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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བཞུགས་སྒྲོལ།།

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Before we begin our meditation, bring to mind the meaning of the words of the refuge and bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited. It is important to consider generating a proper motivation before engaging in any practice. *[Pause for meditation]*

## **B. THE ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HIGH STATUS AND DEFINITE GOODNESS**

This heading has two subdivisions:

1. The cause and effect of high status
2. The cause and effect of definite goodness

Here it is good to recall again what high status and definite goodness actually imply.

### **1. THE CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HIGH STATUS**

This is also subdivided into two:

- 1.1. Extensive exposition
- 1.2. Summation

#### **1.1. Extensive exposition**

This section has three subdivisions:

- 1.1.1. Practices for high status
- 1.1.2. Modes of practice
- 1.1.3. Fruits of practice

It is good to take note that the sequence in which the categories are presented is also the sequential method of how to engage in the practice itself.

One may begin to wonder if it is possible to achieve high status in our next rebirth, and so the treatise first identifies and then presents the possibility of achieving high status. Then we may wonder what the necessary practices to achieve high status are; thus the next subject of the text is presenting the causes. Following on from that, we then wonder how to actually put them into practice, and thus the second subdivision—modes of the practice. Then we might wonder what the actual results of doing the practice are, so the treatise presents—the fruits of practice. So we can learn a lot just from looking at the sequence of the headings. This sequential presentation actually anticipates our queries and then responds to them. It shows us how we can use our wisdom and intelligence to analyse and think about the topic.

#### **1.1.1. Practices for high status**

Earlier we identified the particular practices that are the causes of high status. This subdivision is basically another way of presenting the causes for high status.

This heading has four subdivisions:

- 1.1.1.1. Sixteen practices for high status
- 1.1.1.2. Non-existence of those in other systems
- 1.1.1.3. Fruits of wrongly engaging in those practices
- 1.1.1.4. Virtuous and non-virtuous causes and effects

#### **1.1.1.1. SIXTEEN PRACTICES FOR HIGH STATUS**

The sixteen practices of high status has three subdivisions

- 1.1.1.1.1. Thirteen activities to be ceased
- 1.1.1.1.2. Three practices to engage in
- 1.1.1.1.3. Summation

When we add the thirteen activities to be ceased to the three to engage in, then that makes up the sixteen practices for high status.

##### **1.1.1.1.1. Thirteen activities to be ceased**

These thirteen activities are subdivided into two categories:

- 1.1.1.1.1.1. Ceasing the ten non-virtues
- 1.1.1.1.1.2. Ceasing other improprieties

##### **1.1.1.1.1.1. Ceasing the ten non-virtues**

The ten non-virtues are presented with their opposites, which are the ten virtues. What we need to understand from this presentation is that ceasing to commit the ten non-virtues and engaging in, or adopting, the ten virtues is the cause for achieving high status.

The verse that relates to this outline is:

8. *Not killing, not stealing,  
Forsaking the mates of others.  
Refraining completely from false  
Divisive, harsh and senseless speech*

Here each non-virtue is presented as its opposite, which is virtue. So the act of killing is a negative karma, while its opposite, not killing, is a virtue. It is the same with stealing - the negativity is the act of stealing, taking which is not given, and the opposite of that is to refrain from stealing. So the ten virtues are presented in this way as opposites of the ten non-virtues.

What we need to understand from this presentation is that the ten non-virtues are a cause for us to take an unfortunate rebirth, such as in the lower realms, whereas the opposites of the non-virtues, such as refraining from killing, refraining from stealing and so forth, are the causes for high status, i.e. to take rebirth in the human or god realms. This is how we need to understand the cause and effect sequence that keeps us in cyclic existence—in the lower realms as well as in higher realms. In this context some sets of causes lead us to an unfortunate realm while other sets of causes protect us from those lower realms and bring about the result of high status. This is the actual meaning of Dharma in relation to it being a protection—initially protecting oneself from the unfortunate rebirths.

