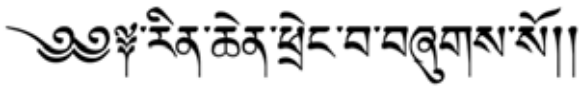


Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. So for that purpose we will adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture, and generate a positive motivation for the practice.
[Meditation]

To set a motivation for the teaching, one can think along these lines: 'For the sake of all sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering and lead 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'.

2.1.3. Ease of attaining buddhahood by reason of having the four limitlessness'

In relation to this sub-heading, there are two verses:

219 *[Bodhisattvas] stay for a limitless time [in the world];*

*For limitless embodied beings they seek
The limitless [good qualities of] enlightenment
And perform limitless virtuous actions.*

220 *Hence though enlightenment is limitless,
How could they not attain it
With these four limitless collections
Without being delayed for long?*

Having explained earlier that one needs to engage in the two collections to obtain enlightenment, one may feel disheartened, thinking that it is impossible to accumulate such merit. Nagarjuna reassures the king that the causes for attaining enlightenment are limitless, because in developing the attitude of benefitting limitless numbers of sentient beings, the merit that one gains is also limitless. By gaining limitless merit one will accumulate the causes for obtaining enlightenment with ease. These are points that we need to consider in relation to ourselves. As explained here, it is not that difficult to create the causes for enlightenment as there are various means for accumulating merit. The point is that when the causes and conditions to bring about a certain result are present, then the result will definitely come about. However, even though the causes and conditions are available to us, we cannot obtain the result if we don't implement those causes.

This reminds me of the time when Wayne complained that he didn't have a car. He said, 'Without a car it is difficult to get around. I need a car'. *[Geshe-la laughs]* So I said 'Well, if you have the money, you can buy the car', to which Wayne replied, 'I don't have the money, so I will have to borrow it'. I said, 'Well if you don't have the means to buy it now, don't even think about getting a car!' Wayne, you might recall that time when you came to my kitchen and said 'I have some difficulty'. When I asked what the difficulty was, you said, 'Well I need a car and I don't know how to go about getting one'. I said, 'Do you have the money to buy a car?' and you said 'No!'. When I asked, 'How do you plan to buy a car?', you said, 'I will have to get a loan from the bank'. Then I said, 'How much would you need to borrow?' and you said, 'Maybe \$9,000'.

My response to that was, 'It may well be the case that the car will be a wreck before you are able to repay the loan. It might seem very convenient to have a car because you can get around easily, but once you have a car, you wouldn't want the seat beside you to be empty. You would like to have someone sitting in the seat beside you, right? However if you are by yourself it is not all that difficult to get around. Even though you think a car will make things easier, having a car might cause more complications. You may have considered that. As a single person, it is easier to be without a car and to get around just by yourself.' Wayne just smiled then and went back to his room. With a limited budget, you have to settle for a second-hand car, which at some stage will need to be fixed, resulting in more expense. And if it irreparably breaks down, then you might have to consider buying another second-hand car. So whilst the intention is to bring about more convenience, it may in fact lead to further complications. That's exactly what happened to Andy!

This story illustrates that if one has the causes, then it is not difficult to obtain the wanted result. But without the causes, achieving the result becomes somewhat more difficult.

These verses from the root text indicate that there are many different ways of engaging in the causes for enlightenment, and that if one actually applies these means to acquire those causes, then it is possible to obtain enlightenment. As indicated here, and further elaborated in the following verses, there are many ways to engage in the two collections of merit and wisdom—it is just a matter of applying them to our practice.

It is with this intention that Nagarjuna gave very practical advice to the king on how to accumulate merit as a cause to achieve enlightenment. Even though these teachings were imparted explicitly to the king, we need to take them as personal instructions and implement them in our daily life. These are practices of a bodhisattva, so when we acknowledge how incredibly wonderful the deeds of a bodhisattva are, then we can appreciate the person who engages in those deeds even more. In fact it is mentioned in the teachings that through the mere recollection of a bodhisattva, we purify a lot of negative karma. These are really important points to consider.

When we contemplate their great deeds we develop admiration, respect, and ultimately, genuine veneration for a bodhisattva. To do that, we first of all need to understand that a bodhisattva has developed bodhicitta. Thus we begin by understanding what bodhicitta is. Having developed that bodhicitta a being becomes a bodhisattva. As presented extensively in the teachings, it is the development of bodhicitta which marks the entry into the Mahayana path. There are the five paths and ten grounds on which the bodhisattva embarks. At each stage they reach specific realisations. So we need to consider the means they use to engage in practice, which are primarily the six perfections and the four means of gathering disciples. By contemplating the nature of a bodhisattva, their realisations, their practices and their wondrous deeds, we begin to develop a great appreciation of how amazing a bodhisattva actually is, and develop the aspiration to become one ourselves.

