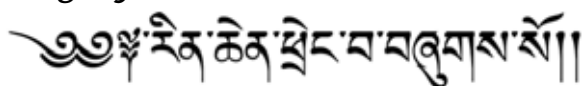

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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We now generate a positive motivation followed by some practice. (*Meditation*)

2.1.2. Extensive explanation of definite goodness

2.1.2.1. PROVING THE CONCEPTIONS OF 'I' AND 'MINE' TO BE FALSE (CONT.)

2.1.2.1.4. Realisation of emptiness as the cause of liberation

The corresponding verse is:

34. *When the Superior Ananda
Heard what this means,
He attained the eye of doctrine
And repeatedly spoke of it to monastics.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that when the *superior* being *Ananda* gained the realisation of the two of types of selflessness, he gained the direct perception of emptiness, and thus obtained the path of seeing. Ananda attained what is referred to here as *the eye of doctrine*, which means having the correct perception of the lack of true existence of phenomena. Having attained the eye of doctrine one reaches a state of being completely free from all stains.

The commentary lists a few things that occur when one reaches that state. The first is being free from the stains which are the deluded obscurations of grasping at true existence. The commentary further explains that in addition to being free from stains, Ananda reached the state of not having to depend on others, which means other ordinary beings. As the commentary explains, in order to reach the state of not having to depend on ordinary beings, one must first rely solely on the supreme Teacher Buddha Shakyamuni and his teachings, the flawless Dharma. By relying on the supreme teacher and the flawless doctrine, Ananda gained the realisation of emptiness, thus reaching the state of not having to rely on others.

This is a very significant point. When one relies upon the supreme teacher and his flawless doctrine, one gains such complete self-confidence that one never needs to rely on other ordinary beings. The main point of the verse is that through hearing, contemplating and meditating on the supreme teacher's flawless doctrine, Ananda gained the realisation of emptiness. Having reached the state of being free from all stains and not having to rely on ordinary beings and other sources, Ananda thus reached the state of being completely free from all doubts. Having reached that fully qualified state, he repeatedly imparted it to other fully ordained *monastics*. He proclaimed to them that in order to gain the profound realisation of emptiness, one needs to depend on the flawless and unmistakable doctrine of the Buddha.

This is also in line with what Shantideva says in his great work *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

Since liberation occurs through seeing the four noble truths,

What is the use of seeing emptiness?

Well, because in the scriptures it is proclaimed.

That without this path, there is no enlightenment.

What is being explained is that without relying on the Buddha's doctrine, which presents the flawless method for gaining the realisation of emptiness, one cannot possibly obtain enlightenment. As this great master mentioned and other teachings emphasise as well, in order to gain the profound realisations, one must depend on the flawless and unmistakable doctrine of the Buddha.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary concludes with the explanation that the supreme method to obtain liberation is to rely upon the Buddha's doctrine, which explains ultimate reality or emptiness. The implication here is that without relying on the doctrine that explains emptiness, one cannot possibly obtain liberation. That is what must be understood. At a personal level, if we wish to reach the state of liberation and be free from all suffering, we must exert ourselves to gain an understanding of emptiness, and we can only do this by relying on the Buddha's doctrine. We must realise that at this time we are incredibly fortunate to have access to the teachings and the teachers who expound them unmistakably. It is really important that we take the initiative to utilise our favourable conditions to the fullest in order to make liberation definitely possible for us to achieve. We need to use the conditions that we have to access the teachings, then contemplate and meditate on the points. These are the methods that we can engage in right now to create the causes to obtain liberation.

When we relate to the teachings, we will notice that the Buddha is giving us direct personal advice and instructions. When the Buddha describes the causes of samsara, he is pointing out that it is the grasping at our own aggregates and the grasping at our own 'I' which are the causes for one's own samsara. The Buddha indicates that the method by which you free yourself from samsara is to overcome grasping at your own aggregates and 'I'. We need to understand from this that external causes or conditions are not the main cause for our samsara.

The cause for one's own samsara lies within oneself, which is the misconception of grasping at one's aggregates and the 'I' as existing truly. As ordinary beings, our physical aggregates are contaminated aggregates, which are in the nature of suffering. It is these very aggregates that we possess now which are the condition for our future cyclic existence. The cause of our samsara now was our grasping at truly existent aggregates and truly existent 'I' that existed within us in our past lifetimes. So the cause for our samsara does not come from someone else, but rather from our own continuum that stretches back into our past lives. That is how the true sufferings experienced now are related to true-origins of the past.

