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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བུ་བླ་མ་གྱི་སྒྲིབ་པ་ལྷན་པའི་སྒྲིབ་པ་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual, sitting in an comfortable posture and generating the appropriate motivation, we can engage in the meditation practice. [meditation]

The meditation practice that we are doing is called *tong-len*, the practice giving and taking, and is a very beneficial practice. Thus, it is really worthwhile to acquaint ourselves with it. The more we familiarise ourselves with this meditation practice the more we will be able to actually engage in the practice, which is essentially to benefit and assist others on the basis of compassion. Without acquainting ourselves with compassion, it will be very difficult to spontaneously generate the wish to help other living beings. So the purpose of the *tong-len* practice is to generate a sound basis on which to benefit other sentient beings.

This practice is primarily a means to increase love and compassion for other sentient beings. What prevents the development of love and compassion is the chronic disease of self-cherishing. So the *tong-len* practice is a powerful means to destroy self-cherishing and replace it with the mind of cherishing other living beings with love and compassion.

Given the right conditions for engaging in the practice of developing love and compassion, it would be foolish or even insane not to take advantage of those conditions. We actually do have the perfect conditions of having access to the practice and to the teachers who present the unmistakable Mahayana teachings. With such perfect conditions it would be really foolish not to seize the opportunity and make use of it. As we are fortunate enough to have those conditions right now, we must take the initiative to engage in the practice.

As we consider ourselves to be Mahayana practitioners, we must think of love and compassion as being the essence of the Mahayana practice. That being the case it would be a mistake to neglect developing love and compassion in favour of other practices. It might be presumptuous of me, but I can safely say that to leave out an essential practice, and engage in some other kind of practice is a completely wrong approach. It is indicated clearly in Lama Tsong Khapa's *Great Treatise of the Stages on the Path to Enlightenment* (the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*), as well as his *Concise Lam Rim* teachings, that the indication of an effective practice of meditation is the reduction of one's delusions. It is a clear sign that the meditation practice is going well when the mind has become more subdued, and one develops a greater aspiration towards enlightenment and a stronger faith in the Three Jewels.

2.2.2.3.2.2.2.3. Thinking that one's own body, like a woman's, is unclean

Again, we can reflect upon the great skill in the way the material is being presented. Having used a woman's body as an example to illustrate the faults and uncleanliness of the body (keeping in mind that the advice was directed to the king), the text now comes to the point of showing how one's own body is exactly the same.

According to the English translation we are up to verse 164 and the first half of verse 165. As mentioned in our last session, there is a discrepancy between the verse numbers in the Tibetan text and the English translation. In his commentary Gyaltsab Je does not comment on an earlier verse that was not, at that time, listed as part of the root text. This also happens further on in the text. These verses are actually part of the root text, but because the commentary does not give specific explanation of these verses, they are left as separate un-numbered verses in the Tibetan text.<sup>1</sup>

The corresponding verses for this heading are:

164 *Just as one's own or others'  
Impurities are reviled,  
Why not revile against one's own  
And others' unclean bodies?*

165ab *Since your own body is  
As unclean as a woman's*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*Just as one's own or others' impurities are reviled,  
likewise why not revile against one's own and others'  
unclean bodies, since your own body is as unclean as a  
woman's?*

Even from a worldly perspective any kind of impurity is considered to be an object of disgust, and is thus reviled. Since conventionally accepted impurities are reviled, *likewise, why not revile one's own and others' unclean bodies?* Here we can see the very sound logic of this presentation. If commonly or conventionally accepted impurities and unclean things are reviled, then it is logical to also revile the body because it is naturally unclean and impure. The first two lines of verse 165, *Since your own body is as unclean as a woman's*, explicitly states this point.

The main point being emphasised here is that there is no difference whatsoever between the impure bodies of others and one's own impure body—the uncleanliness is exactly the same. This point is a very good basis on which to counteract the way we normally focus on the uncleanliness of others, and discriminate against them. Normally, it is easier for us to project uncleanliness onto someone else's body, while unconsciously thinking that our own body is very pure and clean. The point being raised here is that if you see any impurity in the bodies of others, then that should remind you that your own body is equally as unclean and impure.

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<sup>1</sup> Ed: This happens because the student is expected to have memorised the text before receiving a commentary. Thus there is no need to print the root text in the commentary, which therefore contains just a reference to the verse number. Although the commentary usually refers to all verses it does not do so in all cases, which leads to difficulties in the preparation of English translations of commentaries.

