinpoche's commentary is also not very extensive either, but it does give a literal explanation of the meaning of the verses.

The commentary itself begins with an introduction and an actual presentation, but we can skip the details of the introduction. As presented in the commentary, the introduction includes a biography of the author Nagarjuna. We won't go into the detail of his biography; however those with the text book can read it.

In brief, Nagarjuna was renowned as a great master who was prophesied by the Buddha himself, and there are many texts that relate these prophecies. Nagarjuna composed many great treatises on Buddhism and the arts such as astrology and medicine, and so in that way he was a great master of both contemporary and religious texts. The second part of the introduction presents some of the major Buddhist treatises that Nagarjuna composed, which you can look up. Nagarjuna, in fact, was an unequalled and unique master who has been particularly kind to our tradition, because he provided so many clearly explained treatises on the profound and subtle teachings of the Buddha. In our lineage we consider Nagarjuna to have been extremely kind in presenting all of those teachings so very clearly.

According to Gyaltsab's commentary *Precious Garland* has four sub-divisions:

1. The meaning of the title
2. The translator's obeisance or salutation
3. Presenting the meaning or subject matter of the treatise
4. Conclusion

Presenting the material by breaking it up into these different sub-divisions also gives an inkling of how the great Indian masters composed their treatises. It is also a good way for us to become familiar with the actual method of composition, so that if we were to ever compose some text, or do some writing, then we have good example before us.

1. THE MEANING OF THE TITLE

The Sanskrit title of the text is *Rajaparikatha-ratnamala*. In English this is translated as *The Precious Garland of Advice for the King*. Breaking up the actual Indian Sanskrit into syllables 'Raja' means King; 'parikatha' refers to advice; 'ratna' refers to precious and 'mala' is garland or rosary. 'The King' referred to here is King Udayibhadra. One can derive from the title the understanding that the advice appearing in the text is analogous to a precious garland of priceless gems. Each bead is invaluable, and the individual beads are strung together in an orderly sequence, where one individually precious bead very neatly follows another. Like that the advice presented in this treatise is organised sequentially, so that one piece of advice precisely follows the other, with each piece of advice being extremely

precious. This is how we can understand the subject matter of the text as well.

There is a description of the actual mala that we use for mantra recitations which may also be noteworthy. The small beads of the mala are said to represent the arhats and the arya beings, whereas the two beads at the top of the mala (one bigger bead and a smaller bead on the end) represent the two bodies of the Buddha - the form body and the wisdom body. This amazing description of the mala might entertain you [*Geshe-la laughs*]. In fact that understanding of the mala and what it represents can also give your recitation of mantras a more profound meaning. For example, when you are doing a retreat on a particular deity such as Yamantaka, when the sadhana indicates that you do the recitation of mantras, you visualise each bead to be in the aspect of the deity which then dissolves into yourself. So when one recites any mantra with a mala, it would be good to remember that significance; using the mala in that way itself becomes much more meaningful.

Leaving that aside, and coming back to the author Nagarjuna, the reason for presenting the biography of the author is a way for us to develop a genuine connection with the author, and to remember the kindness of the author. Nagarjuna was of southern Indian origin. He was said to be born in Bhandara near to where the Dalai Lama gave the Kalachakra initiation a few years ago. There is actually a town named after him, which is quite near to the area where Nagarjuna was born. As mentioned previously, Nagarjuna was prophesied by the Buddha to come to revive the teachings of the Buddha, and so he was definitely a blessed being in the sense of being predicted by the Buddha himself.

Nagarjuna is known for his great works that revived the Buddha's teachings, particularly the Mahayana teachings. Thus he is renowned as a 'trailblazer' for reviving the Buddha's teachings and explaining them very clearly and precisely. So it is really thanks to the kindness of Nagarjuna that today we have the great fortune to study the teachings and acquire a profound understanding of the meaning of the Buddha's teachings. So it is good for us to know a little bit of background of Nagarjuna, as that helps us to make a genuine and more profound connection with him, and to remember his kindness.

In the Buddha's prophecy there are details of Nagarjuna's birthplace. The gist of the prophecy is that 'in the southern region of India, at a place called Bhaida a person with the name 'Naga' will revive my teaching'. Nowadays Lord Nagarjuna's birthplace is called Bhandara. There is also a park named after Nagarjuna, which is very beautiful and serene, and even a very clean and nice vegetarian restaurant named after Nagarjuna. When someone suggested that there was a park named after Nagarjuna and asked whether I would like to visit it, I said 'Oh most certainly, it would be auspicious to visit a park named after Nagarjuna'. Then soon after we had a stroll in the park which is very beautiful and serene, someone said 'Oh there is a restaurant called 'Nagarjuna', shall we eat there?' 'Well, why not', I said, 'that it is even more auspicious!' I really felt very elated and happy, being in an area that was named after the great Nagarjuna.

