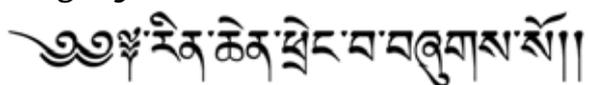

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

19 July 2011

With the appropriate motivation we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

Just as we have attempted in our short session now, it would be really beneficial to do some meditation in our daily lives.

One noteworthy aspect of our tradition is that the object of meditation is specified as being a virtuous object. Although there are various techniques of meditation, our tradition emphasises that the object of meditation needs to be a virtuous object. So, it is crucial that we keep in mind that the object of our meditation contributes to increasing virtue. Periodically I attempt to share points such as these with you, but I'm not too sure whether you take note of them!

The definition of *mental stabilisation*, (*ti-nge-zin* in Tibetan) is a mental factor which focuses single-pointedly on a virtuous object. Thus, because the object of focus is a virtuous object, by default a mind in meditation has to be a virtuous state of mind.

You may recall that His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentioned in his recent teachings that someone had confided in him that after having meditated for a long period of time, his mind tended to become more negative and that he lost his sense of joy and happiness. In mentioning this His Holiness was making a very crucial point. If you were diligently taking notes during the teachings you would have written that down, and if you were listening attentively, you would recall His Holiness mentioning that. If you weren't paying attention to the implications, you might have considered it as a passing remark. However His Holiness was making an essential point. Did you get that point? It's not too obscure if you think about it.

I have other stories to share on that note as well; however I won't take the time to go into them now. On a positive note, there are those who have confided in me that having come here regularly to practise meditation, they have gained great benefit as it has really helped their mind. One person, who was engaged in other forms of meditation said that after coming here and listening to the teachings, he realised that the emphasis was on love and compassion and on how to benefit others. These points, which are emphasised here again and again, seem to have made a strong impression on him. Of course those of us who have been hearing about this for many years may take it for granted, and not think of it as being particularly noteworthy. Nevertheless someone coming from outside, and hearing it for the first time, sees it as being a very significant and essential point.

2.1.4. Giving based on different needs

This refers to giving to others based on their particular needs; it has three subdivisions:

2.1.4.1. Giving to humans with certain needs

2.1.4.2. Giving to the needy

2.1.4.3. Giving that accords with doctrine [or the Dharma]

2.1.4.1. GIVING TO HUMANS WITH CERTAIN NEEDS

Here *giving* relates to giving to those with particular needs. The particular example used here is giving women to those who are in need of women. My interpretation is that this may refer to a custom that we had in Tibet: when the time came for a son to get married, the parents would approach another family who had a daughter. Likewise, when the time came for a daughter to get married, the family would approach another family with a son and ask for the son to be her groom. This is my interpretation of the example given here, although there might be other interpretations as well.

When we think about it, this formal approach to marriage has its own value. The modern tradition is that a boy decides which girl he fancies, and a girl decides who she wants to have as a boyfriend or husband. But this may also cause complications, because a rift may develop between the parents and the child if the family doesn't agree, and some hostility may arise too. In the old tradition, each family would check out the suitability of the other and when both families mutually agreed upon a marriage, there was less complication. Furthermore, in the event of a conflict between the husband and wife, then both families would help to mediate and try to mend the ties because they shared a mutual interest of wanting their children to be together happily. Today, however, the solution seems to be to just get a divorce.

There are two verses relating to this outline, the first of which is:

259 *If you give to those so seeking
Girls of beauty well adorned,
You will thereby attain
Thorough retention of the excellent doctrine.*

In his commentary Gyalsab Je explains:

*If you give to those so seeking girls of beauty well adorned
with precious ornaments, you will thereby attain
thorough retention of the excellent doctrine.*

The Tibetan word *bumo*, translated here as *girl*, can also relate to daughter. When presenting his daughter as a bride to those who are seeking her, the advice to the king is to not withhold, but to give wholeheartedly without any sense of loss, and present her *well adorned with precious ornaments*.

Traditionally, when a daughter is given as a bride, the family of the groom expect that she will bring a dowry of ornaments, jewellery and so forth. If the king was not being mindful and was stingy, then that could cause problems down the track. Therefore the very practical advice given to the king is, 'When others seek your daughter as a bride, then present her with ornaments and jewellery and so forth'.

