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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

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

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With a positive motivation, we will do the meditation.  
(Meditation)

It would be good to generate the following motivation to receive the teachings, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, I need to obtain the state of enlightenment, so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well'.

This motivation consists of the two-fold altruistic intention to benefit sentient beings, which is highly meaningful. In the first part one develops a keen wish to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, which suffices for the aspiring bodhichitta. Whereas the second part, where one commits oneself to put the teachings into practice, which suffices for engaging bodhichitta. Thus, this type of motivation is highly meaningful for whatever practice one may engage in. One will notice particularly that this relates to every sadhana, where a similar format is laid out at the beginning of the practice. So, when one recites the lines relating to this, one will be able to generate the appropriate motivation and corresponding state of mind.

## 2.1.2. Extensive explanation of definite goodness

This is sub-divided into three:

2.1.2.1. Proving the conceptions of 'I' and 'mine' to be false

2.1.2.2. Refutation of inherently existent bondage and liberation

2.1.2.3 All phenomena as free of the extremes of permanence and annihilation

### 2.1.2.1. PROVING THE CONCEPTIONS OF 'I' AND 'MINE' TO BE FALSE

This is further sub-divided into four categories:

2.1.2.1.1. Actual proof

2.1.2.1.2. Attainment of liberation through abandoning these conceptions

2.1.2.1.3. Teaching reality through the example of a reflection

2.1.2.1.4. Realisation of emptiness as the cause of liberation

#### 2.1.2.1.1. Actual proof

These are the verses that relate to proving that the conceptions of 'I' and 'mine' are false:

28. *"The I exists, the mine exists."  
These are wrong as ultimates,  
For the two are not [established]  
By a thorough consciousness of reality just as it  
is.*
29. *The mental and physical aggregates arise  
From the conception of I which is false in fact.  
How could what is grown  
From a false seed be true?*

In relation to the first line, 'The I exists, the mine exists', when we consider the conventional or nominal existence of 'I' and 'mine', we have to agree that nominally an 'I' does exist; there is an entity to the reference of 'I' which does exist. Likewise with 'mine', which is in relation to the aggregates, such as 'my nose', 'my eyes', and 'my ears',

which do exist. By observing the functions of the sense organs, we can definitely agree that the aggregates actually exist. For example, we see with our eyes, smell with our nose and taste with our tongue, so they definitely do exist. Thus, there are no qualms about the nominal existence of 'I' and 'mine'. One needs to understand, because the nominal 'I' and the nominal aggregates referred to as 'mine' do exist, the mere perception of 'I' and the mere perception of 'mine' are not false.

Gyaltsab's Je's commentary explains that although 'I' and 'mine' do exist nominally, the perception of 'I' and 'mine' as existing ultimately is a mistaken perception, and wrong. As explained in the commentary, an 'I' and 'mine' do exist nominally, however the perception of an 'I' and 'mine' existing ultimately or as being inherently established is wrong, and is a mistaken perception, i.e. it is a false perception.

The older students would be familiar with the distinction being made here. However for the newer students, the point to understand is the distinction made between the perception of a nominal 'I' and 'mine', and the view of the transitory collection, which is the view that the 'I' and 'mine' of one's own continuum are inherently existent. The 'I' as perceived by the view of the transitory collection, does not exist. Likewise the aggregates that are perceived by the view of the transitory collection do not exist. However a nominal 'I' and nominal aggregates do exist. The distinction between existence of nominal phenomena, and the non-existence of phenomena as perceived by the mistaken view of the transitory collection needs to be clear.

The view of the transitory collection in relation to 'I' and 'mine' is a mistaken perception, and a wrong consciousness. Why is that so? The reason why it is considered a wrong consciousness, is because the 'I' perceived by the view of the transitory collection does not exist in the way that it is perceived. Likewise the aggregates perceived by the view of the transitory collection, do not exist in the way that they are perceived. Thus, because the 'I' and the aggregates perceived by the view of the transitory collection do not exist in the manner that they are perceived by the view of the transitory collection is a wrong consciousness.