The true origins of suffering fall into the two main categories of karma and delusions. In relation to one's own individual karma, one's actions are influenced by the delusions within one's own mental continuum. There are various types of delusions. Of the three poisons of anger, attachment and ignorance, the root delusion is ignorance, in particular the ignorance that grasps at a truly existent self of the aggregates and person. Influenced by that delusion one creates the karma that is the cause to obtain the physical and mental contaminated aggregates that we possess now. When we relate the cause and effect sequence to our own mental continuum, our understanding of samsara in relation to ourselves becomes much clearer. When we think about samsara in this way, we gain an inkling of how there is no beginning to one's own individual samsara. Otherwise we

might think 'the beginning of my samsara must have started in my mother's womb', which of course is not the case.

When we contemplate and meticulously analyse the nature of samsara in relation to ourselves, it actually induces great sense of joy within oneself. When some people think about renunciation, their mind may feel uncomfortable and uneasy. If one feels uncomfortable thinking about samsara and renunciation, then that is because one has not really understood the main point yet. One has only gained a superficial understanding. That is why study is really important.

When we study and gain an understanding of what has been explained in the teachings, then we will experience a sense of joy. When we contemplate 'What is the origin of suffering?' and 'What is the cause for our own samsara?', and then relate that to our continuum in the past, we see that we have created the causes for our own contaminated aggregates now. Then we might wonder, 'what caused the person in a past life to have contaminated aggregates'? That is how countless past lives are understood. When one further analyses past lives in this way, one will gain an understanding of the fact that there is no beginning to one's samsara.

Then when one contemplates where all this leads us to in the future, we begin to realize that for as long as we are influenced by the root cause of samsara, which is the conception of the 'I', we will continue to obtain a similar existence with the contaminated aggregates from life to life.

One needs to gain an understanding what it means for our contaminated physical aggregates to be in the nature of suffering. It does not mean that the physical and mental aggregates are actually an experience of suffering, for example the body itself is not a suffering. Rather, it means that they serve as the basis for us to experience various other types of sufferings. When we really think about it, it is very true. Our contaminated physical and mental aggregates are the basis on which we experience so many types of suffering. So, that is why they are in the nature of suffering.

Thus obtaining a contaminated body and mind in the future comes about from the misconceptions that we have now. If we are guided and influenced by the misconceptions that we have now, then it will be really difficult for us to see that there is actually an end to our own suffering as well as an end to our own samsara. So it becomes quite clear that until one gains the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness, which directly opposes the misconception that is the cause of samsara, there is no possible way to end samsara. All of this becomes quite clear when we do the analysis in this way.

The conclusion that one comes to with this analysis is that the end to one's samsara is possible only when one gains the realisation of selflessness or emptiness, which is the direct opponent to the misconception of grasping at a true self. One needs to see the possibility of extinguishing that misconception of grasping at true existence with a state of mind that directly opposes that misconception, which is the wisdom realising emptiness. That then becomes a source of great encouragement, and one gains a real sense of joy from getting in touch with the possibility of ending the very cause of one's suffering and samsaric existence.

When we relate to the teachings in this way, it becomes a great source of inspiration and joy. As I have mentioned earlier, this is unlike meditation where we focus single-pointedly on one object. When we engage in such meditation practice we might have a temporary release from the

delusions, and feel a sense of joy for a while, but that in itself does not lead in any way to overcoming the negative states of mind. While we are single-pointedly focused on an object, we may feel joyful, but when we come out of the meditation we resume our normal samsaric existence. Single-pointed meditation alone doesn't provide much impetus to really engage in the practice of the Dharma.

For me, contemplating these teachings and thinking about their meaning is definitely a great source of inspiration. I really find that the teachings themselves are such a wondrous and incredible revelation, and thus a great source of inspiration. That should also be the case for you too. As I mentioned previously, we all have the great conditions right now of having access to the Dharma, and to teachers who expound the teachings clearly. We have the great fortune to have incredibly good conditions right now. As I have mentioned before, we are on the threshold of making a choice to either go up to a good rebirth in the next lifetime, or to fall down to another unfortunate rebirth. That choice is because of the genuine freedom that we have now. Recognising that we have that freedom and using it in an optimum way is really what we need to be doing now.

