
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བཞུགས་སྒྲོལ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

12 July 2011

Keeping in mind the motivation which was developed along the lines of the refuge and bodhicitta prayer that we have just recited, let us now engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

If we practise the meditation technique regularly, just as we have attempted in our short session here, we will definitely gain benefits. Needless to say, we need to really check if whether our practice of meditation, is hitting its intended target or not, which is to subdue the delusions within us. In other words, is the meditation practise having any positive effect on our mind?

What we really need to focus on is overcoming our internal problems. If we investigate and look within ourselves, we will find that even if there are no immediate external issues or problems, we are still holding on to many problems internally. It is as if the problems have become an integral solid part of us. When things are going relatively well externally, that's when we can begin to notice that there is still lot of mental turmoil.

Through our practice of meditation we should be able to pinpoint the real issues that we need to be dealing with, which are the cause of problems within our own state of mind. Rather than attempting to constantly appease external conditions and situations, we need to focus on improving things within our own mind. With meditation practice, we notice that our mind begins to settle down somewhat, things become clearer, and we have a focussed, more balance and more controlled mind. Then, in the event that some external problems arise, they will not affect us to a great degree, because of the stability of our own state of mind. So the effect that meditation practice has on our mind is that whatever difficult issues arise, we will be able to handle them more effectively.

We need to really assess our practice of Dharma, whether it be meditation or listening to the teachings, to ensure that it is working towards its purpose, which is to recognise one's own state of mind and transform it by adopting good virtuous and positive qualities, and discard that which is negative or unsuitable. As mentioned earlier, this can only be achieved by clearly recognising one's own state of mind.

The great Indian master Ashvagosha said that the Dharma should serve its purpose like a mirror, reflecting the state of our own mind. As we're not able to see our own face, we use the mirror as a medium to see if our face needs to be cleaned or beautified. Likewise the Dharma's purpose is to reflect what is going on in our own mind, thus enabling us to modify the behaviour of our body, speech and mind. This analogy, illustrates the purpose of the Dharma very clearly.

To take that analogy further, we use the mirror to detect faults or defects in our face, such as dirt, and then having determined that it is dirty we wash our face. Just seeing that our face is dirty is not sufficient—we need to actually clean it. Likewise the Dharma serves the purpose of enabling us to clearly see what is going on in our mind. Then, as we detect the defects or negativities within our mind, we need to apply the practice of getting rid of them. Just recognising our faults is not sufficient, as the faults will not clear away of their own accord. This shows us how incredibly profound the analogy is; it is a perfect example explaining how the Dharma works for us. Indeed Ashvagosha was a great scholar and master, who made profound comments about the Dharma.

Then we need to consider why we need to remove our faulty way of thinking that causes ill-effects. It is so that we can have a happy and joyful mind, which is our main purpose in life. Whatever we do in life it is done with the prospect that it will bring us happiness. I mention regularly, as I recently did in Warrnambool, that if I had to choose between a happy state of mind and a mass of wealth, I would choose a happy state of mind. Money is meant to make us happy, but all too often it comes at an expense of happiness. If gaining wealth means forsaking happiness then it doesn't serve its purpose. So if it came to a choice, I would rather choose a happy state of mind, because that is the ultimate purpose of our being.

If I asked you that question, what would you choose? If I were to ask business-minded people, some would probably raise their hands for wealth, but these would probably be amateur business people. Those who already have a lot of experience in business and who have already acquired a significant amount of money, would most likely raise their hand for happiness. That is because they would have found from experience that money doesn't necessarily bring the result of happiness. This shows us that we really need to consider what we are doing in our life.

If the main purpose in life can be summarised as achieving a happy mind, then we need to take personal responsibility for bringing about our own happiness. The fact is that no one else can ultimately provide us with happiness—we need to develop it for ourselves. In fact far from providing happiness we may think that some people are very good at making us unhappy! It is clear however, that others definitely cannot give us happiness.

In that light, Nagarjuna also advised us that since we spend so much time creating unhappiness for others, it is worthwhile to make an effort in trying to provide them even with some temporary happiness, through acts of generosity such as giving clothing to those who need clothing, food to those who need food, drink to those who are deprived of drink, helping the sick and so forth. Although, of course, that provides them with a certain amount of happiness on the physical level, we cannot give ultimate mental happiness to others.

