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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པོའི་བཀའ་བཀའ་ལྟོས་པའི་སྒྲུབ་ཀྱི་ལཱ་ལོ།།

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As usual we will spend some time for meditation practice. [Meditation]

It is good to set the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines: in order to benefit all sentient beings, to remove them from all suffering and bring them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. For this purpose, I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well. I will do this particularly as means to overcome a sense of self-centredness or a self-cherishing mind and to replace such a mind with one cherishing other beings.

We now come to the second sub-division:

## 2.1.2. Training in the special causes of high status

Is divided into two:

2.1.2.1. Training in the four ways of assembling students

2.1.2.2. Training in the four: speaking truth, generosity, peace, and wisdom

The first of these:

### 2.1.2.2. TRAINING IN THE FOUR: SPEAKING TRUTH, GENEROSITY, PEACE, AND WISDOM

Is divided into two:

2.1.2.2.1 The four individually

2.1.2.2.2. Summation

The first of these:

#### 2.1.2.2.1 The four individually

Is divided into four:

2.1.2.2.1.1. Training in truth

2.1.2.2.1.2. Training in giving

2.1.2.2.1.3. Training in peace

2.1.2.2.1.4. Training in wisdom

It is good to relate to these topics as a means of personal instruction for our practice.

We have earlier covered the four means of gathering disciples and how those very practices are appropriate for us in our life. These four practices (see above) are also appropriate to adopt during one's life. The direct advice given here by the author (Nagarjuna) is addressed to the king, but when we relate it to ourselves we will find it as instruction for our own life. Nagarjuna is really giving very profound advice regarding how to lead a good and more ethical life.

#### 2.1.2.2.1.1. Training in truth

Nagarjuna is conveying to the king: 'if you tell the truth there will only be benefit for you, and if you engage in falsehood rather than gain there will be loss. So it is in this very practical way that Nagarjuna exhorts the king to engage in the practices.

The verses relating to *training in truth* are the next two verses. The first reads as follows:

134 *Just as by themselves the true words  
Of kings generate firm trust,  
So their false words are the best means  
To create distrust.*

It would be highly beneficial if you can relate to the advice given here as practical means to gain well-being for yourself. What the verse basically explains is that if you tell the truth, you will gain the trust of others, whereas if you resort to telling lies others will not trust what you say. Thus you will lose their trust. In relation to our everyday life, we hear many people complain that others do not trust them. So if we feel that others do not trust us, we need to consider what the reasons could be. Is one telling the truth? Is one being truthful to others? Now, if we were to be truthful at all times we would naturally gain the trust of others but if we don't resort to telling the truth, then to expect trust of others is unreasonable. It seems that many of those who are mistrusted by others endure extra suffering because of this.

I take the advice presented here as very sound advice for my life. I wonder if you can see it in the same way or not? If we can relate to the meaning of the verses, we will find it to be very sound advice.

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

It is advisable to strive in only telling the truth. For even if a king had many other faults, *just as by themselves the true words of kings would generate firm trust*, because he will be able to firmly uphold his promises made in this life; *so too, their false words are the best means to create distrust.*

As expressed here, it is very true that in order for the king to successfully guide and lead others in his kingdom, the basis is to first gain trust from his subjects. Nagarjuna is basically advising the king: 'in order to effectively rule your subjects, you have to gain their trust and the way to do that is by telling the truth'. As the commentary elaborates, Nagarjuna does not deny the fact that the king may have other faults. But even if the king has many other faults, by adopting this one virtue of uttering true words or telling the truth, the subjects will develop a firm trust in the king. Because the king would be renowned for keeping his promises he will naturally gain his subjects' trust. Thus, the benefit in this life is that he will have the satisfaction of being able to rule his kingdom effectively due to having gained this.

