
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇིགས་མེད་ལྷོ་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

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As usual, we will spend some time in meditation by sitting in a comfortable and relaxed position, and setting a motivation along the lines of the Refuge and Bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited.

[Meditation]

We can set the appropriate motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to obtain enlightenment myself, thus I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

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

In our last session we completed the verses on the thirty-two major signs of a buddha which ended with this summary:

196 *Thus in brief know well
These thirty-two signs
Of a great lion of beings
Together with their causes.*

Even though we explained this verse in our last session, I will go over the main points again. In his commentary Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation of this verse:

To summarise, *thus in brief know well these thirty-two signs of a great lion of beings, together with their causes.* You must show respect for the accomplishment of the causes of the signs. Also while in the process of accomplishing the causes, you must understand the interconnected relationship between the causes and effects, and establish the link by making stainless prayers to obtain the distinctive features of the signs.

This indicates that our understanding of the causes of each of the signs should be incorporated into our own practice. On the basis of knowing what the signs are and the specific causes for obtaining those signs; *you must understand the interconnected relationship* between the virtuous deeds that are the *causes* for obtaining the particular signs of an enlightened being and the result itself. Having understood that, we then need to *establish the link in our own practice by making stainless prayers to obtain the distinctive signs* oneself.

As explained in the teachings, it is very important that we dedicate whatever virtues we accumulate towards the ultimate goal of enlightenment. The term *stainless prayers* refers to making strong aspirational prayers and dedicating one's merit to the ultimate goal of enlightenment rather than temporary goals such as being free from sickness in this life, or just to obtain a good rebirth in the next life. When we dedicate the virtues we have accumulated towards obtaining enlightenment, the dedication then becomes a stainless prayer.

As the teachings indicate, and the lamas reiterate, it is really important that we dedicate whatever virtue we accumulate towards alleviating the immediate suffering of sentient beings—such as sickness, hunger and thirst, all conflicts and natural disasters in the world—to the long life of the Mahayana teachers who present the Mahayana teachings, and finally dedicate it towards the ultimate goal of enlightenment. With such dedication our practice will be sealed.

Making stainless prayers is an essential part of our practice. As explained by the great master Nagarjuna, 'that which directs our virtues towards a particular goal is dependent upon our dedication. It is like the bridle on a horse, where the side of the bridle that is pulled directs the horse to move in that direction. Similarly our stainless prayers and dedications direct our virtues to a particular goal'.

So stainless prayers in the form of dedication are really important with respect to the goal to which the prayers are directed. When we dedicate our virtues—all of the required causes towards achieving enlightenment—then our virtues will not be wasted on mundane or temporary goals. Rather, by the virtue of our stainless prayers of dedication to that goal of enlightenment, they will be sustained over all our lifetimes, until we actually achieve enlightenment.

Stainless prayers of dedication are aspirations that are not stained by the worldly concerns of merely this life. In contrast, if we were to engage in practices aimed at short term goals, such as being free from sickness in this lifetime, then although it will have the effect of eliminating pain and suffering in this life, the merit that we have accumulated will then be exhausted. It would not work towards enlightenment or future lifetimes, because it would have been stained with the temporary goals of this life. So we really need to understand that *stainless* refers to pure prayers dedicated towards the long-term goals of future lives and, in particular, enlightenment.

Our dedication must, of course, be in accordance with our daily practice. If we make noble aspirational prayers, but neglect to put them into practice in our daily life, then we have really lost the point. For example, we may commence a practice with the four immeasurable thoughts, which include the very noble aspirations of wishing all sentient beings to be endowed with happiness and the causes for happiness, and to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering and so forth, but even though we may have recited it over 100,000 times by now, it will be of no value if we neglect to help and be of service of those sentient beings around us in our everyday life.

There are many examples of ordinary people outside our immediate Dharma circle who may not be acquainted with the Dharma as we know it, let alone reciting aspirational prayers, but who engage in very noble deeds and service to others; selflessly dedicating their life to helping their fellow human beings. Those people can put us to shame if we don't actually put our noble aspirations into practical effect as well. The main point is that while we may recite major aspirational prayers, we must also remember that is essential to put them into practice.

