Nagarjuna's Precious Garland ১৯৯ ইন্ট্রন্ট্রন্থন ন্ত্র্বাম মা

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By generating a bodhichitta motivation, we can engage in the meditation practice, which will be highly beneficial. [Meditation]

Based on the earlier bodhichitta motivation, we can now generate a motivation for receiving the teaching, along the lines of, 'For the sake of all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching, and put it into practice well'.

The entire content of *Precious Garland* is about how to engage in practice in order to actualise this motivation; thus it is good to incorporate the short on tong-len meditation practice that we have just done into our daily life. This meditation practice is an aid to develop and further increase love and compassion within our hearts, and thus the motivation to practice generosity towards other sentient beings. Since the benefit that others receive from us comes from our being generous, we need to develop a strong basis of love and compassion in order to give unconditionally. The more that love and compassion increases in our hearts, the more the wish to give will arise spontaneously. We will then be able to give whatever is necessary in accordance to the needs of other sentient beings. This is how, in a practical way, we can see the benefit of engaging in this practice.

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

As the teachings indicate, the ultimate result of engaging in the practice of giving and so forth is to obtain the state of buddhahood. What is being presented here are the signs and marks that adorn the great and incomparably kind Buddha's body, along with their specific causes. These signs and marks are the result of the extensive practices that the Buddha engaged in, in his earlier lives as a bodhisattva on the Mahayana path. Thinking in this way will inspire us to obtain the same signs and marks in the future. As we are inclined to practice the Mahayana path, our ultimate aim is to become a buddha ourselves. Therefore we need to seriously consider the practices that are the causes for achieving that state of buddhahood complete with signs and marks.

The causes of enlightenment are bodhichitta and the practice of the six perfections. In order to develop bodhichitta, one needs to first train in developing love and compassion in one's heart. As we have not yet developed bodhichitta, it is not possible for us to generate the actual, uncontrived and effortless bodhichitta. However generating a contrived bodhichitta, which is a bodhichitta attitude developed through effort, is highly beneficial. At a beginner level even the mere wish to develop bodhichitta is really meaningful. Generating that mind is the basis of the Mahayana practice, so we need to put some effort into it.

These teachings were presented in a unique way by the incomparably kind Buddha himself. He showed how his own practices on the path resulted in the attainment of the qualities he possesses now. His was a modest approach, Chapter 2

showing how the Buddha himself had previously engaged in all of the practices that he then presented to his disciples. In a simple way, he is saying 'I have previously practised in this way, so if you wish to gain the same qualities that I now possess, then you should also practise in this way'. We can see how the incomparably kind Buddha's presentation is unique, in the sense that we cannot find such a presentation in other religious traditions. So as Buddhists, we can appreciate the Buddha's teaching for its unique and practical method for engaging in the practices.

To this day the holy sites marking the Buddha's incredible deeds still exist. One can visit Lumbini where the Buddha was born as Prince Siddhartha, and the sites where he took up his princely duties, and then later renounced his princely life. He engaged in the austere practices of a six-year meditation under a Bodhi tree, which you can visit. You can also visit the site in Bodhgaya where he obtained enlightenment. Then there is the site in Sarnath where he gave his first teaching, and the site in Kushinagar where he passed into paranirvana. So, all of these holy sites can be visited to this day. This indicates that the Buddha's life is not mythological, but rather it is based on historical facts The authenticity of these places and sites gives us the confidence that at one time in the past, there was an enlightened being who gave these valid teachings that we can now practise.

The essence of the *Prajnaparamita* teachings—the *Heart Sutra*—was delivered by the Buddha at Vulture's Peak, which is another holy place that one can visit to this day. The local Indian guides explain that it has been called Vulture's Peak since ancient times, because part of it looks like a vulture's head. Furthermore, the teachings indicate that the profound *Vajra-cutter sutra*, which we recite, was given in Vaishali, which is another place that we can visit to this day. Then there is the stupa marking the site where the Buddha taught the Kalachakra teachings in Amaravati, which is in south of India. There is also a throne in Kushinagar, which is said to be the place where the Buddha gave his last teaching before he passed away.