The first act of morality that the Buddha presented is to refrain from killing. So we can see that refraining from killing is the first act of consciously adopting what is called morality or ethics. This also shows the centrality of non-violence in the Buddha's teachings. When we contemplate the Buddha's presentation of the teachings, we can really see that they give very sound and practical advice on how to live a righteous life.

The very first virtuous act that the Buddha presents is to refrain from killing, which is the opposite of the act of killing. We can easily relate to the act of killing as being a really negative deed. There is no living being who would not consider their own life as being the most precious of

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all their possessions. Every living being will instinctively protect their own life, so taking that life away is the most negative act one could inflict upon someone else. Imagine someone threatening to take our life with a sword, and how much fear and suffering would that cause in our mind. Because life is the most prized possession, killing is the most negative act, and thus refraining from the act of killing is presented as the first virtue.

When we observe the Buddha's teachings in this light, i.e. that it is based on non-violence, then we can see that if we were to practise his teachings, it would definitely establish a sound basis for real peace. We want to have peace in the world, but how does peace come about? Peace comes about only by actively and voluntarily refraining from inflicting harm upon others. So this presentation is actually a blueprint for gaining real peace.

We cannot in any way underestimate the value of such practices. As mentioned earlier, if everyone were to actively stop killing we can just imagine how much peace and harmony that would bring to the community. It would definitely be a very safe and harmonious environment. In this way we can see the practical benefit of practices such as refraining from killing, stealing and the rest.

1. When we reflect on the advice to **refrain from killing**, one can realise that the Buddha is really giving us some practical advice to gain a real positive result for oneself. Put simply, the Buddha is saying that the act of killing is harmful to you: if you engage in act of killing then the result of that act will be to be reborn in an unfortunate realm and to experience tremendous suffering. Whereas if you refrain from the act of killing then that will be a cause for you to be reborn in higher realms, achieving high status of the human and god realms.

Indirectly the Buddha is also pointing out that by obtaining high status, such as a human rebirth, we will be able to then accumulate the causes to achieve the ultimate goal of definite goodness, which is enlightenment. The opposite of that is that if one were to engage in act of killing, then as that is the cause to be reborn in the lower realms, one would be reborn in an unfortunate state, such as being reborn as an animal. Being born in those kinds of circumstances will mean that one will not be able to create the causes for obtaining definite goodness. For as long as we remain in lower realms, the opportunity to create the causes for achieving the ultimate goal of enlightenment would not be possible. This is the real understanding that we need to derive from the presentation.

As mentioned previously, not killing and so forth are actually simple practices, but we must engage in them in order to bring about the positive results for ourselves. If we ignore these practices then we completely ignore the very basis of Buddhism. Indeed it is because we neglect these simple practices that we get stuck in samsara, being reborn again and again. We need to ensure that our life is based on these simple practices, then we can slowly build our spiritual development on top of that.

At this point we need to bring to mind what 'virtue' actually means and what its opposite, non-virtue, means. The earlier verses gave a general indication of what virtue

and non-virtue are, however here we can turn to the actual definitions. The definition of *virtue is that which has the potential to bring positive results into fruition*. While, *non-virtue is that which has the potential to bring unpleasant results or experiences to fruition*. We can also relate this to positive and negative karma.

2. The next virtue that is presented in the text is the opposite of the non-virtue of stealing. Stealing is the negative act of taking an object that is owned by someone else, which has not been given. Its opposite is the act of **not stealing**.

Again we can refer to the way in which refraining from stealing would create a positive and pleasant environment, one where we are certain that there are no thieves. If we were to go to such a place we would enjoy our travel; as there would be no anxiety in relation to theft, we would travel very easily in a relaxed frame of mind. So you can see that the virtue of refraining from stealing brings about a sense of ease and peace. On a very practical level we can understand that regardless of whether one is a Buddhist or not, we all agree that not stealing is a positive practice.