As mentioned previously, the causes for obtaining a good rebirth in the next lifetime are, to refrain from killing, which is not something beyond our capacity. We also have the fortunate condition of not having a compulsion to steal, so we can avoid stealing, and avoiding sexual misconduct is also something that we can manage to do. When we refer to the rest of the causes for a fortunate rebirth in this way, we can see that obtaining the causes for a good rebirth is not beyond our reach. There is a real possibility if we practise in this way. That is what I mean about having an independent choice now.

We need to see that we have the right conditions now and that it is essential to use them in the most optimum way that is possible. The main practice is, as I regularly emphasise, to generate a kind attitude; this is really what it all comes down to. If we practise a true sense of concern and generosity toward others then that will really benefit us. Apart from the benefits for our future lives, we can experience the benefits of such kind attitudes right now. It is thus worthwhile for us to engage in the practice of generating a kind mind.

Since we all naturally wish to be happy and we all wish for good things in our life, and as the cause for happiness and goodness is a positive state of mind, we need to familiarise ourselves with how to obtain such a mind. As the great master Shantideva mentioned, there are many causes for happiness, but the supreme cause is the flawless Dharma. There may be many external conditions that make us temporarily happy, but the supreme source of real happiness and joy within our mind is, as indicated by Shantideva, the flawless doctrine, or the Dharma. While we may gain some temporary satisfaction and happiness from external factors, when we gain the happiness and joy of the Dharma then that it is something that is heartfelt and something that we can always carry within ourselves. As we can keep it within us, wherever we are, it is the supreme source of happiness.

As mentioned previously, the genuine source of happiness is a kind and virtuous state of mind. For as long as we feel a genuine sense of love and compassion towards others, we feel quite fulfilled within ourselves, and our mind is naturally imbued with a sense of joy and happiness. Whereas when we begin to lose that sense of genuine concern and love for others, then that is when the real source

of unhappiness starts to grip us. We start feeling depressed, and an unhappy state of mind comes from that. Whenever we have a diminished sense of concern and kindness for others, then that is the time when whatever we do seems unsatisfactory. When we are eating, the food doesn't taste as nice; if we go out and try to enjoy something, it doesn't feel so joyful; if we are staying at home, we feel lonely and unhappy. Even if we go out we seem to be unable to relate to others, and we have no companions. That is when the real source of unhappiness sinks in. Thus, as I emphasise regularly, the greatest investment for our own temporary and future happiness is a kind attitude and a gentle mind. The reason I am relating all of this to you is because I consider you to be Dharma practitioners.

The way in which losing that genuine sense of concern and love for others destroys one's own happiness is quite clear and obvious when we look into various situations. If we ask someone 'would you like to have companions?' The answer would be 'Yes, I would like to have companions'. But people destroy their relationships through being agitated or constantly short-tempered or grumpy. Because of their unwelcoming and unappreciative attitude, others don't feel comfortable around them. When a family sits down to have a meal together they might initially be joyful, but when someone starts to exhibit grumpiness and become unsettled then that starts to disturb everyone else. That is when people start to distance themselves from that person. Of course we cannot blame anyone in this particular situation. When someone is infected by a negative state of mind and able to identify such attitudes within themselves, then it is their responsibility to try and overcome these attitudes.

2.1.2.2. REFUTATION OF INHERENTLY EXISTENT BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

This section has four subdivisions:

- 2.1.2.2.1. Order of entry into cyclic existence
- 2.1.2.2.2. Order of ceasing cyclic existence
- 2.1.2.2.3. Benefits of realising emptiness
- 2.1.2.2.4. Nature of liberation

Just by reading the sequence of outlines we can see how the instructions follow smoothly from one to the other with meticulous logic. The first section shows how one enters cyclic existence, and the second explains how to reverse that and abandon cyclic existence. The third explains the benefit of applying that method of emptiness, which is liberation, while the fourth explains what liberation is. So just from the presentation of the outlines one can gain a profound understanding of how to use our intellect and reasoning. They really illustrate the way to reason.

