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natural inclination to help others. Since we have such an inclination, it is worthwhile and appropriate that we ask ourselves, 'How can I be a good person? How can I have a happy state of mind? How can I be of benefit to others?'

A happy state of mind and being a good person bears no relationship to material wealth. Having a certain amount of wealth is not really a criterion for being a good and happy person, or even being able to benefit others. So what is it then, that really contributes to being a good and happy person? When we really investigate and look into the actual causes, we will be able to detect that it is, as mentioned previously, the positive attitudes in one's mind that are the cause for a good and happy person.

By investigating and acknowledging these facts, we will really contribute to benefitting others. It may not be on a large scale but it will, at the very least, enable us to have a good relationship with our partner, friends, work colleagues and associates in daily life. Whoever it may be, we will be able to have a good relationship with them. We will be able to see for ourselves that when we have a kind attitude towards them it leads to a good and genuine relationship, which results in a harmonious and peaceful state of well-being. Whereas when we harbour anger in our mind, the moment we utter words or respond, we can immediately see the ill-effects. We can see how the expression of anger instantly causes an uneasy feeling within ourselves, to say nothing of our family and friends and all those who are close to us.

With respect to relationships, we all know for a fact that anger or resentment is one of the main causes that harms and destroys any relationship. If, instead of harbouring angry thoughts and negative states of mind, we work towards cultivating a genuine sense of kindness and concern for others then that will be a true basis for maintaining a good relationship with others. On a practical level, we can begin with our closer friends and associates and then slowly expand it to others.

Something to bear in mind is that the very basis of the Dharma is love and compassion. Without love and compassion, then no matter what we do, it will not produce good results. We may be impressed by someone who seems to be nice and kind and who appears to be a good person, but if they lack genuine love and compassion in their heart, their good impression will not last. That is because their behaviour is not based on a genuine sense of love and compassion. Anything that comes from a deep sense of love and compassion can endure and withstand. That is something we really need to pay attention to.

A crucial point to recognise is that Buddhist teachings are based on non-violence. Therefore if love and compassion are lacking and one harbours harmful intentions towards others, then in reality it is not a true practice of Dharma. The Buddha stated very clearly that 'those who engage in violence are not following my path and advice'. Conversely, those who adopt a life of non-violence and inflict no harm on others are following the Buddha's advice.

Furthermore, when we avoid harmfulness and violence towards others, it actually prevents us from being harmed. So when one voluntarily commits not to harm

others, one is, in effect, protecting oneself against harm, which is a very practical benefit. In contrast, when someone actually goes out of their way to harm others, they are in fact causing harm to themselves. This shows how practical the Buddha's advice is.

It is said that the Buddha's teachings are in accordance with worldly convention. They are not 'far fetched' or difficult to fathom, rather they are based on worldly convention, which means that they are accepted as common sense. No-one wants to be harmed, so if one does not wish for harm, the ultimate way to prevent it is to not voluntarily harm others. Then, by default, one will be protected from harm. As no-one wishes to be harmed, the best way to protect oneself is by not harming others. This shows the very practical nature of the Buddha's teachings.

The essential practice of non-harmfulness based on refuge in the Three Jewels, is what distinguishes Buddhists from non-Buddhists. Based on the advice of not harming others, one who has taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha is considered to be a Buddhist. Therefore as a Buddhist, one has the commitment to ensure one does not harm others, and to avoid inflicting any suffering on other beings. Furthermore, in accordance to the Buddha's advice if, when investigating one's state of mind, one detects negativity, then one should try to do everything possible to eradicate that negativity. In addition, as a Buddhist one should enhance the good qualities of one's mind such as love and compassion. When this essential Buddhist practice is practised it is appreciated by everyone. Both Buddhists and non-Buddhists can perceive the positive outcome.

I have related this story before, but once when I was in a restaurant, there was an elderly man who kept smiling at me. Then he came over to speak to me—three times. He obviously recognised that I am a Buddhist, and wanted to show his appreciation for what I have adopted. He said 'I don't follow any particular religion, but if I were to choose a faith and follow a religion, I would be Buddhist!' He went on to say 'You know the reason is because the Buddha was a human being, just like me! Therefore what the Buddha practised and the advice that he gave must have been based on his own experiences. So he has shown us something that is possible for all of us as humans'.