There are many examples of those who are known to actively engage in these practices. They are renowned for not harming others and so they are people who can readily be trusted. Even in a worldly context, someone who is known not to steal and to be honest would naturally be trusted. I could relate some stories of how people entrust their entire savings to someone who is known to be trustworthy; they do so happily because of the trust they have in the other. Someone who is known not to steal from others is someone that everyone would like to be associated with. Someone once told me that they had a Buddhist Thai worker at their home who had a natural quality of trustworthiness. The owner of that house told me that he felt very comfortable with that workman. On a very practical level, as Buddhists it is worthwhile to remind ourselves of the practical advice that the Buddha gave, such as to refrain from killing, from taking something that is not given to you and so forth.

3. The third virtue according to the root text is *forsaking the mates of others*. Basically this is **refraining from sexual misconduct**.

These first three virtues, the virtue of not killing, the virtue of not stealing, and the virtue of not committing sexual misconduct are said to be the three positive virtues that are accumulated by our physical body. The next four virtues relate to refraining from the non-virtues of speech.

4. The fourth virtue is described in the text as *Refraining completely from false*. Here 'false' refers to false speech. So the first non-virtue of speech is **lying** or false speech.

5. The commentary explains the non-virtue of **divisive speech**, often known as slander, as speech that is used to divide either individuals or communities. Refraining from the negativity of divisive speech is another of the virtues of speech. Divisive speech refers to using speech that would break up a relationship, or widen the gap between those who may have already have a strain on their relationship. Any speech directed towards that end

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is called divisive speech, and it is good to be mindful of that when we engage in conversations with others.

6. The next non-virtue presented in the root text is listed just as *harsh* however Gyaltzab Je's commentary explains that **harsh speech** relates to words that are hurtful to the other person. It refers to speech that really pierces the heart or mind of the other. The opposite of the harmful intent of hurting the other is the virtue of refraining from harsh speech.

This is something that we also need to take to heart and try to really be mindful of in our dealings with others, in relationships and so forth. When we consider the ill-effects of harsh speech, it is safe to say that harsh speech is one of the factors that can cause a break in a relationship with someone else. When you use harsh speech, others feel so hurt that it can cause a break in relationship. So this is something we need to be mindful of.

The lam rim states that refraining from harsh speech extends to refraining from uttering even what might be true, if it is going to cause some hurt or pain. For example, calling out to a blind person, 'Hey, blind person', would be unpleasant for them to hear. Now one could argue that it is true that the person is blind, so what is wrong with calling them 'blind'? However, because it hurts the other, it is advised that we refrain from uttering such speech. So to the extent that even if it is the truth, if it causes hurt to the other, then it is better not to mention it.

Basically the Buddha is presenting a practical list of how to behave well on a physical and verbal level, in a way that does not harm others, which is avoiding all physical and verbal actions that are harmful to others. This is what we need to practise on a practical level.

7. The fourth of non-virtues of speech, **idle gossip**, is called *senseless speech* in the text. In Gyaltzab Je's commentary senseless speech is explained as speech that really has no relevance to virtue, as it is just using speech mindlessly. Having identified senseless speech, the fourth virtue of speech is abandoning or refraining from senseless speech. Of all the ten non-virtues, idle gossip is the least severe in terms of the level of negativity, but it is also one of the most notorious in that can waste so much of our precious time in meaningless activity. For those who engage in study it is said that idle gossip is one of the worst obstacles, because it takes up so much precious time that would otherwise be used for study.

When we engage in idle gossip or senseless speech it involves talking about others too, and we might easily end up gossiping in a harmful way.

Verse nine presents the seven non-virtues and their opposites, which are the seven virtues. These seven virtues are related to physical and verbal actions. The three physical actions are the act of killing and the refraining from that, which is the act of not killing, stealing and refraining from that, and sexual misconduct and refraining from that. The four actions of speech are false speech or lying and the opposite of that, which is to be truthful, divisive speech and refraining from divisive speech, harsh speech and refraining from that, and senseless speech or idle gossip and refraining from that.