When we think about the deeds of a bodhisattva at this level, then we get an inkling of the greatness of a buddha as well. An enlightened being is none other than the result of the practices of a bodhisattva, as the ultimate objective of the practices of a bodhisattva is to become enlightened. Without an understanding of the deeds of a bodhisattva, it is not possible to comprehend the majesty or greatness of an

enlightened being. So in order to appreciate and fully understand the greatness of an enlightened being, one first needs to understand bodhisattvas and their deeds.

The uniqueness of the Buddhist path lies in the fact that the Buddha was not a being who spontaneously arose without causes and conditions. Rather an enlightened being is a product of causes and conditions acquired on the path, such as the two collections. Having abandoned the negativities and acquired all the qualities in this way, the Buddha became the enlightened being who we now revere.

This section of the text indicates how through the four limitlessness', one is able to engage in the collections for obtaining enlightenment with ease. Gyaltsab Je's commentary on the two verses states:

Hence even though enlightenment is limitless, how could they not attain it with these four limitless collections without being delayed for long?

Even though enlightenment itself is limitless, as explained in the earlier verses, there is no reason to think that bodhisattvas cannot *attain* enlightenment. Bodhisattvas can definitely obtain enlightenment with little delay through the means of *the four limitless collections*.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary goes on to explain:

For [bodhisattvas] stay for a limitless time [in the world] for the sake of freeing limitless embodied beings from suffering, they seek the limitless [good qualities of] enlightenment and perform limitless virtuous actions that are combined in the two collections.

This is a presentation of the four limitlessness. *Within a span of limitless time, bodhisattvas free limitless embodied beings; they seek limitless good qualities of enlightenment and they perform limitless virtuous actions.* These four limitlessness' combine the two collections of merit and wisdom. Basically, by collecting merit and wisdom in this extensive way, one creates the causes to obtain enlightenment. This is quite clear, and there should be no problem understanding it.

2.2. Advice not to be lazy about accumulating the two collections

This heading has five sub-divisions:

- 2.2.1. General teaching that through the two collections physical and mental suffering is removed
- 2.2.2. Removal of physical suffering by the collection of merit
- 2.2.3. Removal of mental suffering by the collection of wisdom
- 2.2.4. No cause for laziness about accumulating the two collections
- 2.2.5. The power of great compassion

2.2.1. General teaching that through the two collections physical and mental suffering is removed

This heading indicates that more specific explanations will follow.

The verse relating to this is:

*221 The limitless collection of merit
And the limitless collection of wisdom
Eradicate just quickly
Physical and mental sufferings.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

One should not be lazy about accumulating the two collections for obtaining buddhahood...

The collection of merit is said to be an aid to remove physical suffering, whereas the collection of wisdom is said to be an aid to remove mental suffering. When we actually relate to

the practical benefits that can be gained from engaging in the two collections we will feel inspired, because we can see the direct benefit for ourselves. Thus we will become inspired to engage in the collections, rather than feeling lazy and despondent about it.

When the text indicates that the collection of merit eradicates physical suffering, we need to develop a bit more understanding of what that actually means. We can gain such an understanding when we relate to the three types of suffering.

The **suffering of suffering** is relatively easy for us to deal with. We alleviate the suffering of a headache, for example, when we take aspirin; when we are hungry we eat food and the suffering of hunger is removed, and likewise with thirst, cold and so forth. These are relatively easy types of suffering that we can immediately identify as a form of suffering, which makes it easier for us to try to eliminate the causes of that suffering.

We need to understand at a more profound level that the accumulation of merit does not refer to removing the temporary kinds of suffering that we experience. Rather it acts at a more subtle level on the other two kinds of suffering, the **suffering of change**, but most importantly, **all-pervasive suffering**. These two forms of suffering are said to be much harder for us to recognise as suffering.

Recognising the suffering of change is hard enough, but really understanding the all-pervasive suffering that we all possess, is even harder. Here we need to understand that the collection of merit works towards eliminating the very foundation of our suffering, which is all-pervasive suffering. So in that way, we begin to appreciate the relevance of the collection of merit and how it works on a very subtle and deep level.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further reads:

...for the limitless collection of merit and the limitless collection of wisdom eradicate just quickly physical and mental sufferings...

Having mentioned earlier that *one should not be lazy about accumulating the two collections for obtaining buddhahood*, the reason presented here is that both collections of merit and wisdom are *limitless*. They in turn, very *quickly eradicate* the *physical and mental sufferings* within oneself. Here we need to understand that one need not feel inadequate with respect to accumulating the causes for enlightenment.

Furthermore, one need not think that there might be some sort of limit to the time available to accumulate merit. As explained here, the ways and means of accumulating merit and wisdom are limitless, which indicates that the source is also limitless. Thus there is no limit to the acquisition of the causes. Because there are limitless ways to engage in the causes for enlightenment, specifically the accumulation of merit and wisdom, we need not feel inadequate about our efforts.

