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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བཀའ་སྒྲུབ་པའི་རྒྱུ་རྩུག་པོ།

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As usual, we will engage in our meditation practice. We have just recited the Refuge and Bodhichitta prayer, and with that motivation in mind, we can engage in the practice.  
[meditation]

Generate a positive motivation for receiving the teaching, which primarily consists of the wish to benefit other sentient beings.

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

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

#### **2.2. Forsaking the causes of bad transmigrations**

##### **2.2.2. Extensive explanation (cont.)**

##### **2.2.2.4. STOPPING HUNTING**

This is sub-divided into three:

2.2.2.4.1. Forsaking killing

2.2.2.4.2. Forsaking generating fear in others

2.2.2.4.3. Generating pleasure in others

##### **2.2.2.4.1. Forsaking killing**

The advice on forsaking killing should be taken at a personal level, rather than regarding it as advice for others to follow. In order to make it a personal advice, we need to ask questions about the necessity for avoiding the act of killing. What does 'forsake killing' mean? Why should we forsake killing? What are the consequences if we don't avoid killing? When we avoid killing, what are the positive consequences?

As the teachings indicate, we need to understand both the positive effects of avoiding killing and the negative effects if we engage in the act of killing. If, after relating the advice to ourselves we recall past act(s) of killing, then we need to generate strong regret. Then, to purify that negative act, we need to engage in purification practice. Furthermore, we also need to make a commitment to not engage in any further acts of killing; so we make the vow to not kill in the future.

Nagarjuna intended this to be personal advice. However, we should not implement the practice of avoiding killing just because Nagarjuna said so! Thus, we need an understanding of the sound reasons as to why we must avoid killing, and then our understanding and confidence in the law of cause and effect or karma will become stronger. The correct understanding of karma will serve as a sound basis for developing our practice and eventually gaining higher realisations; that is the basis of abiding by the law of karma.

It is totally impossible to achieve higher realisations if one neglects abiding by the law of karma. Therefore we need to establish the basis, and then we can further develop ourselves. At our beginner's level it might not be possible for us to put *all* of Nagarjuna's advice into practice right away, but we do need to practise with whatever ability we have now. The practice of the morality of avoiding killing can be seen as a very practical way of understanding karma, in terms of the positive effects of avoiding killing and the negative effects of taking the life of another being.

The harm caused by the act of killing is very obvious. The benefits of some practices of moral conduct may be obscure to us. We may not really understand why we should avoid certain kinds of actions because it is too hard for us to see the negative consequences of those acts and the positive effects of avoiding such acts. With the act of killing, however, it is very obvious that it will render harmful results.

If we were to witness an act of killing we would see the tremendous terror and suffering that is experienced. It is really obvious that even the prospect of death is very frightening to any living being. How much fear would we feel if our own life was threatened in any way? Our fear would be so tremendous that we would attempt to protect our life in every possible way. From our own experience, we know that one of the most precious things that we wish to protect is our own life, and that any harm inflicted upon our own life causes tremendous suffering.

As explained in the teachings, there are three types of effects of karma: the ripened effects, the effects that are similar to the cause, and the environmental effects. Although the karmas relating to other kinds of deeds might be a bit more obscure, the karma of the act of killing is quite obvious. Those who engage in the act of killing end up becoming quite miserable, and their life is shortened with illness and so forth. So these kinds of effects are quite obvious, and seeing the obvious consequences of the negative act of killing can give us a further determination to avoid killing.

Because the suffering experienced by the victim of killing is very obvious; if you don't wish to cause others to suffer, then you would necessarily want to avoid the act of killing. And at a personal level, we would not want to experience the effects of the negative karma of killing.

If we have engaged in the act of killing and we do not purify the negative karma, then an imprint of that action is left on the mind which, if it is not purified, will remain in one's mind until conditions are right for that imprint to be awakened. When the imprint is activated, one will immediately experience the result of suffering. It is explained in great detail in the teachings how the cause and effect of karma works, and how it is experienced. So understanding this in greater detail will give us more confidence about karma and its effects, and the initiative to engage in the practice. The first of the moral ethics presented by the Buddha was to abandon the act of killing, which is very obvious and so a practical practice for us beginners.

