
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་གྱི་ལྷན་པོ་ལ་བཞུགས་པའི་གསུང་རྒྱུ་ལྷན་པོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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Keeping in mind the motivation of the refuge and bodhicitta prayer that we have just recited, we can do the meditation.
[meditation]

Generate a motivation for receiving the teaching such as, 'For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the Dharma teaching and put it into practice well'.

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

2.2.4. No cause for laziness about accumulating the two collections

According to the meaning of the Tibetan a more accurate translation is 'No cause for being overwhelmed or discouraged about....' would be.

The two verses relating to this outline are:

- 224 *Since thus they are not greatly harmed
By physical and mental suffering,
Why should they be discouraged
Though they lead beings in all worlds?*
- 225 *It is hard to bear suffering even for a little,
What need is there to speak of doing so for
long!
What could bring harm even over limitless time
To happy beings who have no suffering?*

Gyalsab Je's commentary on the meaning of the first verse opens with a rhetorical question:

Even though bodhisattvas need to liberate limitless beings from limitless worlds, why should they be disheartened?

This indicates that even though bodhisattvas have to work towards *liberating limitless* sentient beings, there is no reason for bodhisattvas to feel *disheartened*.

Gyalsab Je goes on to explain:

There is no reason to be discouraged *since they are not greatly harmed by physical and mental suffering, so why should they be discouraged though they lead beings in all worlds*.

We can relate this to our own reasons for feeling discouraged if we experience physical or mental hardship when we undertake a task. Although experiencing such hardship may discourage us, bodhisattvas experience neither *physical nor mental suffering*, and so there is no reason for them to feel *discouraged*.

The reason why we may feel discouraged when we face hardships is because of our inability to endure the hardships. Lacking a sense of endurance is the reason why we become disheartened or discouraged. For bodhisattvas, however, such feelings do not arise since the very cause for becoming discouraged or disheartened, which is suffering, is absent.

Gyalsab Je's commentary continues:

It is hard to bear suffering even for a little, what need to speak of doing so for long!

Although we find it hard to bear minor suffering and minimal hardship, the scope of a bodhisattva is a determination to continuously help sentient beings over many eons. Because they have such a great scope normal suffering cannot dishearten a bodhisattva.

As Gyalsab Je further explains:

However, *what could bring harm even over limitless time to bodhisattvas who are happy beings and who have no suffering?* As there is only gain without even the slightest loss, it is appropriate to quickly engage in the accumulation of the two collections and not appropriate to be lazy.

The reason why bodhisattvas do not experience extreme suffering is primarily due to their practice of patience, particularly the patience of enduring suffering. We, on the other hand, can become disheartened or discouraged when we face even the slightest hardship, because of our lack of patience. If we lack that ability to willingly take on hardships with endurance, we become discouraged.

Here, we need to relate the importance of enduring hardships to our own practice. We need to develop this particular type of patience in order to maintain the continuity of our practices. The patience of enduring suffering helps to maintain the integrity of one's practice, because the very nature of patience is that it prevents one's mind from being disturbed in the event of difficulties or hardships. When we engage in the practice of patience, our mindset does not allow us to become disturbed by hardships and suffering and so forth. Thus, an undisturbed and calm mind helps to maintain the integrity and continuity of one's practice.

When the text specifically mentions that bodhisattvas do not experience suffering, it may be referring to higher level bodhisattvas who only experience joy. However, at the beginner level of the practice, the main factor that maintains continuity of practice is the practice of the patience that endures hardships and suffering. When one doesn't allow the mind to become disturbed by hardships, one is able to maintain a sense of joy and calmness, and in that way one is able to protect one's practice.

This can also be related to the factors that cause anger to arise in our mind. As soon as we lose our patience and allow our mind to become disturbed by suffering, hardships and so forth, then anger will arise. We all share the experience of feeling irritable because we have lost our patience, which of course makes it difficult to relate to others.

It is really important that we understand the significance of the patience of willingly enduring suffering. Then, in the event of facing real hardship, such as sickness for example, because of familiarity with the practice of patience the physical suffering will not cause much mental disturbance.

As you are aware, the very definition of patience is the lack of mental disturbance in the event of suffering or harm. Therefore, if we exert ourselves to practise patience while things are going relatively well for us then, then due to familiarity and virtue with the practice, we will be able to practise patience when actual hardships occur. That is the real significance of the practice. Being able to apply the practice of patience at the time when it is most needed depends on applying it in our everyday lives now. That is how we need to understand the significance and relevance of the practice.