Why is the 'I' that is perceived by the view of the transitory collection non-existent? To understand this we need to know how the view of the transitory collection perceives the 'I', and then we will understand why such an 'I' does not exist. The view of the transitory collection perceives the 'I' as being independently existent—an 'I' that exists without depending on any causes and conditions and thus existing in and of itself. However, such a solely independent 'I' cannot possibly exist.

First of all the 'I' appears as being independently and self-sufficiently existent, and the view of the transitory collection then grasps at that appearance, believing that the 'I' actually exists in that way. Thus, it is a combination of a wrong appearance and grasping at, and adhering to such an appearance. The conclusion is that the view of the transitory collection that perceives an 'I', as well as the view of a transitory collection that perceives 'mine' (the aggregates), is false and is a wrong consciousness.

Gyaltsab's Je's commentary explains that if 'I' and 'mine' were inherently established, then they would have to be perceived by arya's in meditative equipoise. However for the arya's who directly perceive ultimate reality in its entirety,

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there is no perception whatsoever of an 'I' or 'mine'. These points of course were explained in great detail previously<sup>1</sup>.

It would be good to refer to the earlier teachings. In summary, the view of the transitory collection that perceives 'I' and 'mine' as being inherently existent is false and wrong. If 'I' and 'mine' were to be established inherently, then they would have to be perceived by aryas in meditative equipoise. Whatever is perceived by aryas in meditative equipoise is that which exists ultimately. If it is false to the perception of an arya being, then it is not true and cannot be established as being true.

As you would recall from previous explanations, if conventional phenomena were to exist to the perception an arya being in meditative equipoise, then they would have to be established as truly existent phenomena. However because the 'I' and 'mine' do not exist to the perception of an arya being in meditative equipoise focused upon emptiness, they lack true existence. Their existence to the perception of an arya being in meditative equipoise focused upon emptiness is thus the object of negation. As the teachings explain, the lack of conventional phenomena to the perception of an arya being in meditative equipoise is the perception of emptiness. It has been clearly explained that the only thing that is directly perceived by an arya being in meditative equipoise is ultimate reality, i.e. emptiness.

Gyalsab Je's commentary further explains that this point is established with the following syllogism. Take the subject, 'mental and physical aggregates that arise from the conception of 'I': they are false, because the conception of 'I' itself is not established ultimately, and is thus false.

This syllogism explains that once the conception of the 'I' being false is established, then the consequence arising from that is that the mental and physical aggregates also have to be false. When the cause is established as false, then by default, that which arises from that cause is also established as being false. Specifically, the conception of 'I' not being established ultimately and thus being false is the reason that is used to establish that the mental and physical aggregates that arise from such a conception of 'I' are also false.

Gyalsab Je then states that this reason is pervasive, because whatever grows from a false seed cannot be true. That is because if the cause is false, then it does not carry the potential to bring about a true result. By establishing the cause itself being false, it follows that whatever is produced by that cause, the effect, naturally has to be false also. Through the use of a syllogism the reasons are established in a very logical way, and it is good to really understand how the logical use of subject, predicate and reason in the syllogism actually works.

It is good to relate the explanations given here to the main point, which is that all of our mistakes, faults, problems and so forth actually arise from strong grasping at a self. When we actually think about it, it becomes quite clear how true this is. For example, if we think how the 'I' appears when we say 'I do not agree', or 'I cannot accept it', or 'It doesn't accord with my wishes', then it will be quite clear that the 'I' appears as being a very strong and independently existing 'I'. With such a misconception of the 'I', we have a strong sense of self-identity at that time, which seems to give us an extra boost of energy. It can sometimes make us excited and can give rise to very strong emotions. I usually tell people to

be wary when strong anger arises, as the extra boost of energy produced by a strong sense of 'I' can cause quite a bit of destruction.

