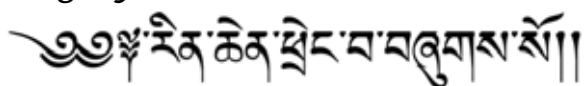


# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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Based on the motivation generated during the refuge and bodhichitta prayer, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [Meditation]

We can now set an appropriate motivation for receiving the teachings such as: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, by freeing them from all suffering and leading them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

## B. EFFECTS OF EACH COLLECTION

Two verses are related to this outline:

212 *The form body of a buddha*  
*Arises from the collections of merit.*  
*The truth body in brief, O King,*  
*Arises from the collections of wisdom.*

213 *Thus these two collections*  
*Are the causes of attaining buddhahood,*  
*So in sum always rely*  
*Upon merit and wisdom.*

As indicated here, the two collections refers to the *collection of merit* and the *collection of wisdom*, which are distinguished by their definitions.

- The collection of merit is that which primarily serves as a cause to obtain the form body of the Buddha.
- The collection of wisdom is that which primarily serves as a cause to obtain the truth body of the Buddha.

Although both collections can be a cause for obtaining both the truth body and the form body of a buddha, the emphasis here is on the primary cause. The primary cause for obtaining the form body of a buddha is the collection of merit and the primary cause for obtaining the wisdom-truth body of a buddha is the collection of wisdom.

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

If one were to ask, 'What effects arise from which collection?', *the form body of a buddha arises from the collections of merit. The truth body in brief, O King, arises from the collections of wisdom. Thus, as these two collections are the causes of attaining the result of buddhahood, in summary always rely upon merit and wisdom and establish them firmly within yourself.*

In saying, *always rely upon merit and wisdom and establish it firmly within yourself*, the king is being explicitly exhorted to engage in the causes for obtaining both aspects of an enlightened body, i.e. the form body and the truth body, by relying on engaging in the collections of merit and wisdom. In the teachings we often come across the explanation that one obtains the ultimate result of buddhahood with the aid of the two collections that. So we need to have a really clear understanding of what the collections of merit and wisdom entail, and how one accumulates the causes for obtaining the result of enlightenment through the combination of both.

From these explanations, one can gain a clear understanding of the unique nature of the Buddhist path, which presents the causes for obtaining the ultimate result. We may revere and respect the Buddha, but we must understand that he did materialise spontaneously without causes and conditions. In his teachings the Buddha said, 'My enlightened state is due to having previously engaged in the collections of merit and wisdom, so if you follow my example, you too can also obtain the ultimate state'. From this unique presentation to his disciples, we can understand how we too can also achieve that ultimate result if we follow the path.

At this stage one also needs to recall the teachings about the bodies of the Buddha, which are the **form body** and the **truth body**.

The form body is further subdivided into the **complete enjoyment body** and the **emanation body**. The body that is of most benefit to us as ordinary sentient beings is the emanation body of an enlightened being, while the complete enjoyment body can only be perceived by high level bodhisattvas.

As indicated in the teachings there are five definite characteristics of the complete enjoyment body. They are:

1. Definite abode: an enjoyment body abides only in the highest pure land.
2. Definite retinue: an enjoyment body is always surrounded only by superior bodhisattvas. Hence the complete enjoyment body is not an aspect of the Buddha that we, as ordinary beings, can perceive, and therefore we do not gain the direct benefit of receiving teachings from that body of the Buddha.
3. Definite doctrine: an enjoyment body only teaches the Mahayana teachings.
4. Definite body: an enjoyment body is always adorned with the thirty-two major signs and eighty minor marks.
5. Definite time: an enjoyment body abides without showing the aspects of birth and death until samsara has been emptied of sentient beings.

Within the **emanation body**, the supreme emanation body was the physical appearance of Shakyamuni Buddha on earth displaying the twelve deeds. Although we might not have a direct connection with that body, there is no doubt that the supreme emanation body came to this world and gave the teachings that we relate to now. However we can have direct connections with other emanation bodies of the Buddha who are in human form, from whom we can directly receive teachings and advices.

The **truth body** (which can be divided into the **nature truth body** and the **wisdom truth body**) is the state of the mind of the enlightened beings. It is beneficial for us to get an understanding of the particular aspects of the Buddha's body to see how we are benefited by the buddhas.

