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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པོའི་བཀའ་འགྲུབ་མཐོན་པོ།

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With a good motivation we can engage in the meditation practice as usual. [Meditation]

We may only have limited time in which to meditate here, but with familiarity with the practice, you can spend more time doing the meditation at home.

We need to familiarise ourselves with the practice of developing love and compassion many times over. Even during one day, we need to think about love and compassion several times, contemplate it, and meditate on it again and again. This is how we become more familiar with love and compassion, and thus make it more stable within our own hearts.

The essence of the Buddha's teachings comes down to developing bodhichitta, which is based on love and compassion. We have that basis of love and compassion within ourselves now, so it's really only a matter of strengthening it and making it firmer and more stable so that it becomes the basis on which to develop bodhichitta. The only way to do that is to familiarise ourselves with it again and again.

As we contemplate and meditate on love and compassion, we will also notice an immediate benefit, which is that the mind becomes calmer and more peaceful. While we are thinking about generating love and compassion, the other delusions definitely subside. Thus developing love and compassion is an antidote for overcoming delusions.

## CHAPTER TWO: INTERWOVEN EXPLANATION OF THE CAUSE AND EFFECT OF DEFINITE GOODNESS AND HIGH STATUS

This chapter has three sub-divisions.

- A. Cause and effect of definite goodness
- B. Cause and effect of high status
- C. Cause and effect of definite goodness

I am not sure if 'interwoven' has the same meaning as the Tibetan word *pelma*. The Tibetan term *pelma* has the connotation of something that comes between two other similar things. In this chapter, the explanations on 'high status' comes in between the two explanations of 'definite goodness', so that's how 'interwoven' has to be understood in relation to the context of this chapter.

Before we go into sub-divisions and explanations in the text, what does 'definite goodness' mean?

*Student: Liberation and enlightenment.*

That is correct, but it is good to be more specific. You need to incorporate the literal meaning of definite goodness, which was explained earlier.

If the result is definite goodness, i.e. liberation and enlightenment, then what are the causes?

*Student: The realisation of emptiness.*

What does 'high status' refer to?

*Student: A human rebirth or higher.*

More specifically, you can say it refers to the happy or fortunate rebirths.

As the main topic is the cause and effect of definite goodness and high status, it is worthwhile to bring to mind the specific causes of each of those two results. The first chapter listed a number of specific causes for high status. As part of our practice it will be of personal benefit to bring to mind the specific causes, and then to reflect on, and contemplate them.

When we bring the topics of the teachings to mind and really contemplate them, we will find that there is no lack of topics for meditation. In fact we might not have enough time even if we meditated all day and night! So, bringing these topics to mind and contemplating them is, in itself, a form of meditation.

Contemplating the teachings one has heard and then meditating on them is the way to gain realisations. The unique method that was presented by Atisha is to first hear the teachings, then to contemplate or analyse what one has heard, and then meditate on that meaning. Indeed, without meditation there is no possible way to gain realisations. So in order to gain realisations we have to meditate—that is clear. However in order to meditate one needs to firstly know what to meditate on, and this is where the hearing and the analysing process comes into play. We must first hear the instructions about the topics on which we are to meditate, then we can think about them or analyse them, and through that process we will gain a clear object on which to meditate

### A. CAUSE AND EFFECT OF DEFINITE GOODNESS

The two sub-divisions of this heading are:

1. Refuting extreme views
2. Difficulty of realising the profound

#### 1. REFUTING EXTREME VIEWS

This is sub-divided into three categories:

- 1.1. Recalling the former explanation through another example
- 1.2. Actual refutation of extreme views
- 1.3. Therefore the four extremes were not taught

##### 1.1. Recalling the former explanation through another example

Here we can see the unique nature of this presentation. We have already covered quite a bit of the topic in the first chapter, so here we are directed to recall the main points of that earlier presentation, which is done by using another example. Here, *former explanation* particularly refers to the presentation of the lack of inherent existence, which is the essence of chapter one. Thus, the first lines of this chapter reads:

101. *Just as when a banana tree  
With all its parts is torn apart, there is nothing,  
So when a person having the [six] constituents  
Is divided, it is the same.*

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102ab. *Therefore the Conquerors said,  
"All phenomena are selfless."*

In explaining this quite simple analogy Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Just as if you were to search for the essence [solid core] of a banana [plantain] tree within all its parts by peeling away the bark, you will find nothing.