Such a sense of strong self-identity can be related to a strong sense of grasping at one's opinion, in which case it would be a case of attachment. Due to strong attachment, the sense of self-identity becomes very strong. In turn anger arises from a strong disagreement and strongly conflicting opinions. Whether it be from a strong attachment or anger, that sense of 'I' becomes very strong. As I mentioned earlier, even someone who would normally be considered as a 'weakling' becomes much stronger when a strong sense of self-identity arises in their mind. When that 'I' or self is threatened, there is an extra boost of energy.

The strong sense of 'I' arises when any kind of delusion arises in the mind. However what we are referring to here is the root delusion, the root cause of all of the other delusions that arise in the mind, which is the conception of 'I' that is a particularly a strong grasping at the 'I' or the self.

When we develop an attitude such as 'it's fine with me whatever you decide', or 'whatever you wish is fine with me', and 'I will accept that', then because the sense of self-identity is not strong and opinionated, one will naturally be calm. On the other hand, with 'I cannot agree with that', 'I cannot accept that', the sense of 'I' and 'me' becomes very strong, and results in agitation and conflict. In this way you can see how a change in attitude can make a huge difference to one's reactions.

In the West there is a lot of concern about depression. If we look into what actually causes depression, then we see in some cases that the depression is nothing more than a really strong sense of clinging to the 'I' or 'me'. If we really look into the general mentality of people in the West, we will find that there seems to be a strong underlying sense of individuality, what we might call a sense of pride. It seems that thoughts and activities are mostly driven by that sense of individuality or pride. As explained in the teachings, pride is none other than a manifestation of grasping at the 'I' or the self, i.e. arises as a result of grasping to the self.

#### *2.1.2.1.2. Attainment of liberation through abandoning these conceptions*

This section explains how the attainment of liberation is achieved by abandoning these misconceptions of 'I' and 'mine'. The relevant verse is:

30. *Having seen thus the aggregates as untrue  
The conception of I is abandoned,  
And due to abandoning the conception of I  
The aggregates arise no more.*

In his commentary Gyalsab Je explains that by seeing the aggregates as untrue, the conception of 'I' and 'mine', which comes from the perception of an inherently established 'I' and 'mine', is abandoned. Having abandoned that perception, the suffering aggregates will arise no more, and thus one will obtain liberation, which is the state of abandoning true suffering and true origination. This shows that one needs to realise the lack of true existence of both person and aggregates in order to obtain liberation. It also clearly shows that the two selflessnesses of person and phenomena are also realised at the subtlest level by the hearer and solitary realiser aryas.

Gyalsab's commentary is quite explicit and clear. Perceiving the aggregates as being truly or inherently existent causes the conception of 'I' to arise. By perceiving the aggregates as lacking true existence or inherent existence, the conception

<sup>1</sup> Covered most recently on 21 July 2009 and 11 August 2009, and more extensively in May and June 2004.

of 'I' and 'mine' arising from that will naturally cease and is abandoned. When the conception of 'I' ceases or has been abandoned, the suffering aggregates (i.e. the aggregates that are in the nature of suffering) will no longer arise. It is through seeing the aggregates as being truly existent that the conception of 'I' arises, and when the aggregates themselves are seen as being not true or false, then naturally the conception of 'I' will not arise. When the conception of 'I' is abandoned, the suffering aggregates (which are a result of the conception of 'I') will also not arise. Thus one will obtain *liberation which is*, as explained in the commentary, *the state of abandoning true suffering and true origination*.

To further explain this, one first needs to understand that the perception of truly existent aggregates is grasping at the self of phenomena. The perception of a person or 'I' as being truly existent is grasping at the self of person. It is due to the grasping at phenomena or the aggregates that the grasping at person arises. Thus, in the cause and effect sequence, the grasping at the aggregates is the cause for the grasping at the person. In reverse order, when grasping at the aggregates ceases, then grasping at the person will also cease. When the grasping at the person ceases, then that conception of the 'I' will be abandoned and the effects of the conception of the 'I', which is the suffering aggregates, will arise no more. Thus, the suffering aggregates cease. Thus by abandoning true suffering as well as the true origination of suffering (which is grasping at the self, or the conception of an 'I'), one obtains the state of liberation. One needs to understand this sequence.