Of the ten virtues, the seven virtues are also within the category known as 'the moral discipline of seven-fold abandonments and their auxiliaries'. These seven moral disciplines and auxiliaries such as abandoning taking intoxicants and so forth are actually very practical ways to protect many other vows that we have taken. It is mentioned in the teaching that if we are mindful of the seven moral codes then that virtue, by default, will actually protect any other vows and commitments that we may have. So it is good to bear in mind the importance of these disciplines.

The remaining three virtues and non-virtues are covered in the next verse:

10. *Thoroughly forsaking covetousness, harmful intent,  
And the views of Nihilists-  
These are the ten gleaming paths of action;  
Their opposites are dark*

8. The first of the three negativities of mind is **covetousness**, while forsaking covetousness is a virtue. Gyaltzab explains in his commentary that covetousness is a mind that, influenced by attachment, covets or longs to possess something that belongs to someone else. So basically this means that when we observe something nice or beautiful that belongs to someone else, we develop the strong wish, 'I would really like to have that for myself'. So a covetous state of mind involves attachment.

9. The second negativity created on a mental level is **harmful intent**, which specifically refers to a state of mind of wishing harm upon others, or wishing to harm others.

10. The third negativity created by the mind is referred to here as holding onto *the views of Nihilists*. As the commentary explains, this specifically refers to holding to view that denies karma or the law of cause and effect. This tenth non-virtue refers to not believing that creating positive karma reaps positive results, and that creating negative karmas reaps negative results. Holding such views that condemns karma is what is referred to as *the views of Nihilists* in the verse.

As the commentary explains, 'adopting the ten virtues' thus means to refrain from these three mental non-virtues plus the earlier seven of speech and body. The verse states that the ten virtues *are the ten gleaming paths of action*'. What is referred to as 'the gleaming path' in the English translation is presented in the teachings as 'the white path', or 'the virtuous path', whereas the opposite of that, is the 'dark path' or 'non-virtuous path', which is presented in the verse simply as *dark*. So we can understand from this presentation that the ten gleaming paths of action refers to the ten virtuous practices. As mentioned earlier the definition of virtue is 'that which has a potential to bring to fruition many positive results and happy experiences', and 'that which has the potential to bring produce negative results' is non-virtue.

The commentary further explains that four conditions must be met for a virtuous or non-virtuous karma to be complete. These are explained extensively in Lama Tsongkapa's *Lam Rim Chenmo* or *The Graduated Path to Enlightenment*. In brief the four conditions are 1) the basis,

2) the intention or the thought, 3) the actual act, and 4) the completion. All four conditions must be present for a karma (either virtuous or non-virtuous) to be complete. I am not going to go into detail about this here; I leave that for your discussion evening. A lam rim textbook will be suitable source on which to base your discussion.

Another point to discuss would be how to purify any negative karma that we might create. It is also good to remind ourselves of a simple statement about negative karma, which is that 'one good thing about negative karma, is that it can be purified'! This profound advice.

The fact that negative karma can be purified should encourage us to engage in the practice of purification. If karma could not be purified then we would feel that there is nothing we can do. However the fact that all negative karma and karmic imprints can be completely purified, will propel one towards actually engaging in the purification practices. You can discuss how a purification practice works in your discussion next week. Discussing and clarifying these points will be of the greatest value in your discussion.

For a complete purification to take place the four opponent powers need to be applied. When the four opponent powers are intact then a complete purification can take place. Discussing by trying to posit ideas and refute something and so forth may have its place and its own virtues. I am certainly not saying it is a waste of time, however engaging in a discussion to gain a good understanding of some important points is extremely valuable and makes the discussion really worthwhile. That is why I feel that sometimes it is good to really bring out a textbook in discussion, and clarify these points.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, by beginning with the ten non-virtues you establish yourself on the virtuous path, which becomes the cause for obtaining high status and indirectly to obtaining definite goodness.

