
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

ཨ་མ་རྒྱལ་པོ་ལྷན་དུ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་འཇམ་དཔལ་གྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ།།

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With the motivation of the refuge and bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited, we can do the meditation practice. (*meditation*)

It would be highly beneficial to incorporate some time for meditation into your daily life, just as we have attempted to do just now. The approach to the practice is to take it slowly, and then you will definitely enjoy the fruit. If one attempts to push too hard, that's when the wind disease called *lung* can arise, [i.e. mental fatigue and stress-related illness.]

2.1.2.3.2. Absence of the fallacy of thereby falling to the view of annihilation

This heading relates to refuting the **objection raised by the lower Buddhist schools**¹ where they say to the Prasangika, 'As you don't accept inherent existence, then that implies that you have fallen to the view of annihilation'. The refutation comes under three subdivisions

2.1.2.3.2.1. Necessity of realising non-duality to attain liberation

2.1.2.3.2.2. Flinging the absurd consequence that a realisation of what is free of the extreme views existence and non-existence

2.1.2.3.2.3. Absence of the fault of annihilation in realising the non-conceptual

2.1.2.3.2.1. Necessity of realising non-duality to attain liberation

The point made in this heading is that in order to attain liberation one needs to adopt the view that is free from both extremes—the extreme of existence or eternalism, and the extreme of non-existence or nihilism. The view that is free of both extremes is the view held by the highest Buddhist school; the Prasangika-Madhyamika [i.e. the Consequentialist-Middle Way] School.

The verse relating to this outline is:

57. *A follower of non-existence goes to bad transmigrations,
And a follower of existence goes to happy transmigrations.
Through correct and true knowledge
One does not rely on dualism and becomes liberated.*

The meaning of this verse is quite easy to understand. As Gyalsab Je's commentary explains, by denying the existence of cause and effect, beings will fall into bad transmigrations, i.e. lower rebirth. Denying the infallibility of cause and effect implies denying the fact by

engaging in virtuous karma one will experience positive results, and by engaging in negativity one will incur negative results. We need to relate this presentation to ourselves; making sure that we have a firm acceptance of the fact that creating positive deeds will create positive results, and engaging in negative deeds will create negative results. We need to be really mindful of this.

Adhering to the infallibility of karmic cause and effect is really important. In many teachings the previous masters have explained that conviction in the infallibility of karma is the most essential part of one's practice. Without a strong conviction in the infallibility of karma we will not be inclined to engage in virtue and shun negativity. Merely repeating the words 'we accept that by creating positive deeds one will accumulate positive results, and by engaging in negativity one will incur negative results', even with some degree of belief is not sufficient. Along with that belief we need to develop a firm conviction. When we have a strong conviction in karma, that indeed will prevent one from engaging in any negative deed and willingly adopt virtuous deeds.

Even if, through habituation or past negative imprints, we were to engage in a negative deed, we would not leave it idle. Rather, immediately afterwards, we will engage in a purification practice with a strong regret for having engaged in negative actions. Feeling regret is one of the primary opponent powers that allow us to actually purify negative karma. So, when someone with a strong conviction in karma finds themselves engaging in negativity, they will immediately feel regret, knowing that the negative deed will bring about negative consequences in the future. They will not remain idle but will engage in a purification practice right away. Without conviction in karma, we may not see the necessity for engaging in purification practice. Thus, it is really important to develop the conviction in karma.

The text is not referring to the denial of karma in general, but more specifically the denial of the cause and effect of karma. In the first line of verse 57, 'A follower of non-existence goes to bad transmigrations', 'non-existence' does not refer to actually denying the existence of karma but to the cause and effect characteristic of karma. In other words it refers to denying that by engaging in negativity one will incur negative results, and that by engaging in virtue one will incur positive results.

Gyalsab Je's commentary explains that the second line of the verse, 'And a follower of existence goes to happy transmigrations', refers to the fact that those who have cultivated a belief or conviction in cause and effect are those who hold the worldly or conventional right view, and through holding that view they will go to a happy transmigration or rebirth.