As mentioned in the previous session, one of the main points about taking refuge is that we need to identify and recognise the objects of refuge, and have a clear understanding of what they are. What are the qualities of the Buddha? What are the attributes of Dharma? Who are the Sangha? Furthermore, we need to incorporate an understanding of the causes of refuge. Why do we take refuge in the Three Jewels? What is the benefit of taking refuge? We really need to incorporate all this into our daily practice, otherwise (as mentioned previously) our recitation of refuge will be just dry words. Also, as I regularly explain, we need to incorporate an understanding of the *basis*, which is the two truths, the *path*

which is method and wisdom, and the *result* which is the two bodies of the Buddha. All of this can be incorporated into the explanation being given here.

Having such a clear understanding is the very basis of our practice. As Mahayana practitioners, our aspiration is to develop bodhichitta, and we engage in practices to develop an awakening mind for the purpose of obtaining enlightenment for the benefit of other sentient beings. So ultimately, our aspiration is to benefit other sentient beings, and the ultimate way to benefit other sentient beings is by becoming enlightened oneself. Hence the qualities of enlightened beings are explained in great detail so as to inspire us to aim to achieve that state ourselves.

As mentioned previously, the second chapter of *Precious Garland* specifically deals with the qualities of the Buddha's body, by detailing the thirty-two major signs and mentioning the eighty major marks. There are also qualities of the Buddha's speech and qualities of the Buddha's enlightened mind. Specifically relating to these qualities is a means for us to understand how, in each and every way, they benefit other sentient beings. So by studying and understanding the qualities of an enlightened being, we can become inspired to become just like the Buddha, and benefit other sentient beings. So it is essential that we have a good understanding.

As mentioned in our last session, we cannot underestimate how profound taking refuge is. That is because refuge encompasses the whole path to enlightenment. When we take refuge with the correct understanding, then it becomes a really profound practice.

With respect to verses 212 and 213, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The first verse indicates what effects arise from which particular collection, and the second verse exhorts the king to firmly establish it.

*The first verse specifically indicates the effects that arise from each collection. As explained previously, each of the collections serves as a cause for obtaining a particular aspect of a buddha's body. The second verse exhorts the king to firmly establish it. It is only by accumulating the two collections that we create the cause to become enlightened—there is no other way. Thus as the second verse explains, we need to establish that firmly within ourselves, which means putting it into practice.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Nagarjuna composed the text called *Sixty Reasons* in order to explain emptiness. The sixtieth reason, written in the form of a dedication, was the reason of dependent arising. He stated the following syllogism: the subjects, persons and aggregates—are empty of inherent existence—because they are dependent arisings.

This syllogism is said to be very profound, as it indicates the collections of both merit and wisdom.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further reads:

When the individual realises the property of the subject i.e. dependent arisings, they need to meditate on it again and again. Thus, by meditating on infinite dependent arisings, and causes and effects of phenomena, and applying the practice of adopting [virtue] and discarding [non-virtue] unmistakably on the path, this becomes the collection of merit.

As explained here, the *property of the subject*, which refers to the reason, *dependent arising*, is said to be both dependent

arisings and the causes and effects of phenomena. One accumulates merit by incorporating that understanding in one's practice.

More specifically, the first five of the six perfections (the perfection of generosity, the perfection of morality, the perfection of patience, the perfection of joyous effort and the perfection of contemplation) are the means for accumulating merit. Whereas the sixth, the perfection of wisdom, is the means for the collection of wisdom.

Engaging in the varieties of dependent arisings of phenomena, and using that as a means to adopt what is virtuous and to discard what is non-virtuous, is the means to accumulate merit. Thus one accumulates merit particularly by abiding by the laws of cause and effect.

As Gyaltsab Je further explains in his commentary:

The valid cognition that realises the predicate of the syllogism i.e. persons and aggregates being empty of inherent existence, is an aid for the collection of wisdom.

Here Gyaltsab Je is explaining that the means of accumulating the collection of wisdom is by contemplating again and again how persons and aggregates are empty of inherent existence.