For those who are not familiar with the structure of a banana tree, if you peel away the outer layer of bark, there is similar layer underneath. And if you peel that second layer away, the third layer is the same, and so you never seem get to the core of the actual tree. This is a very clear analogy, about which Gyaltsab Je wrote:

Similarly, when a person having the six constituents is divided and searched for within all its parts, you will not find even an atom of an inherently established essence.

When you search for the person within their six constituents, you will not find even an atom of inherent existence that can establish an inherently existent person.

The commentary then quotes from a sutra:

*Just as you would not find any essence,  
In the inside or the exterior,  
Of a watery plantain tree,  
After having searched for its essence;  
Likewise, know that all phenomena are the same.*

This verse is simply presenting the analogy that was presented earlier. The main point is that this is presenting the lack of inherent existence again, specifically the lack of inherent existence of a person. The analogy is quite clear. We label a banana tree as being solid, but when we look for a solid core under the bark we will not find the essence of that tree. Likewise with a person—if the person were to exist inherently then you would have to find it on one or all of the six constituents, which is the basis of imputation. However when you search for a person amongst the six constituents, you will not find an inherently existent person anywhere. Using the reasons that were presented earlier is a way of reminding us of the lack of inherent existence.

As I have mentioned many times before, it is really worthwhile to spend some time investigating and questioning our view of what we consider a person to be. Normally when we relate to a person, we have an instinctive notion that the person really exists out there from their own side. We grasp at this misperception and really believe it. So the purpose of all the logic that is being presented in the teachings is to challenge our incorrect perception.

Normally, we don't even question our perception and we totally believe in it. When we see a person they appear to exist solidly from their own side. And we don't really question that, because we totally believe in that apparent existence. However as the teachings present, if a person were to exist solidly from their own side i.e. inherently, then we would have to find them if we were to search for them. There is no other place to search for a person other than on the basis of imputation of the person, which is the six constituents. And when we search for a person

amongst the six constituents, we cannot find the person anywhere.

The Lam Rim teachings present another analogy to illustrate our false perceptions. When you see your horse galloping, the moment you perceive the horse you have a total conviction that that is your horse out there, which exists from its own side. You have an instinctive notion—'that galloping horse is my horse'. But again, if we were to search for the horse within its basis of imputation, then there is no really truly existent horse as we think of it. Normally, without analysis, there is no question that that the horse running out there exists from its own side independently and solidly. So if the horse or the person were actually to exist from their own side, truly and inherently, then where is such a person, and where is such a horse? This manner of investigation really challenges our perceptions and views.

As previously mentioned in the teachings, contemplating whether the person exists within the six constituents involves investigating each individual constituent, such as the earth element, the water element and so forth, and then the collection of those constituents. As the teachings tell us: the individual constituents are not the person, nor is the collection of the constituents the person. Then you are left with the conclusion that you really cannot find a solid and inherently existent person. Your investigation thus leads to gaining the view of emptiness. After analysis and thought one arrives at the conclusion: 'I really can't find a solid, inherently and truly existent person'. Following the investigation, one should just sit with the conclusion that there is no inherently and solidly existing person. When this method is perfected then it becomes the actual view realising the emptiness of the person.

Coming to that conclusion, thinking about it for a while. and then meditating on that is said to be an incredibly powerful practice. It can purify so much negative karma, as well as collect an extensive amount of merit. So rather than merely accepting it with an intellectual and literary understanding, it is really worthwhile to actually contemplate it and think about it in this way.