In this text Nagarjuna has given us a detailed explanation and very profound advice, thus it is essential that we try to integrate it into our own lives. Those who read and study the text will gain real benefit if they actually pay attention to the infallibility of karma, and try to develop a strong conviction in that. With such a conviction in karma then, in the event that we engage in some negativity, by recalling the weight of the negativity, we will immediately feel regret in our heart. The regret would be to the degree of not feeling comfortable going to bed

¹ The lower Buddhist schools are also known as proponents of existence and Realists.

without having done a purification practice. That is something that will definitely occur when you have a strong and firm conviction in karma.

When one has developed a strong conviction in karma, then even if one cannot completely avoid creating negativity, one will be aware of the severity of the consequences and thereby engage in purification practice. Of course, it is sometimes extremely difficult to completely avoid negativity in daily life. But with a strong conviction in the infallibility of karma, then in the event that we engage in some negativity, even if it is done unintentionally, we will develop a strong sense of regret and wish to purify that. Also it is good to remind oneself that in the event that one has somehow been involuntarily compelled or influenced by strong delusion to engage in some negativity, one should not feel too depressed about that, knowing that it can be purified. The one good quality of negativity is that it can be purified, so it is important to remind oneself of that and engage in purification practice when negativities are created.

However one must not use that understanding as an excuse to voluntarily engage in negativity, by thinking that it doesn't matter because it can be purified later. That would be improper and disrespectful to the understanding of karma. Being casual about negativity, thinking, 'Oh, it is OK if I create some negativity, because after all I can purify it', is the wrong attitude to adopt. Rather it is better to use one's understanding of karma to actually engage in purification practice for negativities created in the past, and to avoid further engaging in any form of negativity. In the event that one engages in negativity under the strong influence of delusions, one should not remain idle, rather one must engage in a purification practice, which will bring about a beneficial outcome.

Of course when individuals are completely oblivious to the facts about karma, there is nothing to compel them to engage in purification practices. But we do have faith in karma and its effects, we know that if we were to create negativity we must not leave it unpurified. We understand the need to engage in purification practice. And if we don't actually engage in the practice then what difference is there between us and someone who doesn't recognise negativity for what it is or doesn't know how to purify it? There would be no difference really. This clearly indicates that just knowing about karma is not sufficient if we don't actually adopt the practice of abiding by the law of karma in our life. We need to pay attention to this important point.

Having conviction in karma does not mean just being able to say 'by engaging in positive deeds one will incur positive results, and by engaging in negativity, one will incur negative consequences'. Being able to quote that doesn't necessarily mean that one has conviction in karma. To have conviction in karma means to have a very strong belief in its infallibility, having no doubt that by engaging in positive deeds one will incur positive results, and by engaging in negativity one will incur negative results.

An analogy of the difference between understanding karma and having a conviction in karma is, for example, the difference between having a casual companion and

having a companion in whom one has great trust. When one has great trust in a companion, one has the conviction that they will not mislead or betray you, and that one could entrust one's valuables to them, knowing that their honesty is infallible. Having conviction in karma and its effects, is like having trust in a companion's honesty.

The Tibetan term for karma and its effect is *le-dre* where each syllable has its own connotation. Even though it is quite simple, it is good to get an understanding of it. The syllable *le* means karma or actions, and *dre* is the effect, so jointly it means 'karma and its effects'. Thus when we say 'having conviction in karma and its effects' you will understand that with positive actions karma acts as a positive cause, and the effect will be a positive result of that. Whereas with negativity, karma refers to the negative actions that are the causes and the effects will be negative consequences. So when we refer to karma and its effects it is good to understand the full implication of what that entails.

When we refer to the combination of karma and its effects, it implies the cause and effect both of virtue and non-virtue. Whenever we talk about causes, the very word 'cause' tells us that it is a condition that produces something. Therefore when we refer to virtue as a cause, then we have to understand that means that it will produce a result. So what does it produce? It produces a positive effect. When we refer to negativity as a cause, then again there is the implication that it produces something? So what does it produce? It produces suffering or unpleasant consequences.