Gyaltsab Je continues:

Adorning one's practice with vast methods and meditating continually on the valid cognition that realises the predicate becomes the actual collection of wisdom. The result of the two collections is to obtain the enlightened form body and enlightened truth body.

Here Gyaltsab Je is emphasising that one needs to adorn one's practice with *vast methods*, which relates to the collection of merit. Only when the collection of merit is combined with the collection of wisdom does it become the cause to obtain the two bodies of an enlightened being. Here one needs to incorporate the understanding that the collection of wisdom by itself is not sufficient as a cause to obtain enlightenment.

To give a more specific example; the hearer arya and the solitary realiser arya gain the realisation of emptiness when they obtain the path of seeing. On the paths of accumulation and preparation they have the conceptual understanding of emptiness, and when they obtain the path of seeing they gain the direct realisation of emptiness. However they still possess a contaminated body. Similarly, the bodhisattva gains the intellectual understanding of emptiness on the Mahayana paths of accumulation and preparation, and when they obtain the Mahayana path of seeing, they gain the direct realisation of emptiness or selflessness. And at that point, the bodhisattva's body transforms into an uncontaminated body.

We need to understand the reason for the difference. The realisation of emptiness that is obtained on the hearer path, the solitary realiser path, and the bodhisattva path is the same. So what causes the hearer's body to remain a contaminated body even when they obtain arhatship, until they go into the non-abiding nirvana, while the bodhisattva obtains an uncontaminated body on the path of seeing? It is because along with the accumulation of merit that creates the causes for obtaining buddhahood, the bodhisattva has developed love and compassion and bodhichitta. So we can see the reason why the bodhisattva on the path of seeing obtains an uncontaminated body.

However the practices of trainees on the hearer and solitary realiser paths should not be underestimated. Through their practice of ethics and morality, and their great deeds of generosity and so forth they accumulate much merit. However, as mentioned previously, what is missing is the great love and great compassion that accumulates into developing the awakening mind. When that is missing, the causes to obtain an uncontaminated body to progress further on towards enlightenment cannot be created. This needs to be understood as a way for us to see the great importance of accumulating vast amounts of merit, along with developing the qualities of love and compassion and so forth.

As mentioned previously, accumulating merit involves, on a practical level, engaging in the practices of generosity, morality, patience, and joyous effort. Whatever virtues we accumulate, no matter how tiny, and the tiniest non-virtue that we abandon, is way to accumulate merit. So at our level, we can readily engage in the accumulation of merit. We should not underestimate the collection of merit, as it really is the optimum cause to obtain enlightenment.

Finally, Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Whilst establishing the basis of the right view, if one did not understand that the two truths are unified and not mutually exclusive—like hot and cold—then one will not be able to fully comprehend the two collections that are to be practised on the path and the two resultant enlightened bodies of the Buddha. Thus, you must be skilled in knowing the distinction between the two truths.

This is explaining that one needs to have a clear understanding of the interrelationship between the two truths, rather than seeing them as completely separate entities. In terms of presenting the two truths, the older students of the study group will recall that when we studied *Aryadeva's Four Hundred Verses*, the first seven chapters relate to conventional truth, whereas the eighth chapter relates particularly to ultimate truth. Thus, we had studied the two truths quite extensively. What is being explained here is that one needs to have a very good understanding of how the two truths are unified, rather than perceiving them as being two completely distinct and separate entities.

### C. ADVICE NOT TO FEEL INADEQUATE ABOUT ACCUMULATING THE TWO COLLECTIONS

This section has three sub-divisions:

1. Brief indication
2. Extensive explanation
3. Summation

#### 1. BRIEF INDICATION

The relevant verse of the root text is:

214 *Do not feel inadequate about this [accumulation]  
Of merit to achieve enlightenment,  
Since reasoning and scripture  
Can restore one's spirits.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

When reflecting on the immeasurable merit needed to achieve buddhahood, you should not feel disheartened by thinking who can possibly accomplish that? Thus *do not feel inadequate about this [accumulation] of merit to achieve enlightenment, since without having to experience great sufferings of body and mind, you can swiftly accumulate the collections with sound reasoning and authentic scriptures—such as the Vajra Cutter Sutra—that are purified by the three analyses. This can restore one's spirit.*

Having presented the immeasurable merits needed to obtain the infinite benefits of an enlightened being, one might feel disheartened and think, 'How could I possibly achieve that?' But one need not feel disheartened! As explained here, *without having to experience great sufferings*, great endurance, physical hardship and so forth, one can swiftly accumulate the collections with reasoning and the authentic scriptures. Thus, as explained in the commentary one can use the sound reasoning presented in the teaching, and relate to the authentic scriptures which are purified by the three-fold analysis.

