
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇིགས་ཚེན་ཕྱིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Keeping in mind the motivation generated in the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, we will engage in the practice of meditation.

We need to bear in mind the significance of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta. As mentioned in the teachings, for a Buddhist the purpose of taking refuge is to avoid following other mistaken paths, and in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the purpose of generating bodhicitta is to avoid following the lower vehicle paths. The objects of refuge are the Three Jewels. Generally speaking, all religious traditions incorporate an act of taking refuge, so we need to understand how taking refuge in the Buddhist tradition differs from other religions.

We can say that that the Buddhist way of going for refuge is unique. There are two main causes for taking refuge in the three Jewels: one takes refuge because of *fear of experiencing the sufferings of the lower realms* and fear of *the sufferings of samsara*. While other traditions also explain the sufferings experienced in lower realms and the reasons to fear that, the unique Buddhist tradition is that taking refuge provides the means to be free from the sufferings of all cyclic existence.

In the teachings fear is specifically mentioned as being a cause or motivator for taking refuge in the Three Jewels. However a practical way to understand the need to go for refuge is to relate it to the *purpose* of taking refuge, which is that it is the means for eliminating the causes of suffering of the lower realms as well as every type of suffering in samsara. When we understand that attaining freedom from samsara is the purpose of going for refuge, then the reason for taking refuge becomes clearer.

The manner of taking refuge is to rely completely and wholeheartedly on the objects of refuge from the depths of one's heart. It's not just a matter of believing that the Three Jewels will protect us from the lower realms and samsara, rather, we must actually rely totally upon the objects of refuge. This is an important point to keep in mind.

As Buddhists it is essential to pay close attention to what refuge actually entails, and then generate that refuge in our mind. Developing genuine refuge, even if only for a few moments, is a very powerful practice. Leaving aside complicated details, what we can keep in mind is the basics and the essence of what going for refuge means. Taking refuge in the Three Jewels wholeheartedly (even for a few moments) is a genuine and authentic practice that is very beneficial for our mind. As mentioned earlier, taking refuge wholeheartedly with complete reliance means understanding the purpose of taking refuge, which is to be free, not only from the suffering of the lower realms, but the entire scope of samsaric sufferings. We need to be really mindful of that.

It is relatively easy for us to generate a partial wish to be free from suffering, which includes the suffering of the lower realms as well as the suffering of suffering of the human realm. Within the three types of sufferings, we can easily

relate to wanting to be free from the suffering of suffering. However, it is more difficult for us to see the need to be free from the suffering of change, because that includes all the contaminated pleasures that we experience. If we can't develop a sense of wanting to be free from the suffering of change, then we are no better than some other non-Buddhist school practitioners. Some of the non-Buddhist practitioners have developed renunciation in relation to the suffering of suffering as well as the suffering of change; however because they are attached to the happiness of equanimity they are not able to develop renunciation in relation to the all-pervasive compounded suffering.

They are able to overcome contaminated pleasures, which is the suffering of change, but they fall short when it comes to the happiness of equanimity. Having developed renunciation in relation to the suffering of suffering and the suffering of change, some non-Buddhist practitioners can reach up to the third and fourth levels of concentration. But once they reach these levels, they become attached to the contaminated bliss of equanimity, which is why they are not able to develop renunciation to overcome samsara.

So as Buddhists we need to be mindful of the need to renounce all levels of suffering—the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and all-pervasive compounded suffering. Thus we need to have a good understanding of all levels of suffering. How could one possibly develop genuine renunciation if there is even the slightest hint of attachment to worldly or samsaric pleasures? That would be impossible.

Having a full understanding of what refuge entails and regularly engaging in the practice of taking refuge is very important. During our day-to-day life we may not immediately see the great significance or benefit of taking refuge, but it will become most apparent at the time of death. If, at the time of death (which we will all inevitably have to face) we have familiarity with having wholeheartedly and sincerely taken refuge on a daily basis, then at that time the objects of refuge will naturally come to mind. As mentioned in the teachings, when all else fails and no one can help us, the unfailing sole guide will be the objects of refuge. If the objects of refuge come vividly to mind and one wholeheartedly relies upon those objects at that crucial time, then all other fears and worries will naturally subside. That would be considered as a peaceful death, because one lacks any fear and anxiety.