For example, there are some people who are very judgemental about the dirt on someone's face; they immediately point their finger and say 'you look very dirty and filthy'. Even though it might only relate to external filth or looking a little unkempt, we immediately develop a critical mind about them being filthy. However the filth of some else's body, of their face or hair for example, can be cleaned and washed away. So being critical of another's temporary external impurities implies a lack of concern about one's whole body also being impure. Understanding that the fact that the filth on someone's face or hair is only temporary, while one's own body is impure, will help one to not be critical of others.

Reflecting upon these very logical points presented by the great master Nagarjuna will help to sharpen one's intelligence and, most importantly, develop honesty about one's perceptions. Reflecting in this way will help to prevent a discriminative mind that criticises others, which implicitly implies that one is clean and pure whilst others are dirty.

As mentioned previously, this analysis goes beyond the surface. Conventionally speaking, we don't deny the prevalence of beautiful and ugly attributes. However this very sound and logical reasoning shows us that if we look deeper, beyond the conventional appearance(s) of beauty and ugliness, and consider the very substance of the body, then we will perceive the actual reality of the body as being impure and unclean. This really gives us a very sound, intelligent, and honest view of our mistaken perceptions

#### 2.2.2.3.2.2.3. Consequent unsuitability of attachment to a woman's body

This heading is covered in the second half of verse 165 and verse 166 which read:

165cd *Is it not suitable to part  
From desire for self and other?*

166 *If you yourself wash this body,  
Dripping from the nine wounds  
And still do not think it unclean,  
What use is [religious] instruction for you?*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Since the body is unclean, *is it not suitable to part from desire for the bodies of self and others? If you actually see yourself wash this body daily, dripping from the nine wounds of uncleanliness, and still do not think it unclean; what use O King is the instruction for meditating on faults for you?* There would be no use whatsoever if you do not conceive uncleanliness.

Here Gyaltsab Je begins with a rhetorical question, implying that since the body is equally unclean as others it is appropriate *to part from desire for the bodies of oneself and others alike.*

He goes on to say that *if you actually see yourself wash this body daily, dripping from the nine wounds of uncleanliness, and still do not think it unclean; what use O King is the instruction for meditating on faults for you?* There would be no use whatsoever if you do not conceive uncleanliness. This is clearly reminds us, at a very obvious level, that we wash our body on a daily basis to clean the parts that *drip from*

*the nine wounds.* This is a poetic way of referring the nine orifices of humans—our eyes, ears, mouth, nose and the lower parts. Quite clearly, unclean substances drip from these orifices. In the morning we have to wash our face to clear the accumulation of sleep around the eyes; we all know that what comes out of the nose is not very pleasant, indeed it is quite disgusting. If your ears are not cleaned for a while there will be an accumulation of wax, which again is not very pleasant or very clean. Likewise with the saliva that drips from our mouth, it is not pleasant. Most obviously, the substances that emanate from the lower parts are not considered clean by anyone. If our body was so clean then why would all of these unclean substances drip from its orifices?

Here the king is being advised that even though the uncleanliness and impurity of the body is obvious, if you are unable to meditate on those faults and cannot follow these instructions, then what use would these instructions serve? They would serve no purpose if you fail to acknowledge the obvious impurities and faults of the body. That is the meaning of the rhetorical question.

If what emanates from the nine orifices of our body is of an unclean nature, then that in itself proves that the source of those unclean substances must also be unclean and impure. That is how the logic works. If the source itself was pure and clean, then anything excreted from any of the orifices would also have to be clean. But on the contrary, we see what comes out of the nine orifices and as being obviously unclean and impure which, in itself, is proof that the source of those substances—our body—is also of an unclean and impure nature. This is the point that needs to be understood.

Superficially, and from a distance we may perceive a body as being not only pure and clean, but beautiful or attractive. As a result of that perception, attachment arises. Such a perception is due to our lack of investigation into what we are perceiving. If we look further and really think about it logically, then it will become obvious that a body that appears to be very beautiful, clean and pure is, in fact, not pure in nature, and is thus unclean and impure.

To use an analogy, when you pour clean water into a clean vase, and then pour it out, the water will naturally be clean because the vase itself is clean. But if the vase was filthy inside to begin with, then whatever pure substance you put into it will come out filthy and unclean. This is a good analogy to use with respect to the make-up of our own body.