The **three-fold analysis** uses three criteria for validating a phenomenon:

1. Obvious things are not contradicted by direct valid perception;
2. Slightly obscure things are not contradicted by valid inference, based on the force of evidence;
3. Extremely obscure things are not contradicted by valid inference, based on scriptural authority.

Any phenomenon can be validated using this three-fold analysis.

1. Obvious things are not contradicted by direct valid perception, so we can validate them through our direct perception of them.
2. Slightly obscure things are not contradicted by the valid inference, so they can be validated through inference or sound reasoning and accepted through the force of evidence.
3. For extremely obscure things we need to resort to scriptural authority. Extremely obscure phenomena will not be contradicted by valid inference based on scriptural authority. Here 'authentic scriptures' refers to the scriptures that are validated through the three criteria. I have referred to these three criteria for validating phenomena in the past as well, so you can refer back to those.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION

This section is sub-divided into two:

- 2.1. Advice not to be lazy about the collection of merit
- 2.2. Advice not to be lazy about accumulating the two collections

#### 2.1. Advice not to be lazy about the collection of merit

Here there are three subdivisions:

- 2.1.1. Limitlessness of the merit of generating the aspiration to enlightenment
- 2.1.2. Ease of attaining buddhahood through that cause
- 2.1.3. Ease of attaining buddhahood by reason of having the four limitlessness

##### 2.1.1. Limitlessness of the merit of generating the aspiration to enlightenment

Lest we feel disheartened by the magnitude of accumulating the causes for enlightenment, we need to reflect upon the limitless ways and the limitless merit that are causes for generating the aspiration to enlightenment, such as with the bodhichitta attitude. Bodhichitta can be a means and an end in itself. Aspiring to develop bodhichitta in itself becomes a cause for developing bodhichitta itself. We can accumulate limitless merit by, for example, reflecting on developing great compassion towards other sentient beings, who are limitless in number. The moment we develop and extend

<sup>1</sup> See 19 June 2001 (Tenets); 16 and 23 October 2007 (Aryadeva). These can be found in the collected teachings CD.

our love and compassion to limitless sentient beings, the merit that we gain from that will naturally be limitless. That is how it needs to be understood. When we are presented with the right methods and means, then in just one moment we can accumulate vast amounts of merit with the right motivation and right intentions. We need to understand that the material being presented here is a means to overcome feelings of disheartenment or inadequacy.

There are two verses relating to this outline:

*215 Just as in all directions  
Space, earth, water, fire, and wind  
Are without limit,  
So suffering sentient beings are limitless.*

*216 Through their compassion  
Bodhisattvas are determined to lead  
These limitless sentient beings out of suffering  
And establish them in buddhahood.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary reiterates the meaning of the verse, which is quite clear:

*Just as in all directions, such as above and below, space, earth, water, fire and wind are without limit, so suffering beings are also limitless. Through their motivation of compassion, bodhisattvas are determined to lead these limitless sentient beings out of suffering and establish them in buddhahood.*

This is a presentation of the limitlessness number of sentient beings along with their limitless suffering. The concept of limitless sentient beings relates to the analogy of the four elements. Just as the four elements pervade the whole universe, likewise sentient beings and their individual suffering are also limitless. Through their motivation of compassion, bodhisattvas develop a determination to lead the limitless number of sentient beings out of suffering towards buddhahood. Thus, as clearly presented here, because of their motivation of great compassion focussing on the limitless number of sentient beings, bodhisattvas will naturally accumulate limitless merit from that very intention.

Even though more specific details will be presented later, at this point we need to gain an understanding of how, with the proper motivation, one can accumulate vast amounts of merit, even within just one moment. Because the number of sentient beings is so vast, we can accumulate vast amounts of merit or limitless merit in an instant.