In order to engage in the practice of patience, we need to fully understand it. In particular we need to fully comprehend what the patience of willingly enduring suffering means. Whose suffering is it referring to? Does it relate to the suffering of others or is it one's own suffering? We really need to be clear about that distinction and fully understand that it relates to our own suffering. We really need to understand that the practice of patience that endures sufferings refers to our own suffering.

Gyaltsab Je then concludes:

As there is only gain without even the slightest loss, it is appropriate to quickly engage in the accumulation of the two collections and not appropriate to be lazy.

2.2.5. The power of great compassion

This translation doesn't seem to incorporate full meaning of the Tibetan, which refers to both the potential as well as the power of great compassion.

226 *They have no physical suffering;
How could they have mental suffering?
Through their compassion they feel pain
For the world and so stay in it long.*

Here one needs to understand the distinction between normal compassion and the great compassion that is the subject of this outline. Unlike normal compassion, where one might be biased in feeling compassion for some beings and not others, great compassion is extended to all sentient beings, regardless of how they affect you, or appear to you. Great compassion refers to reflecting, without discrimination, on how every sentient being is suffering and thus wishing them to be free from suffering.

Renunciation is the basis on which one develops great compassion. Without having first developed renunciation, which is the wish to be completely free from suffering oneself, there is no possibility of developing the attitude of wishing others to be free from all suffering. Therefore we need to understand that in order to develop great compassion for all living beings, we need to have first developed renunciation.

To further expand one's understanding of the meaning of compassion, particularly in the Buddhist context, it is important to understand the distinction between general compassion and the compassion that is based on the understanding of the real causes of the suffering of other sentient beings. We develop general compassion when we see the normal suffering of other sentient beings, i.e. the suffering of suffering which refers to the physical and mental suffering that we can relate to on an obvious level. When that kind of suffering is perceived, then a sense of compassion can be spontaneously and naturally developed, which is of course a very good and noble thought.

However, the compassion being specified here is a compassion that is based on understanding the very causes of suffering, in particular the way samsaric suffering as a whole is connected to the twelve interdependent links. Wishing all sentient beings to be free from all types of suffering that are experienced in samsara as well as the very causes of that suffering, is a much more profound level of compassion. In fact we can safely say that this level of compassion is unique to the Buddhist tradition. As far as I understand, other faiths and traditions don't explain compassion to this extent.

The compassion that is developed on the basis of seeing suffering in general can be developed not only by religious followers of other faiths, but even by those who are not

necessarily religious minded. When any ordinary sympathetic human being sees someone else suffering, they have a sense of empathy, a natural wish for them not to suffer, which is compassion. However the very profound level of compassion based on the understanding of the twelve interdependent links and so forth is unique to the Buddhist tradition.

More specifically, three categories of compassion are explained in the teachings:

- compassion focussing on the suffering of sentient beings;
- compassion focussing on phenomena;
- compassion focussing on the suffering that is based on thusness or the identitylessness of other beings.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je opens his explanation with a question:

If asked, doesn't a bodhisattva experience any mental suffering?

Having explained earlier that bodhisattvas do not experience any physical or mental suffering, this question is probing even further by asking, 'Are you sure that bodhisattvas don't have even a tiny bit of suffering?' This is very appropriate question of wishing to really know whether there is any suffering that bodhisattvas may experience is very much related to the modern way of thinking:

Gyaltsab Je then responds to that question by explaining the meaning of the verse:

They have no physical suffering in relation to their own needs; ...

The unequivocal point being made here is that *in relation their own needs they have no suffering* at all. As they have no *physical suffering in relation to their own needs*, how could they have any mental suffering either?

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

They do not have it even slightly. However, *through their compassion* for beings who are suffering, *they feel pain for the world* which is due to their exceptional virtue and not unwillingly....

While it is the case that bodhisattvas do not experience any physical or mental suffering in relation to their own needs, however when they focus on the suffering of other sentient beings, they do feel pain in the form of sadness for the suffering that others experience. Due to their exceptional virtue, the slight pain they feel in their heart when they see other beings suffering is not in the nature of suffering, but rather a cause for great virtue.

This explanation is very suitable for those who have questions about feeling empathy or compassion for others. They often ask questions like, 'Wouldn't one experience unnecessary suffering if one feels compassion for others?'. Of course at our level, we might feel disheartened and even some discomfort when we feel compassion for others. However we must remind ourselves that such an uncomfortable feeling is a virtue rather than a non-virtue. As explained here, bodhisattvas willingly embrace pain when feeling compassion for other sentient beings. Thus their compassion is a great and exceptional virtue.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then concludes with this statement:

...thus they *stay* in samsara for a *long* time.

