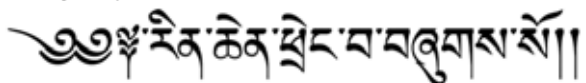


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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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Based on the motivation generated during the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the practice of meditation for a few minutes.

[meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the Dharma and put into it practice well'. This is a motivation without any stains of self-interest but focussing solely on benefiting of other sentient beings. If we can secure the purpose of receiving the teachings with that same attitude as in the *tong len* meditation practice, then that would be highly meaningful. The intent of doing the *tong len* practice is to generate the wish to give away one's joy and happiness, rather than securing happiness just for oneself. It also has the intent of taking the suffering of other sentient beings upon oneself. So, doing any practice with this intent would really be the optimum way to engage in the practice.

As the essence of the *tong len* meditation practice is to generate the positive attitude of wishing to benefit other sentient beings, it is essential to incorporate that attitude into our everyday life. As mentioned previously, just being able to sit rigidly for some time is not necessarily a meditation practice. A true Mahayana meditation practice consists of generating the positive attitude of wishing to benefit other sentient beings, or at best generating bodhicitta. However even if one is not capable of generating the actual bodhicitta attitude right now, at the very least it is good to dedicate one's life to the benefit of others. It is very meaningful to incorporate the aspirational prayer, 'may my actions always be of benefit for sentient beings; may I never harm others in the slightest way' into our daily lives, as that acquaints our mind with the wish to benefit other sentient beings.

We need to practise in such a way that we are seen as a good example of the benefit of practising the Dharma, thus inspiring others. On the other hand, if we are seen to indulge in inappropriate actions after being engaged with the Dharma for many years, then that would cause others to lose faith and become disillusioned. They would think, 'If that is the kind of behaviour of someone who practises Dharma, then there can't be much value in the Dharma itself'. Therefore we need to be really mindful to ensure that we do not cause others to lose faith.

Nagarjuna uses an analogy to show how our actions and deeds need to be in accordance with the Dharma: there is fruit that may appear to be ripe from outside, but which is not actually ripe inside; fruit that may be ripe inside but which does not appear to be ripe on the outside; fruit which appears to be ripe, and which is actually ripe; and fruit that doesn't appear to be ripe, and which is not ripe inside either. Of these four types of fruit the one that is deceptive is the one that looks ripe from the outside but causes indigestion and other problems if one eats it. We should not be like that sort of fruit — outwardly looking like a Dharma practitioner

but internally infested with the three delusions, negative states of mind and bad attitudes. That would be a pitiful situation.

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

Of the twenty-five branches we are up to the **twentieth**. The root text reads:

*272ab. Without hope of reward  
Provide help to others*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Twentieth: *Without hope of reward* for acts of generosity, *provide help to others*

As explained in the commentary, the pure *act* of *generosity* is giving *without* any *hope* of personal *reward*. Giving in expectation of some sort of reward is not a true act of generosity, as it is mixed with an ulterior motive. There is, of course, the natural reward of positive merit or karma that one creates through generosity, which occurs without any intention on the part of the donor. However, a bodhisattva even dedicates that merit for the benefit of others. The main point is that when one engages in an act of generosity, it should be done without any ulterior motive. As the teachings explain, generosity is defined as an intention to give. While the intention to give is actual generosity, there are different kinds of substance and ways of being generous, such as giving material aid and so forth.

It is good to be able to distinguish between a generosity that is based on the pure motivation of wishing to benefit others and the generosity of giving in expectation of something in return. The first type of generosity, giving without any expectations is an act of generosity of the Mahayana practice. We can clearly see that there is a difference between a selfless act of generosity and the generosity that wishes for something in return.

To be more specific, a pure act of generosity is that which does not involve any intention of personal gain. The intention to give solely to benefit the recipient is a pure practice of generosity from the Mahayana point of view. In contrast, any practice mixed with an ulterior motive of self-cherishing is not considered to be a pure Mahayana practice. So we need to ensure that our practice of generosity becomes a Mahayana practice. It is also good to note that there are three types of generosity:

- Generosity with material things, which includes giving food, drink and clothing, shelter and so forth.
- Generosity with Dharma; this is to impart whatever knowledge and understanding of Dharma one has, with the pure motivation to benefit others.
- Generosity of protecting others from fear, which is specifically to protect others whose life might be in danger.

So, there are many different ways of practising generosity. To protect others from the fear of death for example, can be as simple as saving a bug from drowning in a puddle of water, or removing a bug from the scorching rays of the sun and placing it in the shade. These are practical ways of engaging in the practice of Generosity.

As mentioned previously, the practice of Dharma does not necessarily mean sitting piously in a rigid posture. Although it may seem that one is actually engaged in some form of practice, that is not the only way of practising Dharma. At our ordinary level we need not feel that we are deprived of ways to practise Dharma, because there are so many practical things we can do, such as the example of saving a

bug from drowning and so forth. It is good to keep this in mind and incorporate it into our daily lives, as that is how we can slowly increase our virtuous deeds and improve ourselves.