These are really important points for us to consider adopting in our daily practice. As I mention regularly, it is very important that we expend some energy into developing compassion within our heart. We can slowly increase the very basic level of love and compassion that we have now, and turn it into great love and compassion, which then becomes the basis for developing bodhichitta. So in this way, we can see the great significance and practicality of the practice.

The bodhichitta practice (based on the development of love and compassion) is the most beneficial way to swiftly accumulate great amounts of merit. This can be illustrated with the story of King Prasenajit, who asked the Buddha what methods could he possibly follow from the Mahayana path in order to accumulate the causes to achieve enlightenment. He said, 'Since I don't have a focused my mind, and because of my many activities and duties as a king which keeps me busy, can you present any other method to enable me to engage in the Mahayana practice?'

In response the Buddha said, 'Meditating on love and compassion and developing bodhichitta will suffice for you to practise the Mahayana path, and accumulate the merit and means to acquire enlightenment. Then you will not have to abandon your kingly duties or the Mahayana practice. This is the practice for you to adopt, in order to develop bodhichitta'. As presented in the teachings, and further on in the text, cultivating love and compassion and bodhichitta encompasses the essentials of the path. The two most essential things at the beginner level are to accumulate merit and to engage in purification practices, which can be done through cultivating love and compassion and bodhichitta.

We often incorporate into our daily practice the prayer of the *Four Immeasurables* which refers to four particular types of intentions that we develop in relation to sentient beings. Because sentient beings are immeasurable, then the love that is extended towards them with the wish for them to be endowed with happiness and to be free from suffering and abide in equanimity, will likewise be immeasurable. These thoughts are immeasurable because the objects of their focus (sentient beings) are immeasurable.

### **2.1.2. Ease of attaining buddhahood through that cause**

The next two verses are:

*217 [Hence] whether sleeping or not sleeping,  
After thoroughly assuming [such compassion]  
Those who remain steadfast—  
Even though they might not be meticulous*

*218 Always accumulate merit as limitless as all  
sentient beings  
Since sentient beings are limitless.  
Know then that since [the causes] are limitless,  
Limitless buddhahood is not hard to attain.*

As the commentary explains:

*Hence, bodhisattvas who have made the pledge, whether sleeping or not sleeping, after thoroughly assuming [such compassion] those who remain steadfast – even though they might not be meticulous [conscientious] about engaging in virtue, they always accumulate merit as limitless as all sentient beings, since sentient beings are limitless. Know then that since [the causes] are limitless, limitless buddhahood is not hard to attain*

This explanation is in accordance with the *Bodhisattvacharyavata* by Shantideva. The bodhisattva's pledge is based on aspiring bodhichitta and engaging bodhichitta. Once the pledge has been made and has been adopted as a practice, then every time one is conscientious about accumulating virtue, by the mere fact of having developed that awakening mind and having made that pledge, all one's activities (whether one is asleep or awake or sitting or walking) become a means to accumulate merit. Thus one accumulates a vast amount of merit as a result of the intentions that one has developed. So with the proper motivation, there are limitless ways to accumulate merit regardless of the activities we engage in. In this way we can see that we don't lack the means to accumulate merit. This is an essential point that we need to understand and adopt in everyday life.

The mere fact of having developed a bodhichitta mind is such that one can accumulate merit, even while asleep. I recall the winter debate session when we went to other areas of Tibet in order to compete in debates against monks from other monasteries. While some of us would be engaged in studying the text, thinking about and memorising certain points, other monks would say, 'okay, you can put your time into this text, I'm going to sleep with bodhichitta on my

mind!' Of course one could never tell—maybe they were seemingly sleeping whilst actually meditating on bodhichitta. One would never know. Still it could be used as an excuse. A classmate of Geshe Ngawang Dhargye related a story about how a monk in his class, who was quite intelligent and good at his studies, would sometimes say 'oh, I will take a nap with bodhichitta on my mind!'

Being winter it was a difficult time of the year, and our study was also difficult. Four monks would share one small room and we would have to stay up late studying the texts to prepare for the debate. We would have to assiduously study the text, memorise different texts so we would be able to quote them, and also formulate the debate itself, know how to answer a certain opponent in the debate and how to pose debate questions and so forth. So it was a really hard and difficult time.

