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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

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

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30 March 2010

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Thinking along the lines of the meaning of the refuge and bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited, we set our motivation for the meditation that we are about to do. It is really important that we set our motivation before engaging in any activity, as that will guide our actions. (*Pause for meditation*)

## 1.1.1. Practices for high status

### 1.1.1.1. SIXTEEN PRACTICES FOR HIGH STATUS (CONT.)

In our last session we introduced the sixteen dharmas as causes for obtaining high status, which means being reborn in human realm or the god realms. The first ten of the sixteen dharmas are the virtues that are the opposites of each of the ten non-virtues. Three additional virtues are refraining from intoxicants, refraining from harmful intent and refraining from wrong livelihoods, such as those that involve acts requiring deceit and so forth.

As explained earlier, the ordained community must avoid the five wrong livelihoods, which can also apply to the lay community. The remaining three practices of the sixteen dharmas are the three practices to engage in, which are respectful giving, honouring and honourable and practising care and love for others. That makes up the sixteen dharmas.

These sixteen dharmas or practices are also referred to as the path to obtain a high status. Having heard about the possibility of gaining a favourable rebirth in the next life, which is a high status, one may wonder what are the means of achieving that? The answer is that the means of achieving high status is to enter the path of the sixteen practices.

It is worthwhile to investigate in more detail how each of these practices serves as a cause for obtaining particular attributes of a high status. Then one will come to see that all of these practices are essential for obtaining high status. For example, one of the main causes to be reborn as a human is to refrain from killing. So, to voluntarily engage in the act of not killing now is one of the main causes for obtaining a human life in the next rebirth. While being reborn as a human is a good thing, it will not be sufficient if we don't have adequate resources such as wealth and so forth. This leads us to the next practice, refraining from stealing. So, the cause for obtaining wealth in the next life is to lead an ethical life of not stealing in this life.

However, being reborn as a human with sufficient wealth and resources is not enough if we don't have companionship. If we don't have good companions to share our wealth with we would feel that there is something missing in life. Thus, refraining from sexual misconduct is the cause to acquire good companionship. So we can see from these examples that each one of the sixteen practices is a cause for obtaining particular attributes of a high status.

Also we need to know that there is a difference between the mere act of not killing and the morality of not killing. The morality of not killing involves a voluntary intention, such as taking a precept or vow to refrain from killing. The

difference between these two is that while not killing is a good deed in itself, when that act of not killing is complemented with a voluntary vow of not killing it is much more powerful. The act of not killing then actually becomes the morality of not killing. So having a vow or intention to refrain from killing is a source of great merit.

Combining the deed of refraining from the act of killing with the intention to refrain from killing is something that we need to practise. So if, for example, soon after waking up in the morning you were to make the pledge, 'Today I will completely refrain from the act of killing' then you are actually protecting yourself from generating the very intention to kill. That is the way we need to practise, by slowly improving the quality of our morality.

Even in this life we can definitely see the practical benefits of engaging in practices such as refraining from the seven misdeeds. Anyone who is known to refrain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh words and senseless talk or gossip, will naturally be held in high esteem in any society. Regardless of whether they are religious or not, such a person would be considered as a trustworthy and valuable person. So in any society, if we have quite a few people practising the morality of refraining from any of the ten non-virtues, then they will definitely contribute to the wellbeing of that society. There will naturally be harmony and peace in that society. This is how we should see the practical benefits of these practices.

Specific details of what these practices entail will be explained further on in the text, however what I want to emphasise is that when one engages in practices such as not committing the ten non-virtues, then that is a practice of benefitting others in a very practical way. The very fact of refraining from harming others actually benefits others as well as oneself. In addition to refraining from harming others, if one actually benefits others then I would consider that a good deed and the real practice of Dharma. Regardless of whether that falls into a traditional category of Dharma practice or not, I would certainly consider someone who is engaged in helping others as a real Dharma practitioner. I have made comments to some that it is questionable whether sitting down, saying prayers, and meditating becomes a Dharma practice or not, however when someone goes out of their way to benefit someone with a good intention, then there is no question about that being a real Dharma practice.

Whether they have the understanding of Dharma or not, I would consider the mere act of helping someone else to be a real Dharma practice. Individuals who go out of their way to help their parents or other elderly people, people who are sick, or those who are in distress, are actually engaging in what I would consider real Dharma practice. When one voluntarily engages in helping others, one naturally refrains from harming them as well. So this is how I consider the intention to benefit, plus the actual act of helping others, as real Dharma practice.

A regular piece of advice that I share with you and cannot over emphasise, is that the best way to live together with someone else is by developing an altruistic intention of wishing to benefit them. When both sides develop that altruistic intention, then the natural outcome will be harmony and a good mutual feeling. If we think about it, when both partners actually develop the intention to benefit each other, then there is not much room left for complaints, is there? That is because the intention to harm is lacking from both sides so, nobody's feelings will get hurt. If the relationship is based on that noble intention, then there is no

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1.1.2.1. Harming self and others through entering a bad path

1.1.1.2.2. Persons who go on bad paths

1.1.1.2.3. Faults of entering a bad path

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

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

In relation to this the root text states:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 1.1.1.2.3.1. Fruits concordant with non-virtuous causes, a short life etc.
- 1.1.1.2.3.2. Fructification into a whole lifetime in a bad transmigration
- 1.1.1.2.3.3. Arising of fruits of virtue opposite from those

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

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

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

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

The root text states:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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