If we cause greater suffering to those beings around us, then, rather than bringing about happiness we will have completely missed the point. If, rather than trying to help people to be a little more happy and joyful we cause them greater misery and deprive them of further happiness, then we will have failed to apply those noble aspirations at a practical level. It is really important that we put our aspirations into practice in our immediate surroundings, and then slowly extend outwards from that.

3. REASON FOR NOT ELABORATING HERE ON THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF THE BEAUTIFUL FEATURES

This heading particularly relates to the eighty minor marks of a buddha. As the verse reads:

*197 The eighty beautiful features arise
From a concordant cause of love.
Fearing this text would be too long,
I will not, O King, explain them.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins his explanation of these lines with:

The eighty beautiful features arise from a concordant common cause of love that wishes all beings to be happy.

While there are particular causes for all of the eighty marks, the common cause of them all is *love that wishes all beings to be happy*. This very clear and explicit explanation shows us that amongst all the various causes, generating love towards others is the basis of all of the enlightened signs. Thus if we were to neglect expressing genuine love and concern for others, starting with those who surround us, it will, of course, be impossible for us to assume that we are creating any causes for enlightenment! How could we possibly accumulate causes for enlightenment if we neglect the very basic cause of expressing genuine love for those around us?

To assume that our practice is directed towards obtaining enlightenment, while at the same time neglecting to express genuine love and concern for those around us, is a false assumption. After having practised for a long time, we might even complain, 'Why am I not closer to becoming enlightened? How come I'm not a buddha yet?' If we have been neglecting the common cause (which is expressing genuine love for others), then how can we possibly assume that we are getting closer to enlightenment? This is a really essential point for us to remember.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Fearing this text will be too long if each of the particular causes were explained, thus I will not, O King, explain them.

Here Nagarjuna is basically implying to the king, 'As you are very busy with a lot of tasks at hand, you may not have time to contemplate on all of the particular causes, so I will not explain them in detail here'. One of the eighty signs, for example, is that the finger nails are copper coloured, and the specific causes for this mark are explained in the teachings. On that note, it would be good for you to have a copy of the eighty marks and their causes from *The Ornament of Clear Realisation* for reference, and as a means to become acquainted with the eighty marks—even though we are not going to cover

them here. Would you happen to have the verses on the eighty marks with you now? No. Well we can recite that together next week. Returning to the main point, Nagarjuna skilfully says that while there are particular causes for each of the eighty minor marks, fearing it will be too long to present them, 'I will not present them now'.

However, says Gyaltsab Je,

Implicitly this also indicates that one needs to endeavour in cultivating the common causes.

This means that while it may be hard to comprehend and think about each of the particular causes, you can definitely relate to the common cause of each of the marks, which is generating the love of wishing all beings to be happy. That is not too difficult to understand, thus putting the common cause into practice will be sufficient for now. This is great advice for ourselves too. While we may feel that the text and the explanations are vast and intricate, we can definitely relate to the common cause of developing love. That is something that we should keep in mind and put into practice.

As I mentioned earlier, the significance of acquainting ourselves with the list of the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks is that when we do our daily practice such as refuge, and any sadhana practice that refers to the deity who is adorned with the signs and marks of a buddha, it is good to be able to recall what those signs and marks are. The teachings also mention the sixty elegant features of the Buddha's speech, so it would be useful to become acquainted with those too.

As you will remember, when we contemplate the qualities of enlightened beings, we recall the qualities of their body, speech, mind and their deeds. So the qualities of the enlightened *body, speech, mind and actions* summarises all the qualities of an enlightened being. Recalling those qualities inspires us to also obtain those qualities ourselves. At a mundane level, when we see someone quite successful in their work, or in their studies, we want to emulate them, and we think 'oh, it would be wonderful if I could become like them'. Even though we know that we cannot become exactly like them in every aspect, if we admire them and put in the same kind of effort and so forth, we may be able gain some of their qualities. Similarly, recalling the qualities of an enlightened being can help us to develop a stronger faith and inspiration to become like them. That is the real benefit for oneself.

4. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MARKS OF A BUDDHA AND OF A UNIVERSAL EMPEROR

The differences between the marks of a buddha and of a universal emperor are presented in three sub-divisions:

- 4.1. Difference in effects
- 4.2. Difference in causes
- 4.3. Example

4.1. Difference in effects

The relevant verse is:

*198 All universal emperors
Are regarded as having these,
But their purity, beauty, and lustre*

Cannot match even a little those of a buddha.

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

If one were to ask what is the difference between the signs and marks of a buddha and a universal monarch? *All universal emperors are regarded as having a mere approximation of these signs and marks, but there is a great difference from those of the buddhas for their purity is that which is free from all defilements, endowed with extremely appealing beauty and lustre, which is not obscured by any defilements. Thus they cannot match even a little those of a buddha.*

While a universal emperor or monarch would have an approximation of these signs, they are in fact very different from the signs of a buddha. The signs of the Buddha have three main qualities: *their purity is that which is free from all defilements, endowed with extremely appealing beauty, and lustre which is not obscured by any defilements.* All of the signs and every feature of an enlightened being's body are completely appealing in their beauty and lustre, which indicates there are no defects. With ordinary beings some features may seem attractive, but you also find that other features are not so attractive, and have faults or defects. So they are not beautiful in every aspect.

An enlightened being, however, does not have any defects. As explained in other texts as well, an enlightened being's body is always pleasing; there is not single aspect that is defective or unappealing, and they are not obscured by any defilements. Thus the universal emperor's signs do not even remotely match those of the Buddha.

4.2. Difference in causes

The first verse relating to this heading is:

*199 The auspicious signs and beautiful features
Of a universal emperor
Are said to arise [even] from the single cause
Of faith in the King of Subduers.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary mentions:

There is great difference in the causes as well, for *the auspicious signs and beautiful features of a universal emperor are said to arise [even] from the single cause of generating faith in the King of Subduers.*

The causes for the signs of a universal emperor, for example, would arise by merely generating faith in the Buddha himself.

The next lines relating to this sub-heading read:

*200 abcd But such virtue accumulated one-pointedly
For a hundred times ten million eons
Cannot produce even one
Of the hair-pores of a buddha.*

Relating to that difference in cause, Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

But such virtue which are causes for the signs and marks of a universal emperor, accumulated one-pointedly for a hundred times ten million eons cannot produce even one of the hairs-pores of a buddha.

This is a very explicit explanation of the great difference in the causes of the various signs and marks. We covered

the 'hair-pores' that are a particular quality of an enlightened being's body earlier, so we can recall those features here.

4.3. Example

Now we come to the third and last outline which relates to the last four lines of Verse 200:

*200 efgh Just as the brilliance of suns
Is slightly like that of fireflies,
So the signs of a buddha are slightly like
Those of a universal emperor.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of these lines:

Just as the brilliance of the sun which illuminates the world during the day, is slightly like that of fireflies, so this example illustrates how the signs of a buddha are slightly like those of a universal emperor.

Here the analogy of fireflies refers to the glow in their bodies near the end of their abdomen. That slight glow is not noticeable when the sun is out, because it is overpowered by the sun's rays. The illumination of the sun completely overrides the glow of the firefly. Similarly, compared to the signs of the Buddha, the signs of the universal emperor have only a very slight lustre, and much less brilliant. So the Buddha's signs completely overwhelm and surpass the majesty and lustre of the universal emperor's signs. That is the meaning of the analogy.

Then the root text concludes the chapter with:

*The second chapter of the Precious Garland,
The Interwoven, is finished.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then explains:

The commentary on *the second chapter of the Precious Garland of Advice for a King, the Interwoven* explanation of the cause and effect of definite goodness and high status, is complete.

The first chapter described the causes of high status and definite goodness, and the second chapter has interwoven the causes of high status and definite goodness. Having completed those chapters we now come to the third chapter which covers the collections for enlightenment.

CHAPTER THREE: ADVICE TO TRAIN IN THE TWO COLLECTIONS OF MERIT AND WISDOM-THE CAUSES OF HIGHEST ENLIGHTENMENT

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, in order to obtain unsurpassable enlightenment, one needs to engage in the two collections of merit and wisdom. This chapter gives advice on how to train in these two collections, which are the primary causes for the highest enlightenment.

