
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇིགས་མེད་མཚན་མཛད་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

6 April 2010

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

1.1.1. PRACTICES FOR HIGH STATUS

1.1.1.3. FRUITS OF WRONGLY ENGAGING IN THOSE PRACTICES

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

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

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

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

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

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

15. From lying arises slander.

From divisiveness, a parting of friends.

From harshness, hearing the unpleasant.

From senselessness, one's speech is not respected

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

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

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

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

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

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

If we really look into why we become angry it is because we have felt unhappy because of some hurt feelings. When the mind is not disturbed then there is no need for anger to arise in one's mind, and thus one will be able to practise patience effectively. So when others criticise us with what may seem unjust and critical remarks, then that is the time to pay great attention to our mind. It is when we are challenged that anger is most likely to rise in the mind, and if we give in to anger then the negative result of that will only further hurt ourselves, to the detriment of one's well-being. So in difficult situations like that we need to engage in the practice called equalising the eight worldly dharmas¹.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Transcribed from tape by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© **Tara Institute**