As explained in the teachings on the twelve links of interdependent origination, their order represents how we enter cyclic existence. The first link is ignorance, and due to that ignorance one creates the causes for the second link, which is karma, specifically projecting or throwing karma. The imprints of that are then left upon the consciousness, which is the third link. The earlier link causes the next link, all the way up to the twelfth and final link which is ageing and death.¹ That is the way in which the forward progression of the links can be understood.

To explain the cessation of samsara, the reverse order of the links is used. Samsara actually ceases is when the link of

ageing and death ceases and thus the link of birth naturally ceases. We see how this works by understanding where each link comes from. Where do ageing and death come from? They come from birth. So if there was no birth to begin with then the link of ageing and death cannot occur. Thus ageing and death is linked to birth. When ageing and death cease, then the link of birth will naturally cease, and then the links existence, grasping, the six sources of contact and so forth, will all cease in reverse order. Thus the forward and reverse order of the twelve interdependent links show how one enters into cyclic existence or samsara, and how one can actually reverse that process.

The reverse order of the twelve links indicates the way in which cyclic existence ceases. However to stop the links from occurring altogether, one begins with the first link, the link of ignorance. When one stops the link of ignorance, then the following link, karma, cannot be created. Without creating the link of karma the following links cannot be experienced all the way up to ageing and death. So stopping the links is a matter of stopping the first link, which is ignorance. When one gains this understanding, then it becomes very profound.

One needs to relate the teaching on the following verses to the twelve interdependent links. One enters cyclic existence by possessing the first link of ignorance, which naturally leads to the second link of creating karma, which in turn leads to the third link of leaving the imprints of karma upon one's consciousness and so on. So to stop experiencing the twelve interdependent links, one needs to start with the very first link by eliminating ignorance, which in turn eliminates the karma that is created out of ignorance, and thus the mental imprints of that karma cannot be stored in one's consciousness. In that way the rest of the links will be naturally stop as well.

We presented the four sub-divisions in this category earlier, the first which is:

2.1.2.2.1. Order of entry into cyclic existence

This is sub-divided into two:

- 2.1.2.2.1.1. Identifying the root of cyclic existence
- 2.1.2.2.1.2. Example for cyclic existence

2.1.2.2.1.1. Identifying the root of cyclic existence

I have quoted the following verse many times in my teachings to you. It is also quoted in many other teachings, thus being familiar with this verse and its meaning is essential.

- 35. As long as the aggregates are conceived,
So long thereby does the conception of I exist.
Further, when the conception of I exists,
There is action, and from it there also is birth.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that the first line of the verse refers to the misconception of the aggregates as being inherently established. As the commentary explains, for as long as the aggregates are conceived to be inherently established and the apprehended object is not refuted, the conception of 'I' that is perceived by the view of transitory collection exists, and remains without the slightest decrease.

Here Gyaltsab is explaining that the conception of 'I' is based on the conception of truly existent aggregates. This means that by first relating to the aggregates, and perceiving them as being truly existent, the strong grasping at 'I' and 'mine' arises from that. As explained here in the commentary, the view of the transitory collection refers to grasping at the 'I' and the aggregates of one's own

¹ The twelve links are ignorance, karma, consciousness, name and form, the six sources, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, existence, rebirth, ageing and death.

continuum as being truly existent. When the commentary says that *it remains without the slightest decrease* it is referring to the fact that for as long as there is the conception of inherently established aggregates, there will be no decrease in the strong grasping at 'I' and 'mine'

In summary, perceiving phenomena as being truly existent leads to the view of the transitory collection, which is grasping at the 'I' and 'mine' of one's own continuum.

As explained in Gyaltsab's commentary, when the grasping at 'I' and 'mine' is very strong and vivid in one's mind, one will naturally have a strongly opinionated mind, considering certain things to be favourable to the 'I' and other things to be unfavourable to the 'I'. In relation to the 'I' and 'mine' of the transitory collection, there is a strong sense of like and dislike. Attachment develops with the objects that you like, and anger develops towards the things that you dislike. And out of attachment and anger one engages in different kinds of actions, which are karma. These karmas then become the causes for all our suffering. So it is the creation of karma that is the cause for rebirth.

