

develop that realisation. Endeavouring to gain that realisation is the *collection of wisdom*.

Therefore the collections of merit and wisdom are the two essential practices that are the causes for enlightenment. As presented many times in the past, the structure of the path to enlightenment has three main stages:

- The basis, which is the two truths. Without understanding the two truths, one cannot possibly engage in the practice of bodhicitta and gain the realisation of emptiness. In order to develop bodhicitta and gain the realisation of emptiness, one must first have a clear understanding of the two truths, which are therefore considered as the basis.
- The path, which is the two collections. The two collections are referred to as the path, because the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom encompass all the practices on the path that leads to an ultimate state of enlightenment.
- The result, which is gaining the two bodies of the enlightened being. The ultimate goal of engaging the accumulations of merit and wisdom is to gain the two bodies of the Buddha.

One needs to understand how the two resultant bodies of a buddha are dependent on the two collections, which are in turn related to the two truths, which are the basis. If we understand this overview of the whole path, it will deepen our understanding of the relevance of the teaching here.

As I emphasise regularly, we need to be careful to ensure that our practice is steady and constructive, which means that it is founded on the basis of what we already know and understand now. Then we can further develop and deepen our understanding. One of the main pitfalls of our spiritual development is having the attitude of 'oh, I already know that, so what more can I gain from it? Rather, I can undertake higher levels of practice'. If we are not careful and wary, we can easily develop an attitude where we feel contempt for what we know, thinking 'I have already learned that', and focus on seeking something more profound. However in that very pursuit, we might neglect the very basis, which is the profound practice that we need to be working with. As the text itself mentions later, if we jump from one practice to another with the expectation that the alternative will be something better, then in the end we may end up with no substantial result at all.

The main points of the verse we are covering now are:

- When we adopt those practices that are the opposites of the three poisons, which are the three root virtues, and complement them with a bodhicitta attitude, then that is the collection of merit that is the main cause for obtaining the rupakaya, or the form body of the Buddha.
- When on the basis of the three root virtues, one endeavours to gain the realisation of emptiness, then that is the collection of merit that is the main cause for obtaining the dharmakaya or the wisdom truth body of the enlightened being.

If any one of us here were to be asked, 'Do you aspire to become a buddha?', then no doubt the answer would be 'Yes, I definitely want to become an enlightened being'. So if that is our aspiration, we need to know the causes for obtaining buddhahood and the methods needed to achieve that goal. If we have an aspiration or a strong wish to do something, but pay little attention to the actual causes, then we will not obtain the desired result. Here we are attempting

to understand how to achieve the aspiration that we all have, which is to become enlightened. So it is reasonable to implement it in our practice

E. BRANCHES OF THE TWO COLLECTIONS

Under this heading there are two sub-divisions:

1. Brief indication
2. Extensive exposition

1. BRIEF INDICATION

This is further sub-divided into two:

- 1.1. Branches of the collection of merit
- 1.2. Branches of the collection of wisdom

1.1. Branches of the collection of merit

This heading has three sub-divisions:

- 1.1.1. Establishing objects of worship
- 1.1.2. Worship
- 1.1.3. Ceasing to worship unworthy objects

Having acknowledged the collection of merit as being a paramount cause to obtain enlightenment, the methods of accumulating merit are presented here. The three main ways are establishing objects of worship for one's offerings, the actual worship is making offerings, and ceasing to worship or make offerings to unworthy objects.

1.1.1. Establishing objects of worship

Again this is sub-divided into two:

- 1.1.1.1. Newly establishing objects of worship
- 1.1.1.2. Worshipping them once established

Here, *newly established objects* refers to exhorting the king to make an effort to construct and establish holy objects, while *worshipping them once they have been established*, refers to either newly constructed objects, as well as already existing objects of worship.

1.1.1.1. NEWLY ESTABLISHING OBJECTS OF WORSHIP

The two verses relating to this heading read:

- 231 *You should respectfully and extensively construct
Images of Buddha, monuments, and temples
And provide residences,
Abundant riches, and so forth.*
- 232 *Please construct from all precious substances
Images of Buddha with fine proportions,
Well designed and sitting on lotuses,
Adorned with all precious substances.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

O king, *you should respectfully and extensively construct temples and provide residence to the Sangha, abundant riches and so forth. To be placed in the temples, please construct from all precious substances, images of Buddha with fine proportions, well designed and sitting on lotuses, adorned with all precious substances.*

The point we need to understand here is that when the king constructs temples and so forth, he is advised to do so in a respectful manner. In this context *respectful* indicates that the construction should not be an occasion for pride. So we need to ensure that our own practices of constructing images or making donations are done in a respectful manner, without ostentation or boasting about the magnitude of the deed, e.g. making a large donation. Giving with respect will help to overcome any sense of pride and superiority.