As I said recently in my teachings in Warrnambool, I am not here to share anything of great value such as profound knowledge or great insights. As I have often said to you, I would be a good example of a geshe who, despite having completed his studies, doesn't know

much. Even though I may not have any great insights or realisations to share with others, one thing I can boast about is that I have a happy mind.

Despite the fact that I don't have anything valuable to share or give, we can definitely achieve something meaningful together from the good intention that we generate from both sides—a positive motivation from my side as well as from your side. I truly believe that this can contribute to achieving a great purpose. The happy state of mind that I possess is the only valuable thing that I have. In terms of friendship it is like my best friend and companion, and in terms of wealth it is my most valuable possession. Wherever I go, whether I am in my room alone or when I go out, I always carry it with me, which is why I consider it as my most valuable asset.

Now let us remind ourselves to generate the positive motivation for receiving the teachings, such as: In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well. When we generate such a motivation from the depth of our heart then it really does make our purpose in being here meaningful.

2.1. Branches of the collection of merit (cont.)

2.1.2. Other giving

As explained in the commentary, this outline is divided into nine different forms of giving. The first two are:

252cd Eliminate high taxes [levied by the previous monarch].

Reduce the tax rate [on harvests].

In Tibetan, the root text only says, *Eliminate high taxes; levied and imposed by the previous monarch* comes from the commentary.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je says

'Other giving' has nine categories:

First, *eliminate high taxes* levied by the previous monarch.

This explains that that the king should *eliminate high taxes* and in that way making it much easier for the subject to pay their dues. It is an act of generosity in that it helps the needy by making it easier for those who are having difficulties in paying their taxes.

Here *taxes* also refers to unreasonably harsh high taxes. The Tibetan word *tšen-thap* has a connotation of punitive taxes, imposed without any reference to the well-being of the subjects. It implies that these taxes are imposed without the subjects having any say about it, and that payment is enforced vigorously, regardless of the suffering this causes the subjects. So Nagarjuna is instructing the king to eliminate any unreasonable high taxes levied by a previous monarch, thus providing relief for his subjects. *Levied by the previous monarch* also carries the implication that the king should also be careful not apply such taxes in the future.

Second is *reduce the tax rate*.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Reduce the tax rate on harvests and so forth.

The term *on harvests* indicates that this form of giving specifically applies to farmland. It also carries the connotation that taxes are to be collected fairly from all. This means that the government takes no more than is needed and that influential people are not exempt or favoured.

253 Protect [the poor] from the pain of wanting [your wealth].

Set up no [new] tolls and reduce those [that are heavy].

Also free [traders from other areas] from the afflictions

That come from waiting at your door.

The **third** of the nine categories is *protecting the poor from wanting wealth*. Gyaltsab Je's commentary doesn't give any further explanation saying:

Protect the poor from the pain of wanting your wealth.

What is missing in the translation is the connotation of the Tibetan word translated here as *poor*. It doesn't relate so much to any general poverty but specifically to those who are so crushed by debt that they are not able to repay even the interest on their original debt, so the debt increases to the point where they are in an unstoppable downward spiral where they accumulate interest on top of interest. This is a very pitiful state to be in; it causes great misery for any individual or family who is in that state.

So here *protect* refers to those who are in debt. In Tibet there were people in debt from generation to generation; they inherited their father's debt, which he in turn inherited from his father. So the burden of generations of debt was really heavy. Soon after His Holiness the Dalai Lama assumed temporal power, he absolved these debtors of the need to repay their debts. Nagarjuna is advising the king to use his power to protect people from such poverty and misery.

With respect to the **fourth** and **fifth** categories Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Set up no new tolls and reduce those that are heavy.

Set up no new tolls refers to not setting up new tolls while the fifth, *reducing those which are heavy*, refers to reducing heavy tolls imposed by a previous monarch.

Gyaltsab Je describes the **sixth** category as

Also free traders from other areas and from the afflictions of those that come waiting at your door.

This refers to freeing *traders who come from other areas* from heavy taxes as well as those who wait at your door, or who beg to be absolved of their heavy taxes and so forth. *From the afflictions* refers the particular afflictions that cause their problems and worries.