These sites were determined after excavation, where they found stone slabs on which the sutras were written. So these places were marked as being the sites where the Buddha gave his teachings, and have been preserved to this very day.

We can first recite together the verses from Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realisation*, which presents the thirty-two signs of a buddha.

Hands and feet having the signs of wheels, tortoise feet,

Digits of the hands and feet joined with webs,

Hands along with feet smooth and tender,

Seven [regions] of the body elevated,

Long digits, broad heels, a large and upright body,

Knees not protruding, hairs pointing upward,

Calves like the antelope's, long and beautiful arms,

Secret organ well retracted in a sheath.

Golden-hued skin, soft skin,

Hairs growing singly and excellently clockwise,

Face adorned with a treasure hair, torso like the lion's,

Tops of the shoulders rounded, broadness between the shoulders,

With respect to this, the appearance of even tastes that are not delicious as the best of tastes,

Body is symmetrical like a nyagrodha tree,

Possessing a protrusion on the crown, tongue beautiful and long,

The melodious voice of Brahma, cheeks like a lion's,

Very white teeth, even teeth, well set, Forty complete in number, Azure eyes, eyelashes like a magnificent cow's: These thirty-two are the signs.¹

The **first** of the signs, *hands and feet having the signs of wheels*, was introduced in our last session. The relevant verse from *Precious Garland* is:

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.

The verse presents the cause of this first sign. It is incredibly inspiring for us to see how, through the practices mentioned here, of proper honouring of stupas, honourable beings (which includes one's parents), superiors and the elderly, you will become a Universal Monarch, and your glorious hands and feet marked with a design of wheels. As the verse indicates, through specific practices one naturally obtains that sign on enlightenment. It is inspiring to relate the result of a specific sign to the practices that are the cause of that result.

The **second** sign as presented in *Ornament of Clear Realisation* is *tortoise feet*, which is a specific feature of the Buddha's feet. Unlike our own feet, the Buddha's feet are flat like the feet of a tortoise, which are rounded and very smooth. So, the Buddha's feet are said to be rounded and very soft, and not curved.

The verse in the root text which corresponds with this sign is:

178 O King, always maintain firmly
What you have vowed about the practices,
You will then become a bodhisattva
With feet that are very level.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

O King, always maintain firmly what you have vowed and made commitments about the practices. Thus, you will then become a bodhisattva with feet that are very level, and are equally touching the ground.

Here, Nagarjuna is exhorting the king to engage in the practices that the Buddha engaged in. Practising in accordance with vows and commitments made in the past, is the specific cause, even for a bodhisattva, to obtain *feet that are very level and equally touching the ground*.

The **third** sign is *digits of the hands and feet joined with webs*. The corresponding verse from the root text reads:

179 Through giving, speaking pleasantly,
Purposeful behaviour, and concordant
behaviour
You will have hands with glorious
Fingers joined by webs [of light].

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Through giving, speaking pleasantly, purposeful behaviour and concordant behaviour, which are the four means of gathering, you will have hands with glorious fingers, like the king of geese, joined by webs [of light].

The *four means of gathering* refers to the four ways to benefit others by giving them the Dharma. The first of the four is *giving*, which is being generous with material needs and thus relieving others of a difficulty, which will endear us to others. *Speaking pleasantly* or using pleasant words makes others feel at ease. For example, if someone comes to visit

¹ From *Ornament for Clear Realisation* by the Protector Venerable Maitreya, reproduced with permission from FPMT.

from far away, the first words you utter are, 'Have you have had a pleasant trip? Do you feel like resting? Are you feeling OK?' Even in a worldly sense, we all appreciate such pleasant words as 'welcome' and 'very nice to see you' or 'how are you doing?'. They make us feel at ease and welcome, and are, in a conventional sense, regarded as being courteous. So the first two means of gathering disciples epitomise good conduct and the kind of behaviour that makes others feel at ease.