This man had really thought it through in a very logical way. It is of course very true that the Buddha's advice is based on what is possible for anyone. The fact that the Buddha manifested as a human being, shows that he experienced all of the good and bad experiences and faults that we experience, and he applied the practice of Dharma to overcome these faults. We can apply his example to the thoughts and struggles and difficulties that we face.

Even though the man in the restaurant didn't give too many other reasons as why he would choose Buddhism, his statement 'because the Buddha was a person and a human being just like myself' made me think that it was very logical way of validating Buddhism. And the more I thought about it the more it made sense to me, because of his use of logic and reasoning. As mentioned previously,

being a human means that the Buddha would have also experienced all the shortcomings that we experience. Likewise all of the good and positive things that we aspire to, were the basis of the Buddha's own experience.

It is commonly accepted that experience is one of the best teachers. Even in a worldly sense, when a person is looking for work, they are asked 'Have you got any experience in this line of work?' It seems that experience is held in high esteem and is greatly valued even in the worldly sense. So experience in spiritual matters and practice is even more valuable. The more I think about that man's comments, the more profound they become.

To review the main points I have made:

- The Buddha's teaching (the Dharma) is structured around non-violence. And this is something that we really need to pay attention to.
- Furthermore we need to understand how the concept of non-violence comes from our mind. One makes a commitment to non-violence by developing love and compassion in one's heart, so therefore non-violence is based on having developed love and compassion. One needs to clearly recognise the fact that harmful intentions tend to come about when we lack love and compassion. If we wish to harm someone, it is because we lack a sense of true love and compassion towards them. That is how harmful intentions arise. Therefore by developing love and compassion, we will also naturally practise non-violence. This is an essential practice.
- Whatever practice we engage in, for example meditation, we need to ensure that it is based on developing love and compassion. If we neglect or ignore love and compassion, then our practice becomes very dry. We might study something and get an intellectual understanding, but it wouldn't really move our heart; studying in that way doesn't carry much weight or essence. In contrast, if we work at developing love and compassion in our mind, then whatever study or practice we do becomes very meaningful and carries great weight! I'm not suggesting that I have developed love and compassion to any great extent, but I can truly say that I have a strong aspiration for it. I have a conviction that for a practice to be worthwhile and meaningful, it has to be based on love and compassion.
- Another point that we raised this evening was that one's own happiness and suffering is related to one's own mind.
- Recognising that happiness and suffering are related to our mind, we then investigate and check the state of our mind to ensure that we have positive attitudes. If we find there are negativities in our mind, then we must work towards overcoming and eliminating them. Through this process we can secure a positive state of mind, which will bring about real happiness.

On a daily basis it is really worthwhile and meaningful to invest some time and energy just investigating our own state of mind to ensure that we are improving the quality of happiness in our mind. We naturally seem to be drawn to improving our financial status and wealth, and spend a

lot of time to improve that! But spending all of our time and energy on improving our wealth doesn't seem to secure genuine well-being and happiness. We can clearly see that having great wealth does not guarantee happiness. Therefore investing some time and energy to cultivating the positive states of mind that contribute to happiness is a very worthwhile undertaking.

Just spend some time investigating yourself and work towards cultivating a positive attitude – we all have this capacity. Sometimes we may find that without any apparent reason, we will be unhappy and a bit depressed. But if we give into that and allow it to escalate, it will only get worse. So when we detect, for example, that we are feeling a little unhappy or down in the morning (for whatever reason), we should remind ourselves not to dwell on it, and try to come out of it by adopting a positive state of mind. Then towards the afternoon or evening we will find our mind to be a little happier. Even though the morning wasn't so happy, things will become happier later on in the day and, to that extent, we have gained a benefit. We all have that ability. So on a daily basis it is really good to ensure that we are in a happy state of mind.

Furthermore we also notice how the Buddha's teachings often emphasise that there are certain things we need to adopt and certain things we need to discard. The Buddha's teachings can be summarised into these two points: adopt good qualities and discard negativities.

Adopting good qualities and discarding negativities is not of a material nature but it is a state of mind. Therefore adopting good qualities and discarding negativities is dependent on the mind, which is something that we can see for ourselves. Noticing that will also help to cultivate analytical wisdom in our mind. Analytical wisdom is a particular type of intelligence that is able to distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful for oneself, thus enabling one to adopt what is useful and discard what is harmful. This analytical wisdom can slowly increase through the practice of self-analysis.

