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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

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22 June 2010

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Let us generate a positive motivation to engage in the meditation practice.

[meditation]

We have already generated a positive motivation, but to strengthen our positive intent for receiving the teachings, we can generate the following motivation: 'For the sake of all sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I will listen to the Mahayana teachings and put it into practice well'.

Generating such a motivation, where the very intent of listening to the teachings and engaging in the practice in order to benefit all sentient beings, will secure one's practice to actually become an aid to benefit others. Because the very motivation is free from mere self-interest and aimed at the benefit of other sentient beings, the practice that we engage in actually becomes very meaningful. If, in our regular practice, we were to spend a few minutes just focusing on that motivation itself, we will definitely derive some sense of purpose, meaning and fulfilment; we will gain a real sense of joy in our hearts. To that extent we can definitely see the benefit of the motivation.

## 2.1.2.3.1.3. Liberation through realising the meaning of non-duality

The meaning of this outline is that liberation is obtained by following the middle way; the path or the view that is free from both extremes.

50. *Having thus seen that effects arise  
From causes, one asserts what appears  
In the conventions of the world  
And does not accept nihilism*
51. *One who asserts, just as it is, cessation  
That does not arise from conventions  
Does not pass into (a view of) existence.  
Thereby one not relying on duality is  
liberated*

As explained in Gyaltsab Je's commentary, these verses are refutations to the objections posed by the lower Buddhist schools. One must understand how the objections are raised and how they are refuted. The lower Buddhist schools say that if the Prasangika school presents cause and effect as non-inherently existents then that would imply the complete annihilation of cause and effect. In response to that, as indicated in these verses, the Prasangika say, 'As we do not assert the annihilation of cause and effect we do not hold a view of nihilism.

'We do not adhere to a nihilistic view because an effect arising from causes is established by the valid cognition that asserts conventionality. We firmly establish cause and effect through the example of a seed producing a sprout.' The main point of the Prasangika is that while

cause and effect lack even an atom of inherent existence, they definitely do not lack existence altogether. That is because cause and effect can be asserted conventionally by a valid cognition that establishes conventional existence. Any ordinary person can establish the truth of a sprout being produced from a seed; one does not need to use much reasoning or logic to understand that! The fact that an effect is produced by a cause is established through convention, and thus it is merely labelled or imputed by conception.

Furthermore, as Gyaltsab's commentary explains, while the Prasangika refute the inherent existence of cause and effect, they are not denying the actual existence of cause and effect. Thus, they say, 'We don't adhere to the view of nihilism. Furthermore, we do not adhere to the view of eternalism either, because although we refute the inherent establishment of cause and effect, we do not negate the mere conceptual establishment of cause and effect. Cause and effect do exist but they do not exist inherently, thus we do not adhere to the view of eternalism. What we do adhere to is a view that is free from both extremes, a view of non-duality. And it is only by relying on this view that one is liberated.'

Having gone over the explanation, the meaning of words of the verses should become clearer.

### 2.1.2.3.1.4. Illustrative example

The three subdivisions of this category are:

- 2.1.2.3.1.4.1. Example for realising and not realising the reality of things
- 2.1.2.3.1.4.2. Refuting inherently existent aggregates
- 2.1.2.3.1.4.3. No liberation from cyclic existence if views of existence and non-existence are not abandoned

#### 2.1.2.3.1.4.1. Example for realising and not realising the reality of things

52. *A form seen from a distance  
Is seen clearly by those nearby.  
If a mirage were water,  
Why is water not seen by those nearby?*
53. *The way this world is seen  
As real by those afar  
Is not so seen by those nearby  
For whom it is signless like a mirage.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary, if a mirage was actually water there, then the perception of water would not alter with distance. In other words, if the mirage was in fact water, then someone close by would also see it as water. Indeed, any physical form that cannot be seen clearly from a distance will be much clearer when you come closer to it.