We can understand from this presentation that the collection of merit, in conjunction with purification, is the ultimate means for removing not only immediate suffering, but the suffering of the lower realms, as well as in future lifetimes. Thus engaging in purification practices, purifying negative karmas, and accumulating virtue and merit, is the means to remove all levels of physical suffering in this life and in future lifetimes. The accumulation of wisdom is the means to eradicate the more subtle psychological or mental forms of suffering. Basically, we all have this instinctive wish to avoid any kind of physical and mental suffering, so the

ultimate means to eradicate physical and mental suffering is through the accumulation of merit and wisdom.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further states:

It is fitting however to be lazy about accumulating causes for samsara, for they give rise to limitless sufferings.

Not only is accumulation of merit (in conjunction with purification practices) essential if we are to obtain the causes for enlightenment, but it is also a way to lessen the immediate problems in our life. We enjoy unbelievably good conditions, so at this point we can derive greater meaning by incorporating our understanding of the Lam Rim teachings on the great purpose of the precious human rebirth. This then becomes a means to derive the essence of the teachings.

2.2.2. Removal of physical suffering by the collection of merit

222 *The physical sufferings of bad transmigrations
Such as hunger and thirst arise from ill deeds;
Bodhisattvas do not commit ill deeds,
And due to meritorious deeds, they do not have
physical suffering in other lives*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

One should not be lazy thinking that one would have to experience limitless physical sufferings when accumulating the two collections, for *the physical sufferings of bad transmigrations such as hunger and thirst, cold and heat and so forth, arise from ill deeds; bodhisattvas do not commit ill deeds, and due to meritorious deeds do not have physical suffering but only happiness in other lives.*

The main point here is that one should not be disheartened about the effort and suffering that may entail in collecting merit, as it is the means to create causes to eliminate all future sufferings. A bodhisattva experiences no physical suffering because of the merit they have collected. So by contemplating that, one can remove the form of laziness where one fears the suffering that one will have to experience while accumulating the two collections.

The only reason why anyone experiences physical suffering is that they have engaged in negative deeds. Thus the negative karmic imprints are still within their mental continuum. Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, have overcome negative karmic imprints, and thus will not experience the result, which is suffering.

The main point to be understood and incorporated into your practice is that if you don't wish to experience suffering, then you should not accumulate the causes for suffering, which is negative karma. We need to be able to connect the experience to its cause; the experience of suffering is a result of the cause of having accumulated or created negative karma in the past. When we reflect on this and gain a deeper understanding of this connection, we will become very wary about accumulating negative karma, and in the event of having done so, we will immediately resort to purifying it. That would be the means! We all know how to purify negative karma with the aid of the four opponent powers. We should understand that if we don't purify negative karma whenever it is created, then it is immediately left as an imprint on our mind. For as long as we carry the imprints of negative karma in our mental continuum, we will be carrying the causes to experience suffering at any given time when the conditions are right.

We all understand that engaging in negative karma will leave imprints on our mind, which then become the cause

for experiencing negative results. Thus we need to purify the negative karmic imprints within our mental continuum by applying the four opponent powers. Now it is, of course, difficult for us to completely avoid creating some forms of negative karma, because some negative karmic imprints are very deeply implanted into our mental continuum. So even though it is not our wish, we sometimes find ourselves creating negative karmas. However when we notice that, then we can resort to purification practices, and in this way lessen the impact of the negative consequences. As we recall from previous teachings, even though negative karma has no redeeming qualities it can still be purified; so this is one good thing about negative karma! But it is up to us to apply the purification practices. If we have the cause of suffering in the form of a negative karmic imprint, then eventually we will have to experience that the result which is suffering. But if we don't have the causes in our mental continuum, then we will not have to experience the result.

2.2.3. Removal of mental suffering by the collection of wisdom

This heading relates to the verse that reads:

223 *The mental sufferings of desire, hatred, fear,
Lust, and so forth arise from obscuration.
Through knowing them to be baseless
They just quickly forsake mental suffering.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

One should not be lazy thinking that one will have to experience limitless mental sufferings when accumulating the two collections, for *the mental sufferings of desire* that comes from being attached to objects, *hatred* with intention to harm, *fear* of other kings and spirits, *lust* for things that belong to others and *so forth* arise from the *obscuration* of adhering to the four extremes and the ignorance of not knowing the meaning of reality. However bodhisattvas *through* engaging in the accumulation of the collections and *knowing* all phenomena *to be baseless* i.e. without any inherent base, root or reliance, *they just quickly forsake* [abandon] *mental suffering.*

This is the point where we can incorporate the understanding that we have gained from extensive explanations on the obscurations, particularly the ignorance of adhering to the four extremes and the ignorance of not knowing the nature of reality. That fundamental ignorance of grasping at inherent or true existence is the main cause of delusions such as *attachment to objects, hatred with the intention to harm, fear of other kings and spirits, and lust and desire for things that belong to others.* All of these vices arise from the fundamental basis of grasping at a truly-existent self.

