

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པོའི་བཀའ་བློན་པོ་ལྷན་པོ།

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5 April 2011

As usual we can spend some time in meditation. The motivation for our practice can be along the lines of the Refuge and Bodhichitta prayer that we recited earlier. With that in mind, we can now do the practice. *[Meditation]*

Just as we set an appropriate motivation earlier, likewise we can generate the following motivation for receiving the teachings, 'in order to benefit all sentient beings by liberating them from all suffering, and leading them to the ultimate state of enlightenment, I first need to achieve enlightenment myself. So, for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

C. CAUSE AND EFFECT OF DEFINITE GOODNESS

1. CONDENSING THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF HIGHEST ENLIGHTENMENT INTO THREE AND TRAINING IN THEM (CONT.)

In our last session we left off at the three main causes for achieving the ultimate state of enlightenment. The term *cause and effect of definite goodness* encompasses the cause for unparalleled enlightenment. Here one needs to understand why the term *unparalleled* is used. The fully enlightened state of a buddha is referred to as unparalleled, as there is no higher state of enlightenment than that. It is unsurpassable, as there are no realisations or states to be attained after reaching enlightenment. We can relate this understanding to the motivation that we generated earlier, i.e. 'in order to benefit all sentient beings by liberating them from suffering and leading them to the ultimate state of enlightenment, I need to achieve enlightenment myself, so for that purpose I will engage in the practices of listening to the Dharma and put it into practice well'. The correct understanding of the type of enlightenment we are aspiring to makes the motivation that much more meaningful and powerful.

As this heading indicates, with an aspiration to achieve enlightenment, one needs to engage in creating the causes for obtaining that state of buddhahood. So the teaching presents the three primary causes for achieving enlightenment.

The relevant lines were quoted in our last session¹. With respect to these lines Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

If you O king and the beings that dwell in the samsaric world wish to attain unparalleled enlightenment, then the roots of unparalleled enlightenment are the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings, which is produced by four conditions, four causes and four powers, and which is firm like the monarch of mountains:

¹ 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.*

The aspiration to achieve enlightenment or the awakening mind, specifically refers to a mind with *the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment* which, as explained here, *produced by the four conditions, four causes and four powers, and is firm like the monarch of mountains.*

The term *monarch of mountains* refers to the biggest of mountains, which is an allusion to stability. A stable state of mind is one that does not waver and which is not influenced by the opposing self-cherishing state of mind. So a being who has developed bodhichitta (or the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment) does not waver, and their aspiration is firm like the monarch of mountains. The aspiration to achieve enlightenment i.e. bodhichitta, is thus the first of the causes.

The second cause for unsurpassable enlightenment, compassion, is also the cause of the first. As Gyaltsab Je states in his commentary:

... and its primary cause is *compassion*, which focuses on the suffering of sentient beings, *reaching to all quarters*, and wishes them to be free from suffering;

These are essential points to understand. There are three root causes that serve as a basis for achieving unparalleled enlightenment. The first is the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment, the *cause of which is compassion*. Such compassion reaches *to all quarters* of the universe, as it *wishes* for all beings to be free from suffering. This type of compassion is a perpetually generated compassion, unlike contrived compassion, where you have to actually see a suffering being in order to feel some compassion, which is how we normally feel compassion. The compassion that is the second of the root causes to obtain unparalleled enlightenment, is a very strong compassion focused on all beings that, once generated, arises spontaneously and effortlessly at all times.

The third root cause is, as indicated in Gyaltsab Je's commentary,

... the *wisdom* that realises the lack of extremes and *not relying on duality*.

This is referring to the wisdom realising emptiness, which is the third primary root for obtaining unparalleled enlightenment.

