
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པོའི་བཀའ་འགྲུབ་ལོ་ལོ་མོ།།

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22 February 2011

Based on the motivation generated in accordance with the Refuge and Bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited, we can now do some meditation for a few minutes. *[meditation]*

The motivation for receiving the teachings can be along these lines: 'In order to liberate all sentient beings from suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

Having a good, sound and clear motivation is essential. Always bear in mind that the purpose for listening to the teaching and studying this text is to be of service and benefit to other sentient beings. Generating a positive intention for listening to the teaching also helps to subdue the mind, and when we make an attempt to subdue the mind, then it will benefit both our present and future lives. That is the essence of the practice of Dharma, which is that it has some immediate affect on our lives now, as well as on our future lives. Of course that applies to those who accept that there is a future life, but even if you don't accept there is a future life, there will be, at very least, a positive effect in this lifetime.

The real significance of generating a positive state of mind, in this case a motivation, is that it serves as a means to help subdue the mind. And subduing the delusions and negative states of mind is the main cause for happiness. If we neglect to work at transforming our state of mind and constantly look for happiness from external sources, we may become like those who, although they have plenty of material resources, are unhappy and feel that there is something missing in their lives. That is why we need to reflect upon the necessity of subduing our own mind.

2.2.2. Extensive explanation

We have covered the first two of the four headings of this division which are:

2.2.2.1 Stopping attachment to intoxicants

2.2.2.2 Stopping attachment to gambling

2.2.2.3. STOPPING ATTACHMENT TO WOMEN

One needs to bear in mind that the main recipient of this advice was the king, who is being advised to be mindful and to abandon strong attachment to women. However, we also need take it as personal advice for ourselves, and relate it to our own personal need to avoid attachment.

Keep in mind that this advice to overcome attachment was given to the king with the appropriate (to him) example of a woman's body. However when we apply this advice to our own practice, we need to understand that if you are a man you apply it to a woman's body and if you are a woman you apply it to a man's body. You

relate these passages to the object to which you are attached, depending on your gender. As the text will mention later, just as we need to overcome attachment to the bodies of others we also need to overcome attachment to our own body. So the faults of another's body also apply to one's own body.

If we don't understand this advice in its proper context, and take the passages literally, it would be easy to assume that the advice is denigrating the bodies of women. However that is not the case at all. We need to bear in mind that criticising women is breaking one of the root vows, which is a heavy negative karma; this true both in sutra and tantric teachings. So it would be unimaginable for Nagarjuna, a great Buddhist master, scholar and practitioner, to even think of criticising a woman. Therefore we need to understand this advice in its proper context, which is that the advice applies to both genders, and is not solely directed towards seeing the faults of a woman's body.

In fact, other than some minor differences, men and women are physiologically very similar. Of course, there are some hormonal differences but with respect to breasts, for example, some males seem to develop breasts, and quite big ones too! *[loud laughter]* This indicates that the biological make-up of that part of the body is actually quite similar. Thus, as there is hardly any biological difference between male and female bodies, the advice being given here would naturally apply to both men and women. It is a fact that a man can change into a woman (even before a sex change). There have been cases where a man's body has been transformed into a female one, and vice versa. This goes to show that physically there is not really that much difference between men and women.

The main point here is that the direct recipient of Nagarjuna's advice is the king. Talking about the natural substances of the body as faults is a way to overcome attachment to the body. So what seems to be presented as a fault is an actually a method for overcoming attachment to the body. This meticulous presentation of a sequence of meditations on the faults of the body is reflected in the headings.

This topic is sub-divided into three:

2.2.2.3.1. General refutation of the cleanliness of a woman's body

2.2.2.3.2. Specific refutation of the cleanliness of a woman's body

2.2.2.3.3. Effect of meditating on uncleanness

In relation to the similarities in the male and female bodies, I have heard that within the male body there is the basis of a womb. I used to have difficulty in understanding what that really meant. But not too long ago there was a report of how a man in the United States became pregnant. So this goes to show that there is the basis of a womb in male bodies. Some sources say that there is the basis of all the female features in the male body, and it is matter of whether they are manifest or not.