Just like a person who sees a mirage from a distance and believes that there is water, an ordinary being who is far from seeing emptiness will view the world as being inherently or ultimately established. A person who perceives a mirage and doesn't realise that it is a mirage, believes that there is water in the distance (even though there is no water there). Likewise an ordinary being who does not see ultimate reality, sees things as being inherently established. Just as something can be seen clearly when we are close to the object, so too if things did exist inherently then they would have to be seen as such when observed closely. However when arya beings,

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who have the direct realisation of emptiness, perceive phenomena, they perceive phenomena as lacking any inherent existence. If phenomena were to be inherently established, then the arya beings would have to see them in that way. But arya beings do not see any phenomena as being inherently established.

This explanation should be quite clear. However, the illustration indicates that a person seeing a mirage believes that there is water in the distance, because they don't realise that it is mirage. They do not understand that they are seeing a mirage, and for that reason when they see water they believe that there is in fact water there. Using that analogy, when ordinary beings who have not yet gained the realisation of emptiness, perceive phenomena, they perceive phenomena to be ultimately or inherently established. That is because they do not have the understanding of emptiness, and therefore they lack the knowledge of how things actually exist.

Referring back to the analogy, just as someone who is close to an object would see the object very clearly, an arya being who is single-pointedly focused on emptiness, perceives the ultimate reality of that phenomenon. As such, for that noble being in meditative equipoise, let alone an appearance of an inherent object, there is not even the appearance of any conventional existence. As mentioned in previous sessions, the only thing that appears to the wisdom of an arya being in meditative equipoise that is focused on emptiness is emptiness itself. Thus as mentioned in Gyaltsab's commentary, for that arya being there is no appearance whatsoever of any distinction of male or female, good or bad, nor the distinction of any other kind of conventional phenomena. That is because they are focused single-pointedly on the ultimate reality of phenomena, which is emptiness, and thus they only perceive emptiness.

Just like someone who does not see any water when they come close to where they saw a mirage, an arya being who is in meditative equipoise focussing single-pointedly on emptiness does not see any truly existent phenomena. If there was water there then you would have to see it when you came closer to it, but the fact is when you come closer to a mirage you cannot see any water. Likewise if conventional phenomena were to be established as existing truly, ultimately or inherently, then the wisdom realising emptiness of an arya being in meditative equipoise would have to perceive it. But, as explained in the teachings, which I have presented many times before, for any arya being in meditative equipoise on emptiness, there are no other perceptions or appearances apart from emptiness itself.

To re-emphasise this point that I have mentioned many times before, for the wisdom realising emptiness of an arya being in meditative equipoise all three dualistic appearances completely subside, i.e. there is no perception of true existence, there is no perception of any conventional phenomena and there is no perception of object and subject being separate. Therefore none of the three modes of dualistic appearance are present for the wisdom realising emptiness of an arya being in meditative equipoise. That is because the only thing perceived by that arya being's meditative wisdom is emptiness itself.

As mentioned previously, conventional phenomena do not appear to an arya being in meditative equipoise, due to their single pointed focus and complete absorption in emptiness itself. Of course to fully understand how that perception actually works, one would have to gain the actual realisation of emptiness oneself, so I could not assume that you have the full understanding. Nevertheless, as I have explained it over a hundred times before, I expect you to at least have the understanding about the manner of how emptiness is realised, and how gaining the realisation of emptiness is essential. A proper basic understanding will lead you to the point of gaining the unmistakable and profound understanding of emptiness when meditating on emptiness.

As I also emphasise regularly, when we engage in meditation practice, it is important that we try to overcome the notion that the object of our focus is something that is completely separate from our own mind that is perceiving it. Meditation practice will be more effective if we try to adopt an affinity with unifying the subject and object, and generate the sense of the mind focusing on the object and the object itself as one. This also brings to light the point which was emphasised in the mahamudra teaching, where the subject and object have to be seen as being one and inseparable. Familiarity with this meditation practice prepares us for gaining the actual realisation of emptiness, where one is actually free from the duality of seeing object and subject as being separate. In order to gain that actual realisation one needs prepare through the regular practice of meditation now.