It was also explained in the Madhyamaka teachings, that unless and until the apprehended object is refuted, one will not be able to overcome that misconception of grasping to true existence. That is how one gains the realisation of the lack of true existence upon phenomena, which is the realisation of the emptiness of phenomena.²

The commentary further mentions that this is how Nagarjuna also establishes that even hearers and solitary-realiser arhats have gained the realisation of emptiness.

2.1.2.2.1.2. Example for cyclic existence

36. *With these three pathways mutually causing each other
Without a beginning, a middle, or an end,
This wheel of cyclic existence
Turns like the wheel of a firebrand.*

The three pathways referred to in the verse are delusions, karma and the production of the remaining links of interdependent origination, such as birth and so forth. The three pathways are the means by which one enters into cyclic existence. Through delusions one creates karma, from karma there is the production of birth, and the suffering that follows from that. That is how one enters into samsara. If one does not strive to free oneself from these three pathways, one will have to experience suffering unceasingly. The cycle of suffering has *no beginning, no middle and no end*. Thus one needs to free oneself from these sufferings.

In relation to having no beginning, no middle and no end, it has been explained that karma arises from delusions, which leads to suffering, and from which further delusions arise. When we look into how the cause and effect sequence works, we see that there is no end to this cycle; an earlier cause leads to a result, which then becomes the cause for the next result, which in turn leads to the creation of further causes, which are similar to the initial causes. In an endless cycle they turn without a beginning, middle, or an end, *like a firebrand*. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, they each contribute to the arising of another, and thus it is like a firebrand, which has no beginning, no middle and no end. Gyaltsab concludes with a summary of the advice that one

should take from this, which is having identified the root of samsara, one must engage in the practice of applying all root virtues to becoming the method for overcoming samsara.

Samsara is basically the result of an initial misconception of grasping at the aggregates as being truly existent, from which the view of the transitory collection, which is grasping at the inherent existence of one's 'I' and 'mine', arises. That then becomes the cause for all of one's further suffering and thus the cause of samsara. Having identified and understood the ultimate cause in this way, one needs to apply whatever merit or virtue that one may accumulate to make sure that it becomes the cause to overcome this misconception. Thus we have the method of freeing oneself from samsara.

Gyaltsab Je then concludes by saying that if one wishes to understand these points in greater detail, one can refer to Lama Tsong Khapa's great treatise, *Illumination of the Thought*, a commentary on Chandrakirti's *Madhyamakavatara*. We covered the points made there with quite extensive explanations, so students can refer back to those teachings as well.

It should be obvious that we are covering many points that have already been explained in detail in the past. I am not sure how much you have retained from the explanations that have been given in the past. Nevertheless, you may appreciate the fact that the previous teachings have opened many doorways for you.

To summarise, the main point of practice is, as I emphasise regularly, to try to cultivate a kind attitude and protect whatever kind attitude and good mind that one has already developed. That is the advice that is given in the teachings, and it is something that we need to endeavour to do. The explanation of how we enter cyclic existence and how to escape cyclic existence or samsara provides us with an impetus to develop renunciation. Based on our own wish to be free from samsara, we can then generate the wish to free others from samsara too. Thus the explanation of how one enters and frees oneself from samsara is not limited merely to the development of renunciation, but is also an impetus for developing love and compassion followed by bodhichitta. The explanation of how the understanding of samsara serves as a means to develop bodhichitta is explained in the Madhyamaka teachings.

As one of my own late masters, Kyabje Trichang Rinpoche used to emphasise in his teachings, the manner of developing love and compassion based on an understanding of the samsaric nature of sentient beings, is much more profound than developing love and compassion by merely focussing on their obvious level of suffering. This is an important point to understand. When we see someone who is obviously suffering, we might have an immediate and strong emotional response to that and feel some love and compassion, but it doesn't go much beyond that. In fact when we see someone that we dislike who is suffering, we might even feel happy about that, rather than feeling compassion. However, when we think about samsara then we understand that all beings, regardless of whether they are experiencing an obvious level of suffering or not, are an object for which to develop love and compassion. That sort of compassion is much more profound.

Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright

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Edited Version

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² The Madhyamaka teachings from 11 May 2004 to 21 September 2004 cover 'Establishing the selflessness of person with logic', which incorporates the refutation of a number of different propositions about the nature of the self of person.