As result of giving with a generous mind, without any sense of loss, the king will *attain thorough retention of the excellent doctrine*. Here, *thorough retention* (*zung* in Tibetan) refers to a specific *siddhi* or attainment. Attaining the *siddhi* of thorough retention means that one will be able to retain in one's memory whatever words and meanings one hears about the Dharma indefinitely. This is a great attainment because of not forgetting, one will have access to the doctrine at all times, enabling one to impart it to others as well. The ability to explain or expound the Dharma to others with confidence is yet another *siddhi* (called *powa* in Tibetan). Those are the positive consequences that arise from the act of giving without any sense of loss.

The second verse relating to this heading is:

*260 Formerly the Subduer provided
Along with every need and so forth
Eighty thousand girls
With all adornments.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary gives this explanation of the verse:

If in doubt whether it is appropriate, consider how *formerly the Subduer* (when he was a renowned king) *provided along with every need and so forth, eighty-thousand girls with all adornments.*

In a previous lifetime, when the Buddha was a great and majestic king, he generously presented girls (his daughters) to others who sought them, beautified with all adornments and so forth. The main advice here is to be generous, even when it entails losing someone very close such as one's own daughter.

2.1.4.2. GIVING TO THE NEEDY

The verse relating to this heading reads:

*261 Lovingly give to beggars
Various and glittering
Clothes, adornments, perfumes,
Garlands, and enjoyments.*

Gyaltsab Je explains this verse thus:

The king is instructed to *lovingly give to beggars* plenty of *various and glittering clothes* which are free from defects; likewise give *adornments, perfumes, garlands and enjoyments* such as food and drink.

Here *various* relates to being plentiful in number, and *glittering clothes free from defects*, refers to clothes considered to be of proper attire, without stains, not torn or damaged, and which are fit to wear. Along with that there are the *adornments, perfumes, garlands, and other enjoyments such as food and drink.*

The emphasis here is that the king needs to give to the needy with a loving attitude, and it also indicates that he needs to be respectful whilst doing so. You may give a poor person something, but it might be with an attitude of scorn, or just wanting to get rid of them quickly, and generally being disrespectful.

Generally when we give to someone of a higher status we do so with a certain amount of respect because of who they are. We also show respect to objects of worship such as teachers and so forth, because they are worthy of respect. We also show respect to those of equal status because we don't wish to be considered as disrespectful by our peers. However there is danger of becoming disrespectful to those of a lower status. Obviously those seeking help from the king would not be of equal or higher status, and most likely would be quite impoverished and really needy. Therefore the king is instructed that although engaging in generous acts is a highly virtuous deed, he must be mindful of doing so with a loving attitude, implying that he should be respectful.

Although this advice is specifically directed to the king, we need to take it as personal advice. We are already acquainted with the great benefits of being generous; it has been emphasised again and again in the teachings that we need to be generous. The point here is that we should engage in the act of generosity in a respectful and loving way, which can arise when we think about the plight of the other person. So when we give to someone who is in need, we can empathise with them by thinking about how we would feel if we were in need. When we relate to our own suffering, we can

understand the suffering of the other person. By relating to the suffering that the other is going through, a loving attitude can arise when we give to them.

On a practical level, this also relates to the animals that we may feed, for example birds or other animals in the wild. Having contemplated their plight and suffering, we may give them food with a loving attitude, wishing them to be relieved from their particular suffering. Such an attitude makes an act of generosity highly meaningful.

Feeding an animal is a good example of the value of giving to others with a loving attitude. The animal that is being fed will immediately respond to the affectionate way in which the food is given. When they finish eating they will stay near the person in a very comfortable way, feeling content and happy and very secure. They have genuine trust in the person, because they were fed with a loving attitude. If food is given to an animal in an abrupt or menacing way, the animal will grab the food quickly and run away; it will not stay around for fear of being harmed. It will quickly forget it was you who gave the food and will try to run away if approached. Whereas, those animals who know that the food was given with love and care feel very comfortable and will stay around the person. This goes to show that even animals have the intelligence to understand and appreciate that which is given with a loving attitude, and out of genuine concern.

What we need to understand is the way the animal develops a natural trust in the human. When we consider how that trust arises, it is clearly not based merely on having obtained a meagre portion of food. If the food is given in a menacing way, then the animal will try to grab the food and run off—there is no trust developed from the animal's side. Trust comes from the loving attitude of the human who gives the food. This goes to show that trust is not dependent on the actual substance, but is gained from the affection and loving attitude shown by the human.

When we think about it, we can see the very profound nature of this example, and to that effect, see the great value of providing for the needy with a loving attitude and with real care. This is something we really need to pay attention to.