There would be a teacher assigned specifically to accompany those monks participating in the debate; he would be in the middle surrounded by monks who were studying and participating in the debate. Khensur Rinpoche, who is in Adelaide now, would also have some other monks around him.

There would be a night debates which would go on very late into the night. But even after the debate had finished, we had to come back and recite from memory the text we had memorised earlier. Monks would be appointed to come and check if we were actually reciting those texts. When a monk called Rabga was cautioned about being asleep with his shawl over his head, his reply was 'I'm not sleeping, I'm actually thinking about the points of the text', and of course there was no way of proving otherwise!

Gyalsab Je's commentary then concludes this section with:

The *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* states:

As understood by the distinction  
Between aspiring to go and actually going,  
So the wise understand in turn  
The distinction between these two.

As presented here, by the limitless merit accumulated with two types of bodhichitta, that of aspiring and engaging, one will quickly obtain the limitless results of enlightenment.

It is through the two types of bodhichitta, aspiring bodhichitta and engaging bodhichitta, that one accumulates unceasing merit, which then becomes a cause for enlightenment. One needs to understand the difference between aspiring and engaging bodhichitta. As explained in other texts, when one develops **aspiring bodhichitta** one does not need to make any pledge or vow to keep certain commitments. However **engaging bodhichitta** requires one to take a pledge or vow to adopt certain practices. Developing the mere wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings suffices for an aspiring bodhichitta attitude. If, along with that wish, one makes a pledge to adopt and engage in certain practices, vows or commitments, then that will suffice for the engaging bodhichitta attitude.

Knowing this distinction is helpful if one receives an initiation or a subsequent initiation in the form of a blessing. If one wanted to receive it in the form of a blessing, one need not take the engaging bodhichitta vows. One can merely develop the aspiring bodhichitta, which doesn't entail particular commitments. Whereas if one were to take a full initiation, it requires one to take the engaging bodhisattva vows.

The great significance of taking the bodhisattva vows is that they are based on the genuine aspiration to achieve enlightenment. If one actually makes a commitment to engage in the practices and abide by the commitments, the vow that one makes will then become highly meaningful and whatever practice one undertakes from then on will become highly meritorious. In other words, the merit that one gains from virtuous activities arising from engaging bodhisattva vows is far more extensive than the merit we have accumulated with just aspiring bodhichitta. That's why taking the bodhisattva vows is really significant.

Most of us have taken the bodhisattva vows, so it is good to be mindful and try to practice in accordance with the commitments. Since we have already taken the vows, we have the basis for accumulating great merit. The main thing is to try, at the very least, not to allow those vows to degenerate. In the event that this does occur, then one can restore them by taking the vows again. There are specific verses to be recited when taking the bodhichitta vows, but for those who do the six-session guru yoga practice on a daily basis there is a particular section that reaffirms the bodhisattva vows, so they can be restored then. So in that way we can reaffirm the bodhisattva vows on a daily basis.

The ultimate means to please an enlightened being and the gurus is to develop a stronger bodhichitta attitude within ourselves. Based on this bodhichitta attitude tantra becomes a very profound and swift way to achieve enlightenment. In the Guru puja it says 'quickly, quickly, may I achieve the state of enlightenment'. That 'quickly, quickly' attitude has to be based on bodhichitta, then liberating sentient beings from suffering and leading them to ultimate happiness. That is how it becomes such a profound and swift practice.

Developing a bodhichitta attitude in conjunction with tantric practices is also known as a 'superior bodhichitta', because it incorporates the attitude of achieving enlightenment very quickly. It is because of that intention that the bodhichitta attitude in conjunction with the tantric practice can also be understood as a superior bodhichitta attitude.

As I have regularly explained, it is good to be able to apply one's understanding from the text and the teaching to one's practice. For example, we do the Chittamani Tara practice quite regularly in the Centre, so we need to understand how the two types of bodhichitta are incorporated into that practice. For example, when it says 'for the sake obtaining enlightenment...' that is an aspiring bodhichitta attitude, then when one comes to the part saying '...for that purpose, I will engage in this practice', then that incorporates the engaging bodhichitta attitude. This is also similar to the Vajrayogini practice, and indeed all other deity practices are also based on the same structure.

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