This is really the main point of the power of compassion referred to in the outline heading. Due to their great

compassion bodhisattvas want to liberate and help all sentient beings in samsara, so they willingly accept staying in samsara for a long time. When the teachings mention that the bodhisattvas do not intend to abandon samsara, they are referring to this point. For the sake of benefitting sentient beings and out of their great compassion for sentient beings, bodhisattvas don't feel any hurry to leave samsara for their own sake, but willingly endeavour to stay in samsara to benefit other sentient beings.

In summary, through the power of their great compassion, bodhisattvas have no hesitation in remaining in samsara for the benefit of other sentient beings, the sole purpose their vow to remain in samsara is to benefit other sentient beings. You will recall that the opening verse of the Madhyamaka teachings states that compassion is important at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. As explained in other parts of the text, it is the power of great compassion that allows one to abide in samsara to benefit other sentient beings, by helping them to abandon samsara. When they obtain enlightenment, it is through the power of great compassion that they are able to continuously benefit sentient beings to an even greater extent.

When we relate to the teachings in this way, we can see the relevance of great compassion in association with the practices of the patience of enduring the hardships and difficulties of benefitting sentient beings; as well as ethics and so forth. All of the six perfections are complementary to the main practice of great compassion, which bodhisattvas extend to all living beings.

As the great master Lama Tsong Khapa said, in order to benefit other sentient beings we need to develop the wish for them to be free from suffering and to be endowed with happiness and joy. Without those intentions, there is no possible way for us to be of any benefit to other sentient beings.

Now we come to conclusion of the section concerning not feeling inadequate about accumulating the two collections.¹

3. SUMMATION

The verse that relates to this outline is:

227 *Hence do not feel inadequate thinking,
'Buddhahood is far away.'
Always strive at these [collections]
To remove defects and attain good qualities.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Hence, because of these reasons, do not feel inadequate thinking, 'buddhahood is far away', rather always strive at these [collections] to remove defects and attain good qualities.

For the reasons that were presented earlier, those with intelligence should not feel inadequate by thinking that buddhahood is far away, but rather strive to accumulate the two collections, to remove defects and attain all of the good qualities. In this context 'to strive' is the personal instruction to actually engage in the practice of the two collections.

Thus the main point of this section of the text is to contemplate all the reasons that were presented earlier. One needs to build up the courage to clear away and overcome any feelings of inadequacy or discouragement, and see one's own great potential when accumulating the two collections. As presented earlier, there are various ways of engaging in the two collections; recollecting that the purpose of doing so

is because the two collections serve as the main cause for obtaining the ultimate results of the two bodies of an enlightened being.

Giving into feelings of inadequacy and laziness obstructs one from engaging in removing the non-virtuous states of mind and obtaining good qualities. Even though this advice specifically refers to engaging in the two collections, we need to apply this advice to whatever practice we engage in. It is good to remember this point.

The way we can strive to transform or better ourselves is to remove defects or faults and further develop good qualities. Thus we cannot give into laziness, otherwise our practice will suffer. As the sutras indicate, there is no possibility of accumulating any white virtues for one who gives into laziness. So we really need to understand the ill-effects of laziness, and fully acknowledge that the cause of all our defects is laziness. In the first place, it is laziness that prevents us from accumulating any virtue or positive qualities, and if we have engaged in accumulating some virtues or good qualities, it is laziness that prevents us from further increasing those qualities. So not only does laziness prevent one from gaining any qualities, it also prevents the further development of them.

D. THE ENTITIES OF THE TWO COLLECTIONS

This section is sub-divided into three:

1. Advice to forsake the opposites of merit and to rely on the meritorious
2. Effects of three poisons and of their opposites
3. Actual two collections

1. ADVICE TO FORSAKE THE OPPOSITES OF MERIT AND TO RELY ON THE MERITORIOUS

The verse relating to heading this is:

228 *Realising that desire, hatred, and obscuration
Are defects, forsake them completely.
Realising that non-desire, non-hatred, and non-
obscuration
Are good qualities, inculcate them with vigour.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

By realising that desire, hatred and obscuration [or ignorance] are defects, forsake them completely...

One needs to fully understand that *desire* or attachment, *hatred*, and *obscuration* or ignorance are defects or faults. Only then will one develop a strong wish to completely overcome them.

As also explained extensively in other texts, the three poisons, in particular the ignorance of grasping at a self, are the basis or root of all our suffering. Due to the grasping at a self, there is attachment to things that are favourable to the self, and hatred and anger develop towards those things that are unfavourable or that oppose the self. That is how one needs to understand that the ignorance of grasping at the self is the very root of all our suffering.