If we lack familiarity with taking refuge during the course of our day-to-day life, then it will not arise naturally at the time of death. So if we don't familiarise ourselves and wholeheartedly take refuge now when we have the right conditions, how can we expect to be able to take refuge at the time of death? It won't be possible to ask others how to take refuge at that point! We must become familiar with taking refuge on a regular basis, and then, without having to rely upon others, it will vividly come to our mind naturally at the time of death. When the objects of refuge come to mind and we place wholehearted reliance on them, without any doubt whatsoever and with absolute certainty, we will be freed from the lower realms in the next lifetime. So to that extent, we really need to take this advice to heart as a personal responsibility.

We may engage in various different Dharma practices, but if they fail to help us at the time of death, then they would have not really served their purpose. If a non-virtuous state of mind prevails at the final moments of death then, as explained and emphasised in the teachings, that will be the cause of a lower rebirth in the next life. Whereas, if the final

mind of death is virtuous, that will protect one from a lower rebirth, and one will be reborn in a fortunate realm.

In his teachings Lama Tsong Khapa, and indeed all other masters, emphasised this point again and again. As you will be aware from your studies, there are three states of mind can occur at the time of death: virtuous, non-virtuous and neutral. Someone may have engaged in non-virtuous deeds during their life but if, at the time of death, and under the right conditions—such as being in the presence of good friends and companions who are mindful—they are motivated to have a virtuous state of mind, then that person will be protected from a lower rebirth in the next lifetime. That will come about because they had virtuous state of mind at the time of death. Therefore we can see the great significance of familiarising ourselves now with taking genuine refuge, because that is what will be our unfailing protector at the time of death.

There is a specific prayer which says that at crucial times when one is really destitute, when there is no protection from anyone, from family, friends and so forth, 'may I be able to spontaneously rely on the objects of refuge for guidance and help'.

Now we can engage in the practice of meditation.
[meditation]

We can generate a positive motivation for receiving the teaching such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, by liberating them from all suffering and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

2.2. Branches of the collection of wisdom (cont.)

This outline is sub-divided into twenty-five different categories, and we are up to the seventh.

267a Please do not be satisfied with doctrine heard,

Gyaltsab Je's commentary gives this explanation:

Seventh: *Please do not be satisfied with doctrine heard before but aspire to listen to even more.*

We need to consider this as a crucial point for our practice. *Not be satisfied with doctrine heard* refers to not becoming complacent by thinking, 'Well, I've already heard that before, so I don't need to listen to it again', which is how we often think. Such an attitude to the teaching is completely wrong. Rather, as mentioned here, we should *aspire to listen to even more*. We need to use what we have previously heard as a basis to inspire us to listen and study even more of what the teaching was about. That is how we need to develop ourselves. Listen to a teaching and use that as a basis to understand it more each time we hear it, and in that way we can increase our understanding.

When one feels inspired rather than daunted by having to hear a teaching again, then that is a good sign that one is progressing. When listening to the Dharma becomes very enjoyable, like partaking of a tasty meal, one has developed a strong aspiration to learn the Dharma. This is the attitude we need to develop.

267b But retain...

Gyaltsab Je's commentary elaborates these two words:

Eighth: *retain* the meaning of the doctrine concisely.

This is very significant and practical advice that we again need to consider taking to heart. Previously we were advised to not be satisfied with hearing the Dharma once or twice, but to aspire to listen to it again and again. Here we are

being advised to try to have a *concise* understanding of what has been taught and to keep it in mind. To *retain* means to keep it in mind and not forget it. While the very act of listening again and again serves as a means not to forget it, we also need to be mindful of trying to really understand the *meaning of the doctrine* itself.