Having presented that telling the truth is the best means to gain the trust of others, conversely, the false words of a king would be the best means to create distrust. Thus the best way to cause the distrust of others is to utter false words. These are really very essential points which can be related to some practical examples. Even if someone is very rich but is not resorting to telling the truth, the fact of their wealth is not necessarily a cause for others to have trust in them. On the other hand, even if someone is quite poor but they are known to tell the truth, people will naturally trust them despite their lack of wealth. So we can see that the virtue of trust really comes from telling the truth rather than from other factors. I think that I may have previously mentioned some accounts of

travelling on the trains in India. When Indians travelling by themselves need to go to the toilet, if there are some Tibetans in the compartment they will ask the Tibetans to look after their bag, rather than entrusting it to other Indians! [Geshe la laughs]

The essential points presented from the meaning of the verse are that the supreme means to gain the trust of others is resorting to telling the truth. Likewise the main cause for the distrust of others is resorting to falsity (or uttering false words). Therefore these are the points to bear in mind. Along with these points one can also reflect upon (as detailed in other teachings) the many great benefits of telling the truth. Manifold are the positive effects of telling the truth. So it is good to reflect upon those as well.

At this point, we need to relate this practice to the subjects already presented earlier in this text, such as those relating to the ten virtues and ten non-virtues. One of the ten virtues is 'telling the truth' which is the opposite of the non-virtue, 'telling lies'. As a means of implementing this in one's practice, it is good to bring to mind the ill-effects of telling lies and also the positive effects of telling the truth.

We now come to the second verse relating to this outline:

*135 What is not deceitful is the truth;  
It is not an intentional fabrication.  
What is solely helpful to others is the truth.  
The opposite is falsehood since it does not  
help.*

Here, we can again relate to the very skilful means by which Nagarjuna presents the material. Having advised on the benefits of telling the truth and the disadvantages of lying, Nagarjuna now elaborates by defining what truth and falsehood actually mean. We can also see how when Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verses he really incorporates the explicit meaning of the words in his commentary. So it is good for us to relate to that manner of thorough explanation.

The commentary explains:

*Speech which is not deceitful is known as the truth, for it is not an intentional fabrication and is solely helpful to others. The opposite is falsehood, since, even if it appears to be truthful, it does not help. Thus, strive only to speak truthful words to others.*

As very clearly mentioned here, the truth is known as words which are not deceitful (uttered in a way not to deceive others) and not an intentional fabrication. This also implies that if one intentionally fabricates one's speech, that would also not be the truth. So if one does not intentionally fabricate speech and does not intend to deceive others and the speech is solely helpful to others, one would be truthful. Falsehood is its opposite. Even if appearing truthful, when it is intentional or when it actually hurts another, it is considered a falsity.

It is also important that we relate the following presentation to the heading under which it falls: *training in the special causes of high status*. One must again remember that the very practices that are the causes for obtaining high status are being presented. Therefore in relation to truth and falsity, telling the truth is one of the particular causes of high status. Thus, by default,

resorting to falsehood would be a cause for unfortunate rebirths in the lower realms. This is how we need to incorporate the entire understanding of practices such as telling truth, being generous, training in peace, wisdom and so forth as these practices become the ultimate means to create the causes for opening the door to high status and closing the door to the lower realms. Until we are capable of adopting the practices for obtaining definite goodness, for the time being, the best we can do at our level is to prevent ourselves from being born into the lower realms while also creating the causes to obtain a fortunate rebirth in the next lifetime. This is why we must relate to this in a very personal way. By ourselves adopting practices such as resorting to being honest and truthful and refraining from lying and falsehood, we establish the means to feel at ease at the time of death. We will be at ease because free from strong regrets in our mind. Having engaged in ethical practices over our life and with no strong mental regrets we would be able to face the process of death and then go on to the next life. This is how we should relate to it.