Once people are at ease, one then engages in *purposeful* behaviour which relates to encouraging others to engage in purposeful behaviour. The fourth means of gathering, concordant behaviour, relates to one's own behaviour. It is unacceptable if one encourages others to engage in good and purposeful conduct without personally practising such conduct oneself. Just as one encourages others to engage in good behaviour, one must also practise in the same way. In other words, one's own behaviour must be concordant with the advice one gives. Then, having gained the trust of others, one can impart the teachings of the Dharma. That is how great beings impart the Dharma to others.

Through these practices, one becomes enlightened and has hands with glorious fingers, like the king of geese. Now although we may not have come across the king of geese, we can see that the feet of geese are webbed. So, possessing such hands is a sign of having engaged in the four practices of giving Dharma.

Now we come to the **fourth** and **fifth** signs: *Hands along with feet smooth and tender* and *seven regions of the body elevated.* The corresponding verse from the root text is:

180 Through abundant giving
Of the best food and drink
Your glorious hands and feet will be soft;
Your hands, feet, shoulder blades,
And the nape of your neck will broaden,
So your body will be large and those seven
areas broad.

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary is:

Through your abundant giving, of the best food and drink to others...

Not just any kind of giving will suffice, it needs to be *abundant giving*, or continuously giving *the best food and drink* to others. Having engaged in such great acts of generosity in the past, the result will be that:

...your glorious hands and feet will be soft and youthful;...

As explained here, the hands and feet will be very soft, having an appearance of being young and tender.

The **fifth** sign according to *Ornament of Clear Realisation*, is the *seven regions of the body elevated*, which is also presented in this verse.

With regard to this Gyaltsab Je's commentary on Nagarjuna's text states:

... your hands, feet, shoulder blades, and the nape of your neck will broaden, so your body will be large and those seven areas broad.

As explained in the commentary, the seven points are the back of the hands, the two feet, two shoulder blades (or shoulders) and the back of the neck. Unlike our rather flat features, these seven features of the fifth sign are elevated and more rounded. Rather than being shallow like ours, the shoulders are further broadened as is the back of the neck.

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Can you list the five signs we have covered thus far?

Chapter 2

Students: Inaudible.

You don't have to be embarrassed when answering questions! This is the wrong time to be shy and embarrassed. When we are engaged in virtue, there is no need to be shy and embarrassed at all! You can confidently engage in virtue. It's when you are engaging in negativity that you should be shy and embarrassed. In some ways it is quite disgraceful to be very competent when engaging in negativity, and very shy about engaging in virtue. So can you now list the five signs we have covered so far?

Students:

Hands and feet having the signs of wheels, tortoise feet; Digits of the hands and feet joined with webs; Hands along with feet smooth and tender; Seven regions of the body elevated.

The next signs listed in Ornament of Clear Realisation are having long digits, broad heels, a large and upright body.

The following verse of the root text presents the sixth, seventh and eighth signs:

181 Through never doing harm and freeing the condemned Your body will be beautiful, straight, and large, Very tall with long fingers And broad backs of the heels.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Through never doing harm to others and freeing those who are condemned to death, your body will be beautiful to look at, straight without bends, and large, very tall with long fingers and broad backs of the heels.

The sixth sign is that your body will be beautiful to look at, straight without bends and large and very tall. The seventh and eighth signs are, respectively, long fingers and broad backs of the heels. Here, the three signs are attributed to one main cause, which is *never doing harm* to others and freeing *those* who are condemned to death.

There is a minor difference between the presentation of Precious Garland and that of Ornament for Clear Realisation. The latter presents a specific cause for each of the three signs, whereas the former gives one main cause for all three signs. Otherwise, the general layout is the same and the presentation of the signs and marks is the same. Other texts also differ in their presentation of the explanation of the causes for these particular signs.