The object of the offering of temples and residences are the Sangha. Here one needs to understand that the merit one accumulates from offering to the Sangha is superior to the

merit that can be gained from making offerings to even the Buddha or the Dharma! So making offerings to the Sangha is a very meritorious act, far greater than offering to the Buddha and the Dharma.

The second quality is that the construction should be done *extensively*, which indicates that construction should be undertaken carefully and not rushed, and that it should be done in a thorough manner without any negligence.

At a personal level, we can understand that if we support the construction of temples or monasteries or images of the Buddha, by donating whatever we can in a respectful manner, then that will be a very meritorious deed. The real significance is that constructing temples and monasteries and images of the Buddha provides the means for others to accumulate extensive merit. This shows us why making respectful donations is such a meritorious act.

1.1.1.2. WORSHIPPING THEM ONCE ESTABLISHED

The first two lines of Verse 233 are:

*233ab You should sustain with all endeavour
The excellent doctrine and the communities
Of monastics ...*

Here again *communities* refers to the Sangha. When one relates to the reason behind it, one will understand the significance of these lines. The Buddha jewel relies on the Dharma jewel which in turn relies upon the Sangha jewel. Therefore the Sangha are the basis for cultivating the Dharma jewel and ultimately the Buddha jewel. So the Sangha are held in very high esteem, and thus making offerings to the Sangha is a very meritorious deed.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

You should sustain the already accomplished with all endeavour; texts of the excellent doctrine and necessitates such as food and clothing for the communities of fully ordained monastics and other Sangha, and provide them with a residence that is free from the harm of enemies and so forth.

As clearly indicated here, when temples or monasteries have been established, one needs to endow these structures with the means that will enable monastic communities to live there. This includes providing the *texts of the excellent doctrine*, which refers to the written texts of the Buddha's sutras and so forth, in addition to *necessities* for the *fully ordained monastics or Sangha such as food and clothing, and to provide them with a residence that is free from harm of enemies and so forth*. So in addition to constructing monasteries in a suitable location, the king is being advised to maintain them well. For example, one of the practices is to protect the texts from silverfish and the like with camphor, and another is to ensure that there are no leaks near the texts and statues, and to prevent them from being damaged or destroyed. Of course it is not just a matter of protecting texts and statues, but the Sangha who live in the temples need to be protected and fed well; so they need to be given good food and drink!

1.1.2. Worship

This section refers to how to make offerings.

*233cd ... and decorate monuments
With gold and jewelled friezes.*

*234 Revere the monuments
With gold and silver flowers,
Diamonds, corals, pearls,
Emeralds, cat's eye gems, and sapphires.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Decorate monuments [stupas] with gold and jewelled friezes and revere the monuments with gold and silver flowers, diamonds, corals, pearls, emeralds, cat's eye gems and sapphires.

Here *decorate monuments with gold*, can refer to the highest point of a temple or monastery. In Tibet, the topmost parts of many temples and monasteries have these kinds of decorations made from gold.

As the commentary explains, the decorations are made *with gold and jewelled friezes and to revere the monuments with gold and silver flowers, diamonds, corals, pearls, emeralds, cat's eye gems and sapphires*. This indicates that decorations such as flowers are not real flowers, but decorative flowers made out of gold, silver, diamonds, corals and pearls and so forth. Again, one must remember that this particular instruction was given to a wealthy king; Nagarjuna was very skilfully instructing the king to use his riches in a meaningful way, thereby accumulating great merit.

Again, it is to be understood that Nagarjuna's instructions to the king follows the tradition of ornately decorating temples and so forth with the most precious substances possible, such as gold and jewels like emeralds and so forth. Offering whatever precious stones that are available is a means to accumulate extensive merit.

Here, one must not misinterpret the teaching at this point, and think that these precious stones and jewels are to be offered to the Sangha. The specific instruction here is that they are to be used to decorate the monuments and temples and so forth, while good food and clothing are offered to the Sangha!