1. The aspiration to achieve enlightenment

As indicated here, the primary root cause of unparalleled enlightenment is the development of bodhichitta, or the awakening mind. It is necessary to understand that if we wish to achieve enlightenment, then we definitely need to develop an awakening mind, or bodhichitta. Of course as ordinary beings we have not yet developed uncontrived bodhichitta. However, with some effort we can develop a contrived state of bodhichitta by generating a wish to free all beings from suffering and lead them to enlightenment. Even though it is a contrived bodhichitta motivation, it is still incredibly meaningful. Effortless and spontaneous bodhichitta can be achieved by first developing a contrived bodhichitta motivation. Uncontrived and spontaneous bodhichitta, of course, is found only within bodhisattvas, i.e. those who have entered the Mahayana path.

2. Compassion

Seven-fold instruction for developing bodhichitta

An uncontrived bodhichitta, or the awakening mind, is generated by having first developed the causes of that awakening mind. As mentioned in the teachings, one begins by contemplating all beings as having been one's mother,

thus they are as kind as one's mother of this life. When one contemplates this kindness of all sentient beings again and again, the spontaneous wish to repay that kindness will develop in one's mind.

The stages of the seven-fold cause and effect method of developing bodhichitta are:

1. Recognising all beings as having been one's mother.
2. Contemplating their kindness, by using the example of the kindness of one's own mother in this life, who gave birth to us, nourished us and brought us up, then the kindness of each and every living being, who have been kind to us numerous times in our past lives, will dawn upon us.
3. Having contemplated their kindness; the wish to repay their kindness will naturally develop, which is the third cause.
4. After contemplating the kindness of all living beings and generating the wish to repay their kindness, they will begin to appear very appealing and a genuine love for them will develop. So, one develops an appealing love for all living beings (some call it 'heart-warming' love), which regards all living beings equally appealing.
5. Having developed that appealing love, one further contemplates on how best to repay their kindness. By recognising that beings are suffering, one generates a strong wish to alleviate all their suffering, which is called great compassion.
6. That very strong and unceasing wish to remove the suffering of all sentient beings wish further develops into a strong sense of personal responsibility, 'I need to free them from all suffering myself; it falls to me and it is my responsibility to free all sentient beings from all suffering'. This superior intention is developed based on the earlier contemplation that all beings have been kind to oneself just like one's mother. At this point one has completed the sixth stage, which is to take personal responsibility for freeing all sentient beings from all suffering and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness, which is called superior or special intention.
7. At this point one will naturally question whether one has the ability to free all beings from all forms of suffering now, whereupon one quickly realise that one does not have the capacity. After further investigation, one will come to realise that the only way to obtain the capacity to liberate all beings from all suffering is by achieving enlightenment oneself. Even a bodhisattva, who has reached high levels of attainment, doesn't have that capacity; only a buddha and no one else has that capacity. Therefore, 'I need to achieve that ultimate state of enlightenment myself, in order to fulfil my aspiration to free all sentient beings from all suffering'. By contemplating this reasoning, one develops the strong determination to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, which is also called uncontrived bodhichitta or awakening mind.

Chandrakirti presented this very systematic and logical presentation of the technique for developing bodhichitta. By initially using logic and then contemplation, one becomes more and more familiar with developing compassion, to the point of generating actual compassion.

So the sequence of how bodhichitta is generated is that it is dependent on the superior intention or responsibility that one takes for all sentient beings, which in turn is dependent on developing compassion, which is itself developed on the basis of a heart-warming or appealing love towards all

sentient beings. That is developed on the basis of wishing to repay their kindness, which is based on contemplating the kindness of all sentient beings, which in turn is based on recognising them as having been one's mother in the past.

Chandrakirti presented this very systematic presentation based of the logic of our own mother being our closest and kindest relation. When we have the same view of the appeal of all other beings as we have for our mother in this life, then all living beings will be equally appealing and we will have an unbiased view of them. Through familiarity with this practice, it is definitely possible to reach the point of spontaneously seeing all beings as equally appealing as one's own mother. When one reaches the stage of seeing all other beings as equally appealing and equally deserving of our help to be free from all suffering, then the following states of mind are developed naturally

This practice should not be seen as a mere intellectual exercise, but rather as a means to develop that real sense of a warm heartedness towards all living beings. Then the keen wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings and to free them from suffering will be developed, which is a most precious state of mind. Even though we may not have developed that uncontrived and spontaneous wish of the awakening mind right now, we will, through familiarity from meditating on these points, definitely develop a strong affinity with the awakening mind. This affinity will, at the very least, protect us from the lower realms in the next life.