I have also explained that at every level in meditation practice, one should go beyond focusing on the actual external physical object. The focal object is not to be a physical object but rather a mental image of that object. Initially one may conceptualise a mental image and focus on that, and gradually one will gain the sense of object and subject being inseparable.

Also, even though the sadhana on deity-yoga presents the self-generation by visualising oneself as the deity, we beginners may not actually be able to do that easily. To maintain a focus on oneself as the actual deity, getting a clear image and generating divine pride within oneself, is rather difficult. Therefore it seems more fitting to focus on a mental image of the deity within one's own heart and familiarise ourselves with that mental image; gradually developing the unity of the deity within one's own heart and oneself. That seems to be the practical method for developing divine pride.

Of course at the beginner's level in the generation stage, we are focussing on a conceptualised mental image. In reference to the generation stage practice, Kirti's commentary on tantra explains that the focus of a meditation on the deity is initially based upon a conceptualised mental image. Therefore we need to focus on a conceptual image and as we progress further we will gain more clarity.

The practice of generating oneself as a deity and focusing on that in one's meditation is the ultimate method for developing concentration. One may question whether a concentration developed by focusing on a conceptualised image is a proper technique. However, for example, when one is meditating to overcome attachment, one of

the prescribed meditations is to see the surrounding area as being filled with skeletons. That image is actually conjured by our conception and bears no relation to reality, as the surrounding area is of course not filled with skeletons.

But imagining the surrounding area being filled with skeletons is specifically prescribed as one of the objects for developing mental stabilisation or concentration, and therefore is not a wrong consciousness. It is clear that it is a mental image with which one develops an affinity, and which is a very effective perception to overcome the delusions in one's mind, specifically attachment. Thus it is prescribed as an object for developing concentration. One needs to understand that just because an object is a conceptualised image it doesn't necessarily mean that it is invalid.

#### 2.1.2.3.1.4.2. Refuting inherently existent aggregates

54. *Just as a mirage is seemingly water  
But not water and does not in fact exist (as  
water),  
So the aggregates are seemingly a self  
But not a self and do not exist in fact.*

As explained in Gyaltsab Je's commentary, just as the water in a mirage is seemingly water and when investigated is found not to be water, so too the aggregates are not inherently existent. Although they appear to be like an inherently established self, they are in fact not a self.

This explanation is quite clear. In the mirage analogy, although there appears to be water, it can be established that in reality there is no water to be found. Likewise even though the aggregates appear to be established inherently, in reality the aggregates lack any inherent existence.

On another level, just as non-existent water is perceived to exist in a mirage, likewise for ordinary beings, who have not gained even the conceptual understanding of emptiness, there is an appearance of inherent existence, and an adherence to the belief of inherently established phenomena.

#### 2.1.2.3.1.4.3. No liberation from cyclic existence if views of existence and non-existence are not abandoned

The first of the verses corresponding to this outline reads:

55. *Having thought a mirage to be water  
And then having gone there,  
Someone would just be stupid to surmise,  
"That water does not exist"*

Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary that having perceived a mirage, and believing that there is water there, when some people actually go to the site where they thought there was water, they start thinking, 'There is no water here now. So where is the water that I saw before?' Thinking in that way would be definitely considered to be foolish, because there was no water to begin with. It is not as if the water seen from a distance has now disappeared. So, thinking that it has actually disappeared would be quite foolish.

Just as with this analogy, perceiving our contaminated aggregates as having inherent existence previously, but lacking it when analysed, would be a mind of ignorance.

It would be a clear sign of being ignorant about ultimate reality or suchness. Liberation from cyclic existence is not possible for anyone who is ignorant about ultimate reality.

The point being made here is that when one identifies the object of negation of any phenomena, one is not negating something that exists. Rather, the object of negation is non-existent and has never existed previously. That has to be understood.