2.1.4.3. GIVING THAT ACCORDS WITH DOCTRINE

The meaning of next three verses is not too obscure, as they are quite easy to follow. Of course the main point is to try and put it into practice.

*262 If you provide [facilities]
For those most deprived who lack
The means [to study] the doctrine,
There is no greater gift than that.*

In relation to this verse Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

If you provide facilities for those most deprived who lack the means to study the doctrine, there is no greater gift than that, as you are giving the very doctrine that is studied.

For those who have a keen interest in wanting to study the Dharma, but *who lack the means to do so, there is no greater gift than providing them with the material things that will enable them to study the doctrine or the Dharma.* To them, that is the ultimate gift, because it gives them the ultimate means to ensure their well-being and happiness. As it explains here, when you provide the means for study *you are giving the very doctrine that is studied*, which is essentially equivalent to giving them the Dharma itself. There is no greater gift than giving the Dharma.

263 *Even give poison
To those whom it will help,
But do not give even the best food
To those whom it will not help.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

If you think that it is inappropriate for bodhisattvas to *give poison* to others, consider that it is acceptable to *even give poison to those whom it will help* to cure a certain disease...

As indicated here, the term *poison* denotes a substance that is harmful to anyone who consumes it. However, a substance which is known to have harmful effects can, on some occasions, be skilfully administered by a doctor to treat certain types of disease. So something that is normally considered to be a poison can also be highly beneficial in some cases. Of course this implies that whoever is administering the poisonous substance has the knowledge and skill to do so in the most appropriate way. Without such skill and knowledge, it could be really harmful or even deadly. The point here is that a substance that is usually considered as a poison can otherwise be beneficial when it is skilfully administered by a doctor.

The commentary then continues:

...but do not give even the best of food to those whom it will not help.

Foods that are normally considered to be very sustaining should not be given to a person, who may be harmed by that food because of a disease. If there is no benefit, then it is best not to give it to them.

264 *Just as it is said that it will help
To cut off a finger bitten by a snake,
So the Subduer says that if it helps others,
One should even bring [temporary], discomfort.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that:

Just as it is said, that it will help to cut off a finger bitten by a snake, so the Subduer says that if it helps others, one should even bring temporary discomfort.

When a snake bites a finger, an immediate (albeit severe) measure might be to cut off the finger. Severing the finger would save the individual by preventing the poison from entering the bloodstream, which could result in death. That is an analogy of the Buddha's advice that if there is benefit for the other, then even though certain actions may cause discomfort, it is appropriate and necessary to apply those actions.

If one were to be asked whether it is suitable to give poison to others, then the immediate answer would normally be that it is not suitable to do that. However if there is a benefit and it helps to cure a particular type of disease, and if it is administered in the appropriate way, then under those circumstances it is suitable and beneficial to give someone poison. If the question is whether it is appropriate to give nice good food to others, then generally the answer is that it is indeed very appropriate. However if it might be harmful to an individual, then it is inappropriate. The point here is that whether something is considered as being appropriate or inappropriate depends on the circumstances.

What has been explained in the last few verses is how to be generous, and the need for a respectful manner while engaging in acts of generosity. The definition of generosity is the intention to give, while that which is given, such as food or materials, is called the substance of generosity. Thus we need to understand that generosity is a state of mind, while

various different substances or mediums can be used as the basis for generosity.

2.2. Branches of the collection of wisdom

As indicated in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

There are twenty-five *branches of the collection of wisdom*.

In relation to the first branch, the first two lines of the next verse indicate:

265ab *You should respect most highly
The excellent doctrine and its proponents.*

The explanation in the commentary is:

First: *You should respect most highly the excellent doctrine of internal science, and its proponents with exquisite offerings of food, clothing and so forth.*

Here Nagarjuna is saying to the king, 'You need to take the initiative to *respect most highly the excellent doctrine*'. The Dharma is also referred to as the doctrine of internal science, because it is the study of the mind, so this is referring to respecting the Dharma. *Its proponents*, refers to those who propound the doctrine, and the way to show respect and appreciation for those proponents of the Dharma is by providing *food, clothing and so forth*.

I have explained on previous occasions what internal science refers to. You will recall that it is that which serves as an antidote to overcome the self-grasping within one's mind. That is the main point we need to understand.

