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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇིགས་ཀྱི་ཆེན་པོའི་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

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Maintaining the motivation from the refuge and bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited, we will now engage in our meditation practice. [Meditation]

We can set the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

Rather than leaving the motivation as mere words, if we could actually generate that thought and determination in our mind, even for a few minutes, then through that familiarity, we will slowly be able to put it into practice. In that way one can become a good Dharma practitioner by integrating the practice into one's personal life, rather than just explaining it to others.

The chant leader needs to be aware that with some chants there may be times where beginning the chant with the first word of the verse or stanza will interfere with the balance between the number of words and the entire melody. So in order to maintain the synchronisation of words and melody the chant leader traditionally starts with an 'ohhhhhh...'. However beginning the chant with the first word seems to work with the verse we use in the meditation. [Geshe-la chants] That is how it would traditionally be chanted.

## 2.2.2.2. SELFLESSNESS OF OTHER PHENOMENA

### 2.2.2.2.1. Refuting an inherently existent form aggregate

#### 2.2.2.2.1.3. Applying the refutation to other phenomena

##### 2.2.2.2.1.3.2 Sources for the emptiness of inherent existence

In this section the four sub-divisions are:

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.1 All phenomena as empty of inherent existence

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.2 Explanation

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.3 Stating proofs

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.4 No fault of falling into a view of annihilation

#### 2.2.2.2.1.3.2.2 Explanation

The corresponding verse reads:

94. *Earth, water, fire and wind  
Do not have a chance  
In the face of that indemonstrable  
consciousness  
Complete Lord over the limitless.*

In studying this text it is really worthwhile to pay attention to the structure of the outlines, and the way in which each verse relates to its heading. At a glance, some verses may seem repetitive, but each is tackling the different subtle doubts that others may have. Nagarjuna's presentation is particularly conducive for beginners like

us, so it is good to remember Nagarjuna kindness in doing that.

In this verse, *consciousness* refers to the consciousness of an arya being in meditative equipoise directly realising emptiness, which was explained in detail last week. It is *indemonstrable* in the sense that it cannot really be described to others. For example, if you describe a lump of molasses as 'sweet', you are not able to describe the actual experience of that sweetness. Another person would have to taste it to know what the experience of sweetness is like. It is in that sense that the consciousness directly realising emptiness is said to be indemonstrable.

In his commentary, Gyaltzab Je explains the verse thus:

To that consciousness, which knows itself but is indemonstrable to others, and which is the complete lord over limitless existence, earth, water, fire and wind do not find any location in the face of its perception, because it doesn't perceive them in the slightest.

As was explained in our last session, the particular consciousness (which is the wisdom realising emptiness directly by an arya being in meditative equipoise) is indemonstrable, in that it cannot be explained with words and is not fathomable by other ordinary consciousnesses. To that indemonstrable consciousness, elements such as *earth, water, fire and wind do not find any location*, meaning that they cease to exist. As previously explained, seeing the ultimate reality of phenomena means not seeing them conventionally. Therefore conventional existence in the perception of an arya being in meditative equipoise is the object of negation.

The verse from Nagarjuna that we chant before the teaching includes a salutation to the Buddha explaining that his mind is free from all fabrications.<sup>1</sup> *Without distinction*, relates to having removed all fabrications, while *without identity* refers to the state of abiding in the peace of nirvana. Both of those terms actually present emptiness.

The main point of this presentation is to identify the particular consciousness of an arya being who is in the meditative equipoise that directly perceives emptiness. For that consciousness all fabrications cease, and all conventional appearances also cease. Therefore not seeing conventional existence or conventional phenomena is said to be the ultimate seeing, or the seeing of emptiness. These are points that we need to really understand.

As mentioned previously, in the face of the perception of an arya being who is in meditative equipoise, the conventional appearance is seen to as non-existent. And if conventionality was to appear, then that would be the object of negation. In directly realising emptiness the arya being has completely negated all the objects of negation, so therefore there is no appearance of conventionality.

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<sup>1</sup> I prostrate to the perfect Buddha  
The best of teachers, who taught that  
Whatever is dependently arisen  
Is unceasing, unborn, unannihilated, not permanent,  
Not coming not going,  
Without distinction, without identity  
And free from conceptual obstruction.