## 1.2. Actual refutation of extreme views

This has three sub-divisions:

- 1.2.1. Absence of inherent existence of self and selflessness
- 1.2.2. Absence of inherent existence of existents and non-existents
- 1.2.3. Dispelling an objection that not teaching an end to cyclic existence is wrong

Some of these points were covered earlier however the following explanations go into a bit more detail.

### 1.2.1. Absence of inherent existence of self and selflessness

This is presented in the following lines:

102cd. *Since this is so, all six constituents  
Have been delineated as selfless for you.*

103. *Thus neither self nor non-self  
Are to be apprehended as real.  
Therefore the Great Subduer rejected  
Views of self and of non-self.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of these lines:

The reason and suitability of presenting persons and the six constituents and all else as selfless to you O King,...

This is making reference to the fact that the person and the aggregates or the six constituents are selfless. Nagarjuna is saying to the king, 'I have a reason for presenting the person and the six constituents as being selfless'.

... [it] is because the Conqueror said that all phenomena are selfless, and that they do not exist inherently

Nagarjuna quotes the Buddha's words on selflessness because he knows that as the king has faith in the Buddha and is a follower of the Buddha, he can use quotes from the Buddha as a valid source on the topic of selflessness. By presenting the view of selflessness as the Buddha's teachings, Nagarjuna is also implicitly validating the authenticity of the source. Doing that shows that selflessness is not something that Nagarjuna made up himself, but that it actually comes from the authentic source of the Buddha's own words. When the commentary says *because things do not exist inherently* it is referring to all the logic and reasons for the lack of inherent existence that were presented earlier.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

It is because of this reason that non-things are also said to lack inherent existence.

Earlier, objects or matter were presented as lacking inherent existence. The logic being presented here is that if 'things' lack inherent existence, then by default the opposite, 'non-things', would also have to lack inherent existence.

The commentary continues:

The reason why the Buddha, the Great Subduer, whose three doors are not stained by even the subtlest faults, rejected the view of self and non-self as inherently existent is because the view holding self or non-self as being inherently established is a perverse view.

The Buddha is described here as the Great Subduer. That is because his three doors are not stained, i.e. the body, speech and mind of the Buddha are not stained by even the subtlest faults. Thus the Buddha is free from all adversities and faults. This establishes the Buddha as a valid being. Thus the fact that the Buddha rejected the view of self and non-self as inherently established, is yet another reason presented to the king, which supports the non-inherent existence of self and non-self.

Gyaltsab Je concludes this section saying:

That is because as presented earlier, self and non-self cannot not be perceived as being inherently established.

### **1.2.2. Absence of inherent existence of existents and non-existents**

This heading sub-divided into two:

#### **1.2.2.1. Actual explanation**

1.2.2.2. Reason for not answering in any of the four extremes

#### **1.2.2.1. ACTUAL EXPLANATION**

This heading is explained in two verses the first of which is:

*104. Sights, sounds, and so forth were said by the Subduer  
Not to be true and not to be false.  
If from one position its opposite arises,  
Both do not exist in fact*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je says:

The reason why the Buddha taught that the six objects such as sights and sounds are not established as true or as false is because both are not established ultimately.

Two of the six objects, sights and sounds, are explicitly presented here. The others are taste, smell, tactile and mental sense objects. In brief, all six objects are not established as true or false because sights and sounds etc. are not established ultimately.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

If you say that by refuting its true existence their non-existence is established or that their false existence would be inherently established, because true and false are mutually exclusive; that is not so. It has already been established that there are no inherently existent things and no inherently existent trueness. Thus there are no inherently existent non-things and no inherently existent falseness, because the latter exist only in relation to the former.

The opponents say: when you present things as being empty of inherent existence, then the opposite of that, which is falseness, would truly exist. They are using a perverse logic, because the two things are seen as mutually exclusive. But it doesn't work that way.

*105. Thus ultimately this world  
Is beyond truth and falsity.  
Therefore the Subduer does not assert  
That it really exists or does not.*

As Gyaltsab's commentary explains:

Thus the reason why the Subduer does not assert ultimately established existence or non-existence is because, as with the reasons presented earlier, ultimately this world is beyond truth and falsity.