The act of generosity, first with material aid, is said to be one of the supreme ways for others to get close to you, as others will naturally appreciate you as a person. For example, when you are generous with material things such as food and drink, others naturally appreciate that and feel close to you. This is very evident also with those who care for animals. The appreciation of pets such as dogs and cats is very clear. When you are kind to other animals and feed them, they also really appreciate that. It is known that animals do not forget, even up to twenty years later some animals will remember an act of kindness. Conversely we know of some humans who completely forget someone who has been kind to them even for many years; they may even consider that person as an enemy. It is important to note that even animals appreciate a practical act of kindness.

This reminds me of a TV show that I saw just yesterday. I didn't see the whole show, only part of it, but in the part that I saw were two animals of different species becoming very good friends. A young elephant calf and a sheep had become really good friends, roaming about together, and playing together. At some point the young elephant seems to have become sick, and was not able to eat. As it became weaker, the sheep was so distressed that it also stopped eating. It kept looking at the elephant, trying to go near to console it. The person who was caring for the elephant also seemed to be very distressed, and crying because the young elephant was so ill.

Last week the program showed a dog and a goat who were also very good companions. Like the earlier case, when the dog became ill and had to be taken to the vet, the goat stopped grazing. It was very distressed. Then, when the dog went home, the goat excitedly looked into van the dog was travelling in. Then when the dog came out, the goat immediately recognised it, and in a great sign of joy it began jumping around. These are very clear examples of great affection, even between animals of different species. This is something really worth taking note of.

These are clear examples of the value of genuine concern and affection. As I regularly mention, genuine concern, affection and love is invaluable. This can be seen clearly even with animals. As I often mention, genuine affection and love for others fosters genuine trust. Again, this is shown with animals, where different species can get along and become really close, and trust comes along with that because of the kindness and affection they feel for each other. In another example from that show, I saw a bear and a tiger who had become friends and companions. I think that it is quite extraordinary and amazing to see the affection expressed between different species of animals. Normally we wouldn't think that this is possible, but the fact that this occurs shows that there are no boundaries when it comes to expressing genuine affection and love.

The main point here is the value of genuine affection and love, and how that brings about strong bonds and mutual trust. If that is experienced within the animal realm then there is no need to mention how true that is for humans too. When genuine concern, love and affection is expressed for another then whatever they do together is meaningful, whether it be eating a meal, going out, or working together. Whatever they do together gives rise to really genuine joy. If, on the other hand, there is a lack of affection, then even if it

seems on the surface and you are merry and having good time, there is no sense of deep joy inside. That is because a genuine sense of affection and love is missing.

In summary the main point is that when an act of generosity is done with the sole intention of benefitting the other, without any ulterior motive, then that is definitely appreciated. It is definitely a way to bring others closer to you, along with the trust and so forth that comes with that. When we think about the earlier examples, then we can see how acts of generosity are really the optimum way to bring about a sense of real happiness and joy.

The **twenty-first** branch of wisdom is

*272cd. Bear suffering alone  
And share your pleasures with beggars*

In his commentary Gyaltzab Je explains the meaning of these two lines as follows:

Twenty-first: When others cause one suffering, *bear the suffering alone and share your pleasures* such as meals, *with beggars*.

*When others cause one suffering*, refers to any discomfort that one may experience as a consequence of the actions of others. *Bear the suffering* has the connotation of being tolerant and patient with the suffering that others cause. The real connotation to *bear suffering alone* is to cultivate patience within oneself. However what one can share whatever means of *pleasure* and happiness one has, such as food, clothing, shelter and so forth with others, such as *beggars* and so forth.

As explained briefly in the commentary, when others serve as a cause for personal suffering then that is the time to apply whatever practice of patience one is inclined to practice. *Bear the suffering* doesn't mean just enduring the pain regardless of the effect, rather it means that if we actively implement the practice of patience, then it becomes enduring, and does not become a cause for even more suffering. That is why practising patience here is relevant.

Another thing we can derive from this explanation is that suffering is not something that can be shared with others. Rather, we have to experience it ourselves. However, with the right motivation and attitude suffering can become more tolerable and not a heavy burden. Likewise, we cannot really share our happiness with others; it is not as though we can give our own happy state of mind to others. However through the act of sharing food and drink and giving what others need, we can actually serve as a condition for others to be happy. Even though we cannot actually share our experience of happiness, we can provide means for others to become happy. This is the way we can derive a deeper understanding of these two lines. We could go further in elaborating this point, but that might be sufficient for now.

The main point is that we should take this as a personal instruction and implement it in our daily lives. It is good to remind ourselves of the great virtue of generosity, even in terms of the practical benefits for the other. Whenever possible, with whatever means we have, it is good for us to practise generosity. We shouldn't feel that we have to be incredibly rich to be generous, as we can practise generosity in small ways, by giving a bit of money to beggars or buskers on the street. Apart from beggars or others who are asking for money, we can be generous by offering to pay for the tea or coffee for a friend, or a companion, or relative.