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This explanation also relates to the following verse, which reads:

95. *Here long and short, subtle and coarse,  
Virtue and non-virtue,  
And here names and forms  
All are ceased.*

This verse is referring to all aspects of form or conventional existence. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

In the face of the perception of an arya who is in meditative equipoise [directly perceiving emptiness], long and short thick and thin virtue and non-virtue, name and forms have all ceased and are thus empty of inherent existence...

In brief all composite or compounded things are assumed to be empty of inherent existence. Gyaltsab Je then explains why they are empty of inherent existence:

...because if they were established inherently then they would have to be ultimate reality, and thus would have to be perceived in meditative equipoise.

This implies that because they are not perceived in meditative equipoise, they are therefore empty of inherent existence. Because of the fact that phenomena are not perceived in meditative equipoise those phenomena are empty of inherent existence.

The logic here is based on the fact that only ultimate reality is perceived by an arya being in meditative equipoise. So if conventional phenomena were to be perceived, they would have to be ultimate reality, however that is not the case. It is said that the ultimate reality of all existence is perceived by an arya being in meditative equipoise. Thus the ultimate reality of ourselves is also perceived by the arya being. So in that sense it is said that there is no ultimate reality that is not perceived by an arya being in meditative equipoise.

We also need to relate this point to the explanation that has been presented many times before. If conventional phenomena were to appear to the arya being in meditative equipoise then there would be the fault of their meditative wisdom having dualistic appearance. However, as explained previously, there is no dualistic appearance whatsoever to the wisdom directly realizing emptiness. To that wisdom realizing emptiness all three dualistic appearances i.e. the dualistic appearance of the subject and object being separate, the dualistic appearance of true existence, and the dualistic appearance of conventional existence or conventionality, completely cease.

#### **2.2.2.2.1.3.2.3 Stating proofs**

96. *All those that earlier appeared to consciousness  
Because of not knowing that (reality)  
Will later cease for consciousness in that way  
Because of knowing that (reality).*

This verse is presented in order to remove any doubt about whether phenomena actually cease to exist. Although phenomena cease to exist to the perception of an arya being in meditative equipoise, they do not cast off actual existence. This verse addresses such doubts. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

[If you ask] when conditioned phenomena fall apart to that indemonstrable consciousness, at that point do conditioned phenomena cease to exist?

Here *indemonstrable consciousness* refers to the wisdom directly realising emptiness in meditative equipoise. To that query the commentary responds:

[Answer] That is not the case. Primordially existent absence of inherently existent production, means that even though the lack of inherent existence of conditioned phenomena has always been there from the beginning, it has been obscured by ignorance, like for example someone with cataracts having blurred vision.

This explains that although conditioned phenomena have ceased to appear to that particular consciousness, the conditioned phenomena themselves do not cease to exist. What does cease is *the inherent existence of the conditioned phenomena*, the lack of which has existed *from the beginning*.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

In the case of ordinary beings, they are not able to see [the lack of inherent existence], but to the consciousness of an arya who has realised emptiness, the lack of inherent existence of things, which has existed from the beginning, are seen as interdependent originations and empty of inherent existence. It is because they know this ultimate reality of phenomena directly, that all conditioned phenomena have ceased to exist for their consciousness, and are not seen in the face of perception by an arya's meditative equipoise.

This is specifically refuting doubts about how conditioned phenomena have ceased for the indemonstrable consciousness of an arya being. The others understand this to mean that things completely cease to exist, i.e. it seems as if existent things are being said to be non-existent. However that is not the case. There is no assertion that something that existed before is seen to be non-existent later. Rather, the lack of inherent existence has always existed in the past, but has not been comprehended by ordinary beings.

The example used to explain this is a person with cataracts who is unable to see an object clearly. Even though an object is present a person with cataracts cannot see it clearly, and in the worst case cannot see it at all. If the question is, 'because it is not seen by the person who has cataracts, does that mean that the object does not exist?', then, the answer is 'no', that is of course not the case'. Just because the person cannot see something because of blurred vision doesn't mean that the actual object does not exist. Similarly, the lack of inherent existence has always existed in the past, but has not been seen by ordinary beings because of their ignorance.