The **seventh** category is described in the following two lines:

*254ab Eliminate robbers and thieves
In your own and others' countries.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Eliminate robbers and thieves in your own and other's countries.

This refers to *eliminating known robbers and thieves* who cause the king's subjects much worry and fear. At a

personal level this refers to being careful not to engage in the act of stealing.

The **eighth** category is listed in the last two lines of the verse:

*254cd Please set prices fairly
And keep profits level [even during scarcity].*

With respect to this Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Please set prices fairly, and keep profits level even during scarcity.

This relates to setting prices that are fair to both buyers and sellers, so that the sellers make a reasonable profit, while the buyers don't have to pay unfairly high prices. In other words it means setting prices at a level where there is equal benefit for the sellers as well as the buyers.

The **ninth** and final category is covered in these two verses:

*255 You should know full well [the counsel]
That your ministers offer,
And should always enact it
If it nurses the world.*

*256 Just as you are intent on thinking
Of what could be done to help yourself,
So you should be intent on thinking
Of what could be done to help others.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

What need is there to say much, you should know full well the counsel that your ministers offer, and since there may be things said that harm the world, should always enact what is virtuous and good, and only if it nurses the world.

What need is there to say much indicates that as the king is learned and from a noble clan, he has a great deal of knowledge already. So as the king is quite intelligent and so forth, says Nagarjuna, there is no need to explain this in too much in detail.

You should know full well the counsel that your ministers offer indicates that the king doesn't have to make all the decisions himself, as he has a council of ministers. Here however, Nagarjuna is advising the king to listen to what his ministers have to say, but at the same time to use his own intelligence to discern if the advice they offer is of benefit or not.

Since there are things that harm the world, indicates that the king should not act on things that may harm the world. On the other hand he *should always enact what is virtuous and good and only if it nurses the world*.

So in a very practical way, Nagarjuna is advising the king of the importance of listening to his council first, without any assumptions about their intent. Again we can use this as personal instruction. We should carefully listen to advice and not act upon it if it is harmful to oneself or others. If, on the other hand, it is beneficial, or virtuous and good, and it nurses or benefits the world, then we should definitely act on that advice.

In relation to the last two lines of verse 256, Gyaltsab Je says:

Nagarjuna further instructs the king; just as you are intent on thinking of what could be done to help

yourself, so you should intent on thinking of what could be done to help others respectfully.

This condensed advice indicates that what is useful and beneficial for oneself is also beneficial for others. Again this very practical and profound advice that Nagarjuna shared with the king is also a personal instruction that we should adopt. This advice can be interpreted as meaning that one should respectfully return help and benefit to those who help oneself. This is really very practical advice that we need to adopt.

It is all too easy to return harm to those who benefit us, rather than being grateful and appreciative. When we really think about it, that is quite disgraceful behaviour. So we need to really protect ourselves from such misdeeds, while at the same time recognising those who are genuinely kind and concerned about us, and returning that favour with respect and kind words.

In one of his works Lama Tsong Khapa mentioned that the action of those who return harm to those who benefit them is worse than the behaviour of an animal. This implies that even animals recognise those who have been kind to them. We see, for example, dogs who respond with great affection to their owners who take care of them. They wag their tails and roll round showing in their own way their appreciation for their owner. If humans are not able to even recognise, let alone appreciate those who are kind to them, then their behaviour is definitely worse than animals in that sense. So we really need to be mindful of that.

This is all practical advice that will contribute to our well-being and happiness in this life. We need not think about the great long term benefits in a future life, as we are being given practical advice on how to develop inner happiness and well-being in our relationships (whether it be with another individuals or within a family situation) in this life. If appreciation is shown to us and seemingly affectionately returned, then there is mutual good feeling and a sense of well-being.

In the relationship between a master and his dog (or other pets) the master, of course, takes the initiative in caring for the dog by feeding it and so forth. When the dog responds with great affection, showing its appreciation in that way, this gives the master joy and happiness. It is even more case between humans; whether it is a family situation or people living together, when they are kind and affectionate to each other and show appreciation, then a genuine sense of well-being can be derived from that.