It is said that those who have a strong affinity with bodhichitta cannot possibly be born in the lower realms. Thus, having an affinity with bodhichitta will protect and secure a rebirth with the right conditions to practice Dharma in our future life. The right conditions, which we have now, are meeting with the Mahayana teachings and the perfect Mahayana teachers, and obtaining these conditions again in the future will allow us to further develop ourselves. Even if we have not generated an awakening mind in this life, there is every possibility that we will develop it in the next life or beyond, which is how we progress towards enlightenment.

3. Wisdom

The third root cause of highest enlightenment is the wisdom realising emptiness. This is essential for achieving unparalleled enlightenment. Without the realisation of emptiness there is no possible way to achieve enlightenment—none at all!

Structure of the Mahayana path

All three roots to the achievement of unparalleled enlightenment are equally essential. So we must familiarise ourselves with these points and gain as profound an understanding of them as we can. As I have explained in previous teachings, it is good for us to really understand the complete structure of the Mahayana, which can be summarised into:

- The **basis**, which is the two truths.
- The **path**, which is method and wisdom.
- The **result**, which is the attainment of the two bodies of a buddha, i.e. form body and the wisdom truth body.

It is advantageous to have a good understanding of this structure and to know how they are interdependent.

The two truths are *conventional truth* and *ultimate truth*. Based on actualising the ultimate understanding of the two truths, one develops the path, within which both method and wisdom are essential. The awakening mind or the

altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment is the *method*, while *wisdom* is the wisdom realising emptiness. This relates also to the two accumulations: the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. The accumulation of merit refers to developing the awakening mind and the accumulation of wisdom is to acquire the ultimate wisdom realising emptiness. Therefore the method, which is the awakening mind or bodhichitta, is said to be the main cause to develop the *form body* of a buddha (an enlightened being's body) and the wisdom realising emptiness becomes the main cause for achieving the *wisdom truth body* (the qualities of a buddha's mind).

With respect to the two truths, the ultimate outcome of understanding conventional truth is the means to generate the awakening mind, while an understanding of ultimate truth is the basis for developing the wisdom realising emptiness. Thus the basis is the two truths, and the path is essentially bodhichitta and the wisdom realising emptiness, which is the means to achieve the result of the two bodies of a buddha (the form body and the wisdom truth body of an enlightened being). Thus the ultimate goal is to achieve the state of buddhahood.

Contemplating and meditating on this process is, in itself, a high form of meditation. Not only does it leave a very strong positive imprint on our mind, but we also gain a more profound understanding of these points. Even thinking about these points can bring about a very relaxed state of mind, as we are diverted from the negative states of mind. So during the practice of meditation we can definitely gain a calm state of mind as well as immediate release from the delusions. In that way it is a very powerful and meaningful meditation.

The main point to understand here is that the root causes for unparalleled enlightenment are (1) the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment or the awakening mind, (2) compassion, and (3) the wisdom realising emptiness. Although these three are presented as the primary or root causes, it is to be understood that there are other practices such as engaging in the practices of generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, concentration and so forth, which are auxiliary causes.

It is also good to incorporate this explanation into an understanding of what a Mahayana practitioner is. How does a Mahayana practitioner engage in practice? The answer is that, at the very least, they have a contrived state of an awakening mind, or bodhichitta, and that they engage in the practice of the six perfections. The practices of a Mahayana practitioner are referred to as the bodhisattva practices. What are the bodhisattva practices? They are engaging in the six perfections after having developed the awakening mind. Anyone who aspires to the Mahayana practices should understand that whatever practice one does, it should be based, at the very least, on a contrived bodhichitta, or an awakening state of mind.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je further explains:

