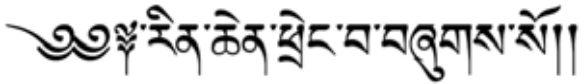


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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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With a proper, good motivation we will engage in the practice of meditation.

It is not compulsory for everyone to lead the chanting, and of course the idea is to practice before you come. You may think you know the tune but without a bit of practice beforehand you may not get the tune exactly right. That is why we practice a lot in the monastery before we actually lead a puja. Some of you may have had a similar experience when you are teaching and you think, 'Oh, I am quite familiar with this topic' so you don't prepare properly. Then when you go to give the teaching it doesn't flow very well. So it seems that is really quite important to prepare for any activity that you engage in.

Another kind of preparation is to develop an appropriate awareness in order to prevent oneself from even the smallest misdeed. The classic analogy, which I have probably presented earlier, is that when you are too focussed on trying to protect yourself from a big dog in the distance, you neglect the small dog that is nearby, which might actually bite you. This analogy shows how we need to be mindful of preventing ourselves from committing even the smallest misdeeds. Through thinking 'Oh, a small misdeed is nothing to worry about', a minor misdeed can have very grave consequences in the future. Any lapse in mindfulness can actually harm us. That is why this analogy is used.

[meditation]

We can set our motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well'. The main purpose of the meditation practice which we did earlier is to develop love and compassion with the technique of giving and taking. This practice of giving and taking is actually a good way to remind oneself that the main purpose of developing love and compassion is that it will create a positive attitude that will be useful in every part of our lives, both now and in the future. That is something that we should keep in mind.

If one were to practise without love and compassion, then that would not be a unique Mahayana practice. One might be able to utter some words or conceptualise something in one's mind, but it will lack the essence. So it is essential that we pay attention to the importance of love and compassion, as that serves as the very foundation of the good qualities in one's mind. The more we attempt to develop love and compassion, the more it will bring us a real sense of joy and peace, and a sense of real comfort.

The students who attended the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings will recall that the opening line of the *Madhyamakavatara* explains how love and compassion is important in the beginning, the middle and the end. It is important to really bring this to mind and incorporate that understanding at the beginning of every practice, such as listening to a teaching.

## 2.1.2.3.4.3. Tangentially refuting the assertions of non-Buddhists

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.2.3.4.3.1. Refuting the Vaisheshikas' assertion of permanent atoms

2.1.2.3.4.3.2. Refuting the Vaishnavas' assertion of a permanent person

2.1.2.3.4.3.1. Refuting the Vaisheshikas' assertion of permanent atoms

The refutation the Vaisheshikas' assertion is covered in the next two verses. Verse 66 reads:

66. *If always changing,  
How are things non-momentary?  
If not changing,  
How can they be altered in fact?*

In his commentary, Gyaltsab Je explains that the Vaisheshikas say that all the earlier refutations were based on the acceptance that things have momentarily changes, and thus the refutations are based on time, i.e. the past, present and future. The faults explained in the refutations arise from accepting that things are inherently existent. 'However', say the Vaisheshikas, 'In our system those faults will not occur, because we assert subtle atoms as being inherently permanent'. To that our Prasangika system poses these two questions: Do things have momentary change? and Do they lack momentary change?

The Prasangika say that if the first is accepted, i.e. that there is momentary change, then how could the subtlest atom not be transitory? How could it change from moment to moment and at the same time be a permanent phenomenon? It cannot, because it changes momentarily. This is refers to the first two lines of the verse, 'If always changing, How are things non-momentary?' The Prasangika objection is, 'If you say that the subtlest atom changes momentarily then that contradicts your assertion that the subtlest atom is permanent. If there is momentary change then that ends up as constant change, and something that changes constantly cannot be permanent'.

The second half of verse 66 presents the response to the second question, i.e. do they lack momentary change? The objection raised by the Prasangika is that if things don't change momentarily then they could not change at all, thus the natural occurrence of change, such as from youth to old age and so forth would not be possible. If there were to be permanence on a momentary level then there could be no change over a long period of time, which goes against the obvious natural changes over time.

The main point is that the Vaisheshikas assert that the subtlest atom of a functional thing is permanent. To refute this our own Prasangika system poses this question: Does the subtlest atom change on a momentary basis or not? If it changes on a momentary basis then you could not call it a permanent thing because it does change, which counters the assertion that there can be a functional thing that is permanent. However, if functional things do not change momentarily, then there could be no change on any other level.

Hence, as the last two lines of verse 66 state, 'If not changing, How can they be altered in fact?' This means that if things were based on permanent subtle atoms which do not change, then how could the change such as from youth to old age and so forth occur. This is how the Vaisheshikas' assertion is refuted.