I really admire those who take great measures in the care of their pets. Some time ago on TV I saw Oprah Winfrey grieving over the loss of her pet dog. I have never seen a show with Oprah crying to that extent! Normally she tries to be very joyous and uplifting, but on that particular show she was sobbing so much. I don't know if she would have cried so much if her mother passed away—although I am not sure if her mother has indeed passed away! There are cases where people don't feel much sorrow when relatives die, but when their pet dies they feel very great sorrow. Losing a pet and feeling such sorrow is an indication of how close Oprah was to her pet dog. Whenever a close companion in life, pet or human,

passes on then there is grief and sadness, which shows the extent of their affection. The main point of this verse however, is that we need to recognise those who have been kind to us, and respectfully return that appreciation as well.

Going back to an essential point mentioned earlier: In verse 255 the king is instructed to listen to his council and ministers. The personal advice following from this is that when others give us advice with a good intention it is appropriate for us really listen to that advice. However listening respectfully to advice given with a good intention, perhaps by relatives or/and close friends, doesn't necessarily mean that we have to immediately apply that advice. Even if it comes from a friend and is intended well, it is still necessary for us to analyse what that advice entails, and if it is really useful or meaningful then we should follow it. But if we do not find it useful or meaningful or even harmful then we need to disregard it.

2.1.3. Giving away all wealth

This outline is explained in two verses, the first of which is

*257 If only for a moment make yourself
Available for the use of others
Just as earth, water, fire, wind, medicine,
And forests [are available to all].*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse in this way:

Just as things which are not owned by anyone such as earth, water, fire, wind, medicine and forests are available to all, likewise O king, If only for a moment, make yourself available for the use of others.

We can also relate this analogy of things that are not owned, such as *earth, water, fire, wind, medicine, forests* to areas like the national parks, which can be used by everyone. Even though they are not created with that intention, they are readily available for all to use. Using that analogy the king is being advised that although he may not make himself and his wealth available to others continuously, he should make himself available for the benefit of others even it is only for a moment.

*258 Even during their seventh step
Merit measureless as the sky
Is generated in bodhisattvas
Whose attitude is to give all wealth away.*

In relation to this, Gyaltsab Je states:

Even during their seventh step, without any extra effort, merit measureless as the sky is generated in bodhisattvas whose attitude is to give all wealth away.

With their aspiration of bodhicitta, bodhisattvas are committed to obtaining enlightenment for the sake of all. They keep their aspiration in mind at all times, even when they are walking, for example, seven steps. Even though those seven steps will not help them to achieve that state of enlightenment quicker, they become a great meritorious act because of that great aspiration in the bodhisattvas' minds. Because of the great noble intention that they have in their mind, which is that to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, each step they take becomes a means to attain their goal.

Of course their noble intention entails an altruistic mind of wishing to give away all their wealth and possessions. So due to their motivation and good intention bodhisattvas obtain great merit. Thus, it is being emphasised here, it is appropriate to engage in deeds similar to that, and this advice applies to us just as much as to the king.

There is another interpretation, which is that when bodhisattvas take seven steps towards others with their altruistic intention of giving everything away, then even though they are not able to actually fulfil the hopes and wishes of all beings by giving everything away, the merit that they gain from those that seven steps is measureless.

We can apply this understanding at a personal level to whatever practice we engage in. For example in the *tong len* practice, the giving and taking meditation that we do, we imagine taking in the suffering of all beings and then we give away all our body, wealth and merit. In practice we may not be able to actually give away our body, or our wealth or all our merit right now, but the mere intention that we generate will be the source of a great amount of merit. So we can see how a practice, even at the mere level of intention, is very valuable, and we should not underestimate the merit that we gain from practices such as this.

Normally the next session would be discussion and the following one would be the exam. However, because I need to do the White Tara retreat in preparation for the initiation, I intend to teach for the following two weeks, with discussion on the first Tuesday of August and the exam on the second Tuesday of August. This revised schedule will enable me to complete that retreat.

The Study Group seminar this year will be on August 21, so you need to decide what the subject would be. It needs to be a subject that is manageable for everyone to be able to research and study, as well as being beneficial. Once the subject is decided, different groups will prepare aspects of it. It would also good to have perhaps some secret questions prepared by each group to ask another group, so that people can add to their knowledge on the spot.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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