It is normally considered that listening to the Dharma as many times as possible will leave a strong imprint on our mind. However I doubt whether a significant imprint would be left on the mind if one has not understood the meaning of what has been taught. Of course, that doesn't mean to say there is no virtue in just listening to the teaching, but whether that will establish strong imprint on the mind is questionable. If, on the other hand, one has made an attempt to understand the meaning of the teaching, then that will definitely leave a strong imprint on the mind. Understanding the meaning of the Dharma means listening to it again and again, contemplating it and thinking about it. When we understand its meaning in this way a very significant imprint will be left on our mind.

There is a further point about retaining the meaning of the teaching. The wisdom that one gains from listening to the Dharma comes from retaining the meaning of what one has heard in the teaching. If we have not retained the meaning of what we have heard, then how can we possibly analyse or think about it any further? If we miss out on analysing and thinking about the Dharma, then we will not gain the wisdom that is derived from the thinking process, and without that wisdom, how can we meditate on the meaning? It would be impossible to gain the ultimate wisdom that is acquired through meditation. The process of progressively gaining the wisdom is by first hearing the teaching, then contemplating and analysing it and then meditating on it; The whole process is dependent on retaining the earlier wisdom one has gained.

267b ...and discriminate meanings.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary doesn't add any further explanation:

Ninth: *and discriminate meanings.*

The commentary does not further elaborate on the root text. The Tibetan word *nambar-yiwa*, translated here as *discriminate* is the sixth of the eight divisions of grammatical structure. It refers to being able to distinguish between for example, what is the true and false, virtue and non-virtue, correct and incorrect and so forth. Thus it refers to the ability to discern the meaning of the doctrine.

267cd Please always be intent

On offering presents to teachers.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Tenth: *Please always be intent on offering presents and so forth to teachers.*

The main point is that one needs to recollect the kindness of one's teachers at all times. Here *teachers* refers to both the teachers from whom one has received the teachings directly from, as well as the lineage teachers. Essentially this branch of the collection of wisdom is to bring to mind one's teachers again and again. As I often say, I don't have many qualities to boast about, but one thing I can say is that I periodically bring to mind Buddha Shakyamuni, who is inseparable from Dorje Chang, from whom we derive the essence of all the teachings. I can safely say that I have a constant recollection of Buddha Shakyamuni, every few minutes throughout the day. The main point is that we need to develop a constant remembrance of our teacher.

Sometimes there is a misinterpretation of what *root lama* means. Some understand it to mean their first teacher, but that is not necessarily the case, so we need to have the correct understanding of what the term *root lama* actually means. With respect to the lineage, Shakyamuni, who is inseparable from the ultimate essence of Dorje Chang, is the main source for all lamas, the *extensive lineage* was directly passed on to Maitreya who in turn passed it down to Asanga and successive Indian and Tibetan masters; while the *profound lineage* which was passed down through Manjushri, Nagarjuna and successive Indian and Tibetan masters. So an unbroken lineage of teachings and instructions has been passed down from Buddha Shakyamuni to our present-day gurus, from whom we directly receive the teachings.

The significance of recalling the connection between the lineage gurus and our own guru is in identifying what the message is and who is giving the message. Simply put the message is to free yourself from the sufferings of samsara and obtain liberation. This message was handed down by Buddha Shakyamuni over 2,500 years ago. That may seem a very long time ago, however that message has been carried down through an unbroken lineage, all the way to our own root guru from whom we receive it directly. We have received the message now as a result of the connection with our guru. Thus, recollecting the kindness of one's guru is significant and important.

Although directed to the king, the advice here is to always present offerings to our teachers with respect and faith. It is good to note that there is a distinction between respect and faith. It is explained that we develop respect when we think about the qualities of the guru, whereas we generate faith when we think about the kindness of the guru. Thus we can pay respect not only to our own personal teachers, but any teacher who has the qualities and propounds the unmistakable doctrine. However faith in our own teachers is developed in dependence on the kindness of directly receiving teachings, advice and personal instructions from them. So we develop both respect and faith in our own teachers.

When we think about the kindness of our parents, we may not call it faith, but we do have a genuine appreciation and sense of reliance upon them. If we don't have genuine respect or trust, then there will always be some doubt in as to their concern for our well being. The same applies to our teachers as well; if we lack faith and respect towards our guru, then there will always be some doubt in our mind.