The commentary then states:

It is the case that conditioned phenomena have always been empty of inherent existence from the beginning, but only seen later. It is not the case that things existed inherently before and are later seen to lack inherent existence. Otherwise, meditative equipoise would serve as means to destroy things

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and also the fault of not perceiving ultimate reality would occur.

This is in response to the main objection of the opponents, which is that if the inherent existence of conditioned phenomena existed previously, and is now seen to be non-existent by an arya being in meditative equipoise, then the wisdom realising emptiness by the arya being would become a cause to actually destroy the phenomena. But that is not the case. The wisdom realising emptiness does not actually destroy phenomena which existed before, rather, it destroys the perception of inherent existence that has always been present in the past. Thus, it is not the case of phenomena being destroyed by an arya being who realises emptiness.

**97. *All these phenomena of beings  
Are seen as fuel for the fire of consciousness.  
They are pacified through being burned  
By the light of true discrimination.***

Gyalsab Je gives this explanation of the meaning of the verse:

All these phenomena of beings i.e. object of knowledge and the consciousness that perceives them, are seen as fuel for the meditative fire of consciousness, because they are completely burned.

All phenomena fit into the two categories of objects of knowledge and the consciousness that knows them, which are included in the phrase *all these phenomena of beings*.

The verse is structured as a syllogism. The first line *all these phenomena of beings* is the subject; the predicate is *are seen as fuel for the [meditative] fire of consciousness*, which particularly relates to the arya being's meditative equipoise; and the reason is because *they are completely burned*. Thus the phenomena of beings are like fuel for the meditative consciousness, because they are completely burned or consumed by it.

If we were to take this syllogism literally, we would misinterpret the meditative fire of consciousness as actually burning all phenomena, which doesn't make sense. Thus *all these phenomena* refers to the appearance of true existence of phenomena, and with respect to the consciousness, it relates to all fabrications of perceiving true existence. That is what is burned or consumed by the consciousness realising emptiness.

The commentary then explains the manner in which they are burned, with the analogy of light:

They are burned by the light of the discriminating awareness truly seeing ultimate reality, which pacifies all dualistic appearances.

Here the analogy of light refers to the *discriminating awareness of truly seeing ultimate reality*, which is what *pacifies all dualistic appearances*. Here one can specifically relate dualistic appearance to the dualistic appearance of conventional and ultimate reality as being completely separate and unrelated entities, which is said to be the worst of the dualistic appearances.

When the commentary refers to *pacifies all dualistic appearances*, then that includes removing both the obscurations that perceive true existence, and the very

imprints of those obscurations. So the wisdom realising emptiness of an arya being in meditative equipoise not only removes deluded obscurations, but also removes the obscurations to omniscience. Thus one needs to understand that gaining the wisdom directly realising emptiness is not only a means to free oneself from samsara and obtain liberation, but it is also the essential and ultimate means for achieving enlightenment, as it serves as an antidote to overcome the very imprints of dualistic appearances.

One needs to understand the analogy used in this presentation. The wisdom realising emptiness is presented as being like a fire or light that burns and consumes things. When the analogy is applied to the meaning of the wisdom realising emptiness, it is the fire or light that consumes or pacifies all obscurations, i.e. deluded obscurations as well as the obscurations to omniscience.

So when we relate this to ourselves, we can understand the purpose and why we need to obtain the wisdom realising emptiness. The ignorance of grasping at the self is the cause of all our delusions, and thus the cause of all our negative states of mind. Therefore we need to overcome that ignorance of grasping at the self, which we cannot do without gaining the realisation of emptiness. In this way we will definitely be inspired to develop this very precious wisdom realising emptiness.

Whenever we engage in the practice of Dharma, we need to relate it to the understanding of emptiness on a more personal level. Whatever the level of our practice of Dharma, we must always bring it back to the main point, which is that the whole purpose for engaging in the practice of Dharma is to subdue and pacify our very unruly state of mind. We have all experienced the shortcomings of an unruly mind, and that is what needs to be pacified. From the very outset, in whatever practice we engage, we need to remind ourselves that the purpose for our Dharma practice, study or meditation is to subdue our own mind. Then we will then be able to direct our practice towards that end.