265c *You should listen reverently to the doctrine*

With respect to this the commentary reads:

Second: *Without any conceit, you should listen reverently to the doctrine*

When one listens to the doctrine, one should do so without any conceit. This means that the intention of listening to the Dharma is first and foremost to subdue one's own mind, rather than merely seeing as a means to acquire more knowledge, and then boasting about having learned the Dharma. Having listened to many teachings and thereby learned the Dharma, one may assume oneself more skilled than others by virtue of having greater knowledge. If such an attitude develops, then one is listening to the Dharma with the intention of conceit, which is something about which we need to be very wary.

265d *And also impart it to others.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Third: *And also practise generosity of Dharma, by imparting text books and so forth to others.*

This is quite easy to follow. The third branch was to listen to the Dharma without any sense of conceit and then impart it to others. Methods to *impart the Dharma* are either by teaching it directly or providing the means for others to learn, for example giving them *text books and so forth*. We should keep in mind that being generous in such ways is a very highly meaningful activity.

Another important point to bear in mind is that when imparting the Dharma to others, it should be done without any sense of conceit or pride. If those who listen to the Dharma are instructed to listen without conceit and pride, but the teacher is filled with pride and conceit, then that is completely contradictory. How could you expect your listeners to lack pride and conceit if you are imparting the doctrine while full of pride and conceit yourself? That would be hypocritical, and so we need to really keep that point in mind.

266a *Take no pleasure in worldly talk;*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then explains:

Fourth: *Take no pleasure in worldly talk*, which either harms or does not have any benefit for others, as it becomes an obstacle to the practice of Dharma.

Here, the king is instructed to *take no pleasure* by engaging in *worldly talk*, which can also be referred to as idle gossip. Worldly talk, or *idle gossip*, is defined here as being either *that which directly harms the other, or which is of no benefit to the other*. The commentary explains that engaging in worldly talk is *an obstacle to Dharma practice*.

As we all know, we can spend so many hours engaged in such chatter that we don't notice how the time has gone. That time could have otherwise been spent in a meaningful way such as in Dharma practice. Also worldly talk has a direct impact, as it can be specifically aimed at harming others. So it is clear that engaging in frivolous or worldly talk is definitely an obstacle to practising the Dharma.

266b *Take delight in what passes beyond the world.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Fifth: *Take delight* in speech which concerns *what passes beyond the world*, such as the methods for transcending samsara.

Having previously explained the need to avoid engaging in worldly talk, the advice here is to take pleasure or delight in the activities that are the methods for passing *beyond the world*, such as the methods for transcending samsara. It is worthwhile to take delight in spending time and energy on that which serves as a means to overcome the causes for samsara, thus becoming a cause for liberation.

266cd *Cause good qualities to grow in others
In the same way [you wish them] for yourself.*

As the commentary reads:

Sixth: *Cause good qualities*, such as that of hearing, contemplating and meditation, *to grow in others in the same way you wish them for yourself*.

It could also be implied that this also refers to the good qualities that one already possesses. In a very practical and profound way these lines are explaining that just as one has gained good qualities through *hearing* the doctrine and *contemplating* (which means to analyse and think about) the Dharma, whatever wisdom or intelligence one has gained from *meditating* on the Dharma, should be used to engage in activities to cause others to also gain those good qualities. The advice given here is to acknowledge the good qualities one has obtained from hearing, contemplating and meditating on the doctrine without any sense of conceit or pride, and then generate the wish for others to also gain such qualities.

In a very practical and profound way this is explaining that whatever good qualities one may possess such as the knowledge gained from directly hearing the doctrine, and contemplating the Dharma, and whatever wisdom, or intelligence, one has gained from meditating on the Dharma should be used to engage in activities that cause others to also gain those good qualities.

The process for gaining ultimate wisdom within ourselves is based on first hearing the doctrine, which indicates that one needs to initially hear it from qualified teachers. One will gain a certain amount of wisdom from hearing the Dharma, however it is not yet a very stable intelligence or wisdom. When one uses the material that one has heard to further analyse and think about the Dharma, then one will gain a more profound wisdom or intelligence. It becomes even

firmer and more stable because it is something that one has personally validated by analysing and thinking about it. When one recognises the validity of the Dharma, then it becomes more stable within one's mind. However it does not become one hundred per cent stable until we gain the actual realisation, which is done by meditating the points that one has understood and analysed previously.

This unique method of presenting the way to gain wisdom comes from the great Kadampa tradition. The Kadampa masters mentioned that the more one has heard the teachings, the more points one will have to contemplate and to think about, and thus gain wisdom through thinking. The more one has analysed the Dharma, the more points there will be for meditation. When one engages in meditation practice, one will have a rich source of information upon which to meditate and thus gain profound realisations. These are really crucial points for us to consider.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*