For as long as there is ignorance in one's mind, it will be the cause of mental suffering. Then the teaching goes on to explain that a bodhisattva quickly abandons all mental suffering through engaging in the accumulation of the collection of wisdom, knowing that all phenomena are baseless and without inherent existence. When the fundamental cause of all suffering (the ignorance of grasping at a truly-existent self) is overcome, then having gained that wisdom, all the results (all forms of mental suffering) will be eliminated. That is what is to be understood here.

Gaining the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness overcomes all of one's misconceptions, and thus eliminates the suffering that is a consequence of those misconceptions. This has been extensively explained many times in the past, but I will review the main points here. When a bodhisattva,

who has gained the realisation of emptiness, perceives an attractive or beautiful object, it is not as if the object doesn't appear as attractive to them. In fact the beauty and the appealing features and attributes of the object still appear to the bodhisattva. However, due to the understanding that it does not exist in the way that it appears, the bodhisattva knows that the appearance is not the reality of the actual object, so attraction and attachment to the object will not arise for a bodhisattva.

Ordinary beings, on the other hand, feel an immediate attraction and develop a strong attachment, because of their total belief in their perception of the object. Bodhisattvas do not have the same belief in the appearance of the object, which is how attachment is overcome. Likewise, for ordinary beings an unappealing object would be a cause for aversion or anger because of their total belief in the negative or unattractive attributes of that object.

Despite an object having the appearance of unappealing features or attributes, a bodhisattva will know that it doesn't exist in the way that it appears. As a result of this understanding, aversion or anger towards the object will not arise. Attachment and anger are overcome when the negative emotions related to desire or hatred for an object do not occur. Thus bodhisattvas do not create any new negative karma and thus do not experience any mental agony or mental suffering.

As ordinary beings, we have a total belief in the appearance of objects, and so we develop strong attachment or aversion towards those objects, which in turn creates a lot of mental suffering. As the teachings explain, the primary cause of our mental suffering is the superstitious mind. Superstitious mental misconceptions arise when one fails to understand the actual reality of phenomena. When these misconceptions are overcome by gaining the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness, then all mental suffering will naturally subside.

To gain a further understanding of this, one can incorporate the explanations in the Lam Rim. As you will recall, one develops a heart-warming love for other sentient beings by seeing them as being appealing. Due to their wisdom, when a bodhisattva meditates on the appealing nature of sentient beings, they don't develop even the slightest attachment to sentient beings. Here the referent wisdom is the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness. We need to incorporate that understanding into what is being explained here.

As people will be aware, next Tuesday will be a discussion session, and the exam will be on the following Tuesday, 14 June. I'm assuming that most people will be here, as his Holiness' teachings in Melbourne will be finished by then, and His Holiness will be in Canberra. Although some people might be going to Canberra, we can still have the exam then.

As I regularly mention, the discussion is to be conducted by sharing your understanding and knowledge. If you have gained any understanding or knowledge from the teachings, then that is the time to present it. If someone has a question to ask about the teachings, then, if one has gained some understanding, that is the time to share your understanding. Otherwise there is not much use having that knowledge. Sharing is a way to help others as well as gaining a better understanding of the teachings.

It is explained in the teachings that there is incredible benefit in sharing one's knowledge with others so that they gain some understanding of the Dharma. Imparting even a part of the knowledge of the Dharma to someone else is implanting the seed of enlightenment in their mind stream.

Gaining just one aspect of understanding the Dharma serves as a basis for gaining the ultimate knowledge of the Dharma, which is an enlightened mind. So sharing knowledge of the Dharma implants the seed of omniscience in the other person's mind. That is the great benefit that the other gets, while we gain extensive merit. With this understanding one will appreciate the explanation in the teachings that generosity of the Dharma is a much greater deed than generosity with material aid.

We will now recite the *Eight Verses of Mind Training*, dedicating it to Alan's late mum. As mentioned previously, we visualise Amitabha Buddha in the space before us. Then through the rays of light coming from Amitabha Buddha's heart, we visualise that Alan's mum's consciousness has been drawn up to the pure land. So with that visualisation, we can recite the *Eight Verses of Mind Training*.

For my part, I have done practices for Alan's mum. I was prompted to do that when Vanessa mentioned that it is traditional to bring flowers to show one's condolences. She went on to say that it might be better to give the flowers directly to me to do the practices for Alan's mum. So with that offering of flowers, I did a self-initiation practice.

Alan, you would not know that this happened. So, perhaps it would be appropriate for you to thank Vanessa for making the offering of flowers towards the practices for your late mum.

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