#### **1.2.2.2. REASON FOR NOT ANSWERING IN ANY OF THE FOUR EXTREMES**

As this is a presentation of what I have previously explained, it should be quite easy to follow.

The relevant verse is:

*106. [Knowing that] these in all ways do not exist,  
How could the All-Knower say  
They have limits or no limits,  
Or have both or neither?*

In explaining the meaning of this verse Gyaltsab Je asks:

How could the Omniscient-One say that the self and the world have limits [an end] or no limits [no end], or have both or neither? He didn't because

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the self and the world, in all ways, are not inherently existent.

When the Buddha was asked questions about whether there is a beginning or an end to the self, or whether there is a beginning or end to the world, he remained silent because the questions were asked on the basis of an assumption that the self and the world and so forth are inherently existent. So the Buddha didn't answer these questions because that would only confirm the assumption of inherent existence. Later on the text explains why the people who asked such questions are not suitable vessels.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.2.3. Dispelling an objection that not teaching an end to cyclic existence is wrong**

This heading has two sub-divisions:

1.2.3.1. Objection

1.2.3.2. Answer

#### **1.2.3.1. OBJECTION**

The first of the two verses in this subdivision is

*107. Innumerable buddhas have come,  
And likewise will come and are here at  
present.  
There are zillions of sentient beings,  
And in addition the buddhas intend to abide  
in the three times.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je first presents the objection:

It was not appropriate for the Omniscient One not to teach about the beginning and end of the world. Because innumerable buddhas have come in the past, likewise they will come in the future, and as each of the zillions of sentient beings residing at present become enlightened, there will be zillions of buddhas who will lead even more beings to liberation. And in addition, for the purpose of leading sentient beings to liberation, the buddhas intend to abide in the three times.

The query relates to the past buddhas and the future buddhas yet to come. The logic used is that after current sentient beings have become enlightened, they will be able to liberate even more sentient beings, until there are no more to liberate, so therefore there must definitely be an end to samsara. Thus, says the argument, as there must be an end to samsara, the Buddha most definitely should have presented that fact. The objection is continued in the next verse:

*108. The extinguishing of the world in the three  
Times does not cause it to increase,  
Then why was the All-Knower silent  
About the limits of the world?*

Gyaltsab Je explains:

Because it is not possible for sentient beings which did not exist in the past to be [newly] born, there is no increase in the number of sentient beings; the extinguishing of sentient beings and abiding in the three times is not a cause for the increasing of the sentient being's worlds. Thus, why didn't the Omniscient One teach on the beginning and end of

sentient beings, when a great number in the past have been extinguished and there has been no increase?

The response to that objection is in the next verse:

#### **1.2.3.2. ANSWER**

This heading has three sub-divisions.

1.2.3.2.1. Example for the absence of inherent existence of the world's production and cessation

1.2.3.2.2. Example for the absence of inherent existence of going and coming

1.2.3.2.3. Things are only nominally imputed

*1.2.3.2.1. Example for the absence of inherent existence of the world's production and cessation*

Here there are two further sub-divisions:

1.2.3.2.1.1. The profound as what is secret for non-receptacles

1.2.3.2.1.2. Actual example

**1.2.3.2.1.1. The profound as what is secret for non-receptacles**

The relevant verse is:

*109. That which is secret for a common being  
Is the profound doctrine,  
The world as like an illusion,  
The ambrosia of the Buddha's teaching.*

This presents the answer to the previous objection. As Gyaltsab explains in his commentary:

Ordinary beings grasp onto things as being truly established and deprecate [deny] suchness; when such unsuitable vessels combined the extremes into fourteen categories and posed them as questions to the Buddha, it was appropriate for the Buddha not to give an answer. That which is a secret for common unsuitable vessels is the profound doctrine. That is because the world is like an illusion in so far that it doesn't exist inherently as it appears. This is the essential ambrosia [nectar] of the Buddha's teaching, which is not seen by those bound by ordinary perceptions.