2.2.2.3.1. General refutation of the cleanliness of a woman's body

In order to overcome attachment to a woman's body, the first misconception to be dealt with is that a woman's body is clean. Therefore the king is advised to first of all

overcome that misconception. Here 'cleanliness' specifically relates to 'attractiveness'.

When we see how this technique of overcoming attachment, in this case to a body, is presented, we can also relate that to how attachment to any object develops. If you analyse our state of mind of when and how attachment actually develops, the first instance of attachment is when you see the object as being attractive. Based on the attractive attributes of the object, longing for that object is developed. As the longing to possess or to own an object develops, strong attachment starts to emerge. This is how the gradual process of attachment develops—it is initially based on the attractiveness of the object.

The question is, does attractiveness actually exist as an attribute? We can't go to the extreme of saying that attractiveness doesn't exist—of course it does. Being attractive is relative to the attribute of being unattractive, and being unattractive is relative to being attractive. So therefore attractiveness does exist.

With respect to what I have presented to you previously, this question will be a test of the memory of the older students. Does attachment perceive the attractiveness of the object or not?

Student: It is being attracted to an over-embellishment of the qualities of attractiveness.

Does the mind of attachment apprehend or perceive attractiveness? That is the question. It is definitely appropriate for us to investigate in this way. Once this might have been considered to be a specifically Buddhist investigation, but as His Holiness the Dalai Lama has reminded us on many occasions, scientists are becoming very interested in looking at how all of the perceptions and states of mind actually work. As Buddhists, our study is based on the psychology of how the mind works and so forth. So, what would be the fault if attachment perceives attractiveness, and why?

Student: Because attractiveness does exist.

If attractiveness exists why doesn't attachment perceive it? What is the implication?

Student: Because attachment is an incorrect state of mind.

Yes, that is correct, that is getting to the point. Attachment is classified as a wrong consciousness, and the implication of a wrong consciousness is that the object that is perceived by the wrong consciousness does not exist. That is why attachment is classified as a wrong consciousness, because it is mistaken in relation to the object that it perceives.

With the question of whether or not attractiveness exists, then the answer is that yes, attractiveness does exist. Now in relation to attachment, does the attractiveness that appears to the attachment actually exist? The answer is no. That is because the attachment perceives an attractiveness that is superimposed by an incorrectly assuming conception. Because it is superimposed by an incorrect attention, the apprehended object itself is an exaggeration and thus not the actual natural attractiveness. In other words, when attachment perceives the attractiveness of an object, it is not perceiving the actual reality of the object, or it's existent

attractiveness, but rather it is perceiving an exaggerated attractiveness that is superimposed by the incorrectly assuming conception. That is the conclusion that we need to understand.

As explained in the teachings, *the definition of attachment is that it is a mental factor that focuses on the exaggerated attractiveness of a contaminated object*. There is a further implication in the two syllables that make up the Tibetan word for attachment: *do* and *chak*. *Do* has the connotation of having a longing or desire for the object, while *chak* has the connotation of clinging to the object. Together both syllables mean 'clinging desire', which is the literal connotation of the Tibetan word for 'attachment'.

It is worthwhile to really pay attention to how the commentary presents Nagarjuna's root text. The author of the commentary, Gyaltsab Rinpoche, who was a great and renowned scholar, presents the material in a very logical and systematic way. He categorised the first of the verses in this part of the text as a general refutation of the cleanliness of a woman's body.

Here 'general refutation' refers to a refutation of the cleanliness of bodies in general. When we apply it in that way, it does not have to be someone else's body, more specifically a woman's body. Sometimes we may have the notion 'his (or her) body is really clean and very attractive, but my body is not so clean or attractive'. As mentioned previously, cleanliness in relation to attractiveness refers to the fact that the bodies of others, as well as one's own body, are equally unattractive, or of an unclean nature. That is a point to be understood.

The first verse that relates to this outline is:

*148 Lust for a woman mostly comes
From thinking that her body is clean,
But there is nothing clean
In a woman's body in fact.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains and expands the meaning of the verse in this way:

Lust for a woman mostly comes from, even though unclean, thinking that her body is clean. But, in reality, there is nothing clean in a woman's body in fact. Thus it is not appropriate to have attachment.