#### 2.2.2.3.2.2.4 Chiding persons who praise women

The root text reads:

167 *Whoever composes poetry  
With metaphors elevating this body—  
O how shameless! O how stupid!  
How embarrassing before [wise] beings!*

168 *Moreover, these sentient beings—  
Obscured by the darkness of ignorance  
Quarrel most over what they desire,  
Like dogs for the sake of some dirty thing.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab further adds to the meaning of these verses:

*Whoever composes poetry with metaphors, such as features of the body being like a lotus or moon, elevating and exaggerating the qualities of this woman's body in such ways. O how shameless! O how stupid! How embarrassing it is before [wise] beings. Moreover, these sentient beings – obscured by the darkness of ignorance – quarrel with teachers, students, friends and the like, most over what they desire, thus are like dogs [who quarrel] for the sake of some dirty thing.*

As mentioned in the previous session, there are treatises, books and so forth that describe and praise the beauty of a woman's body in exaggerated ways, using poetic terms like 'your face is like a lotus' or 'your face is like the moon' and so forth. As an aside, you need to be careful when people praise you in that way, because they may be using the praise to deceive you into believing that they really like you. So when someone starts to praise you in an exaggerated manner, you need to be a bit wary. That is because the qualities are being described out of strong attachment rather than through any genuine fondness.

As mentioned previously, these texts are meant to generate and increase lust and desire, in this case for a woman's body. Therefore, as mentioned in the root text itself, it is really shameful to compose such material in the presence of the wise beings who can see the reality of things. That is because the material is not based on reality, but just another form of deception for oneself as well as others. It is *shameless, stupid and embarrassing* in the presence of the wise beings. Those who go out of their way to excessively praise and exaggerate the qualities of women, are *obscured by the darkness of ignorance* and will thus *quarrel with teachers, students, friends and the like*, out of attachment and desire. When this occurs, it is no different from *dogs* quarrelling over something as unclean as faeces, which some dogs are known to eat.

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

This is another important point to consider. There are many who believe that without attachment there can be no enjoyment or pleasure. Even some monks have said to me 'you know, attachment seems to really contribute to some pleasure and enjoyment'. This wrong conception is quite deep-rooted in the minds of ordinary beings. It is definitely a wrong conception to say that without attachment there can be no pleasure or happiness. Here, the text is specifically tackling this wrong conception by refuting that attachment to a woman, for example, is a cause for happiness.

The corresponding verse of the root text reads:

*169 There is pleasure when a sore is scratched,  
But to be without sores is more pleasurable still.  
Just so, there are pleasures in worldly desires,  
But to be without desires is more pleasurable still.*

Gyaltsab Je explains the verse thus:

*There is pleasure is perceived when a leper's sore is scratched because of the slight relief they experience, but to be without sores is more pleasurable still. Just so, there are pleasures perceived when*

*engrossed in the five objects of worldly desires, but to be without desires is more pleasurable still.*

Nagarjuna's analogy is very clearly based on our own experiences. The Tibetan word for *leper's sore* also has the connotation of any kind of itchy skin rash, which is something we have all experienced. We know that when we initially scratch the rash we will gain some relief from the itching. However, skin diseases flare up when scratched, and only get worse. So although there is some temporary pleasure to be gained from scratching the sore, in the long-run it actually creates more discomfort.

Here Nagarjuna is using an analogy that is based on our own experience, to explain the apparent pleasure that we feel from engaging with an object of desire. It seems that there is some temporary satisfaction, particularly in relation to lust and desire, but immediately after satisfying one's desire(s) one feels low in energy, and the body feels heavy and so forth. This shows how, just like scratching a sore, engaging with objects of desire can ultimately lead to many more problems.

Even though there is some temporary pleasure from scratching the sore, it would be even more pleasurable to not have had the rash and itching to begin with. It is the same with the perceived pleasures of *the five objects of worldly desires*. The object of desire of the eye consciousness is form, sounds are the object of desire of the ear faculty, and likewise with smell, taste and tactile sensations. Engaging in any of these five objects of worldly pleasure is exactly the same as the analogy. Although we may experience some temporary pleasure or satisfaction it will actually lead to more dissatisfaction in the long-run. The pleasure we believe we experience is based on our faulty perception of worldly pleasures and so, in reality, they are not real pleasures. The conclusion being presented here is that life without desires is even more pleasurable still. If there is no real pleasure to be gained from engaging in the five worldly sense objects, then lacking any desire in the first place would be a far more pleasurable and happy state.