Acharya Chandrakirti presents this point extensively in his *Madhyamakavatara* and further condenses the meaning in his commentary *Clear Words*. As presented in *Madhyamakavatara*, in order to generate bodhichitta, it has to be ornamented with the wisdom realising non-duality, preceded by great compassion and is the main cause for obtaining the primordial wisdom of the conquerors. In order to fully comprehend the intent of Arya Nagarjuna this treatise on compassion was composed. As Arya Nagarjuna elucidates, on the

paths of accumulation and preparation one fully embraces the three causes; finally on the first ground one will directly penetrate the meaning of emptiness, gaining the realisation of the perfection of wisdom. Thus, he presents the primary cause of unsurpassable enlightenment in a concise manner. If you wish to gain a comprehensive understanding of how bodhichitta is first developed and then practised once it has been developed, you need to refer to Je Rinpoche's [Lama Tsong Khapa] extensive treatise on the bodhisattvas' general deeds and the practices of last two perfections.

This is showing how the authentic sources explain the awakening mind, compassion, and the wisdom realising emptiness, as being the root causes of unsurpassable enlightenment. As mentioned here, on the first two paths—the *path of accumulation* and the *path of preparation*—the main emphasis is on further cultivating compassion, bodhichitta and gaining a conceptual understanding of emptiness. Then the direct realisation of emptiness is gained on the *path of seeing*, which is also where the first of the ten bodhisattva grounds is obtained.

The ten bodhisattva grounds are explained in the fifth chapter of *Precious Garland*. Chandrakirti extracted the essence from Nagarjuna's treatises and explained it in greater detail in the *Madhyamakavatara* and in *Clear Words*.

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

As the signs and marks of a buddha are being presented in this section, it is good to understand the literal meaning of the word *sign*. The definition of a sign or mark is that which indicates that the one who possesses it is a valid being.

This heading is divided into two sub-headings:

2.1. Exhortation to listen

2.2. Actual explanation of the thirty-two marks of a buddha

2.1. Exhortation to listen

The relevant verse reads:

*176 O great King, listen to how
Your body will be adorned
With the thirty-two signs
Of a great being.*

The sequence here is as was explained earlier. The ultimate goal of enlightenment can be summarised into achieving the two bodies of a buddha, the form body and the wisdom truth body. This section refers to the signs and marks of the form body of the Buddha. According to the definition of a sign, the possession of these marks is a clear sign that the person is a valid or enlightened being. These signs and marks that adorn the form body of enlightened beings do not just come about spontaneously without depending on any causes and conditions, but they are dependent on specific causes and conditions. What are the causes and conditions for achieving those marks and signs? So, here the text gives the presentation of what the marks are along with their causes.

This systematic presentation can also be used as a meditation topic where one thinks about the marks, their causes and how the causes and effects are inter-related. There are different forms of meditation, and this one falls into the category of analytic meditation, which is a very high form of meditation. It is good to use whatever understanding one gains from these teachings as a part of our personal practice.

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

Addressing the king Nagarjuna advises him thus: *O great King, listen to the causes and effects of the signs and the relationship between the two—in order to understand how your body will be adorned with the thirty-two signs, just like that of a great being.*

Indicating that the king will be adorned with the signs in the future is a way of inspiring the king, because it indicates that the king will obtain those signs when he becomes enlightened. So Nagarjuna exhorts the king to listen to what the signs are (which are the effects) and to the causes of those signs, and the relationship between the two. By acquiring the causes now, you will obtain the marks of a superior or enlightened being in the future.

2.2. Actual explanation of the thirty-two marks of a Buddha

177 *Through proper honouring of stupas,
Honourable beings, superiors, and the elderly
You will become a Universal Monarch,
Your glorious hands and feet marked with [a
design of] wheels.*

This verse relates to the first mark, which is that the *hands and feet are marked with wheels*. Did you look them up as I asked? It would be good to have a copy of the list so that you can refer to it, or even memorise them. It is good to know what the thirty-two major marks are, then, when an explanation is given, we can gain a deeper understanding of them. As I have mentioned earlier that would be very useful for one's own practice.

If we recite the list then that will leave an imprint to gain an understanding all the different marks that adorn the Buddha as an enlightened being. So it is good to become familiar with them. In the *Ornament of Clear Realisation* the marks are listed in verse form, which would be easier to recite together.