When one actually investigates attractiveness, and really searches for an attractive aspect of a woman's body (or any body for that matter), one will find no attractive attribute existing in reality. Thus, Gyaltsab Je is emphasising that when an attractive body is viewed superficially, it may seem beautiful in shape and colour and so forth, but if one scrutinises and further investigates, then where is that beauty or attractiveness?

One will then establish that the perceived attractiveness or so-called beauty is imaginary and not really there. If it were to be there, then one would have to find it, but after investigation it cannot be found. Therefore, as I have mentioned in previous teachings, when we investigate our own body from the soles of our feet to the crest of our head, or go beyond the skin and look inside, we will quickly notice there is nothing that can be attributed as being attractive or really beautiful. It actually becomes quite clear that the substances that constitute the body are repulsive, and that the colour and shape and so forth of

the external appearance are just a façade. That is the point that is being made.

Of course, some might then be tempted to ask, 'Are you implying there are no beautiful women?' As there are definitely beautiful women I'm not denying that there are beautiful women! In accordance with worldly convention, we accept that there are both beautiful men and beautiful women. However if we only perceive beautiful men and women at the level of conventional reality and don't go beyond that, then we will never really overcome attachment to either beautiful men or women.

The whole point of the teaching is to present a technique to overcome attachment, i.e. to deal with one's attachment, lust or excessive desire and to transform that. The technique presented here is to go beyond the mere appearance of beauty and investigate it by focussing on the reality of the unattractive, or unclean attributes of the object, in this case the human body. After spending some time meditating on the unattractive attributes of the body, one will notice that attachment subsides. So the main purpose for engaging in this meditation on the uncleanliness of the body is to overcome the obsessive mind of attachment.

One needs to understand that a superficial focus on an object will not suffice to overcome attachment. We might focus on some of the unattractive attributes periodically or intellectually, and think 'oh yes there are some unattractive aspects of the body', but deep down one still holds onto the belief that a beautiful body really is beautiful. As long as one holds onto such a misconception deep within one's mind there is no way to completely overcome attachment. The meditation might work temporarily, but as soon as the meditation is over and one comes out of it, the same lust or attachment towards the body will again be manifest, even quite strongly. The implication here is that we really need to work on overcoming that deep seated misconception in our mind about the attractiveness of the body. Then that attachment can gradually be overcome.

That completes the general refutation of the cleanliness of a woman's body.

2.2.2.3.2. Specific refutation of the cleanliness of a woman's body

Later on the text will explain how attachment is overcome gradually, and that one cannot expect to overcome attachment straight away. As we learn about the technique one needs to bear in mind that it is a gradual process. There are three sub-divisions:

2.2.2.3.2.1. Refuting that a woman's parts are beautiful

2.2.2.3.2.2. Refuting that the whole body is beautiful

2.2.2.3.2.3. Refuting that attachment to a woman is a cause of happiness.

2.2.2.3.2.1. Refuting that a woman's parts are beautiful

This heading has four sub-divisions:

2.2.2.3.2.1.1. Unsuitability of attachment to a woman's body because of its only having a nature of the unclean

2.2.2.3.2.1.2. Example

2.2.2.3.2.1.3. Absence of the state of desirelessness if attached to women

2.2.2.3.2.1.4. Though a woman's body is unclean, the stupid call it a cause of pleasure

2.2.2.3.2.1.1. Unsuitability of attachment to a woman's body because of its only having a nature of the unclean

Again, we need to remember that this applies to both the male *and* female body. If the object of attachment is a male body, then the advice will apply to a woman, and if the object of attachment is a female body, then the advice will apply to a man. When the unclean nature of the body is explained, it will be clear that it applies to everybody.

The root text reads as follows:

*149 The mouth is a vessel of foul saliva
And scum between the teeth,
The nose a vessel of snot, slime, and mucus,
The eyes are vessels of tears and other
excretions*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je says:

It is not appropriate to have attachment for the mouth, because it is a vessel of foul saliva and scum between the teeth. Likewise, the nose is a vessel of snot, slime, and mucus, and the eyes are vessels of tears and other excretions.