The way to relate to the topics presented here is to, first of all, contemplate the great unsurpassable qualities of enlightenment. Having contemplated the qualities of an enlightened being and the enlightened state itself, then reflect upon the causes of that and work sequentially backwards through the causes. So, contemplating that the immediate cause of enlightenment is bodhichitta and all of the bodhisattva levels, one comes down to the very causes of bodhichitta itself, which is love and compassion.

Even before entering the path, the common causes that become the causes to enter the path, are the practices of the medium scope and the small scope. So in this way we come right down to the very basic level of the initial causes that we can be engaging in right now. In this way, we can make a personal connection with the ultimate state of enlightenment. By working through the sequence of causes, we can reach the level of basic causes which we are able to engage in right now. In this way we can develop a holistic view of the path to enlightenment, and relate it to our own level of practice now.

The six main categories that comprise the chapter are:

- A. Modes of the collections
- B. Effects of each collection
- C. Advice not to feel inadequate about accumulating the two collections
- D. The entities (or nature) of the two collections
- E. Branches of the two collections
- F. Benefits arising to one who amasses merit

Seeing the sequential nature of the presentation of the material, we can really see how skilfully it has been presented. The text begins with the *modes of the collections* which explain what the collections are. Then it goes into the *effects of each collection*, followed by *advice not to feel inadequate*. Here, some of you might remember that one of the three types of laziness is the laziness of feeling inadequate in doing practice. Therefore we need to overcome laziness in order to engage in the accumulation of merit. When accumulating the two collections we need to encourage ourselves in our efforts, in order to overcome the feeling of inadequacy. Then the chapter moves onto the nature or *entities of the two collections* themselves, followed by the *branches* or the number of divisions within the two collections, concluding with the *benefits*.

One needs to derive an understanding of the structure of the presentation. The ultimate goal of unsurpassable enlightenment is presented first. Then, lest we feel that that such an enlightened state is out of reach, the causes for obtaining that state of enlightenment are then presented. Presenting the causes indicates that the great enlightened being, the Buddha, was not an entity who miraculously or spontaneously arose from nothing; he was dependent upon causes and conditions. In relation to the context at this point, what are the causes of the collections of merit and wisdom?

Thus we can develop a sense of affinity with the causes and see how, by accumulating the causes now, we can actually obtain that state of enlightenment ourselves in the future. Showing the relationship between the causes and the effect (the state of enlightenment) shows us that the state of enlightenment is attainable and something that we can achieve ourselves. This great presentation shows us a way for us to make that connection for ourselves, and see the possibility.

A. MODES OF THE COLLECTIONS

This is sub-divided into four divisions:

1. Exhorting the king to listen
2. Limitlessness of the collection of merit

3. Limitlessness of the collection of wisdom
4. Limitlessness of effects of the two collections

1. EXHORTING THE KING TO LISTEN

The first verse of the chapter reads:

*201 Great king, hear from the great scriptures
Of the Great Vehicle
How the marks of a buddha
Arise from inconceivable merit.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The earlier three specific causes were presented as primary causes, however all causes for unparalleled enlightenment are subsumed into the two collections. As such they are presented here.

The earlier three specific causes were covered earlier in the text. Compassion extending to sentient beings in all directions, bodhichitta, and the wisdom realising emptiness are the three specific primary *causes for unparalleled enlightenment*, and they can be *subsumed into the two collections*.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

What has been presented so far is that when buddhahood is obtained, the king will be adorned by the signs of a buddha. However the amount of merit to be accumulated has not been specified. Thus to present this, he is addressed as *Great King*, and exhorted to *hear from the great scriptures of the Great Vehicle, how the marks of a buddha arise from inconceivable merit*.