It is necessary for us to subdue our own mind. Saying that others have to be pacified and subdued doesn't work without first subduing our own minds. We can assist others only when our own mind is subdued, so it is our responsibility to work on our own mind first.

It is very beneficial for us to relate our practice to Lama Tsong Khapa's advice. He said that the most revered Buddha Shakyamuni is the one who is free from all faults, who has acquired all qualities, and who has reached the state of omniscience. The great Buddha didn't just manifest from above and come down to the Earth. Achieving the state of buddhahood is not some sort of power that is bestowed upon you.

Rather it is a gradual process from the state of being an ordinary being, and then engaging in the practice of removing negative states of mind one at a time, and acquiring or adopting the qualities one at a time. Through that one eventually achieves the state of completely abandoning all negativities and acquiring all good qualities, and thus becoming omniscient. That advice is really profound, because it is based on the level we are at

now. The way to follow the path that leads to the state of omniscience, is to adopting one single good quality and avoiding one negativity at a time.

This advice from Lama Tsong Khapa was included in his explanation of cessation and the path. He explained that cessation and the path are not something out there, that you just make reference to, pay respect to, and then obtain some time later. It is only by removing negativities and acquiring the qualities now, at whatever level one is at, that one will achieve cessation and the path within one's own mental continuum.

There is a definite connection between ourselves and an enlightened being. If an enlightened being was a primordial being already free from all faults and with all good qualities, then that would definitely be an unattainable state for us. As we are not free from all faults and have not obtained all good qualities, we wouldn't have any hope of achieving enlightenment! But, when an enlightened being is described as a being who has acquired those qualities from a very ordinary state, then that gives us hope and encouragement, because it shows us that there is a connection between our own state now and the state of reaching enlightenment.

This is the ultimate reasoning in Buddhism—that buddhahood or enlightenment is possible for every individual being, and that everyone has the 'buddha potential'. This is based on the reasoning that enlightenment is attained through the process of removing one fault at a time, and acquiring one quality at a time. This shows that even at our level buddhahood is possible, as removing one fault at a time is manageable, and acquiring one quality at a time is also manageable. So we definitely have that potential!

On a more subtle level, this also shows us that the so-called faults or delusions are adventitious and not in the nature of one's mind. Therefore they can be separated from our mind. Delusions are not the same entity as our mind, and because they are adventitious we can therefore remove them from our mind. The same principle applies to the acquisition of qualities; by further developing our potential we can achieve all qualities.

In fact that every individual has the capacity to free the mind from the stains of the delusions is, in itself, the reason why all living beings have a buddha nature, and therefore the potential to become enlightened. This sound reasoning can really encourage us.

#### **2.2.2.2.1.3.2.4 No fault of falling into a view of annihilation**

This section presents a refutation of the fault of being nihilistic. According to the lower schools, the explanation that conditioned phenomena cease to that indemonstrable consciousness, makes it sound as if the Prasangika are have nihilistic views. Here, the Prasangika explain they do not have the fault of being nihilistic.

98. *The reality is later ascertained  
Of what was formerly imputed by ignorance.  
When a thing is not found,  
How can there be a non-thing?*

In explaining the meaning of the verse, Gyaltzab Je first states the objection:

[Objection] In that case you have asserted that everything does not exist, and thus you become a nihilist.

Then the commentary presents the answer:

[Answer] That is not so. Afflictive ignorance previously imputed inherent existence where there is no inherent existence. Later on, having delineated the emptiness of inherent existence, one ascertains suchness and realises the mode of abiding of things. But there is no fallacy of deprecating things even in the slightest.

This is explaining that inherent existence was imputed by afflictive or deluded ignorance. Thus one needs to really understand that the fault lies with the afflictive ignorance, which is the cause for perceiving things as existing inherently. As explained here, *later on, having delineated the emptiness of inherent existence, one ascertains suchness and realises the mode of abiding of things*. The lack of inherent existence is perceived when one gains the realisation of emptiness. Thus when the lack of inherent existence is perceived, it is a negation of a view that existed in the past, and not a negation of the actual existence of phenomena. Hence there is no fault of falling into the extreme of nihilism.