We need to understand the truth of this. We might, out of a state of attachment, and without any investigation, find someone's mouth attractive. Here, the text examines different aspects of the body to show that in reality, there is nothing clean about it. Saliva is found in the mouth, and if the mouth were to be very beautiful and clean, then the saliva would also be considered a pure and clean substance. But if someone is drooling, we normally think 'yuck!', and won't see that as being attractive in any sense. However if one was attached to someone, then one might lick the saliva! That is very possible!! Of course I don't have any experience with this [*very loud laughter*], but you might have!

Whether this is an exaggeration or not is something for you to decide. What I have come to understand is when someone is overcome by lust, their mind is influenced by the very strong misconception called 'incorrectly assuming conception' (which is how it is literally translated). In such a somewhat insane state of the mind things that are normally considered to be unclean or disgusting are viewed as being very clean, and thus one longs for them. That loss of reason is due to the crazed mind of attachment.

When people talk about the beauty of others, it is quite common to hear comments about a particular part, 'oh that person's eyes are exquisitely beautiful', or 'there is something about the mouth which is very beautiful' or the ears! There is an identification of specific attributes denoting a person as an object of beauty. So here, the teaching goes into the reality of each part. If the mouth is perceived as very attractive, then investigate what comes out of the mouth and what is inside of the mouth, the saliva. In one's right state of mind, i.e. without attachment, would one see that as being attractive? If one doesn't brush one's teeth, one will notice a foul smell emanating from the mouth even after just one day. You see people removing scum from their teeth, which is quite disgusting. This is the reality, yet the crazed mind

of attachment could consider that being very attractive and very beautiful.

The commentary further describes the uncleanliness of the nose. The nose is just a vessel of snot and there is nothing really attractive about it. If you consider the nose to be very beautiful, do you consider the snot as being attractive and beautiful? So the nose is nothing more than a vessel of snot. These are really important points for us to consider.

This presentation opposes the exaggerated and crazed mind of attachment that superimposes attractiveness on the body. Even though it's not from actual experience on my part, it seems to be the case that with a very strong mind of attachment, there is a lot of superimposing of attributes onto the object or objects. The more the mind superimposes these attributes of beauty, the more the attractiveness of the object is enhanced, and so attachment continues to increase. It seems quite peculiar, to say the least, that in a crazed mind of attachment there are all sorts of fantasies that are conjured by the mind as a means of developing even more attraction to the object. I suppose it may mean that one will generate a greater temporary satisfaction as attachment to the object increases. Like fantasy, it seems to increase some sort of temporary pleasure. I don't know, but I suppose that is how the mind works. It seems that there are many peculiar and strange ways in which the mind fantasises about the beauty and attractiveness of an object, to further enhance one's attachment to it.

By investigating in this way, taking the instance of a crazed state of mind where we might fantasise about an extremely exaggerated projection of the object, when we see it from a normal perspective we will see that our perception is exaggerated. That is an example that we can begin to understand. In fact, attachment to any object is a state of mind that exaggerates the qualities of that object.

The commentary then further describes the eyes as vessels of tears and other excretions. This relates to overcoming the attachment to the eyes, in particular. If one focuses on natural excretions from the eye such as tears and gunk, the reality of the uncleanliness of the eyes becomes apparent, and then one can overcome strong attachment to the eyes. In this way, as the text presents, when one examines each attribute of an object to which one may be otherwise attracted, such as the mouth, nose, or eyes, and contemplates the reality of what it produces, or what it is a vessel for, then the exaggerated view of the attractiveness of that particular object will be overcome. Thus attachment is reduced. As some masters have indicated, it's not too hard to notice the uncleanliness of the body!