The relevance of contemplating and analysing the cause and effect sequences of the act of killing is that our commitment to avoid killing becomes much stronger. Furthermore, if one recalls having engaged in an act of killing during the past, then by contemplating the specific details of the karmic consequences one will develop a very strong sense of regret. Such regret will only become apparent when one really contemplates the details of the suffering of the other being, as well as that great suffering that one will experience in the future, because of the karma one has created. Using this two-fold combination of contemplating the suffering of the other and contemplating one's own suffering, will definitely result in developing very strong regret about having committed such negative deeds in the past. Most importantly, a very strong commitment to not engage in such negative deeds in the future will spontaneously arise. When that combination takes place, then the purification is completed.

Based on strong regret, the commitment to not engage in such negative acts in the future can be developed. If, because one sees the ill effects of deeds one has committed in the

past, one has developed strong regret, then one will take the initiative to make a strong commitment not to engage in those negative deeds again in the future. Then we will have developed a very strong basis for avoiding such negative deeds again in the future. This analysis and understanding of karmic consequences not only helps us to abide by the law of karma, but it also allows us to develop a strong sense of compassion for other beings. Contemplating the suffering that one has caused in the past, and how much suffering others experience as a result of their acts of killing, will initiate a strong sense of compassion. That is why this is such a very profound practice for our development.

The verse relating to this topic is:

*171 To hunt game is a horrible  
Cause of short life,  
Fear, suffering, and hell,  
Therefore always steadfastly keep from killing*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further adds to the meaning of the verse:

*To hunt game is horrible because the ripening results of having killed in past lives, as well as karmic results that are similar to that cause, will cause a short life, fear, suffering and hell. Therefore always steadfastly keep from killing.*

As the commentary explains, if one engages in the act of killing, for example hunting, then because of the specific karmic results called ripening results, as well as the karmic results that are similar to the cause, the consequences in a future life will be that one's own life will be short. We see many examples of individual who experience a short life; as explained here, this is the consequence of having taken life in the past. A further karmic result is living in fear. We may wonder why some beings live in great fear, or we may wonder why we experience fear sometimes. Fear is said to be a result of the act of killing, or shortening the life of other beings in the past. Further suffering that could be experienced in future lifetimes is the suffering of the hells.

Here Nagarjuna is advising the king to stop killing through acts of hunting and so forth, because of the negative consequences that the king will experience in the future. Thus, Nagarjuna cautions the king, 'even though you may be mighty and majestic now and you may feel that you have great power, nevertheless you will not always remain strong and healthy. You will have to pass on to a future life. So even though you may not experience these results now, take your future lives into consideration so that you will not have to experience suffering then'. So Nagarjuna is giving this personal advice out of compassion for the king, as well for those living beings who would be otherwise killed by the king.

I feel that Nagarjuna is giving us incredibly practical advice. Using sound reasoning and practical analogies, his very sound advice is clearly given out of his compassion and love for us. Nagarjuna's advice to the king is to 'always steadfastly keep from killing and avoid killing because of all of the negative consequences that would otherwise be experienced. To do that you must therefore abide by the morality of avoiding killing, and steadfastly abide by that discipline'.

We can also further understand that Nagarjuna is making predictions about the future, and that these predictions are based on valid reasons. Normally when we talk about predictions we think that there must be something paranormal about them, but the predictions made by Nagarjuna are very clear and soundly based. The prediction

is that if one engages in certain acts, then the definite result will be such and such, and if one doesn't wish for that prediction to be fulfilled, then one needs to practice counter-measures. That is how Nagarjuna's advice is of such great benefit.