While I was seated at a table in the restaurant, I noticed that there was a short Tibetan person nearby who kept glancing at me. He didn't seem to know me and I also didn't recognise him. When he asked me where I came from I said 'I come from Australia' and when I asked where he was from he said that he had come from Switzerland. Although I initially didn't recognise him I said 'Would you happen to be Ralu Rinpoche?' (Ralu is the same province in Tibet where I come from and I knew about Ralu Rinpoche). When I asked him whether that was his name he said 'actually I am the so-called Ralu Rinpoche, however that Rinpoche part is made up and not really genuine in my case' [*Geshe-la laughs*]. There was a lady there and he said 'this is my girlfriend' [*laughter*], so he had given back his robes.

Later, when I learnt more about Rinpoche's present life, I heard that his partner was really a very kind woman who had taken very good care in looking after him, and who had genuine concern and fondness for Rinpoche; she was a very good partner. When he indicated that 'the title Rinpoche doesn't really suit me or is not genuine in my case', he was referring to the fact that he was now living an ordinary life without that grand religious connotation.

As mentioned previously the title of the treatise is the *Precious Garland of Advice for a King*. The king referred to in the title is King Udayibhadra. The subject matter, the 'precious garland' refers to the value of the advice that is presented in the treatise itself. That covers the meaning of the title.

2. THE TRANSLATOR'S OBEISANCE

In this case the translator would be the Tibetan translator who translated the original Sanskrit text into Tibetan. It was customary for the translator, to pay homage at the beginning of the translated treatise in so as to remove obstacles and so forth.

The translator's obeisance or homage, as indicated in the commentary is:

Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas

The older students will be familiar with that particular type of homage, i.e. prostrating to all buddhas and bodhisattvas. What does that indicate?

Student: That it is a Sutra teaching?

Perhaps Claire's guess was more accurate. The translator's homage indicates which basket of teachings it comes from. The Buddha's teachings are divided into the three baskets: Sutra, Abhidharma, and Vinaya.

In this case, prostrating and paying homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas indicates that the text belongs to the Sutra basket of the Buddha's teachings. The treatises on the Abhidharma teachings and commentaries and so forth would have a salutation paying homage by prostrating to Manjushri. Vinaya texts pay homage to the Omniscient one.

This convention was introduced by the earlier Dharma kings of Tibet so it would be clear, just from the homage of the translator, what basket of the Buddha's teachings the treatise belongs to. Then there would be no confusion. Thus from the homage of this treatise, we can understand that it is a treatise on the sutra teachings of the Buddha. The real reason for the translator to pay homage and do prostrations to all buddhas and bodhisattvas is as a means to accumulate extensive merit, prior to composing the treatise, so as to be able to succeed in completing the composition, and also to remove any obstacles.

3. PRESENTING THE TREATISE ITSELF

Presenting the meaning of the treatise itself is further divided into three:

1. The activities to be done prior to composing the treatise
2. The treatise itself
3. Completion of the treatise

I. THE ACTIVITIES TO BE DONE PRIOR TO COMPOSING THE TREATISE

This section has two sub-divisions:

- A. Obeisance to and praise of the Buddha
- B. Promise to compose the treatise or the book

A. OBEISANCE TO AND PRAISE OF THE BUDDHA

This is further divided into three sub-divisions, which consist of:

1. The purpose of doing the homage or obeisance
2. The concise meaning of the obeisance itself
3. Meaning of the actual words

1. The purpose of doing the homage or obeisance

As explained in the commentary, the purpose of the obeisance is two-fold: to accomplish one's own goals as well as accomplish the goals of others.

In relation to the purpose of **accomplishing one's own goals**, as mentioned in the commentary, paying homage to incomparable holy objects with great reverence and faith in one's mind has the purpose of being able to accomplish the composition of the treatise and remove any obstacles or hindrances that may be involved. In that way the temporary as well as all ultimate goals will be fulfilled.

The second purpose of accomplishment **for the sake of others** is for the completed composition to be a source for others to relate to by listening, studying and practising it, thus fulfilling their wishes.

2. The concise meaning of the obeisance itself

The two sub-divisions of the concise meaning of the obeisance are:

2.1. Praise

2.2. Prostration

2.1. Praise

In the layout of the Tibetan verse, the praise comes first followed by the prostrations, however the English rendition is the other way around.