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So the assertion of the Vaisheshika is reduced to absurdity in both cases. In the first case, if subtlest atom does change momentarily then their assertion that it is a permanent thing is absurd, because if it is permanent then that implies that it does not change. Therefore asserting that the subtlest atom or any functional thing is a permanent thing is absurd.

In the second case, i.e. that subtlest atom does not change momentarily, the absurdity is that this goes against nature. The obvious natural transformation from young child, to youth, to old age could not occur if there was no change. So this absurdity is based on the obvious changes that do take place. Therefore the main point in refuting the Vaisheshika assertion is to establish our own Prasangika point of view that all functional things, even at the subtlest atomic level, are impermanent, with momentary changes taking place at every instant.

When presented with these two views—the Vaisheshikas' assertion that the subtlest atom is permanent, and our own system's presentation that the subtlest atom is impermanent—can you comprehend how the subtlest atom isn't permanent? If someone were to claim that functional things are permanent then we need to be able to present logical reasons showing why a clock, for example, cannot be permanent. That is the main thing that we need to understand.

In relation to these two different views, the perception that apprehends the subtlest atom as being permanent would be a mistaken or faulty perception, and whereas the perception that apprehends the subtlest atom as being impermanent is a valid perception. One needs able to make this distinction between these two modes of perception of phenomena.

Nagarjuna clarified this distinction between faulty perceptions and valid perceptions. When we see how Nagarjuna presented these very clear distinctions then we can develop a genuine admiration for Nagarjuna's work, and an appreciation of his kindness in working so hard to make his presentation so very clear, through his use of logical reasons.

Without the logical reasons that Nagarjuna presented we would not be able refute someone who comes up with the assertion that the subtlest atoms are permanent. Without having a reason to contradict that view we might actually end up actually accepting and agreeing with that view! So the reasoning presented by Nagarjuna gives us a very sound basis with which to refute that sort of distorted view.

Thus the correct view and the valid perception is gaining the understanding that is necessary to perceive the subtlest atom as being impermanent, which means that it has the nature of being transitory, changing from moment to moment. When we develop that valid, correct perception, we actually accumulate great merit. Just gaining the understanding of how subtlest atom is of a transitory nature, changing from moment to moment, is the basis for great virtue.

On a personal level, gaining the correct understanding and recognising the subtlest atom as being impermanent, and relating that to oneself, means understanding that as one is merely an accumulation of subtle atoms, one is therefore in the nature of being transitory, and thus one changes from moment to moment.

Reflecting upon one's own transitory nature rather than outer circumstances and atoms transforms one's mind, and therefore serves a great purpose. So much of our negative unhappy states of mind, our anger and attachment, are very much related to the external changes that we experience.

Without an understanding of how external phenomena are of a transitory nature we will experience great sorrow, or anger and negative states of mind, when these changes occur. However when one gains the understanding of the impermanence and transitory nature of both oneself and external phenomena, it will help to maintain equilibrium in one's mind. Then one will not be so affected by external changes.

In order to incorporate the teachings of this text into our practice and enhance our understanding of impermanence, it is essential that we combine it with the teachings of the Lam Rim, in particular the topic of death and impermanence. As the Lam Rim teachings explain, the fault of not engaging in the practice of Dharma rests with not recollecting the impermanent nature of both oneself and the surrounding events. So an understanding of death and impermanence is a really great impetus to practise the Dharma in order to accumulate more virtue.

On the surface the Lam Rim teaching may seem to be quite different to what is being presented here, however the two presentations really come down to the same thing. Although Lam Rim presentation focuses on transitory nature of oneself in relation to death, its basis is that things are actually of a transitory nature even at the subtlest level. Thus it is essential to really reflect again and again on the disadvantages or faults of not recollecting death and impermanence, and the great advantages or benefits of recollecting death and impermanence. Then we will find from our own experience that a lot of our attachment is really based on immediate goals and gratification of this life only, and because of that attachment to immediate gratification, we incur lot of negativities. If we were reflect upon our own impending death, then that will definitely reduce strong attachment to this life and its worldly activities.

Verse 66 is a refutation of the assertion of the non-Buddhist Vaisheshikas that subtlest atoms are permanent. But it is not enough to just leave it as a logical refutation. Rather we need to actually incorporate that understanding in our practice in order to reduce negativity and engage in virtue. The understanding gained from studying the text has then served its real purpose. That is the main point I am emphasising.