268a *Do not recite [the books of] worldly nihilists, and so forth.*

As the commentary reads:

Eleventh: *Do not recite the books of worldly nihilists and so forth, as it will be a hindrance to the collection of wisdom.*

Here *worldly nihilists*, refers to non-Buddhists who reject the possibility of future lives. Relating to the teachings of such proponents would *hinder the collection of the wisdom* realising emptiness. Being influenced by treatises that denounce past and future lives, and which promote the idea of an inherently existent self and permanence, will definitely hinder the development of the realisation of selflessness and impermanence, which are the doctrines used to gain the ultimate wisdom of realising emptiness. This branch of wisdom shouldn't be too obscure but rather clear and easy to understand.

However, if it is for the purpose of having a discussion or debate to benefit the other, then it is permissible to read their texts to be able to refute them. Although the king, who is the subject of this advice, would probably not have the need to engage in such debates.

268b *Forsake debating in the interest of pride.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je merely repeats the line as its meaning is quite clear.

Twelfth: *Forsake debating in the interest of pride.*

When one engages in a debate with others, it should be free from egotistical pride. If one's views are tainted with the motivation of defeating the opponent and winning the debate for the sake of the satisfaction of winning, then that would be *debating in the interest of pride*. So when engaging in a debate or discussion with another, you need to be careful not to do so with that intention in mind.

268c *Do not praise your own good qualities.*

This point is also mentioned in the mind-training teachings.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Thirteenth: *Do not speak about and praise your own good qualities.*

Even though the commentary doesn't elaborate very much, we can derive from this explanation that speaking about and advertising one's own qualities could generate pride. For that purpose we need to refrain from proclaiming and speaking of our own good qualities. The essential point here is that whatever qualities we may have are ultimately for the sole purpose of subduing our mind. If those qualities generate pride, then that defeats the purpose of subduing the mind. This is an incredibly significant point to keep in mind.

Whatever the means used to obtain qualities, whether it is through study or practice, the objective is to subdue the mind, and thereby overcome the delusions. It is not for the purpose of going around and praising oneself, or using it as a means for self proclamation. When you think about it, this is the crux of the instruction.

There is a mind-training teaching called *Precious Rosary, Ratnavali* in Sanskrit, in which there is a particular verse mentioning how one needs to hide one's own qualities while proclaiming the qualities of others, and to proclaim whatever faults one has and hide the faults of others. This makes the same point as the thirteenth branch of wisdom.

268d *Speak of the good qualities even of your foes.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Fourteenth: *However, speak of the good qualities even of your foes.*

Although one does not praise oneself or proclaim one's own qualities, it is still appropriate to mention the qualities of others, even if they are one's enemies.

269 *[When debating] do not attack to the quick.*

The commentary reads:

Fifteenth: *When debating do not attack to the quick.*

Basically the commentary is restating the root text. What is lacking in the English translation is the element of ridiculing or exposing the faults of others. I feel this point relates to a similar point in the seven-point mind training, where there is a specific reference to publicly ridiculing and expose the faults of people who have a certain status. However, the main point here relates to *debating*. When one is debating with others, one needs to be mindful not to debate or discuss anything that would ridicule others or highlight their faults.

This also relates to not divulging secrets about one's own points; when debating with non-Buddhist schools certain points shouldn't be disclosed to them as they are not ready to hear them.

*269bc Do not talk about others
With bad intent. ...*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Sixteenth: *Do not talk about other's faults with bad intent.*

One should *not talk about others' faults with harmful intentions*. So we should not talk about the faults of others if there is only harm and no benefit. This implies that in the event of there being some benefit to be gained, which will improve them and so forth, then there might be a timely purpose in talking about their faults with them. Otherwise it would be being done with harmful intent.

We also need to be wary about engaging in frivolous talk about the faults of others. Too often we find ourselves in a conversation, and without having any harmful intention, saying, 'Oh yes, he or she is behaving in a ridiculous manner'. Then we end up talking about the faults of others which when it gets back to them, could be very harmful.