As was explained previously, the main point here is that the beings who posed questions to the Buddha regarding whether or not there is an end to samsara, strongly held on to the view of inherent existence. Thus they are not suitable vessels for the Buddha to present an appropriate answer. Such an answer would have been that the end of cyclic existence lies in overcoming the misconception of inherent existence. However those posing the questions were not ready to hear about the lack of inherent existence of phenomena, and wouldn't have been able to cope with it, which is why the Buddha did not provide an answer.

As mentioned in previous sessions the fact that the Buddha did not give an answer is a clear indication that the Buddha is an omniscient being. The Buddha had no intention of misleading them, so he didn't answer the questions. In fact, not answering was a sufficient response for them. That is how it is to be understood. The essential point of this explanation lies in these words: *the world is like an illusion in so far that it doesn't exist inherently as it appears. This is the essential ambrosia [nectar] of the Buddha's teaching. This is the profound main point.*

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<sup>1</sup> The teaching of 31 October 2006 gave a detailed list of the fourteen questions the Buddha refused to answer.

### 1.2.3.2.1.2. Actual example

The actual example is provided in the next two verses. The explanations of these verses can be brief because we have covered most of these points before. Also additional explanations lie further ahead in the text.

*110. Just as the production and disintegration  
Of an illusory elephant are seen,  
But the production and disintegration  
Do not really exist.*

*111. So the production and disintegration  
Of the illusion-like world are seen,  
But the production and disintegration  
Do not ultimately exist.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary presents:

Just as an illusory elephant may appear to be born and die, in reality it has no true birth and death. Likewise even though there is appearance of inherent existence, it is empty just like an illusion. Thus even though there is an appearance of birth and death in this world, ultimately there is no birth and death.

As an illusory elephant could be seen to be born and to die, but in reality that illusory elephant has not been born and will not die, because it does not exist as a real elephant. Similarly, even though inherent existence appears to exist, just like an illusion there is ultimately no real inherent birth and death. Inherent existence cannot be found anywhere.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Furthermore, just as the spectators who are under the magician's spell have the apprehension of conjured horses and elephants as actually existing on stage, likewise ordinary beings, who don't have any understanding of emptiness, have the apprehension of things existing inherently, and don't have any concept of things being empty of inherent existence.

This has also been presented in earlier teachings. The analogy used is when a magician conjures up an elephant; the spectators see an elephant that they totally believe exists. However even though it appears to the spectators it is an illusory elephant that does not really exist. The fact that it appears to the spectators doesn't validate it as being real. Similarly, although inherent existence appears to ordinary beings, there is no actual inherent existence.

Though there is the appearance of the conjured horses and elephants to the magician himself, he knows they don't exist in fact. Likewise for ordinary beings who have the conceptual understanding of emptiness and to the arya beings below the seventh bodhisattva ground, there is the appearance of all things as being inherently established and they have the manifest grasping of true existence. However for the arya beings who have obtained the eighth bodhisattva ground and above, there is not even that grasping. Just like the spectators who are not affected by the magician's spell do not even have the appearance of the conjured horses and elephants, likewise in the face of a trainee arya who is in meditative equipoise,

there is no appearance of any conventional realities. This is to be understood.

This is an essential point to keep in mind. As the commentary explains, when a magician conjures up horses and elephants, the spectators perceive the elephants and horses as existing on the stage from their own side. There is no question in the spectators' minds about whether or not there are horses and elephants on the stage. They are perceived as being right there!

It is the same for ordinary beings who do not have an understanding of emptiness. To them things appear as existing inherently, and they have no doubt in their mind about whether or not things exist inherently. An ordinary being totally believes in the appearance of inherent existence.

In this analogy, the spectators, who have been subject to the spell, and who totally believe in the existence of the elephants, are analogous to ordinary beings, who have a perception of, and total belief in, inherent existence.