Turning now to the second verse of this subdivision:

*67. Do they become momentary  
Through partial or complete disintegration?  
Because an inequality is not apprehended,  
This momentariness cannot be admitted  
either way.*

Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary that if, out of the fear of the consequences following from the objections raised in verse 66, the Vaisheshikas were to assert that there is a natural momentary change, then the question that arises is: 'Earlier, you asserted that that things are permanent but their states are impermanent, so therefore does that apply to all aspects of a thing or only one part, or some parts of it?'

More fully the question put to the Vaisheshikas is: 'In asserting that things are permanent but their states are impermanent, is it only one aspect of the thing that changes or do all the aspects of the thing change? Basically, do you say something is impermanent because one part of it is disintegrating, or is it impermanent because all parts of the thing are disintegrating? Both alternatives defy logic and are therefore absurd'.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the objection to their assertion in this way: it is absurd to assert that only one part of a thing disintegrates but that other parts don't change at all. What is being indicated is that the Vaisheshikas' are not able to posit momentary change in the continuum of a thing, because they consider change as being the complete disintegration of the object. Their view is more in accordance with an ordinary person seeing change when something breaks or completely disintegrates and ceases to exist. Thus, the basis on which the Vaisheshika assert change is that if something changes, then it completely disintegrates and no longer exists, which of course is an absurdity. So the point being presented here is that the Vaisheshikas are unable to comprehend the momentary change of phenomena. They are unable to accept that from the very next moment a functional thing is produced, momentary change begins to take place.

2.1.2.3.4.3.2. *Refuting the Vaishnavas' assertion of a permanent person*

68. *If momentary, then it becomes entirely non-existent;*

*Hence how could it be old?*

*Also if non-momentary, it is constant;*

*Hence how could it be old?*

As Gyaltsab's commentary explains, the Vaishnavas say 'The earlier objections to the assertions of the Vaisheshikas do not apply to me, because I assert that a person is entirely permanent from the beginning, through the middle, and to the end. Thus a person is permanent and already old from the very beginning'. This refers to the objection that was raised in response to the Vaisheshika assertion that a permanent thing can have a state of impermanence. The Vaishnavas are saying, 'We don't make that assertion, so your objections don't apply to us'.

The question that arises from that is this: Is a person a functional thing or not? If it is a functional thing then that implies that the person is subject to momentary change and is thus impermanent. And if it is momentary and impermanent then the very next moment after it is produced it will have to begin to disintegrate.

The first two lines of verse 68 posit this objection to the Vaishnavas' assertion: how could a permanent person be old from the beginning? Are they functional thing or not? If it is a functional thing then there is momentary change, and if there is momentary change then how can it be old before it even begins the process of momentary disintegration? That is the first objection.

The last two lines pose this objection: If something is a permanent thing that cannot change, then how can it actually also be considered as old? The very connotation of 'old' implies that it has changed from an earlier state to its present old state. So the absurdity being pointed out is if it something were to be permanent and unchanging, then it couldn't be considered as being old.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains that you could not possibly posit a permanent thing as being old, because permanence implies that something is exactly the same as it was previously. So it could not be considered old because no change has taken place.

The main objection to the Vaishnavas' assertion is that it is not possible for a person to be permanent and old. How could a person possibly be permanent and at the same time be old? So the objection points out the fundamental contradiction of their own assertion. Common sense alone

tells us that being old implies maturing over time, that there has been some change that has occurred over time. Even on our level we can understand the absurdity of the Vaishnavas' view.

To use a specific illustration, compare the person who was present in the morning and with the same person later on in the day. Has the later person become older than the person of the morning? If they have become older then that implies they cannot be permanent. If they were to be permanent then they could not become older, and they would have to be exactly the same, i.e. there could be absolutely no change from the person in the morning to the person in the evening.

#### 2.1.2.3.4.4. Refuting inherently existent moments

This has four subdivisions:

2.1.2.3.4.4.1. All moments as having parts

2.1.2.3.4.4.2. Refuting inherent existence of what has parts

2.1.2.3.4.4.3. Refuting inherently existent things through the reason of their not being one or many

2.1.2.3.4.4.4. Reason for not holding the world as having an end

2.1.2.3.4.4.1. *All moments as having parts*

Inherently existent moments are refuted when all moments, including the subtlest moment, are understood as having parts. In earlier teachings I explained the different Buddhist schools' views on partless particles. Within the four Buddhist schools, the Sautrantika and Vaibhashika systems assert partless particles and partless moments; but from the higher Buddhist schools' points of view, including our Prasangika system, all moments and particles have parts. When we begin to understand how each moment actually has parts, then it becomes easier for us to understand that there is not one moment that could exist inherently. One needs to incorporate that understanding in the refutation of inherent existence. We have also covered refuting inherent existence using the reason that they are neither one nor many.