The root text reads:

1. *I bow down to the omniscient
Freed from all defects,
Adorned with all good qualities,
The sole friend of all beings.*

The last three lines are part of the praise, while the first line is the actual prostration.

The praise consists of praising the Buddha, who has the two excellences, which are:

1. Excellent accomplishment of one's own goals
2. Excellent accomplishment of the goals of others

In brief then, the qualities of the Buddha can be condensed into these two excellences. Praising the Buddha endowed with the excellent accomplishment of one's own goals has two aspects: abandoning all abandonments, and gaining all realisations

Freed from all defects indicates abandoning all of that which is to be abandoned. *Adorned with all good qualities* refers to the excellence of obtaining all the good qualities. The *sole friend of all beings* refers to the excellence of the accomplishment of the goals of others. This praise indicates that the Buddha is endowed with three qualities in total, the excellent accomplishment of one's own goals, which consists of two qualities - abandoning all abandonments and gaining all realisations, and the third quality is the excellent accomplishment of the goals of others.

The word *Omniscient* refers to the Buddha, who is referred to as the 'excellent teacher'. It is good to note that an excellent teacher is one who is adorned with the three excellences (the excellence of having abandoned all abandonments, the excellence of having obtained all good qualities and the excellence of accomplishing others' goals). A being who has these excellent qualities, is thus referred to as an 'excellent teacher', as they are unlike other ordinary beings or ordinary teachers.

2.2. Prostration

The words *I bow down* refers to the prostration in the homage.

This verse of homage also indicates very concisely the object of refuge. The Buddha refuge is the Buddha himself, the qualities that the Buddha is endowed with (having obtained all qualities and having abandoned all abandonments) is the Dharma refuge, and the being who actually possesses these qualities is the Sangha refuge. So paying homage to the Buddha in this way

also suffices as homage to the Three Jewels. As indicated by all masters, paying homage to the Three Jewels before engaging in any activity is a sure method for removing obstacles and accomplishing all of one's goals.

The lam rim teachings indicate that the most genuine and profound way of taking refuge is to understand the qualities of the objects of refuge. With such an understanding, going for refuge is a really profound and genuine refuge. The way to present the objects of refuge is by presenting the qualities of each of the objects of refuge with the three excellences. An understanding of what the three excellences refer to will instil a real and genuine sense of faith in the Buddha. When taking refuge in the Buddha, for example, if we have a concise understanding of what the actual term 'Buddha' refers to, then our act of going for refuge itself becomes much more meaningful.

The Tibetan term for the Buddha is *sang-gya*, which is comprised of two syllables: *sang* means to clear away or to awaken, while the connotation of *gya* is to proliferate. If one were to wake up from a deep sleep the mind would be fresh again, so the word *sang* indicates a mind being fresh and clear. *Sang* particularly refers to the mind being completely free from ignorance and in that way being awakened from the slumber of the darkness of ignorance. That is what the first syllable of the term for Buddha refers to. The *gya* basically refers to having abandoned all abandonments and acquired all the good qualities, and so proliferating with the qualities of having abandoned all negativities and acquired all good qualities.

Earlier we referred to the Buddha as being endowed with the excellences of being completely free from all negativities, endowed with all good qualities and engaging in enlightened activities - the great deed of benefitting other beings. Such an excellent teacher, referred to as the Buddha (or *sang-gya* in Tibetan) is a being who does not just come about spontaneously without causes and conditions. Rather it is a result of having engaged in practice over a long period of time.

So our practice is to gradually remove each negativity and acquire each small quality. The way to achieve that state of being completely free from all negativities and endowed with all good qualities is based on gradually removing each and every negativity from one's mind and acquiring every small quality. This is the progressive procedure that leads to the state of being the 'excellent teacher', which is something that we can also achieve if we follow the same path. That is something that is good for us to remember.

3. The meaning of the actual words

The 'I' in the words *I bow down*, refers to Nagarjuna himself. Who is Nagarjuna bowing down to? It is the Omniscient one. *Omniscient* connotes the being who is endowed with a complete understanding and knowledge of all that is to be known, which is condensed into all ultimate phenomena as well as all relative phenomena. Thus an omniscient one is one who is endowed with complete knowledge, in particular one who simultaneously understands all phenomena, that which consists of the ultimate reality, as well as the relative reality. A being endowed with those qualities is called omniscient.