The next sub-division is:

#### 2.1.2.2.1.2. Training in giving

The verse relating to this is the following:

*136 Just as a single splendid charity  
Conceals the faults of kings,  
So avarice destroys  
All their wealth.*

As the commentary explains the meaning of this verse:

*Even if a king has many faults, just as a single splendid and great act of charity, would conceal his faults by making them less obvious. So too, avarice destroys all their wealth. Thus overcome miserliness and practice generosity.*

The meaning here is quite clear. But still one needs to understand the full implication of what is being presented. Nagarjuna is again relating his advice to the king by explaining that while he may have many faults, if he were to resort to an act of generosity (being kind and generous to his subjects) then, through such great generous acts, his other faults would become less obvious (hidden or concealed). Because the act of generosity is well received by others it overrides other faults of the king. Thus Nagarjuna is basically pointing out the great benefit arising from the act of generosity. At the same time Nagarjuna also explains how the falsehood of miserliness, or having a strong desire for one's wealth, rather than having any actual benefit is a cause only to destroy one's wealth. Thus Nagarjuna explains the practice of generosity in a matter-of-fact way to the king: 'when you practise generosity, there is a great benefit such as concealing your faults and being appreciated by your subjects whereas, if you resort to avarice or miserliness, it will only destroy your wealth. Thus you should overcome miserliness and practice generosity'.

Now we come to the third sub-division in this category which is:

#### 2.1.2.2.1.3. Training in peace

The verse relating to this is:

*137 In peace there is profundity.*

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*From profundity the highest respect arises,  
From respect come influence and command,  
Therefore observe peace.*

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

When you overcome a distracted and reckless mind through complete restraint over your senses, there comes peace.

The first part of the explanation here deals with when one actually overcomes a *distracted and reckless mind*. A 'distracted and reckless mind' is a combination of a mind being distracted and prone to danger. If the mind is left unrestrained the danger of being influenced by delusions will lead to grave consequences. The actual means to overcome a distracted and reckless mind is through complete restraint over one's senses. There is a difference between protecting one's senses and restraint. Restraint from the very beginning does not allow the particular sense consciousness to be influenced by the object. For example, the moment a beautiful object is observed by the eye sense, the mind may feel an attraction towards it. At that point, if one does not restrain the attachment in the mind, there will be nothing to prevent the attachment from arising. Therefore, when coming into contact with a seemingly beautiful or attractive object, without applying sufficient restraint, attachment will naturally arise. If one allows attachment to arise, the consequences of becoming really obsessed with the object will manifest.

It is exactly the same with respect to the other senses. When we hear a beautiful sound, if we don't apply restraint, attachment to the sound may arise. This is the same for taste sense objects and so forth. If they are beautiful and appealing then attachment will arise; if they are unappealing then aversion will arise. This is how delusions arise in relation to the appearance of the object. If it appears as appealing or beautiful, attachment will arise whereas if it appears unattractive or unappealing, aversion will arise. This is true of all five sense objects. If one were to be influenced by either attachment or anger that will lead to the negative consequences of the mind becoming extremely distracted and reckless. The danger of recklessness occurs because of that influence. So in order to prevent distraction followed by recklessness of the mind, one needs to apply restraint over the senses. This is the point being presented here.

After having applied restraint on the five senses, one's mind will be protected from distraction and recklessness and, as a result, the mind will naturally become peaceful, whereby the mind rests in natural peace.

As the commentary further explains:

*In peace, because it is difficult to fathom the mind, there is profundity and from profundity, the highest respect arises. From hard earned respect, comes influence and command. Therefore, observe peace.*

Being in a peaceful state of mind is naturally a profound state, thus from that profundity one will gain the respect of others. In other words what is being implied here is that with a genuinely peaceful state of mind there also comes a natural dignity which itself becomes means to gain the respect of others. Through respect, one will have a positive influence and command over others. However,

as the commentary explains, the *respect* is hard earned, because it is dependent on restraint of one's senses which is not easy. Although it may not be easy, it is worthwhile to put effort in obtaining such a state. This is the essential point being presented here. Although it is not an easy task for the king, nevertheless the result and consequences of restraining one's senses would be highly beneficial. Because it is worthwhile to engage in this practice, Nagarjuna exhorts the king to train in obtaining peace of mind.