Although we have covered the topic of the following verses in the past, nevertheless we will go through the explanation given in the text.

The relevant verse to this subdivision reads:

69. *Just as a moment has an end, so a beginning  
And a middle must be considered.*

*Thus due to this triple nature of a moment,  
There is no momentary abiding of the world.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, a moment is produced, it stays and disintegrates, and thus it is impermanent. However if you [who assert inherent existence] say 'A part of a moment does exist inherently', then *just as you would accept a moment having an end*, likewise you have to accept *a beginning and a middle* of a moment too, because partless things do not exist. Thus, all living things and the environment of the *world* cannot inherently *abide even for a moment*, because every part of its moments has *this triple nature of a moment*. In relation to the characteristics of all products, every moment has a production, staying and disintegrating. While accepting this, to say that a moment is inherently existent is contradictory.

The next session is discussion and the week after that will be the exam.

The Tibetan community has been asked to complete one hundred million recitations of the Tara Praises and the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra for the long life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Those of you who have the wish and time

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could contribute to this by doing 100,000 or whatever you can do. You can tell me how many you recite so we can forward it to the Tibetan Government for inclusion in the total. Of course if you do not have the time or inclination to do it, then that is fine.

*Question: Is it the long or condensed version of the Tara Praises?*

Normally it is the long version, but if you were to attempt to do 10,000 in one day then you would do the short version. The short 6-line praise to Tara came about when Tara appeared in a vision to Atisha, and advised him to do 10,000 Tara praises a day for his long life. Atisha wondered how he could manage to complete 10,000 Tara praises in one day, and so he asked Tara how he could achieve that. That is when Tara presented Atisha with the short version.

These practices are very meaningful for those who are able to do them. Doing practices for the long life of the guru is one of the best ways to work for one's own long life. When we do the practice we accumulate virtue and it is that accumulated virtue and merit that we dedicate to the long life of the guru which, because of our connection with him, will definitely benefit the guru's long life as well.

It is an incredibly great fortune to be actually able to see His Holiness in human form as a monk. Having this astonishing opportunity is of course due to our own merit. So engaging in the accumulation of further merit allows us to have a further opportunity to meet with the guru, and for the guru to remain and so forth.

There is a story about how, when many people lined up to see his Holiness, there was one Tibetan who later asked, 'Where was the Dalai Lama? I didn't see him'. Even though His Holiness had actually passed by, this man didn't have the fortune to see him. There are also stories about people going to Lhasa but not seeing the famous Jo-wo statue of Shakyamuni Buddha. The implication is that if one does not have the merit one will not be able to see it, even if it is actually present. Normally when I posit the view that one has the ability to see a great being according to one's merit, the other geshe debate that.

There is also the account of the great Indian master Asanga, who went into retreat for nine years specifically to accomplish the ability to have a vision of Maitreya. But after nine years he had not been able to see Maitreya. When he came out of the retreat he saw an old dog with a maggot infested wound. Asanga related how incredible compassion arose when he saw that maggot infested wound and he wanted to save the dog.

So he considered how he could remove the maggots. If he just removed them then the maggots would perish, so he was in a bit of a dilemma. With the great compassion he found the solution to save both the maggots and the dog, which was to cut off some of his own flesh from his leg and place the maggots on that flesh. To do this he used his tongue to lift the maggots off the wound. In this way the maggots would survive and the dog would be healed. As he did that he closed his eyes because it was such a disgusting task, and as he opened his eyes there was Maitreya in front of him. Asanga exclaimed, 'Finally you have come! Out of compassion for me, you have actually come!' Maitreya replied 'I was always present and near you!!', indicating that it was due to the lack of a ripened mind that Asanga was not able to see him. It was Asanga's love and compassion that ripened his mind so that all obscurations to seeing Maitreya were removed.

Asanga was so excited that he wanted to share his vision of Maitreya with others, so he lifted Maitreya onto his back and walked around town saying, 'This wondrous thing has happened! Come and see Maitreya'. But people thought he was crazy because all they saw on his back was the dog. The point of the story is that when we do our normal practices we can assume that the buddhas are definitely present. The only reason we don't see them is because of our obscurations. But even though we are not able to see the buddhas directly, we will definitely benefit if we acknowledge that they are present when we do our practice.

This also relates to taking refuge. Regardless of whether one is able to clearly envision the objects of refuge or not, by virtue of the mere fact of taking refuge, the Three Jewels are definitely present. There is no need to doubt whether the objects of refuge, the Three Jewels, are present.

*Transcribed from tape by Su Lan Foo  
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