*269cd ... Individually
Analyse your own mistakes yourself.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary echoes the same meaning:

Seventeenth: *Individually analyse your own mistakes yourself.*

This is a very significant point for our own practice. We need to be able to *analyse our own mistakes*, which implies that we need to recognise our own faults, lest someone else points them out to us, which would be very uncomfortable for us. We wouldn't want the discomfort of others pointing out our faults, but as we do need to eradicate these faults, it is fitting that we analyse our own faults for ourselves. For example if someone else comes up and says, 'Do you realise that you are a very angry person?' we would not like that at all. It would be very unpleasant and hard to accept such a criticism. However we can see for ourselves whether or not we are an angry person. If we detect that our anger is becoming harmful, we need to then take the initiative to do something about it.

To that effect the Kadampa masters said that we need to be our own witness, which means that rather than having others witness our mistakes, we are a witness to ourselves. As the great Kadampa master Durewa had said, 'The real witness is checking and analysing one's own mind'. It is by constantly checking and analysing our own state of mind that we become our own witness. Then when we notice a fault in ourselves we are able to begin to overcome that fault. That is how we serve as our own witness.

*270 You should root out completely from yourself
The faults the wise decry in others,
And through your influence
Also cause others to do the same.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Eighteenth: *You should root out completely from yourself the faults the wise find suitable to decry in others, and through your influence also cause others to do the same.*

This is reiterating the root text, which is quite clear. Those particular faults that *the wise* detect in others, are the very faults that we need to *completely eliminate from ourselves*. As we progress in eradicating those faults, we can positively *influence others to do the same*.

*271 Considering the harm others do to you
As created by your former deeds, do not anger.
Act such that further suffering will not be
created
And your own faults will disappear.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je says:

Nineteenth: *Considering the harm others do to you as a result of karma, created by your own former karmic deeds, do not anger as it will cause further suffering. Thus act such that further suffering will not be created and your faults will disappear.*

The essential point here is that you should not react with anger when you are harmed by others. Rather you should contemplate how that harm is the consequence of your own karmic actions in the past. So whatever unpleasantness you experience is a just result of past karma.

If one were to ask, 'Why shouldn't I get angry if someone harms me?', the response is that *your anger will cause further suffering*. If you become angry when you are harmed by others, then rather than relieving the suffering experienced as a result of that harm, you will actually create further suffering. This is closely related to the point of cultivating patience.

Of the two types of patience, the patience of not retaliating in the event of harm inflicted by others is applicable here. As the teachings explain, practising this kind of patience specifically means contemplating that the harm received from others is none other than the consequences of one's own previous karma. So if the unpleasantness one is experiencing is due to one's own karmic actions in the past, then it is unreasonable to become upset and angry with a person who only serves as a condition for one to experience that harm. The real cause is one's own previous karma. By contemplating in that way, one can develop the patience of not retaliating.

Not retaliating doesn't necessarily refer to a harmful action, but it specifically refers to not becoming angry. So when someone harms you, the patience described here refers to protecting your mind from becoming angry. Then you have developed the patience that protects the mind in the event of being harmed.

Simply put, when we are harmed by others, we should ask ourselves, 'Is there any benefit to be gained from becoming angry? What are the pros and cons? What are the advantages and the disadvantages? There are no advantages because anger does not overcome or reverse the harm that has been inflicted. But the great disadvantage is that anger will become a cause for further suffering.

As explained in the mind-training teachings, when one develops a mind of anger and then retaliates by inflicting harm on others, the very moment that the anger develops will leave an imprint on one's mind for further suffering. The action of reciprocating the harm will create more karma, to be experienced either in this life, or in future lives. We can easily see that in this life; when we harm someone, then when the opportunity arises, they will harm us back.

The harm we receive in future lifetimes could be related to harming others in this life as a result of anger. So as the Kadampa masters have advised, rather than returning harm with harm, one should consider how to benefit the other person. When we experience harm (as a result of our own negative karma) then our karma has ripened and we are using up the negative karma that we have created in the past, thus exhausting that particular karma. Therefore it is

more fitting to render benefit to those who harm us, rather than inflicting harm. That is the how the Kadampa masters practised.