So at a personal level, the understanding of karma and effect implies that if one wishes for happiness then one needs to create the causes for happiness, which is virtue. And if one does not wish to experience unhappiness or any type of suffering then one needs to avoid the cause of suffering, which is negativity. That is how we need to apply our understanding of karma and its effects to our own life in order to obtain what we wish for, and avoid what we does not wish for.

Having not only an understanding but a conviction in karma, means that when unpleasant circumstances, such as sickness, occur, one will see that as an indication of the effect of karma ripening. Whenever one has some sort of disease, one will see that as a message that one is experiencing the consequences of negativity, and by seeing it in that light one has a sense of acceptance as well. Thus, we experience less distress and worries in our mind.

Likewise when things are going well and one has sense of joy and happiness, then that is another message: one is experiencing the positive effect of virtue that one has accumulated in the past. In the light of that understanding and conviction in karma, both good times and difficult times will not affect the core of one's being. Rather than causing doubts, one will be able to use difficult circumstances as means to enhance one's practice. In that way it becomes really meaningful. Otherwise, without a very firm conviction in karma, then the slightest external change can totally throw us off from our practice.

As one begins to develop that conviction in karma one will be able to engage in the great practices prescribed by the Kadampa masters, such as the mind training teaching. It is said that one will reach the stage of being glad when one experiences difficulties, and being wary when things are going too well. If one is not really familiar with the practices then being glad when things are not going well, and wary when things are going well may seem to be an absurd way of thinking. However, when one develops a good understanding of, and conviction in karma, one will be able to really embrace this practice. With a profound understanding of karma, one will know that any difficulties that one is experiencing are actually the result of previous karma, and that the negative karma is ripening and thus being used up. So of course one would be glad about that.

Normally, whenever we experience any difficulties in life our immediate reaction is to become upset and angry. So if we find ourselves becoming angry in a situation where there are difficulties, then that means that we have not really understood the implication of why are experiencing those difficulties, which in turn means that we don't accept the difficulties. Accepting difficulties comes from understanding karma; one sees that experiencing difficulty is not such a bad thing because it is the result of karma ripening, and one is actually using up the negative karmic imprints within oneself. Thus one would be glad and happy about experiencing those difficulties.

Whereas when things are going well it is easy to develop attachment to that circumstance, which will actually further harm one's practice, as one's delusions will be increasing. So when things go well a practitioner becomes a little bit wary, and not get too excited and happy about that, because it can become a cause for attachment to arise. Through understanding this one will definitely embrace the practice of willingly taking on hardships and difficulties, and not intentionally try to seek out good situations. One will be wary of attachment and avoid seeking pleasant situations.

As Gyalsab Je explains in his commentary, in verse 57 a *follower of non-existence* refers to an individual who denies karma and its effect. As a consequence, such a being will experience a *bad transmigration* or the lower rebirth. A *follower of existence* refers to someone who has the conviction in karma and its effects, an individual who adheres to the conventional or worldly right view has a *happy transmigration* or higher rebirth. However the follower of existence will still be reborn in samsara and thus will not be liberated from samsara. In other words, although adhering to a worldly right view results in a higher rebirth and being free from lower rebirths, one will still remain in samsara.

In relation to the second two lines 'Through correct and true knowledge, One does not rely on dualism and becomes liberated', Gyalsab Je's commentary explains that liberation is only possible for a being, such as *arya*, who adheres to the view that is free from the extremes of both eternalism and nihilism. That is because they fully understand the ultimate reality of all phenomena. Thus what is being indicated here is that it is only by being free from the dualistic view and adhering to the view that is

free from both extremes, the Middle Way view, one is able to actually obtain liberation, and be completely free from samsara.

To summarise, this verse explains that by merely developing a conviction in karma one will have a happy transmigration or happy rebirth, but will still remain in samsara. Someone who does not have a conviction in karma will create the causes to be reborn in a lower or unfortunate rebirth, referred to in the text as a bad transmigration. Although adhering to the understanding of karma with conviction will enable one to enjoy a higher rebirth, just holding onto that worldly right view is not sufficient to free one from samsara. In order to be free from samsara one needs to adopt the view that is free from both extremes, the view of non-duality. The reason why a noble being is able to free themselves from samsara is because they have developed the view which is free from duality.