So with the body being beautiful, straight without bends and large and very tall, long fingers and broad backs of the heels, eight signs have now been covered.

The ninth and tenth signs are presented in the following verse:

182 Through spreading the vowed practices You will have glory, a good colour, Your ankles will not be prominent, Your body hairs will stand upwards.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Through spreading the words and meaning of the vowed

This refers to the cause of the signs, which is *spreading the* words and meaning of the vowed practices. Observing and explaining whatever vows one has taken will encourage others to keep those commitments and vows. Then, as a result of that practice:

... you will have glory, a good colour. Your ankles will not be prominent; your body hairs will individually stand upwards, turning clockwise.

The **ninth** sign is to have glory, a good colour and your ankles will not be prominent. The Buddha's ankles are not prominent and don't protrude, and are very smooth and rounded. The tenth sign is your body hairs will individually stand upwards, turning clockwise. Here the 'hairs' are body hairs, which spiral upwards and turn clockwise.

So how many signs have we covered?

Students: Ten.

And if you were to recite them?

Students:

Hands and feet having the signs of wheels, tortoise feet; Digits of the hands and feet joined with webs; Hands along with feet smooth and tender; Seven regions of the body elevated; Long digits, broad heels, a large and upright body; Knees not protruding, hairs pointing upward.

The next verse presents the **eleventh** sign:

183 Through your zest for knowledge, the arts, And so forth, and through imparting them You will have the calves of an antelope, A sharp mind, and great wisdom.

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

Through your zest for knowledge, the arts, and so forth, having learned them respectfully, and through respectfully imparting them to others, you will have the calves of an antelope, a sharp mind because of good memory, and great discriminative wisdom.

As explained here, a zest for knowledge particularly pertains to the arts. Within the arts there are the minor arts and the major arts. The minor arts incorporate general knowledge about the sciences, medicine, astrology and poetry and so forth. After having learnt them oneself, respectfully, one then imparts or teaches them to others. Having engaged in these deeds in the past, the result is the enlightened sign of the calves of an antelope. Unlike our own calves which are uneven in size and shape, the calves of an antelope reduce very evenly down to the hoof.

Here extra features are presented that are not part of the thirty-two signs. However they are part of the qualities of an enlightened mind: a sharp mind because of good memory, and great discriminative wisdom. These natural qualities are attained after having engaged in the arts with diligence, and then conveying the knowledge to others.

Now we come to the **twelfth** sign. Is that correct?

Students: Yes.

The root verse is:

184 If others seek your wealth and possessions, Through the discipline of immediate giving You will have broad arms and a pleasant appearance

And will become a leader of the world.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

If others seek your wealth and possessions, through the vowed discipline of immediate giving,...

This refers to the cause. Having previously engaged in the practice of *immediate generosity*, means that when others seek one's wealth or possessions, they are immediately given without any hesitation. Through such a virtuous action in the past:

... you will have broad and long arms and a pleasant appearance with nice complexion.

Here, the resultant sign or enlightened feature is to *have long arms*. Unlike our arms, the arms of enlightened beings are very long and if they were completely relaxed, their hands would almost touch the ground. They wouldn't ever have to bend down to pick up anything! *[soft laughter]*. This isn't just an external feature, because a buddha is miraculously able to pick up anything they desire.

Other specific features arising from this cause are *a pleasant appearance with a nice complexion*. Many of the signs or features of the Buddha's body specifically relate to having engaged in great acts of generosity in the past, helping the needy and the poor may times over. Thus the practice of generosity is one of the primary and predominant practices in Buddhism, which is good to know, lest one thinks that Buddhism doesn't emphasise the need to be generous.

Now we go to the **thirteenth** sign, which is presented in the following verse:

185 Through reconciling well
Friends who have become divided
You will become the best of those
Whose glorious secret organ retracts inside

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary, the cause is:

Through reconciling well, friends who have become divided;...