#### 2.2.2.4.2. Forsaking generating fear in others

What follows is more practical advice to the king, as Nagarjuna advises the king to forsake generating fear in others. For example, fear can be used as a means of intimidation, 'if you don't follow my orders, I will punish you', and in the past punishment could have meant the severing of limbs and so forth. Even if the orders were rescinded, the fear would remain, and in the past a person sentenced by the king might not be able to sleep out of great fear about what they will have to experience. So Nagarjuna is cautioning the king to not to use his might and power to cause fear in others. We, too, can take this advice at a personal level and not intimidate or cause fear in others.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

*172 Those who frighten embodied beings  
When they encounter them are malevolent  
Like a snake spitting poison,  
Its body completely stained with impurity.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je adds a few points:

*Those who frighten embodied beings through harmfulness when they encounter them are malevolent, and thus must be completely forsaken. They cause fear like a snake spitting poison, its body completely stained with impurity.*

A snake is used as an illustration of what causes fear in others. A very venomous snake not only bites, but also spits poison to harm others. Anyone encountering such a snake is immediately fearful, and tries to evade, or even destroy it. Nobody wants to encounter such a poisonous snake, because of the fear it causes. Likewise, anyone who is malevolent or harmful to others, making them fearful, would not be pleasant to encounter. With this illustration, the king is advised to avoid causing fear in others.

The main point of the advice here is to not cause others fear through harmfulness. As with the case of the poisonous snake, fear is generated due to the potential harm it can cause. Likewise, causing fear out of threats or harmful attitudes and behaviour is an ill deed, and so it must be overcome and avoided.

#### 2.2.2.4.3. Generating pleasure in others

The relevant verse from the root text is:

*173 Just as farmers are gladdened  
When a great rain-cloud gathers,  
So those who gladden embodied beings  
When encountering them are beneficent.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Just as farmers are gladdened when a great rain-cloud gathers; so those like a king, who gladdens embodied beings with good conduct when encountering them are beneficent and enacting dharma conduct. Thus, this must be practiced at all times.*

The analogy here is of farmers whose crops haven't had rain for some time. As soon as rain-clouds gather, with the prospect of rainfall, the farmers are gladdened. Through this analogy the king is being advised to help others and to show good conduct by gladdening other beings. Here 'gladden other beings' refers to making other beings both physically and mentally happy. This is achieved by being beneficial to them through Dharma conduct. It is not just any conduct,

but specifically Dharma conduct that benefits others on a physical and mental level.

Thus, in summary, the king is being advised that it is to his advantage to engage in good conduct, which is explained here as being conduct that is beneficial to others. Such beneficial conduct is based on avoiding harm to others, which, as explained earlier, means avoiding the acts of killing and causing fear in others and so forth. These acts are considered to run counter to the well-being and welfare of others. On the other hand, benefiting others on a physical and mental level, brings them a real sense of joy and happiness, and so it is Dharma conduct.

Clearly, the king is being advised in a very practical way that he should avoid certain kinds of misconduct, and engage in the positive and good conduct, or Dharma conduct. Again, this advice can be applied on a personal level, and we should try to implement it in our daily life, for our own benefit as well as for others.

### 2.3. Summary: Abandoning non-practices and achieving the practices

The explanation of this heading comes in the first half of Verse 174, which reads:

*174ab Thus observe the practices incessantly  
And abandon those counter to them.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary elaborates:

Thus, as has been extensively explained previously,  
*observe the practices incessantly...*

Earlier in the text there was an extensive and detailed explanation about the need to avoid the ten non-virtuous deeds, and other misdeeds as well. This part of the text has explained the need to avoid the act of killing and causing fear in others, leading to this summary: one needs to observe and incessantly practice those things that we need to adopt.

The next point Gyaltsab Je makes is:

...abandoning non-Dharma practices which harm oneself and which are counter to Dharma practices.

The two main points being concisely explained here are the need to engage in conducive practices in accordance with the Dharma, and to avoid or abandon non-Dharma practices and deeds.