2.1.2.3.2.2. Flinging the absurd consequence that a realisation of what is free of the extreme views existence and non-existence

58. *If through correct and true knowledge
(Such wise persons) do not assert existence
and non-existence
And thereby (you think) that they follow
non-existence
Why should they not be followers of
existence?*

As Gyalsab Je's commentary explains, the Prasangika oppose the lower Buddhist schools' objection by posing a rhetorical question and using a line of reasoning that is similar to their reasoning. The Prasangika say, 'You say that we fall into the view of non-existence because we adhere to a view that sees the ultimate reality of all phenomena as denying their inherent existence. So according to you do we also hold the view of existence as well, as we do not assert the non-existence of karma and its effects?'

This refutation is clarified further in the next verse:

59. *If from refuting existence
Non-existence would accrue to them,
Why from refuting non-existence
Would existence not accrue to them?*

As the commentary explains, if you say that *refuting inherent existence* implies that *non-existence would accrue* to the Prasangika, then similarly why would existence not accrue to them as well? It would have to accrue, because they *refute* the *non-existence* of cause and effect. Thus the refutation is made with the a line of reasoning to their objection.

The main point that the Prasangika make is, 'If you object to our view of non-inherent existence of phenomena by saying that it implies non-existence altogether, then according to you, I would be a proponent of *existence*, because I refute the non-existence of causes and its effects. Because I accept the existence of causes and its effects, I would be a proponent of existence according to you .

2.1.2.3.2.3. Absence of the fault of annihilation in realising the non-conceptual

This verse refutes a similar objection:

60. *They implicitly have no nihilistic thesis
And also have no nihilistic behaviour
And due to relying on [the path to]
enlightenment have no nihilistic thought.
Hence how can they be regarded as nihilists?*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary, the **objection by the lower schools** that the Madhyamika adhere to a view of non-existence, or nihilism, is incorrect, because we Madhyamikas never deny the existence of karma and its effects.

The **refutation** is that the objection that the Madhyamikas are nihilists does not apply, 'because we do not deny the existence of karma and its effects. Not only do we not deny the existence of karma and its effects mentally, but verbally you will not find one word implying that we deny the existence of karma and its effects'.

A **further objection from the other schools** is, 'Even though you may not verbally deny the existence of karma and its effects, you seem to indicate by your behaviour that you do in fact deny the existence of karma and its effects'. So they are teasing the Madhyamika a bit.

The **refutation** of that objection is, 'In fact we overcome every adverse and unethical behaviour on the physical level'.

Yet **another objection** is, 'Your ethical behaviour is actually just a pretence in order to acquire fame and wealth from others, but in fact mentally you still adhere to the denial of karma and its effect'.

The **refutation** is, 'Your objection does not apply, because far from adhering to a mind that denies the existence of karma, we adhere to a path that leads one to ultimate state of enlightenment, and to that end we adhere to the infallibility of karma and its effects, which serves as a cause to achieve that ultimate state of enlightenment'.

As Gyaltsab's commentary then concludes, the meaning of these verses is that the objections by the other schools (such as the Vaibhashikas) arise because they hold onto karma and its effects as being inherently and truly existent. Thus, when the Madhyamikas present the view of karma and its effects as being completely empty of inherent existence, that is like a profound initiation for them. However they are not able to fully comprehend it.

2.1.2.3.3. Freedom from extremes as an uncommon feature of Buddhism

The next two verses present the views of the non-Buddhist schools. Those of you who have access to the texts that present some of the views of the non Buddhist schools would be familiar with them.² We can cover some of the views of the Samkhyas, Vaibhashikas, and the Jains in our next session. This was also explained in the teachings on tenets.³

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² See for example *Cutting Through Appearances*, pp. 155-170, *Meditation on Emptiness* pp. 317-333

³ The teachings on tenets given in 2000 are available on the all editions of the CD, *Teachings from Tara Institute*. The topic was also taught in 1985 and 1986.