So we are advised to *act such that further suffering will not be created and your faults will disappear*.

Becoming angry is only a cause for further suffering and if one prevents anger from arising, one will not be creating any further personal suffering. Becoming angry disturbs the mind, so not becoming angry means that there will be no mental disturbance. One way to feel kindness for the person who harms us is to contemplate how their very actions allow us to practise patience. If they didn't inflict of harm, then there would be nothing to be patient about.

You may recall that His Holiness emphasised this point in his recent teachings. He said that teachers and the Buddha are not the objects of our patience; the teacher teaches us how to be patient, and we don't need to practise patience with our teacher because our teacher is kind to us. It is the individual who inflicts the harm upon us who gives us the opportunity to practise patience, so therefore they are really being kind to us. What do we do to people who are kind to us? We try to benefit and please them with presents and so forth. So in that light it is fitting to benefit those who harm us, rather than retaliating. Retaliation serves no purpose because it may be met by further harm. For example, if someone has hit you and you hit them back, that will result in them hitting you back again! When I was a young monk I got into a lot of fights, I would hit them and they would hit back and it went on like that until there was blood everywhere.

As you are aware, next week will be a discussion session, and as I regularly remind you, it will be good to participate with good intention and motivation. The following week will be the exam. I may not be able to attend the exam myself, but I encourage you all to come to it.

The Study Group seminar will be conducted on Sunday August 21, and it would be good for you to take the initiative to prepare thoroughly and conduct it well.

One of the topics is refuge. It is good for those who are doing the presentation to research and try to further understand the two causes of refuge, and how one generates the refuge and so forth. Regardless of whether or not there will be enough time to present and discuss all of the details of your preparation, there will still be benefit from what you study and read.

Another topic is high status and definite goodness. What are the causes of high status? The text says that there are sixteen causes of high status. In previous sessions, we covered in detail the causes for definite goodness, which specifically refers to the wisdom realising emptiness. Then one needs to relate that to the three higher trainings of morality, contemplation and wisdom.

In relation to bodhicitta there is, of course, the presentation of the six causes and the effect, but the main point is to gain a substantial understanding of what this means. Look into the seven-point cause and effect sequence for developing bodhicitta. There is the contrived bodhicitta attitude and the spontaneously generated bodhicitta attitude. You need to be able to see how the six causes relate to the contrived bodhicitta attitude, which transforms into uncontrived spontaneously generated bodhicitta.

This means that the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of other sentient beings needs to be generated on the basis of many reasonings such as the recollection of all beings as being one's mother, remembering kindness, and generating love and compassion, up to the point of developing superior intention, when one takes personal responsibility, aspiring to achieve enlightenment for the purpose of freeing all sentient beings. Having developed that state of mind in this way, one will generate an unceasing and spontaneous aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. At that point, one has developed the actual bodhicitta. This is how we need to understand the progressive way of developing a contrived bodhicitta into an uncontrived bodhicitta. Of course, before developing the seven-point cause and effect sequences, one needs to develop equanimity.

As mentioned previously, there is also the technique of equalising oneself with other sentient beings. We are all exactly alike with respect to wanting to avoid suffering and wanting to experience happiness. So equalising here needs to be based on how we are all equal with respect to wishing for happiness and not wishing to experience suffering. That is another crucial point upon which one needs to also reflect.

Developing the bodhicitta mind by equalising and exchanging oneself with others involves thinking about the fault of cherishing oneself from many different angles. That is then further developed using logical reasons to contemplate the benefits of cherishing other sentient beings. Then based on that, one exchanges one's own happiness and self-interest for the benefit of others, making the interests of other sentient beings a primary concern.

A state of mind based on love—the practice of giving—and compassion—taking away the suffering of others—is where the *tong len* practice comes in. It is a cause for generating bodhicitta, and at that point there is an actual exchange of oneself with another. According to *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, there are eleven categories in that sequence. This is just prompting you to review those points, so try to keep them in mind.

After you have done your research and engaged in the seminar, it will be my turn to test you to see if you can remember all of the points!

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Edited Version*

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