With respect to the text we are in the second chapter of *Precious Garland*.

## **B. CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HIGH STATUS**

### **2. ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HIGH STATUS (CONT.)**

#### **2.2. Forsaking the causes of bad transmigrations<sup>1</sup>**

##### **2.2.2. Extensive explanation**

This is further sub-divided into four categories:

2.2.2.1. Stopping attachment to intoxicants

2.2.2.2. Stopping attachment to gambling

2.2.2.3. Stopping attachment to women

2.2.2.4. Stopping hunting

The Tibetan word that is translated here as hunting, has a connotation of capturing, as in setting traps for capturing animals such as rats or mice. It could also be implying the act of hunting as well, which is a sport that kings engaged in.

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<sup>1</sup> The structure of each chapter can be found on pages 269 to 280 of the text. The headings for this part of the text are found on page 273.

### 2.2.2.1 STOPPING ATTACHMENT TO INTOXICANTS

Nagarjuna is explaining to the king that it is advisable to abandon attachment to intoxicants, because there are many ill-effects and faults that arise from intoxicants such as alcohol.

In relation to this outline, the verse from the root text is:

146. *Intoxicants lead to worldly scorn,  
Your affairs are ruined, wealth is wasted,  
The unsuitable is done from delusion,  
Therefore always avoid intoxicants.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of the verse thus:

From the very beginning when intoxicants (alcohol) are consumed, it will lead to *worldly scorn, your affairs are ruined, and your wealth is wasted.*

Gyaltsab Je is indicating that ruin will occur *from the very beginning*, not later on or sometime down the line. If one consumes intoxicants, for example too much alcohol, there will be adverse effects from the very start. When one first consumes alcohol one may not immediately feel the effects, but when the alcohol influences one's ability to discern right from wrong, then one's *affairs* will be *ruined*, because one will be unable to think clearly and effectively.

The third fault, which is your *wealth* will be *wasted*, is something that we can also see clearly, especially in relation to our contemporary world. These days there are many people whose wealth is ruined due to their intoxication. Even 'just having a drink' could be quite expensive. I have heard that some wines can cost up to \$1,000 a bottle. When you think about it, paying so much money for just one bottle of wine is ridiculously extravagant.

There are extreme examples of how intoxicants (specifically alcohol) can lead to ruin. There are people, like those I have known in Nepal, such as a father of a young family who, having become an alcoholic, spends all his wages on alcohol. Therefore the family—the wife and children—directly suffer. They are adversely affected by his actions because none of their wealth stays at home. The father is using all the money to purchase alcohol, and as a result they all go downhill. These are really important points for us to consider.

Gyaltsab Je further explains:

Also because of the lack of conscientiousness, the *unsuitable is done from delusion*. Therefore because of these four faults, *always avoid intoxicants*.

The conscientious mind is a state of mind or intelligence that is able to think clearly, and able to avoid things that are harmful to oneself and others. Due to the lack of *conscientiousness* when one is completely under the influence alcohol, one's conscientious mind is adversely affected, and therefore *the unsuitable is done from delusions*. Under the influence of delusions, one will engage in many unsuitable actions or harmful deeds.

As presented here, the four faults of consuming intoxicants are: it leads to worldly scorn; one's affairs will be ruined; one's wealth will be wasted; and one will lack conscientiousness. *Therefore because of these four faults, always avoid intoxicants.*

These are points that we need to consider. My practical advice (usually to students who I relate to) is that it is best if one can avoid alcohol. then At the very least, it is really important to try to minimise or limit one's intake of alcohol. Some claim that a bit of alcohol can be good for one's health, which may be true to a certain extent, particularly if one feels a little bit down or low in energy. Apparently just having a sip of alcohol might help in those circumstances. There is even a Tibetan saying 'when you're suffering from *lung* (which is equivalent to feeling depressed or a bit down), then having a little alcohol can be grounding'. However in saying this I have to remind you that there is no excuse for drinking excessively and without limit. All of the faults mentioned here occur when one goes over the limit, and beyond what is helpful.