#### 1.1.1.1.2. Ceasing other improprieties

The thirteen activities to be abandoned is subdivided into two—abandoning the ten non-virtues, which we have completed—and three others described in the following lines:

*10 ab. Not drinking intoxicants, a good livelihood, Non-harming...*

1. The first of the three additional improper actions that are to be abandoned is **drinking intoxicants**. As the commentary explains, consuming intoxicants affects our body and leads to an uncontrolled mind. So it is a non-virtue that needs to be abandoned.

2. The second improper activity to be abandoned is **wrong livelihood**. The opposite of that is right livelihood. For a lay person a wrong livelihood would be engaging in a livelihood involving deceiving others, for example, when a grain trader uses the scales to make the weight less when selling, and more when buying, so his the profit is increased when he is buying and selling. Engaging in such acts of deception and cheating for profit are examples of wrong livelihood.

Gyaltsab specifically mentions that for an ordained person wrong livelihood refers to the five wrong livelihoods, which he lists. They are also presented in the

lam rim text so you can refer to that, as it is useful to understand.

Specifically the lam rim teachings refer to the five wrong livelihoods in the preliminary practice of making offerings. It mentions that one must make offerings that are free from acquisition involving a wrong livelihood. There are two categories: that which is deceitful through thought and that which is deceitful in causes. Deceitful through thought refers to making offerings with the eight worldly concerns. Deceitful offerings by its cause, refers to acquiring material offerings through any of the five wrong livelihoods. What you need to understand in this context is that it is said that even though you should not acquire offerings from any of the wrong livelihoods, if someone hands you an offering that has already been acquired through wrong livelihood, then that should be offered as a way to purify that karma.

The third of other improper deeds is **harming**. This is different from harmful intent, as it refers to actual harm that one inflicts upon others, for example, hitting someone else with a stick and causing physical pain. The opposite of that is non-harming. So avoiding the ten non-virtues, plus the three other improper deeds makes up the up the thirteen activities to be abandoned.

Of the sixteen practices of high status, thirteen have to be abandoned and the following three have to be adopted

#### 1.1.1.1.2. Three practices to be adopted

The root text states:

*10bc. ...respectful giving,  
Honouring the honourable and love-*

1. The first practice to be adopted is **giving**, which refers to the act of generosity. Gyaltsab's commentary explains that if, for example, an act of generosity involves a material object it should be given to the other in a respectful way. We need to understand from this that when something is actually given from one's own hand then that is much more meritorious than, say, sending it with someone else. Giving with our own hands in a respectful way is highly meritorious.

When we refer to the act of giving, for example, we can take it down to the simple act of serving a guest with a cup of tea. We know from our own experience how much we appreciate it if the tea is handed to us in nice respectful or gentle manner. So when we offer tea to someone, even though it is just cup of tea, if it is given in respectful and nice way it will be much appreciated by others. That is how we can apply these practices at a practical level in our everyday life

In relation to the object, the commentary explains that we give to the poor and the needy, and that we can also give to those who are worthy of receiving an offering, such as the abbot of a monastery, or those who have higher qualities than oneself, so we give to 'all the objects worthy of offering, such as the enlightened beings'.

Before we drink a cup of tea, we can engage in an act of generosity by first making an offering of that tea to the enlightened beings, which then becomes an act of generosity. As we offer it we envisage the enlightened beings, our teachers, so in that way our offering becomes an act of generosity. Yet again we can see how the

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Buddha has presented these practices in a very practical way, relating them to our everyday activities. Even when we drink or eat, we can turn that act into a practice by simply adopting an attitude in our mind, and then make the offering to our teachers and enlightened beings. That is a very practical way to practise virtue.