Here, by recalling the sequence of the advice presented explicitly to the king we can see how, on a personal level, it also relates to us. What Nagarjuna is really presenting are the essential causes for obtaining high status in the next rebirth. By so doing he is also presenting the practical benefits to be experienced in this very lifetime. Particularly in relation to the king's main task, which is to rule his subjects, Nagarjuna very skilfully presents these practices as essential means for gaining the practical benefit now, while, of course, at the same time, engaging in practices to obtain a high status. So, to consider the earlier points, Nagarjuna is telling the king to first engage in the practice of telling the truth (truthful words) which will naturally bring about the trust of his subjects. This exhortation for the king to engage in the practice of uttering truthful words is in relation to the practice of speech. Then he exhorts the king to practice generosity. The definition of generosity is "a mind wishing to give". So, the wish or intention to give is an act of generosity. Thus, generosity begins from a mental state. Therefore Nagarjuna exhorts the king to engage in the positive mental activity of generosity. The benefit of engaging in generosity is to gain a positive influence over other beings (his subjects). Then next, he exhorts the king to protect the mind from distractions and recklessness through the practice of restraining the senses. By doing this the benefit is gaining a peaceful state of mind, one associated with a natural dignity that subsequently becomes a very effective means for ruling subjects.

#### 2.1.2.2.1.4. Training in wisdom

Nagarjuna presents another essential point, which is to practise *wisdom*. Having engaged in all of the earlier practices, it is essential to practise wisdom. The wisdom presented here relates to a 'good wisdom'. The corresponding verse reads:

*138 From wisdom one has a mind unshakable,  
Non-reliance on others, firmness,  
And is not deceived.  
Therefore, O King, be intent on wisdom.*

The commentary explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

*From the discriminating wisdom of knowing what needs to be adopted and discarded, one has a mind that is unshakable or moved by others; non-reliance on others, firmness in the mind, and one is not deceived by negative friends. Therefore, O king, be intent on adopting wisdom.*

As the commentary explains, the specific 'wisdom' referred to here is a 'discriminating wisdom' which is the wisdom that knows what positive things need to be adopted and what negativities (delusions and so forth)

need to be discarded. Having personally gained such a discriminating wisdom, one's mind will be unshakeable or unmoved by others. This implies that until and unless one has developed such discriminating wisdom, one's mind will be vulnerable to the influence of others. We may assume that something is positive or good but as soon as someone tells us otherwise, we are easily led astray. Conversely, if we are easily led astray and easily influenced by others that means one has not really developed that discriminating wisdom within oneself. It is really true that having developed discriminating wisdom, one will have an unshakeable mind. Furthermore, non-reliance on others affirms the quality (or extent) of the discriminating wisdom. Having gained discriminating wisdom, one does not have to constantly resort to others. We would notice that if we were not too sure about something ourselves, then due to our uncertainty and doubt we would have to ask the advice of others. When we resort to others' advice, depending upon whom we are asking and the advice they are giving, whatever instructions they provide will easily influence us.

As a quality of a firm mind is not needing to rely upon others, one will therefore acquire firmness in the mind. Thus the positive consequences of not being deceived by negative friends will follow. This again is an essential point. 'Negative friends' refers to people who influence us to adopt unethical ways of practice and so forth. For example, we may know that telling the truth and not relying on falsity is a virtue and something to be adopted, however, through the influence of others we may be led astray in thinking that telling a lie is okay, and to deceive others is fine. So when we are influenced by someone to think in that way, at that moment, that person becomes a negative or non-virtuous friend. Likewise, we may generally know that engaging in negative acts such as sexual misconduct is not ethical. However, through the influence of others, we may resort to promiscuous sexual activity. Someone might tell us 'its okay to engage in promiscuous sexual activity.' When we resort to that and think 'that should be fine' we are again being led astray by a negative or non-virtuous friend. Thus adopting discriminating wisdom is the way to become protected from their influence. As Nagarjuna exhorts the king: "*Therefore, O king, be intent on adopting wisdom*".

It is by adopting discriminating wisdom so firmly that many great masters in Tibet were led to give up their life for that sake. Particularly at the time of the communist takeover of Tibet, and during the cultural revolution, many great lamas, learned geshes and monks and nuns were threatened with death unless they relinquished the dharma. Many were killed because they chose not to do so. They were empowered to not give up the dharma due to the firm discriminating wisdom they had internally developed. They considered the dharma more precious than their own life and had no hesitation in giving up their life for the sake of protecting the dharma. Alternatively, for those who would not have developed a sound discriminating wisdom, when the same choice of 'the dharma or your life?' was presented they may have readily tended towards giving up the dharma and keeping their life. The clear sign that discriminating

wisdom is firmly established in one's mind is when the dharma becomes more precious than one's own life.