The word *free from all defects* indicates that the Omniscient one (the Buddha) has the particular attribute of abandoning all abandonments, which consists of abandoning seeing the person and the aggregates as being inherently existent. In other words, the defect of the deluded obscuration - having the defilement of seeing the person and the aggregates as being inherently existent - has been abandoned. Furthermore having also abandoned the dualistic view - indeed the very imprints of the dualistic view, means that the obscuration to omniscience has also been eliminated. So the two obscurations have been completely abandoned.

Adorned with all good qualities refers to having obtained the qualities that are common to the hearers and solitary realisers. These include qualities such as the Thirty-seven Practices and so forth, and the uncommon qualities include the ten powers and so forth. The earlier indication was like a summary, indicating the first of the common and uncommon qualities. Here, however, the commentary adds 'and so forth' to 'common and uncommon qualities' to indicate that all the uncommon and common qualities have been completely realised by the mind of the Buddha.

The second and third lines refer to the excellence and accomplishment of one's own goals i.e. one's personal qualities. The last line in the English translation of the verse, *the sole friend of all beings*, refers to the excellence of the accomplishment for the good of others. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, by being endowed with great compassion the Buddha benefits all beings in an unbiased manner. The Buddha benefits all beings without discrimination by protecting them from all faults and negativities, and by helping them to remove all faults and negativities, and in this way leading them to the unsurpassed state of complete happiness. By referring to the Buddha as the 'sole friend' the text is referring to a real and genuine friend who helps one, regardless of one's response. Regardless of the attitude one may have towards the Buddha, the Buddha from his own side benefits all beings, without any attitude of bias or discrimination. In this way, the Buddha is the *sole friend of all beings*.

This relates to the Buddha being endowed with the qualities of being an excellent teacher. Now if the Buddha had only those perfect qualities but didn't have the great love and compassion to benefit other sentient beings, then the quality of being an excellent teacher would be lacking. Thus while having all the good qualities in relation to one's own accomplishments, the quality of being endowed with great love and compassion also has the excellence of benefitting other beings.

In summary, the first verse of *Precious Garland* is a verse of obeisance or homage to the Buddha. The person paying homage is the author himself, Nagarjuna, and the object of the homage is explicitly the Buddha and implicitly the three jewels.

The Buddha is explicitly praised as being the excellent teacher who is free from all defects, adorned with all good qualities and the sole friend of all beings. 'Free from all defects' connotes the complete abandonment of all negativities and 'adorned with all good qualities' connotes the obtaining of all great realisations and 'the sole friend of all beings' connotes the excellent accomplishment of other beings. In this way, as he has the three excellences, the Buddha himself is portrayed as being the excellent teacher. So in this verse Nagarjuna pays homage to such an omniscient being. Implicitly this verse also shows homage to the Three Jewels, the Buddha himself (the Buddha jewel) and the qualities within the Buddha (the Dharma jewel) and those who strive and work towards achieving those qualities (the Sangha jewel). So in this way, the first verse refers to the three jewels as well making homage to them.

It would be good for everyone to recite together the first verse and homage together.

*Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas
I bow down to the omniscient
Freed from all defects,
Adorned with all good qualities,
The sole friend of all beings.*

I've just learned the verse myself now thus I can recite it from memory. It is good to be familiar with this verse as a way to remember the meaning behind the words, (as indicated in the commentary). Then when we recite the verse we remember the meaning behind the words and in this way it will become really meaningful and very profound.

So this evening we have covered the author and we have identified who the author is.

Who is the author of the *Precious Garland*?

Students: Nagarjuna.

Where is Nagarjuna from?

Students: Southern India.

Who is the object of homage or obeisance of the translator?

Students: All the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Who is the object of obeisance or homage of the root text?

Students: The Buddha.

Yes, the Omniscient one, and we can also say the excellent teacher.

What does the word 'omniscient' refer to?

Students: One who knows all.

We have to be very precise here. Rather than only saying 'knowing' it is important to include the words 'simultaneously and directly'. Thus omniscient refers to 'simultaneously and directly knowing all phenomena'. It is important to include those two aspects, otherwise there could be some faults.

So we have broken the ice with the text, which is more or less a straight forward text. That's not to say that it's easy, but it is quite straight forward. It will be good for those of you who have access to the root text to do some preparation from your own side. Also if you access to any commentaries on this text, it will be good to read that as well.

The way I try to present my teachings is to go over each of the verses of the text. In conjunction with the commentary I try to really cover the meaning of each verse and not to leave anything out. That is how I have taught the texts that we have studied. It's not that I'm boasting about it but I really try to go into all of the meanings without leaving anything out. Maybe the reason why I am compelled to do that is because you have paid such good attention in the past. If you continue to do so, then that is a very good basis for us to continue.

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