We really need to try to derive the main points from this explanation, as well as their implication. It may seem quite complex at first but if you approach it in gradual steps then it will become clearer and clearer in your mind. The cause of all our problems—grasping at an inherently existent self of aggregates and of person—is false. The perception of truly existent or inherently existent aggregates is referred to as grasping at the self of the aggregates. This grasping at the self is the cause of all of our mistaken views and problems. In order to overcome that misconception (of grasping to the self of aggregates), one needs to realise the lack of true existence of the aggregates. That will then become the direct antidote for overcoming the misconception that the aggregates are truly existent.

In order to gain the realisation of the lack of true existence, one questions whether the aggregates actually exist in the way that they are perceived. Do the aggregates exist truly or inherently, which means independently and existing in their own right? Do they exist in that way or not? Having investigated it in this way, one comes to understand that the aggregates cannot possibly exist truly in and of themselves, without depending on anything else. Then one will gain the inkling that they actually lack true existence. With this realisation, one will understand how the 'I' itself, which is dependent on the aggregates, also lack true existence. When one gains the realisation of the lack of true existence in relation to aggregates and person, one will then overcome the misconception of a truly existent self. That then serves as a cause for overcoming all misconceptions, which are causes for obtaining the contaminated aggregates, which are in the nature of suffering. It is good to understand this step-by-step approach to reaching the correct understanding of reality.

One needs to further understand that the object is the same for both the misconception and the correct perception. For example, if we were to ask 'what is the object of the perception of truly existent aggregates?' then the object is the

aggregates, right? If we were to further ask 'what is the perception of the lack of true existence of the aggregates?', then the object is also the aggregates. As explained in the teachings, one needs to reach a good understanding of how there are two completely contradictory views that focuses on the same object. If one realises this contradiction, then one has an inkling of the correct view. You are focussing on the same object, but there are two different types of perceptions. One needs to understand the distinction between those two perceptions, and then try to gain the understanding of the correct one.

#### *2.1.2.1.3. Teaching reality through the example of a reflection*

This section is divided into two:

2.1.2.1.3.1. Example for ceasing sufferings and their sources through realising the person and aggregates as not truly existing

2.1.2.1.3.2. The opposite example

#### **2.1.2.1.3.1. Example for ceasing sufferings and their sources through realising the person and aggregates as not truly existing**

This outline presents the teaching on the nature of reality, with the example of a reflection in a mirror. The English translation of the text does not convey the meaning that that true suffering and true origination will cease when one gains the realisation of the lack of inherent existence of the person and the aggregates. The example that illustrates this is presented in the following verses:

31. *Just as it is said  
That an image of one's face is seen  
Depending on a mirror  
But does not really exist [as a face],*
32. *So the conception of I exists  
Dependent on the aggregates,  
But like the image of one's face  
The I does not at all really exist.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that these verses indicate that although one can see the image of one's face in a mirror, the image does not exist truly. It is not established as it appears, in the slightest way. Likewise by depending on the aggregates and so forth, one will have the conception of 'I', but just as the image of one's face in the mirror is false, so too the person and the aggregates are not established inherently in the slightest way.

The main point of using the example of an image of one's face in a mirror is to explain the falsity of the 'I' and the aggregates. The example is quite obvious. The image of one's face is reflected upon the mirror, but the image that we see in the mirror is not our face. This example is used to illustrate that even though aggregates and the 'I' appear to be truly existent or inherently existent, in reality they do not exist in that way. That is how one needs to understand the analogy of an image in the mirror.

The commentary explains that while the details of the image of our face will be clear in all aspects, that image is in no way any part of our face. We see an image of our whole head in the mirror, we see our nose, our ears and so on, but none of the detail that we see in the image is actually any part of our face. The nose that we see in the mirror is not our nose, the ears are not our ears, and likewise our eyes and so forth. No aspect of the details that we see in the mirror is any part of our face.