The magician himself also perceives the elephants and horses that he has created with his spell, but he does not believe that there are actually elephants and horses present, because he conjured them up himself. So even though the magician is also under the spell of seeing them, he does not believe in their existence. Thus the magician is analogous to both ordinary beings who have a conceptual realisation of emptiness, and arya beings to whom inherent existence still appears but don't believe in it.

As explained in the teachings, those on the seventh bodhisattva ground and below have the realisation of emptiness, along with the perception of inherent existence, but once they reach the eighth ground inherent existence will not appear to them at all.

In the analogy, spectators who come late to the magician's show, and who have not been affected by the spell, will not see the conjured elephants or horses and therefore will not believe in them. This is an analogy for the face of the perception of an arya being who is meditative equipoise, where there is no appearance whatsoever of conventionality or of inherent existence, as well as no projection of inherent existence.

Of course the analogy and the meaning applied to it have been presented many times previously to the older students, and it is good to gain a really firm understanding of the analogy and its meaning.

Here the analogy is presenting three types of beings:

- Those who have both the perception of the appearance as well as the belief in that.
- Those who perceive the appearance of the illusion but do not believe in it.
- The third type of person does not need to see the illusion, nor do they believe in the illusion.

When those three types of beings in the analogy are related to the appearance of inherent existence:

- There is the ordinary being who has both the appearance of inherent existence and the belief in it, which they grasp at.

- There is the being who has a conceptual and actual direct realisation of emptiness of an arya, but who is not in meditative equipoise. Such beings have the appearance of inherent existence but don't have the grasping or apprehension of it, because they don't believe it.
- There is an arya being who is in meditative equipoise who has neither the appearance nor the apprehension of inherent existence. In the face of the perception of an arya being who is in meditative equipoise all three types of dualistic appearance completely cease, so therefore they don't have any inherent appearance. But of course the arya buddha has neither the appearance nor the apprehension of inherent existence at all times.

As you will be aware, the next session will be a discussion session. Again I urge you to really try to conduct the discussion in such a manner as to really learn something and benefit from it as well.

The points to discuss are for example, the essential points about the earlier analogies and their related meanings. Becoming more familiar with the 'magician' analogy and understanding it better is really beneficial. Also important is the lack of inherent existence and how that applies to phenomena such as the self. If we ask whether a self exists, then the answer is yes, the self of a person does exist. So, what is lacking is an inherently existent self. Do the aggregates or other phenomena exist? Yes they do exist. So what is lacking? The aggregates and phenomena lack inherently existent aggregates or phenomena.

The more we really consider and contemplate these points, the more likely it is that we will be able to subdue our seemingly unshakable, unruly and self-centred mind. No matter what practice we do, it seems as if we continue to regard our self-centred and unruly mind as most precious, thus whatever practice we do, it doesn't really affect that self-centred mind.

That is because we have not really come to the main point. So if we were to really consider these points about the lack of inherent existence, and the lack of true existence of the self, beginning with one's own individual self, then that will actually start to subdue our unruly mind. When the truth of that dawns upon us, we will loosen that grip of self-centredness.

I also say jokingly that if we can start to alter that self-centredness and go beyond it, then samsara can be quite an enjoyable place! Otherwise samsara is not all that enjoyable, and no matter what we do, something will always be unpleasant, and samsara itself will be unpleasant.

I have no doubt that you will have a good discussion, but nevertheless I am urging you to carry a good motivation into the discussion. That motivation basically should be along the lines of 'what is the best way I can benefit or serve others? May the discussion serve as a means to benefit others'. If those who have more knowledge share it with others with a good motivation, you will actually gain merit of presenting the teachings.

If those who ask the questions, ask in a nice way (as opposed to a challenge) they will get more information. Thus, with such an open mind and attitude one will definitely get the benefit. Although this benefit is profound, on a more practical level, having a good discussion with an open mind and a harmonious feeling, will improve our relationship with others, and thus the camaraderie will be stronger.

Following your good discussion you can also have a good exam in the following week.

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