The actual sign that is the result is:

...like the great elephant and the precious horse, you will become the best of those whose secret organ retracts inside

We need to understand that each of the causes are practices that we can engage in now, which inspires us to engage in them. This is a very practical presentation indicating the importance of helping others to maintain good relationships, and helping to bring them together.

The specific cause here is to assist in reconciling friends or relatives who are divided or parted. Thus helping to restore relationships or friendships is a very good deed. This inspires us to not engage in acts of divisiveness or slander and so forth in our everyday life. By engaging in the positive deed of helping others to maintain their good relationships, and to dispel conflict or disharmony when it arises (by using pleasant words and so forth), one creates the causes for those enlightened signs or marks to be obtained in the future.

When we study these causes of the thirty-two signs of a buddha, we are being presented with specific practices. For each cause, the practice incorporates two parts: things to adopt and things to avoid and discard, i.e. adopting virtue as a practice and discarding non-virtue, which is its opposite.

Using the thirteenth sign as an example, we need to abandon causing division between friends and relations. The point of the practice to be adopted is to engage in ways and means to reconcile those who may be divided, or who may be experiencing relationship difficulties. This is how we need to incorporate these practices into our own daily life.

When we think about it, there is really great deal of meaning and purpose in all of these presentations. By contemplating these points, and the points of the teachings in general, one will become more aware of one's own faults and ill-deeds, and understand that we need to overcome them. Furthermore one will also come to recognise the positive qualities that need to be strengthened and further developed. This is how we engage in our practice.

As I have previously mentioned, when one listens to the Dharma, one should regard the teachings as being like a

mirror. The purpose of looking into a mirror is to beautify ourselves; the mirror is a medium to detect any dirt on our face, which can then be cleaned off. Similarly, the Dharma is like a mirror, in that it shows us our faults, particularly those in our own mind. Using the Dharma as a mirror to see the faults of our own mind also shows us how to overcome those faults.

As the teachings present, our practice can be summarised into two main points:

- 1. Practices that are to be adopted:
- 2. Practices that are to be abandoned.

So how many signs have we covered so far?

Students: Thirteen.

As a way to distinguish them properly, it might be good to develop a list of them so that you can recognise the individual signs clearly. Gaining some understanding of the signs is a way to strengthen our refuge practice as well. As presented in the advice on taking refuge, we need to relate to the qualities of the Buddha in order to develop strong faith in him. Then taking refuge in the Buddha becomes more powerful.

The qualities of the Buddha can be divided into three: his qualities of body, speech and mind. The thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of the Buddha basically summarise the qualities of the Buddha's *body*. Then there is the Buddha's eloquent *speech* and so forth. The qualities of the Buddha's *mind* are his omniscience along with great love and compassion, which gives him the great ability to benefit others.

It is by understanding the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech and mind, and his great deeds, that one's faith and sense of refuge in the Buddha becomes much stronger and firmer. These are ways to practise in daily life.

The great significance of contemplating the qualities of the Buddha is that it inspires us to become like the Buddha ourselves. When we are inspired, then, as one of the main causes for achieving enlightenment is bodhichitta, our inclination to develop bodhichitta will also develop naturally. To take a conventional example, when, in our worldly, everyday life, we see a prominent or influential person with many good qualities we wish to emulate that person. When we really admire them, we have the spontaneous thought, 'Wouldn't it be nice if I could be like them and have those same qualities myself'. So along with admiration, there is a natural tendency to want to emulate the qualities one notices. Then one will naturally examine the causes of those qualities, how they trained and how they have gained those qualities and then strive to achieve the same result.

The same applies to admiring the Buddha. Having faith in him and taking refuge in the Buddha is a means for us to aspire to become like the Buddha, and thus to engage in the practices of love and compassion and bodhichitta, which are the main cause to achieve the state of enlightenment. That is the significance of this teaching.

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