Likewise the aggregates and the 'I' appear to the faulty perception as being truly existent. Every aspect of the aggregates as well as the 'I' itself appear as being inherently existent or inherently established. However, just like the image in the mirror is not true in any way, even though the aggregates and the 'I' appear in every aspect and detail to be inherently existent, there is not even the slightest aspect of true existence in any part of the aggregates or the 'I'.

The commentary further explains that even a simpleton or an elderly person with conventional knowledge, realises that the image of a face in a mirror is not actually the face. One needs to understand how the analogy is being used here; — it is not the image itself that is false. To understand the image itself as being false is more subtle, and is an example of the realisation of emptiness. Whereas here the analogy refers to realising that the image is not the face itself, which is not a very subtle or obscure realisation. Even a simpleton or an elderly person who has mere conventional knowledge will realise that. In other words, realising that the image is not the face is not a realisation of emptiness. There is, a phrase in Tibetan that you can look at an image of *momo* in a glass case, but you can't really taste it. [*Geshe-la laughs*]. The image of a momo in the mirror cannot be tasted or eaten. Right?

#### 2.1.2.1.3.2. The opposite example

The opposite example relates to verse 33:

*33. Just as without depending on a mirror  
The image of one's face is not seen,  
So too the conception of I does not exist  
Without depending on the aggregates.*

In his commentary, Gyaltsab Je explains that just as one cannot possibly see an image of one's face without depending on a mirror, so too one cannot have a conception of an 'I' without depending on the aggregates. Thus, without realising the lack of inherent existence of the aggregates, one cannot possibly see the lack of inherent existence of 'I' and 'mine'. As explained in the commentary, this is emphasising the points that were explained earlier.

The commentary explains this using the following syllogism. Take the subject 'a person and the aggregates': they lack inherent existence, because they are interdependent originations, just like the image in a mirror. Here the syllogism is using the reasoning of interdependent origination.

At this point one needs to understand that the analogy of an image in a mirror is being used here in a more subtle way than in the previous verses. The analogy refers to understanding the lack of true existence of the image itself, rather than understanding the image as not being the actual object that is reflected (which is the face as in the earlier example). As also explained in the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*, it is by first realising the lack of true existence with an example that one will be able to gain the realisation of the lack of true existence of the main subject, which is the aggregates and the person. The reason why it is easier with an example is that the subject, the mirror, which is the basis of imputation, is easier to relate to as being false. Because of the nature of object, or basis of imputation, it is easier to understand the lack of true existence based on the reflection in a mirror, than it is to understand the lack of true existence of the aggregates and the person. Thus, when one understands the lack of true existence based on the example of the reflection in the mirror, one will then be able to utilise that understanding to

understand the lack of true existence of the aggregates and the person. Is that clear?

The main point is that in order to gain the understanding or realisation of the lack of true existence of the subject 'aggregates and person', one needs to initially understand the example of a reflection in a mirror. The syllogism presents the subject, 'person and aggregates' as lacking inherent establishment, because it is an interdependent origination, and the example is a reflection in a mirror. This indicates that understanding the lack of inherent establishment is easier if one first uses the reflection of an image in a mirror as an example, rather than beginning with the subject 'person and aggregates'.

While this explanation relates to a subtle understanding based upon the example of an image in a mirror, one can also gain an understanding of the lack of true existence at the grosser level, by understanding that the image of a face in the mirror is not actually the face itself. Even with that grosser example, when one understands that the reflection of one's face in the mirror is not actually the face, one can see how, even though the person and aggregates appear as being inherently existent, they lack inherent or true existence in reality. We need to gain some understanding of the syllogism that is presented here using the earlier, grosser, example of the image in the mirror. So it is really good to reflect on the grosser as well as the subtler levels of understanding of the example of the image in the mirror.

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