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

Because it is the essence of all reliquaries, blessed by the buddhas and a holy object for accumulating virtue and purifying negative karma, the Conqueror—Buddha Shakyamuni himself—is referred to as stupa [or receptacle of offerings].

The first part of the commentary relates to the *proper honouring of stupas*, where the ultimate stupa literally means *a receptacle of offerings*, which is the Buddha himself.

The commentary continues:

Thus, *through proper honouring of actual stupas which are buddhas; as well as honourable beings such as one's parents, abbots and teachers, the sick, the superior-arya sangha and the elderly, you will become a universal monarch.* And thus, you will not be suppressed by other's glory but rather *your own glorious hands and feet will be marked with [a design of] wheels.*

This presentation clearly shows the cause, which is to honour the ultimate receptacle of offerings, the stupa, or the Buddha himself. Furthermore, one's own parents having shown extreme kindness can be categorised as *honourable beings*, as well as *abbots, teachers and the sick*. The Buddha mentioned that caring for the sick and the elderly is one of the kindest ways to benefit others. So I regularly encourage people who work in nursing homes or homes for the aged that, with a proper motivation such work is a really good deed, and very good work in which to engage. By engaging in that and also honouring *the superior aya sangha and the*

elderly, you will become a universal monarch, which in this case, refers to being an enlightened being.

Thus *you will not be suppressed by others' glory, but rather your own glory, where your feet will be adorned with wheels.* Here *wheel* literally refers to a Dharma wheel, and it is not just any diagram of a wheel. Rather the wheel has specific features, for example, having a thousand spokes, having a hub and so forth, There is a very clear and luminous imprint of this wheel manifesting on a buddha's hands and feet.

Again, it is not as if the signs and marks of an enlightened being arise spontaneously or miraculously, and that we need to worship and pay respect to the Buddha because of his majesty. The glorious and majestic marks of an enlightened being are dependent on particular causes and conditions. This indicates that at one time the Conqueror, the Buddha, was an ordinary being just like us. It was during the time as an ordinary being that the Buddha engaged in the service of benefitting others, as indicated here, honouring the stupas as well as honourable beings such as one's parents, abbots and teachers, the sick, the aya sangha and the elderly.

Engaging in such virtuous deeds over many life times became the cause for the Buddha to obtain marks such as the Dharma wheel. It is good to really understand how, due to the specific causes and conditions; one will obtain these majestic signs and marks as an indication of being a superior or enlightened being. It is important that we contemplate this process as a way to inspire ourselves to engage in virtuous deeds now, as way to create the appropriate causes.

In essence, the presentation here, along with our study and understanding, serves as a means to inspire us to also engage in virtue and by doing so, to create the causes to obtain those marks and signs ourselves in the future. The way to create the causes now is, as explained here, to honour stupas and so forth. As we are capable of doing so, it is not out of reach.

Conventional stupas are either images of the Buddha, or a representation of the Buddha's mind. There are images, paintings and drawings, statues and relics and so forth that we need to regard as the actual manifestation of Buddha. Due to our obscurations we don't have the ability to actually see the Buddha with our own eyes now, so the next best thing for us is to relate to the images or representations of enlightened beings in the form of statues, stupas and so forth. Honouring them with the thought 'this is the real Buddha not just a representation', and then making offerings, singing praises and doing prostrations and so forth is highly meritorious practices. Making offerings in this way is highly meritorious. Furthermore, as explained here, whenever possible help and respect one's parents, abbots, teachers, the sick, the elderly, the Sangha and so forth, which is the cause to accumulate virtue, and so obtain those results oneself.

If we leave the study of this as just mere intellectual knowledge, thinking 'OK, I understand what the signs are, and that these are the causes', will not really be of personal benefit. But if we take this as a personal instruction it serves as a means to inspire us to accumulate virtue, and then it serves a great purpose and is of great benefit. If we can do that then we can derive the essence of the teachings, which serves as a great benefit for ourselves.

Edited Version
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