Then a further objection is raised:

[Objection] By refuting inherently established things, you actually establish inherent existence.

The answer to that is:

[Answer] When things are not found to exist inherently how can that establish a non-thing to exist inherently? It is not possible, for without the reliant there can not be reliance.

This point was presented earlier in the text. In response to the presentation of the lack of inherent existence, this query arises: is selflessness (or the lack of inherent existence) itself inherently existent? If a phenomenon is presented as lacking inherent existence then maybe the lack of inherent existence itself exists inherently? This doubt is presented to eradicate any possibility of inherent existence, under any circumstances. So this is really a very meticulous and precise way of presenting the teachings.

We can also understand this point in relation to, for example, a vase. When a vase is presented as lacking inherent existence, one can immediately relate to the possibility of the inherent existence of the vase also being empty of inherent existence.

#### **2.2.2.2.1.4 Refuting inherently existent space**

Compounded phenomena have been presented as being empty of inherent existence. This may lead to a doubt as to whether 'non-things' (i.e. existent phenomena that are not things) may be inherently existent or not. This verse contains a refutation of that doubt:

99. *Because the phenomena of forms  
Are only names, a space too is only a name.  
Without the elements how could forms exist?  
Therefore even name-only does not exist.*

In presenting the meaning of this verse Gyaltzab Je's commentary reads:

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If you say that uncompounded space is inherently established: that is not so, because space is merely a name and does not exist inherently. That is because the negation of space which is the phenomena of forms are only names.

If you say obstructive form is inherently established: there is no way for form to exist inherently, because the elements are not established inherently. Even mere names are not established inherently, because that which posses a name is not established inherently.

The lack of inherent existence of the elements was presented earlier, so there is no need to go into further explanation, as the commentary is quite clear.

#### **2.2.2.2.2 APPLYING THE REFUTATION TO THE REMAINING AGGREGATES**

The first aggregate is the form aggregate. As the inherent existence of form has been refuted, the refutation of the inherent existence of the remaining aggregates is now presented.

*100. Feelings, discriminations, compositional factors,  
And consciousnesses are to be considered  
Like the elements and the self.  
Thereby the six constituents are selfless.*

The five aggregates are form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness. A person who possesses all five aggregates is referred to as a form being, or a being in the form realm; a being in the formless realm is a being who does not have the first (form) aggregate, but who has the other four aggregates.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

The aggregates of feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness, just like the elements and self, are considered as empty of inherent existence. The same logic presented previously, such as the reasoning of neither one nor many harms their inherent establishment. Thereby, just like the person, the six constituents are also selfless.

### **C. PRESENTING THE NAME OF THE CHAPTER**

*This is the first chapter of Precious Garland which  
presents high status and definite goodness.*

The commentary concludes with:

This completes the commentary to the first chapter of the *Precious Garland* by Nagarjuna, entitled 'An explanation of high status and definite goodness'.

We will now do the Tara Praises, which is a very significant practice for our overall well-being. The Tara practice presents Tara as a combination of the guru, the saviour, and the deity. Tara is an unfailing friend when one is unwell, and someone upon whom one can rely, like a doctor. So Tara is the saviour in every way.

When we rely on other beings there is no certainty. In difficult times ordinary beings may fail us, but when we rely on Tara (who is an enlightened being), she is an unfailing guide, friend and companion at all times. That is the significance of doing the Tara practice. As the practice says: 'by taking the manifestation of my guru, please grant me all the blessings; by taking the

manifestation of the deity, please grant me all attainments; by taking the manifestation of a protector, please grant me protection, well-being, and all needs and conditions for my practice' and so forth. So if we rely on Tara with those intentions in mind, then it becomes very meaningful.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has also mentioned, a devout Christian has complete faith in God and when they entrust themselves entirely into Him, they get benefit from that total reliance. If, as practitioners of Buddhism, we have a similar attitude of complete reliance on our guide and saviour, who is an enlightened being, it will definitely bring us the greatest benefit.

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