This summary by Nagarjuna is the same as the advice that His Holiness the Dalai Lama presents. His Holiness shares his practical advice about making the commitment 'I will not harm any other living being in even the slightest way, and I will engage in whatever possible way to benefit other sentient beings'. Making this commitment on a daily basis is, as His Holiness advised, highly beneficial.

If the advice of all the teachings were to be summarised, it really comes down to these two points: to avoid harming others even in the slightest way and to consciously engage in benefiting other sentient beings. I personally find this a very, very powerful point to contemplate. In your daily practice you can take the initiative, and spend a few minutes contemplating these points. Firstly contemplate the necessity for engaging in such a practice, and then make the commitment from the depths of your heart, 'today, I will intentionally avoid harming any living being in the slightest way, and I will actively engage in benefiting others'. Making that heartfelt commitment and contemplating that point really moves one's heart, and one can actually feel the blessing of that very powerful thought moving through oneself, because it is such a very altruistic and powerful state of mind.

Spending even just a few moments of your daily practice contemplating this point will be highly beneficial. So we will now actually contemplate this for a few minutes. *[Pause for meditation]*

The summary is 'to observe the Dharma practices incessantly and abandon those which are counter to them' can be amplified in these two thoughts to contemplate

- I will not engage in the slightest way to harm others;
- I will do everything possible to benefit other sentient beings.

Making that commitment from the depths of our heart and contemplating it is putting the essential points of Nagarjuna's summary into practice, and thus it is really beneficial.

### C. CAUSE AND EFFECT OF DEFINITE GOODNESS

This section is sub-divided into four:

1. Condensing the principal causes of highest enlightenment into three and training in them
2. Training in the causes for achieving the thirty-two signs of a buddha
3. Reason for not elaborating here on the causes and effects of the beautiful features
4. Difference between the marks of a buddha and of a universal emperor

#### 1. CONDENSING THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF HIGHEST ENLIGHTENMENT INTO THREE AND TRAINING IN THEM

The lines corresponding to this heading are the second half of verse 174 along with verse 175:

*174cd If you and the world wish to attain  
Unparalleled enlightenment,*

*175 Its roots are the altruistic aspiration to  
enlightenment  
Firm like the monarch of mountains,  
Compassion reaching to all quarters,  
And wisdom not relying on duality.*

Those of you who studied the *Madhyamakavatara* will recall that these key points were also presented in that text. Of course the *Madhyamakavatara* is a commentary to Nagarjuna's work *Fundamental Wisdom*. This verse is reiterating the points that are presented in the *Madhyamakavatara*. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

If you, king, and the beings that dwell in *the samsaric world wish to attain unparalleled enlightenment*, then the roots of unparalleled enlightenment are:

If one were to ask 'what are the roots of unparalleled enlightenment?' then the response presented here, is that if you have the wish to obtain unparalleled enlightenment, then you need to consider the main causes for achieving unparalleled enlightenment.

Gyaltsab Je then lists three points:

The **first** is presented as *the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment* for the sake of all living beings and that which is produced by the four conditions, the four causes and the four powers, and which is *firm like the monarch of mountains*.

This corresponds to part of the first verse in the *Madhyamakavatara* root text:

The mind of compassion and non-dual awareness  
And bodhichitta are the causes of conquerors'  
children.

As presented by Gyaltsab Je the *altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings is produced by the four conditions, the four causes and the four powers*. The particularities of altruistic aspirations are further explained in *The Bodhisattva Grounds*. We need not go into the detail of these four conditions, four causes and four powers now, but those who are interested can refer to the *Lam Rim*, which explains them clearly. The main point is that one of the three roots of unparalleled enlightenment is the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. *That which is produced by the four conditions, four causes and four powers and which is firm like the monarch of mountains* means that it is very firm and stable.

The **second** of the three causes is:

*Compassion* focuses on the suffering of sentient beings *reaching to all quarters* and wishes them to be free from suffering

Thus the second root is compassion, which focuses on the suffering of sentient beings reaching out to all quarters of the universe.

The **third** root cause is

*The wisdom* that realises the lack of extremes that does *not rely on duality*.