The three specific causes presented previously were presented as primary causes. When buddhahood is obtained, the king (and indeed anyone who attains buddhahood) will be adorned by the signs of a buddha, and although the causes for each of the thirty-two major marks were explained, the amount of merit that has to be accumulated in order to obtain each of the signs was not presented. As the commentary explains, to present this - the king *is addressed as Great King* and he is *exhorted to hear from the great scriptures of the Great Vehicle*. The great Mahayana scriptures, the 20,000 verses of *Prajnaparamita sutra* for example, explain how the marks of the Buddha arose from inconceivable merit, and that the merit required to obtain each of the signs is inconceivable. Even though the merit is inconceivable, an analogy in accordance with the capacity of ordinary beings is presented to get an idea.

There is also a sutra request by the girl Rinchen, which explains the signs and marks. However the explanation in this sutra is a bit different from the explanations in the *Prajnaparamita sutra*. The presentation in *The Ornament of Clear Realisation* by Maitreya, is related to that of the twenty-thousand verses of the *Prajnaparamita sutra*.

2. LIMITLESSNESS OF THE COLLECTION OF MERIT

This is sub-divided into two:

- 2.1. Actual explanation
- 2.2. The collections are infinite but are taught to trainees as measurable

2.1. Actual explanation

Even though there is no real measure of the merits that need to be accumulated (which is why they are referred

to as inconceivable), there needs to be some sort of guidance, in the form of comparisons, so that ordinary beings can conceive the notion.

The actual explanation of a comparison of that inconceivable merit is presented in five sub-divisions:

2.1.1. Achieving one hair-pore of a buddha through ten times the merit of solitary realisers, etc.

2.1.2. Achieving one beautiful feature of a buddha through a hundred times the merit for achieving a hair-pore

2.1.3. Achieving one mark of a buddha through a hundred times the merit for producing all the beautiful features

It is more difficult to accumulate merit for a major mark than it is for a minor mark, because more merit is required than that needed to obtain a minor mark. *Achieving one mark of a buddha through a hundred times the merit for producing all the beautiful features*, relates to the eighty minor marks.

2.1.4. Achieving the hair-spiral on a buddhas brow through a thousand times the merit for producing all the marks

The merit needed to *achieve the hair-spiral on the Buddha's brow* (or forehead) is one thousand times the merit needed to produce all the marks

2.1.5. Achieving the crown protrusion through a thousand times the above merit

To obtain the *crown protrusion* of the Buddha one thousand-fold of the merit that is needed to achieve the hair-spiral is required. It is said that as the crown protrusion is the most majestic feature of the Buddha's marks, it needs the most merit.

So through this presentation we can see how the inconceivable amount of merit that needs to be accumulated to actually become a buddha. From this we need to learn not to be short-sighted, but rather to have the foresight to understand that 'no matter how long it takes to accumulate the merit, I will accumulate the merit to achieve those results'. Such an attitude will come from having a courageous and expansive mind.

2.1.1. Achieving one hair-pore of a buddha through ten times the merit of solitary realisers, etc.

The next two verses read:

202 *The merit giving rise to all
Solitary realisers, to learners, and non-
learners,
And all the merit of the transient world
Is measureless like the universe itself.*

203 *Through such merit ten times extended
One hair-pore of a buddha is achieved.
All the hair-pores of a buddha
Arise in just the same way.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The *merit* that is a cause and *giving rise to all solitary realisers* who dwell in all parts of the universe, to the seven Hinayana *arya learners and non-learners*, and *all the merit* to be born in higher rebirths of the *transient world is measureless like the universe itself*. *Through such measureless merit ten times extended*,

one hair-pore of a buddha is achieved. All the hair-pores of a buddha arise from such merit in just the same way.

The merit that is a cause and giving rise to all solitary realisers who dwell in all parts of the universe, to the seven Hinayana arya learners and non-learners; plus all the merit that is a cause to be born in higher rebirths, which means that even to be reborn in our present condition as a human being we have had to accumulate an unimaginable amount of merit in the past - thus all of these merits combined to such a measureless merit ten times extended, i.e. ten times the number of immeasurable merits, is the merit needed to accumulate one hair-pore of a buddha. And all the hair-pores of a buddha arise from such merit in just the same way. So this gives us an idea of how much merit needs to be accumulated in order to obtain even one of the minor marks of an enlightened being, such as the hair-pore of a buddha!

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