Although this seems to be a very simple practice, you should not dismiss it on the grounds of its simplicity. If we don't perform simple practices then when *are* we going to engage in any practice? Practice begins at a very practical level in what we do on a regular basis, such as drinking or eating. When we offer tea or a meal to someone else, if we offer it in a manner that is gentle and which shows respect for other, then that simple act of giving tea and offering a meal (which we would have done anyway) becomes a virtue. Because of one's attitude and manner it will be a karmic cause for obtaining high status.

High status basically refers to having good rebirth in the next lifetime. One may think, 'Oh, the causes and conditions for high status are very obscure and difficult', but in fact that is not the case. As explained here, engaging more mindfully in everyday activities, making them a bit more worthwhile, is a simple way of creating the appropriate causes. If you give to others, to friends, or your partner, and you do it a respectful way then it becomes an act of generosity. Along with dedication it becomes the cause of high status and definite goodness.

Everyday we need to drink and eat so if, for example, before we drink tea we just spend a few moments being mindful and mentally offer it to the enlightened beings, then that becomes the cause for high status. So we can make even normal activities, like drinking tea, into virtue and a cause for high status and ultimately enlightenment. This is how we engage in practice. We all agree that the practice of generosity is a good deed, but how we are going to engage in really big acts of generosity if we don't have the means to do so? It is much more practical to begin with the means that we already have, which are presented to us in our everyday life.

2. Next is **honouring the honourable** which has, in fact, just been discussed.

3. The root text just mentions **love**, however as the commentary explains, it specifically refers to bringing to mind, for example, the four immeasurables and cultivating them: immeasurable love, immeasurable compassion, immeasurable joy, immeasurable equanimity. Cultivating such thoughts in our mind is a way to practise real love. As mentioned in the commentary, this is what is called the Dharma.

The sixteen dharmas that we have listed this evening are the causes that enable us to obtain the high status.

On the question of respectful giving, Gyaltsab Je explains there are three types of gifts: giving spiritual advice or Dharma, giving material needs to others, and also giving protection from fear. Although this is only mentioned in brief here, one can understand how the giving of Dharma is a really meaningful act of giving. So when sharing the Dharma with others be mindful, and do so in a respectful and gentle way. That then becomes really great act of generosity. Giving material needs can be, for example,

giving tea or a meal to others. Giving protection to others or protecting them from fear means, for example, actually saving life, or helping others when they are sick.

#### 1.1.1.1.3. *Summation*

The summary is contained in last line of verse ten, which is:

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

What one needs to understand from this line is that, in brief, the causes to obtain the high status are these sixteen practices.

It is good to refer to other texts as well. If you have commentaries on this text then that's fine, but other texts, like the lam rim, also refer to these points. They can help you to understand a little more about the points which are mentioned here. I could go into much more detail but that would mean taking up much more time, and we do have to cover the whole text. Nevertheless these are really important points. I can safely say that I could spend much more time going into detail about these points, but if you ask me whether I do the practice, then that is questionable. However, I am quite comfortable that I can explain these points in much more detail. The main point for you is to look up and become familiar with the points mentioned in this text.

There is Tibetan saying that 'even fishermen could quote words of Dharma'. This is saying that it is not enough to be able to quote eloquent sayings from a text if one does not put into practice. Once when I was walking along St Kilda pier I happened to pass a man who was fishing and as we glanced at each other he said, 'There are no fish to catch today', and my immediate response was, 'Oh, that's very good' [*laughter*] He actually smiled and seemed to understand the point I was making.

As you would be aware, the next session is the discussion session. As I mentioned earlier, it would be very meaningful to have a good discussion and make it really worthwhile. Also bear in mind that engaging in a good discussion means sharing your knowledge with others. That would be a real act of generosity of the Dharma. So do not underestimate the value of sharing in discussing the Dharma well. Then on the following week there will be the exam; I encourage you to come and participate in the test.

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*Edited Version*

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