It is good for us to try and apply what is presented here as much as we can to our daily life. These points are really very essential and have practical benefit for oneself. Besides being actual dharma practice, even in a worldly context we can see that they are all very relevant. For example, relating to the last point, *developing wisdom* requires a firm and stable mind. Even in a worldly context, people would often say 'I don't think I could really be a friend of him (or her), because they are not very reliable'. Conversely, a reliable person would be considered a good friend because of their reliability, which is depended on their firm and stable mind. This is why when explaining the virtues of someone in a worldly context we use these terms.

#### 2.1.2.2.2. Summation

The *summation* follows from having explained *the four individually*. The verse relating to this reads:

*139 A lord of humanity having the four  
goodnesses  
Truth, generosity, peace, and wisdom  
Is praised by gods and humans  
As are the four good practices themselves.*

The 'summation' refers to the four practices presented earlier. It summarises all of those practices and presents them again in their summary form. This we can see quite clearly from the verse: a *lord of humanity having the four goodnesses* are presented: *truth, generosity, peace and wisdom*. Someone who is endowed with these qualities *is praised by gods and humans*.

The commentary explains:

For *the lord of humanity* [king] who is endowed with the four goodnesses; which are *truth, generosity, peace and wisdom*; they are *praised by gods and humans* just like *the four good practices themselves*. Thus, strive to possess the four good dharmas.

This again relates to the king. Nagarjuna is exhorting the king to strive to possess the *four good dharmas*.

#### 2.1.2.3. RELYING ON SPECIAL ASSOCIATES WHO CAUSE INCREASE OF VIRTUE

To mention again, it is good to relate to the sequence of how the teaching is presented. Having presented the *four essential practices*, the type of 'associates' upon whom needs to rely as condition for practising the four dharmas, is now presented. This again illustrates the very skilful way the teachings are conveyed.

This is further sub-divided into three:

2.1.2.3.1. Characteristics of special associates

2.1.2.3.2. Suitability of following special associates

2.1.2.3.3. Continuously meditating on the imminence of death

(This is the point where death and impermanence are also explained.)

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### 2.1.2.3.1. *Characteristics of special associates*

A 'special associate' in this context would pertain to a special friend.

The corresponding verse reads as follows:

*140 Wisdom and practice always grow  
For one who keeps company  
With those who speak advisedly,  
Who are pure, and who have unstained  
wisdom and compassion.*

As the commentary presents:

It is advisable to associate with friends possessing the four characteristics that cause virtue to increase.

The commentary then presents the four characteristics.

These are: in relation to a king, avoiding flattering words and using words which are soothing and pleasant [*advisedly*]; having a *pure* mind with less desire and contentment; having the *wisdom* that knows all mundane and dharma activities; having less anger and endowed with the *compassion* to benefit others. If you were to associate with such friends who are unstained by the faults which are contrary to these characteristics, then *wisdom* as well as *dharma-practices* will *always* increase and *grow*.

Regarding 'avoiding flattering words' it is normal that when a person is facing the king they might be tempted to flatter him with untrue words in order to please and gain his favour. Or, because saying something that is true might cause the king angst, they might say something is true even though untrue. In either case the behaviour is not really appropriate because it is based on the wish to flatter the king. Instead words that are 'soothing and pleasant' to hear and beneficial for the mind are to be uttered.

As it was explained earlier that the king rely on special associates, now Nagarjuna explains the reason why it is suitable to do so.

### 2.1.2.3.2. *Suitability of following special associates*

We can leave the explanation of this for our next session.

It is good to understand the four practices that have been presented here and try to relate them to one's own life; to understand their significance and to really try adopting them in one's life to the best of one's ability.

While the volunteers bring in the tea, the rest of us can recite the Tara praises.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright  
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