In summary the three main roots are

- The altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings;
- The compassion that focuses on the suffering of sentient beings reaching to all quarters, and wishes them to be free from suffering;
- The wisdom that realises the lack of extremes that does not rely on duality.

These three roots are very clearly presented in the root verse itself:

If you and the world wish to attain unparalleled enlightenment, its roots are:

- (1) Altruistic aspiration to enlightenment, which is firm like the monarch of mountains
- (2) Compassion reaching to all quarters
- (3) Wisdom not relying on duality.

## **2. TRAINING IN THE CAUSES FOR ACHIEVING THE THIRTY-TWO SIGNS OF A BUDDHA**

The next topic refers to the causes of the thirty-two major marks of a buddha, It describes each and then explains their causes. It would be good for you do some research so that when there is a reference to these marks you will be able to bring to mind that there are thirty-two major marks. There is some discrepancy between various texts in how these marks and their causes are presented. Nagarjuna's presentation seems to be more in accord with the *Uttara tantra* by Maitreya. However the main point is for us to actually get to know what the thirty-two major marks are; which you can prepare for yourself by referring to texts that explain them.

There is also a sutra requested by a girl called Rinchin Sangmo, which presents the thirty-two marks. If one has access to this particular sutra, it would be good for you to become acquainted with that, as it quite helpful for one's practice. Also you can understand that in fact there is no difference based on gender in the Buddha's teachings.

Amongst the Buddha's disciples there were some very intelligent women—their intelligence can be determined by the questions they asked the Buddha. His response to the queries of his disciples was presented as teachings that are called *sutras*. It is good to understand that.

It is important that we have a full understanding of the equality of both of male and female roles in the Buddha's teachings. The perfect circle of disciples of the Buddha consists of a fully ordained monk, a fully ordained nun a layman with vows and a laywoman with vows. Those who recite the *Vajra-cutter sutra*, will know that towards the end of the sutra there is a description of who was present when the Buddha gave that teaching. It clearly indicates that the disciples consist of fully ordained monks, fully ordained nuns, lay female practitioners with vows, and lay male practitioners with vows, gods and demi-gods and so forth. This describes the complete entourage of the Buddha's disciples.

In the *Heart Sutra*, which we regularly recite, Shariputra asks Avalokiteshvara, 'how does a son of good lineage practice in the profound?' and Avalokiteshvara responds, 'whatever son or daughter of good lineage who wishes to practice the profound should look at it this way' and then presents the method. This clearly indicates that there is no distinction between a male practitioner and a female practitioner. The earnest seeker may have male or female form, as both use exactly the same method to engage in that insight into wisdom. These are really important points that we need to understand, as they are helpful for the mind.

In the tantra, there are elaborately detailed explanations about the roles of male and female practitioners. According to tantra there is no difference in how a male or female body becomes enlightened—either body will do. That is specifically explained in the Guhyasamaja Tantra, which explains how the male enhances the wisdom of the female and the female enhances the wisdom of the male. Thus, by helping to enhance each other's wisdom, both male and female achieve the final realisation of enlightenment.

In summary, it would be good to acquaint yourselves with the marks of the Buddha, in particular the thirty-two major marks. The eighty minor marks are quite extensive, however if one has access to explanations, it is also good to be familiar with that as well. The main reason for familiarising oneself with the major and minor marks of the Buddha is that they are mentioned in the teachings, prayers and sadhanas. In the *Praise to Manjushri* prayer (which we do before every Tuesday evening teaching) the qualities of Manjushri are explained. At the very end of the prayer there is an indication that he is endowed with 112 marks; these are the 32 major and the 80 minor marks. So when these signs and marks are mentioned, even in passing, then at least one can remember what they refer to. To that extent, there is a personal benefit as it leaves a positive imprint on our mind.

The sadhana practice of any deity always mentions that the enlightened being is endowed with the major and minor marks. So again, every time the signs of the enlightened being are presented in sadhana practices, we will be able to relate to what they are, which is of great benefit.

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