Gyaltsab Je continues to explain:

...and by realising that non-desire, non-hatred and non-obscuration are good qualities inculcate them with respect and vigour.

The opposites of merit referred to in the heading are the three poisons of desire, hatred and obscuration or ignorance. For as long as one harbours the three poisons within one's mental continuum, there will be no opportunity to engage in meritorious acts and gain merit for oneself. When one recognises that desire is a defect and wishes to abandon it,

¹ Begun on 24 May 2011.
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one needs to cultivate the opposite of desire, which is non-desire. Similarly, when one recognises anger and hatred as being defects or faults, then to overcome those one needs to develop the opposite, which is non-hatred; likewise non-obscuration is the opposite to ignorance.

These opposites are good qualities, otherwise called meritorious. Thus, to *inculcate them with respect and vigour* means to fully embrace them and to engage in cultivating them. Thus the abandonment of each of the three poisons is itself a root virtue: the root virtue of non-desire, the root virtue of non-hatred and the root virtue of non-obscuration.

One needs to go beyond merely relying on the words, and really understand that non-desire is not just having a state of mind of indifference, but that it is a state of mind that is an antidote for overcoming desire. Even though the virtue is explicitly stated as 'non-desire', one needs to understand that it is a state of mind that actually opposes desire, which is essentially an antidote for overcoming desire. Likewise, non-hatred is a state of mind that serves as an antidote for overcoming hatred or anger, while non-obscuration is a state of mind that serves as an antidote for overcoming ignorance. So we need to understand the full implication of what is being presented here in order to incorporate it into our own practice.

We need to identify the anger and ignorance that lie within ourselves. We are very familiar in seeing others being angry or feeling desire and we readily attribute those faults to others, so we don't need any further practice in that! However in order to develop a practice for our own transformation, we need to relate the same faults within ourselves. Just as one sees others feeling miserable from the pangs of desire, ask 'Do I too have that within me?'. Likewise, as one sees the faults of anger in others, ask 'Do I have anger within myself?'. If we can tell that others are angry, we can detect the same in ourselves and then see how it is the cause of our own misery and suffering. It is only then that we develop the determination and commitment to overcome our own desire, hatred and ignorance. That is how we need to apply it in our practice.

2. EFFECTS OF THREE POISONS AND OF THEIR OPPOSITES

The verse relating to this reads:

*229 Through desire one goes into a hungry ghost transmigration,
Through hatred one is impelled into a hell,
Through obscuration one mostly goes into an animal transmigration.
Through stopping these one becomes a god or a human.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Through desire to things one goes into a hungry ghost transmigration. Through hatred one is impelled into hell. Through obscuration it is possible to go to a happy transmigration, however one mostly goes into an animal transmigration. Through the virtue of stopping these three, one becomes a god or human.

Having explained the three poisons and their effects in detail, this verse is pointing out that in overcoming the three poisons, one also experiences the opposites of those, which are meritorious rebirths.

Here again, we can incorporate the more detailed explanations given in the Lam Rim teachings, which explain how desire is one of the main causes for being born in a *hungry ghost* realm, and for experiencing the suffering of that

realm. There are also the hell realms and as explained here, harbouring anger or hatred is a cause for the extensive suffering of the *hell* realms (which are explained in detail in the Lam Rim teachings). Contemplating those kinds of suffering encourages us to overcome the causes of that suffering by overcoming desire, hatred and ignorance. That of course is the intent of these teachings.

In summary when, as mentioned in other teachings, we understand that the three poisons are a cause of suffering because they cause a rebirth in either the animal realm, hungry ghost realm or the hell realms, we then gain a greater understanding of how the three poisons are the root causes of suffering. If we can imagine the sufferings of the animal, hungry ghost and hell realms and imagine ourselves experiencing such suffering, we would consider it unbearable.

The way to overcome such suffering is to engage in the opposites of the three poisons, which are the three root virtues of non-desire, non-hatred and non-ignorance. Establishing those root virtues within one's own mental continuum is the cause that overcomes all experiences of suffering. This is how we gain the understanding of the intent of the teaching on the sufferings of the lower realms.

Gyaltsab Je's presentation is a very comprehensive way of pointing out what the three poisons are and how they are the cause of suffering. In addition he indicates that the opposites of the three poisons are the virtues, which are the causes for a happy life. This is an easy way to derive the main point of the comprehensive presentation.

Venerable Rigsal underwent knee-surgery this morning, which apparently has been successful. So we can now make dedications for her speedy recovery.

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Edited Version
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