The specific instruction to the king was that he should establish temples and monasteries in such a place and manner that are free from harm. Once established, he should use his power to protect them and ensure that the communities, or the Sangha, thrive. The decline of Buddhism in India over time occurred due to the lack of protection of monasteries and so forth. External forces were able to destroy monuments and temples and for a long period of time, there were no monasteries, temples or even statues in India, and the Sangha were left to fend for themselves. If they had been continuously protected from earlier times, this may not have happened. As the king has the power and the means to give protection, Nagarjuna exhorts him to do so. That covers the worship of monuments.

Next is making offerings to those who propound the doctrine (notably the teachers of the Dharma).

*235 To revere propounders of doctrine
Is to do what pleases them—
[Offering] goods and services
And relying firmly on the doctrine.*

In explanation of this verse Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

To revere propounders of doctrine is to do what pleases them, offering goods such as clothing and services and relying firmly on the six practices explained previously. Some texts read 'rely firmly on the doctrine'.

The king was initially instructed to construct temples and revere them by applying extensive decorations, and to make offerings to sustain the Sangha community who live in the monasteries or temples. Now he is being asked to revere or make offerings to those who propound the doctrine or the Dharma. Just as the Sangha are extremely precious, so too are the teachers who propound the doctrine, or the Dharma,

to the Sangha. So the king is being exhorted to offer service to that end.

The next verse refers to how to listen to those who propound the doctrine.

*236 Listen to teachers with homage
And respect, serve, and pray to them.
Always respectfully revere
The [other] bodhisattvas.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

When listening to the Dharma, *listen to teachers with homage and respect*, mindfully *serve*, ask after their well-being *and pray to them*. *Always respectfully revere the [other] bodhisattvas* as well, who are not your teachers.

In relation to one's own teachers, one listens to the Dharma with *homage and respect*. Likewise, one *mindfully serves* one's teacher and *asks after their well-being*, checking if they are well and comfortable. One should bear in mind that one also needs to pay respect to other great beings such as bodhisattvas, who may not be one's own teacher. This is another profound personal instruction: we may naturally have an affinity or fondness for our own teacher, but we should not neglect or ignore other great teachers or bodhisattvas to whom we must also pay respect.

1.1.3. Ceasing to worship unworthy objects

The verse relating to this outline is:

*237 You should not respect, revere,
Or do homage to others, the Forders,
Because through that the ignorant
Would become enamoured of the faulty.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with:

You should not respect, revere or do homage to others, the Forders...

The Forders refers to those who hold onto wrong views or non-Buddhist views. They are also called the Tirthikas. The commentary goes on to explain the reason why one should not revere and pay respect to such Forders:

... because, if a king pays respect to the ignorant, who are not able to distinguish between faults and virtues, then others, thinking that they are worthy, would become enamoured of the faulty.

One must understand that even though one should not *revere* or worship Forders, this doesn't mean being disrespectful to them. However, as indicated here, if the king were to pay respect and worship such teachers, then ordinary people who may not have the capacity to distinguish right from wrong, would naturally follow suit. Some people will naturally ape the actions of those in authority, thinking, 'If the king pays respect to such a person, then I will also have to pay them respect'.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

You must completely forsake those who may have the name 'teacher', but who propound false doctrines.

Here, Gyaltsab Je is emphasising that one must completely forsake those who propound false doctrines with erroneous conduct, even those who may have the title 'teacher'. Not only would it be detrimental to one's own progress but, as indicated to the king, it would be detrimental to the progress of others as well.

One needs to pay due respect to one's teacher, because of what the teacher represents, which is that he or she guides

one's development. As indicated in Aryadeva's text, *Four Hundred Verses*, a suitable student should have:

1. An intelligent mind
2. An unprejudiced mind
3. A keen interest¹

These three qualities ensure that the student will see no faults in their teacher. One of the qualities of a discriminative mind is that it can discriminate between what is right and what is wrong. So when a teacher imparts knowledge, the student will apply the teaching as personal instruction and will validate it with their own intelligence. In that way, the student will naturally have respect for their teacher and so will be inclined to see no fault in them. This is the how one's mind can be trained.

I have mentioned a few times that some passages from *the Four Hundred Verses* are important verses to keep in mind and to memorise if possible. Recently His Holiness also mentioned two particular verses to remember. If those verses which I indicated earlier had been kept in mind, then when His Holiness mentioned them, you would have recalled them.

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¹ See teaching of 16 October 2007.