Going over the limit will mean that all of these faults will become apparent. I feel that while alcohol may have some helpful properties, there is no benefit or virtue in smoking. Some may disagree saying that they have reasons to say why smoking can be good for them. But I have too many stories and personal experiences with others to accept that. There are very clear signs that smoking is really harmful for one's health.

There are those who say 'If I have a drink or smoke I'll be happy', 'If I don't have a drink or smoke then I can't possibly be happy and that is my weakness. So I have to do that'. It is very difficult for us to try to advise those who are determined and who have confirmed their need for an intoxicant to overcome their habit. If you bluntly tell them 'you shouldn't drink' or 'you shouldn't smoke' it will not be helpful. They will be unable to break the habit solely on the basis of just being told to stop.

Rather we should find the ways and means to slowly discourage them from their habit. With respect to both alcohol and smoking, if it is a habit and you are addicted, then giving up is very difficult, and I understand that the addiction is not easy to overcome. But for us who are concerned about others there are ways to try and help them, but it needs to be a very gradual process implemented with skilful means.

Rather than imparting one-on-one advice which might be hard for them to accept, I have advised those who have a problem with either alcohol or smoking drugs to join a support group, like Alcoholics Anonymous. Such groups are really beneficial. Because its a group, you are with like-minded people and somehow you may see things from a different perspective, and may become more accepting. So group support seems to be useful. That is the advice I have given to others, some have followed that advice, and I have seen that it has helped them.

### 2.2.2.2. STOPPING ATTACHMENT TO GAMBLING

The verse relating to this is reads:

147. *Gambling causes avarice,  
Unpleasantness, hatred, deception, cheating,  
Wildness, lying, senseless talk, and harsh  
speech,  
Therefore always avoid gambling.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse:

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There are nine faults that are caused by gambling, therefore always avoid gambling. ...

Here the advice to stop attachment to gambling is given by presenting the disadvantages or harmful effects that result. These disadvantages make us reconsider whether gambling is good or not, because if we see the disadvantages it prompts us to consider avoiding gambling. For example, if someone doesn't know that fire burns, then nothing will stop them from poking their finger into a fire. But as soon as they experience being burnt by fire, they will never attempt to put their finger into a fire again, as a result of their personal experience of being burnt. Likewise with gambling, when the disadvantages of gambling become apparent, one will tend to avoid engaging in such activity.

The nine faults as presented in the commentary are:

The nine faults are: *avarice* towards other's wealth,...

The word *avarice* means attachment to the wealth of others. The very fact of gambling means that you have an attachment to the wealth of others. You gamble in order to win other peoples' money. That's why you place your own bets!

The second fault as presented in the commentary:

... the *unpleasantness* of wondering whether one will win or not,...

This is also very true. After you place your bet, you will be anxious about 'will I win or not?' until an outcome is reached. The nagging doubt about whether one will win or not brings about *unpleasantness* in the mind.

The other faults are:

... hatred, deception, cheating, lying, senseless talk, and harsh speech<sup>2</sup>.

Next is *hatred*, which definitely arises when someone else wins the bet— one tends to feel upset with them.

*Deception* followed by *cheating* would occur when one is playing with others in some types of games. If one is desperate to win, one might resort to cheating by trying to deceive them. What is translated as 'cheating' relates to using dishonest methods to win one's bet.

The other faults are lying, senseless talk and harsh speech. When one is completely obsessed with winning, one might resort to *lying*. If the king was found to be lying, then that would be a huge disgrace. It would be one of the worst things that a king could do, because it could destroy his reputation.

*Senseless talk* refers to talking all sorts of nonsense, basically gossip and so forth. Using *harsh speech* can also be used to intimidate others during gambling.

All of these faults arise as a result of being attached to gambling. Therefore Nagarjuna's advice to the king is to avoid gambling.

Further faults may arise when the loser may experience great frustration and anger, and start a fight or exchange blows, resulting in bleeding and so forth.

In addition to these faults that occur during the actual gambling session, if one comes out as a loser, one might also resort to lying and deceiving one's partner. There

will be a sense of unease at home afterwards, because one has to find ways and means to try and deceive one's partner. And if the partner finds out, that will be a cause for high anxiety and unease. So the resultant problems are not confined to the place of gambling, but can spread to one's home life.

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<sup>2</sup> Wildness is not included in the commentary.  
Chapter 2