When we think about it, our whole life seems to be driven by desire for the five sense objects. Taking some particular examples, some people are really attached to nice sounds—as soon as you hear that sound you become very excited and you can't rest. You have to follow it and saturate yourself with that pleasant sound, and so you are driven towards the sense object. It is the same with pleasant sights, where we spend so much time and energy trying to appease the visual pleasures to be gained from visual objects. Similarly with taste there are those who are very attached to certain kinds of foods—the mere sight or smell of the food will excite them to want the food even more, even though they are not hungry. The force of these objects of desire of worldly pleasure drives us to them.

To take this explanation a little bit further, our tainted and faulty perception draws us in, and occupies our time and energy with the object(s) of desire, and there are different levels of engagement with the object of desire. Using the example of an object of desire of sight, when we first see a beautiful object, our first contact with that object is made through our eye consciousness. Through our eyes, our eye consciousness perceives the object, and

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we exaggerate its beautiful or attractive qualities. At a later stage our mental consciousness contributes to our infatuation with the object. It is our mental consciousness, or our mental conception of an object, which brings an image of that object to mind. It seems that we are constantly preoccupied with the image of that object in our mind.

Even when it's dark and we cannot see anything, the image of that object is still clear in our mind. Thus we preoccupy ourselves by constantly bringing the image of that object to mind. It is our mental consciousness that is perceiving that mental image of the object. That is how we preoccupy ourselves with the object of desire, in this instance an object of sight. Understanding this brings to light the distinction between the eye consciousness, which is a sense consciousness, and mental consciousness. For those who have studied mind and mental factors, it is good to also incorporate that understanding into how it relates to our obsession with an object of desire.

#### *2.2.2.3.3. Effect of meditating on uncleanness*

Having described in detail how to meditate on the uncleanness of the body, the text goes on to explain the positive effects that one will experience as a result of such meditation.

The relevant verse reads:

*170 If you analyse thus, even though  
You do not achieve freedom from desire,  
Because your desire has lessened  
You will not lust for women.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*If you analyse the natural uncleanness of the body thus, even though you do not achieve freedom from desire right from the start, because your desire has lessened, you will not lust for women.*

Analysing the nature of the body, and realising it has the nature being unclean, may not be sufficient to completely overcome deep-rooted lust or desire. However through the acquaintance with this meditation on seeing the faults of the body, desire will be lessened and so naturally lust for another will diminish, to the point that there will be no more lust in general. This advice does not suggest that we have to walk around with our eyes closed or not look at any objects. Rather, when we see things then because of our acquaintance with the practice of analysing the reality of the nature of the body, and focussing on its uncleanness, our desire for the object will naturally be reduced. Then the strong lust one may have previously had for one's object of desire (for example, a member of the opposite sex), will definitely be reduced, and one will no longer have that lust. Even though one may be seeing an object that one has seen previously, through acquaintance with the meditation practice, one's attitude towards that object will be different. Seeing the object again will not cause lust to arise; to that effect one has experienced a positive result from the meditation.

It seems a little warm and humid tonight, so we can conclude the evening at this point. Maybe the Queensland weather has started to come down here.

Regular students would be aware that next Tuesday night will be the discussion night, followed by the exam on the following week. I request you to engage in a meaningful way, discussing the points that we have covered over the last four sessions. Specifically this means dealing with the instructions on how to meditate on seeing the faults of the body as a means to overcome the excessive desire and lust. As mentioned previously, even though the primary example is the lust for a woman's body, one needs to understand that the faults relate to both the male and female body. There is no difference whatsoever in the faults of the body itself. So go beyond that sort of distinction, and see how the advice applies in all instances of desire and lust.

Then go further and discuss why we need to overcome lust. What is the purpose of trying to overcome desire and lust? Your discussion will lead to looking further into the faults of excessive attachment and desire, and how the faults of excessive desire seem to be a cause a loss of direction in life, leading to quarrelling with others and promiscuous. A lot of problems and difficulties arise in the world because of uncontrolled desire and lust. Using that as an example, discuss the need to overcome desire and lust.

The exam in the following week is based on the homework questions and discussion, and it is good to write down your answers well.

We will now recite the eight verses of mind training, and dedicate it to our Dharma friend Cynthia's late mother, who passed away recently. While reciting this prayer the appropriate visualisation is of the Buddha Amitabha in the space above. The compassion of the Amitabha Buddha manifests as rays like a hook coming out from his heart, which draws up the consciousness of Cynthia's late mother, bringing her up to the pure land of Amitabha. It will be good to do this visualisation as we do the recitation.

That is the best way to offer your condolences, which has the connotation of helping to uplift one's mind. In the western world you give flowers to do the same thing.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright  
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