The next verse relates to the point of seeing things as existing either inherently or not existing at all:

56. *One who conceives of the mirage-like world  
That it does or does not exist  
Is consequently ignorant.  
When there is ignorance, one is not liberated*

Here one needs to understand that the text is emphasising this point again and again, which is that without the realisation of emptiness one cannot obtain any of the states of liberation, i.e. without the realisation of emptiness neither the hearer's and solitary realiser's self liberation nor the state of enlightenment can be achieved. Thus, even hearers and solitary realisers need to gain the realisation of emptiness in order to obtain liberation.

It is also good to relate the perception of inherent existence by ordinary beings to our own perceptions. When we perceive, for example, a very close friend, we have this total conviction that this individual exists from their own side. We apprehend this very vivid appearance of the friend as existing entirely from its own side. This is true for anything that we actually relate to. There is this natural perception and apprehension of all phenomena as being inherently established, and existing from their own side.

We could say that while Melbourne lacks rain, there is no lack of the rain of delusion within oneself, particularly the perception of inherent existence. We may not have sufficient conducive conditions, but we have plenty of conditions that are not conducive for us. The point to understand is that all our difficulties and problems arise because of having too many conditions that are not conducive for us, namely the perceptions of inherent existence.

That misperception and misapprehension that we have of things and events as being inherently existent, or inherently established, causes delusions such as attachment and anger to arise strongly within ourselves. As soon as we relate to a friend and the qualities that we attribute to them as being inherently existent, the stronger they appear to be from their own side. The stronger the exaggeration of those qualities and attributes in our mind, the stronger the attachment that we have for them. Of course as ordinary beings we are not able to really stop the appearance of inherent existence, but what we can do is to remind ourselves that even though they appear to be inherently established or existent, the fact remains that the attributes and qualities don't exist from their own side. Whatever attributes one sees in a friend, they are not inherently established. By thinking in that way the level of attachment towards the friend will naturally reduce.

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Likewise in relation to those that one feels little bit hostile towards, if one sees that their faults so forth do not exist inherently, even though they appear to be inherently existent, that notion then will also reduce anger towards that person. In this way we can see that the conceptual understanding of, not mention the actual realisation of, emptiness will definitely help to reduce strong negative emotions, such as attachment and anger. To that extent it definitely can benefit our life. I regularly emphasise that it is important to think about this point.

As we study the text, and its explanation of emptiness, it is important to remind ourselves why emptiness is such an important topic, and how it actually serves as the means to overcome the delusions. As the teachings mention, the direct perception of emptiness is the direct antidote for overcoming all delusions. So if one begins to relate that to our own perceptions, and see how through changing that perception actually helps to reduce attachment or anger, then we can begin to see how actual realisation of emptiness serves as an antidote for overcoming all delusions.

A point to really establish and understand is that the attractive attributes of an object do exist, so one does not deny the actual existence of those attractive attributes. Rather, what one is refuting is the exaggerated attractive attributes of the object that one perceives. Thus attractive attributes do exist, but the exaggerated perception of those attributes does not exist. This is a very, very important point to distinguish and understand.

Attachment arises in relation to the exaggerated attractive attributes that one places upon the object. So when one gets around to the understanding that the exaggerated attributes that one perceives, which cause attachment to arise, do not in fact exist, then that understanding will definitely reduce attachment to the object. In relation to the understanding of emptiness, one relates to the object as lacking inherently established attractive attributes. There are relative or conventional attractive attributes, but ultimately they don't exist inherently.

If one can actually apply an antidote to overcome seeing the object as being overly attractive, then that level of practice would be really incredible way to deal with overcoming attachment.

Just as the appealing exaggerated attractive attributes of an object do not exist inherently, so too the unattractive attributes of an object that one feels hostile towards do not exist inherently. What appear to be exceedingly unattractive attributes do not exist in the way that they appear to exist.

When we see how it is faulty perception that causes the delusion to arise, and that this faulty perception is based upon the actual grasping at an inherently existent self, then we can see the truth in the statement that all forms of delusions arise from the root delusion of grasping at the conception of a self.

In attempting to overcome attachment to an object, what one is attempting to oppose is the attractiveness that is superimposed by incorrect attention. That is what one has to oppose, and in that way one actually can overcome attachment to the object.

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