One very practical way to understand the uncleanliness of the body is to consider the mere fact that once a clean substance goes into the body, it becomes foul. For example, after ingesting a beautiful and fragrant fruit, it immediately becomes foul. If you chew on the fruit and spit it out of your mouth, it is disgusting. No-one would want to eat that! It is not attractive at all! To elaborate further, when we swallow a piece of beautiful fruit, and it exits from the lower part of the body as excrement, the very smell is foul, the colour and the shape are unattractive and there is absolutely nothing attractive

about it! If the body was a clean vessel, then what goes into it would have to come out clean as well. But the fact that clean and attractive substances are taken into the body and come out as very unattractive and unclean, shows how the body itself is unclean.

Is there any difference between a male and female body in this respect? Are there any differences at all? In fact all the faults that have been explained here are exactly the same for both male and female—there is no difference.

The next verse (which relates to the same outline) reads:

*150 The abdomen and chest is a vessel
Of faeces, urine, lungs, liver, and so forth.
Those who through obscuration do not see
A woman this way, lust for her body.*

Gyaltsab Je says:

The abdomen and chest is a vessel of faeces, urine, lungs, liver, and so forth. Those who through obscuration do not see a woman to be unclean in this way, lust for her body.

Basically, the root text is very clear thus the commentary doesn't give much further explanation. Having earlier related to particular attributes of the head, the focus is directed to the lower parts of the body, the abdomen and chest. If one were to see the abdomen or the chest as an object of attachment, then one needs to consider how each of these is a vessel for unclean substances. The abdomen, for example, is a vessel for faeces, urine and so forth. As the substances within these vessels are not attractive in the slightest, one will not be excessively attracted to those parts. That being the case, one begins to overcome lust for a body.

2.2.2.3.2.1.2. Example

The verse relating to this is:

*151 Just as some fools desire
An ornamented pot filled with what is unclean,
So ignorant, obscured
Worldly beings desire women.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je presents the meaning of this verse:

Just as some fools desire an ornamented pot, embellished with jewels but filled with what is unclean, so ignorant, obscured worldly beings desire women.

The analogy here is a pot or a vase that is externally embellished with jewels, but filled with a foul substance, such as excrement or something very unclean and smelly. At a distance, a fool might be attached to the pot because of its external appearance.

One would never consider touching or even approaching a vessel that is filled with an unclean and repulsive substance. If the vessel is nicely decorated and aesthetically appealing, then only fools who are ignorant of its contents would become attached to it. An object of attachment such as a woman's body, for instance, may have beautiful hair and make-up, and she may be wearing beautiful jewels and colourful clothing. This is analogous to the pot embellished with jewels, in that the woman's body is filled with faeces and unattractive parts such as the liver, lungs, the intestines and so forth. Just like being attracted to the jewelled pot, fools will be attracted to the external beautified aspects of the woman's body. That is how this analogy works. By

focussing on what is inside the body, all attraction to the body will be entirely overcome.

Many of the older students here will recall a similar presentation in the text *Four Hundred Verses*, where three different perceptions of a woman's body were presented.

- To a yogi meditating on the unattractive attributes and faults of the body, a woman's body, for example, would appear as nothing more than a corpse.
- To a wild beast the woman's body, would appear as food.
- To a person who is lustfully attached to a woman's body, the perception of the woman's body (or any other body) is an object of pleasure.

So there are three different perceptions of the same object.

The technique being presented is a means to overcome attachment to the body by contemplating its unattractiveness in all of its natural aspects. It is advised that in order to overcome attachment we need to develop the perception of a yogi or meditator.

2.2.2.3.2.1.3. Absence of the state of desirelessness if attached to women

For as long as one is attached to a woman's body, there is no way to overcome desire. As the root text says:

*152 If the world is greatly attached
Even to this ever-so-smelly body
Which should cause loss of attachment,
How can it be led to freedom from desire?*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse:

If the world is greatly attached even to this ever-so-smelly body, which should be the ultimate cause for loss of attachment, then by what other means, can they be led to freedom from desire? There would be no other means to free them from desire.

To clarify further, what is being presented with a rhetorical question is, if the naturally unclean state of the body is not sufficient reason to overcome attachment to the body, then by what other means could one possibly overcome attachment? There is no other way. So, the implication is that the naturally unclean attributes of the body should be a sufficient reason to overcome any attachment to the body.

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