Furthermore we can also be generous by giving time to others when they are distressed, consoling them with a few gentle words, and spending a little time with them. When a

friend, companion or relative is distressed, you could offer to take them out for a walk. Spending some time with them in this way is also an act of generosity. So we can see that the act of generosity is not limited to giving material things, but can also include giving time and affection. That is a really meaningful and worthwhile, and an active way of benefiting others.

Now we come to the **twenty-second** of the twenty-five categories. The relevant verse reads:

273. *Do not be inflated  
Even by the prosperity of gods.  
Do not be depressed  
Even by the poverty of hungry ghosts.*

This is really very practical and invaluable advice when we think about it. As Gyaltsab Je says in his commentary:

Twenty-second: Not to mention slight gain or loss, *do not be inflated even by the prosperity of gods.* Likewise, *do not be depressed even by the poverty of the hungry ghosts.*

This is explaining very clearly is that we should not feel pompous and superior with a slight gain, or feel completely depressed with a slight loss, which is how we normally react. When something goes well, we might feel elated and excited, and when the slightest thing goes wrong we immediately become very, very depressed. The advice of this teaching is that slight gains, let alone riches equal to the gods, are not a reason to be pompous and proud. And it is the same with knowledge: even we have the knowledge that equals the gods, we should not feel pompous and proud. Likewise experiencing even the extreme poverty of the hungry ghosts should not be cause to feel completely depressed and develop low self-esteem.

We really need to pay heed to this advice. We may feel that we don't have much reason to be over-excited about a lot of wealth, but we might often feel we have reason to be depressed when things are not going well. According to the advice here, we need to really be mindful that if we can adopt the right attitude, then even when things don't go well, and there are difficulties and problems, we can still maintain some integrity and dignity. We really need to keep that in mind. And I can definitely say that I have had great experience with things not going well, and having difficulties and problems in my life.

The verse that relates to the **twenty-third** branch of wisdom is:

274. *For your sake always speak the truth.  
Even should it cause your death  
Or ruin your governance,  
Do not speak in any other way.*

As Gyaltsab Je' commentary reads:

Twenty-third: *For your own sake, even should it cause your death or ruin your governance, always speak the truth to benefit others.* If it is false and harms others, should it even grant you life and governance, *do not speak in any other way.*

Here the king, as the direct recipient of the advice, is being advised never to waiver from speaking the truth at any cost, and to never to forsake any promise he makes. As it explains here, even if it were to cause our own *death*, or *ruin* our *governance*, we should still uphold the value of truth and not forsake it by uttering false words. Even if uttering false words, that cause harm to others, was to grant a great life, majesty and governance, one should forsake that, and thus forsake those benefits of majesty of life and governance and

so forth. The main point, of course, is to protect the truth, and not utter false words.

The **twenty-fourth** branch is:

275. *Always observe the discipline  
Of actions just as it has been explained.  
In that way, O glorious one, you will become  
The best of authoritative beings upon the earth*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Twenty-fourth: *Always observe the discipline of actions just as it has been explained* and as you have promised. *In that way, O glorious one, you will become the best of authoritative valid beings upon the earth.* Thus be sure to keep the promises that you have made.

The main point here is to maintain the integrity of keeping one's commitments. *Always observe the discipline of actions just as it has been explained* refers to always maintaining the positive or virtuous actions that you have promised to keep. As the king advised, if he acts in that way then being the *glorious one*, the king will *become the best of authoritative and valid beings upon the earth.* This means that the natural consequence of abiding by virtuous actions and the promises you have made, will be that you will have a natural authority. Others will naturally do whatever you ask, and in that way you will become known as a valid or truthful being, who others will naturally trust. So, as the commentary explains, be sure to keep the promises that you make. Even though this advice was given to the king, we need to take it as personal advice and put it into practice, as it is most excellent advice.

The verse relating to the **twenty-fifth**, and final, branch of the collection of wisdom is:

276. *You should always analyse well  
Everything before you act,  
And through seeing things correctly as they are  
Do not put full reliance on others*

Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation of the meaning of this verse:

Twenty-fifth: What need is there to say much, O King. *You should always analyse well everything* in regard to what ought to be adopted and what ought to be discarded *before you act, and through seeing things correctly as they are*, i.e. the distinction between what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded there will be no need to ask others. So *do not put full reliance on others.*

This again is very relevant personal advice, which is also emphasised in Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*. It indicates the great importance of *analysing* things before one engages in any action. If, after having thoroughly analysed the action, one sees clearly that there is a benefit in engaging in that action, then one should *adopt* it. If, after investigation and analysis, one finds that the action is not in accordance with virtue and the Dharma, then one needs to *discard* it.

This applies to every action that we do in everyday life. It is invaluable to really analyse the situation before engaging in any action. When one adopts this practice and only engages in action after seeing the benefit, then there is no need to rely on others. That is because one has used one's own intelligence, and discriminative wisdom to discern what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded. Then, as it says here, one need *not put full reliance up others.*

If we resort to listening to others, and rely solely up their advice before we engage in any action, then we can never be really sure whether the action is going to be useful or not.

Some may say one thing while others may have a different opinion, so we can never be totally be sure. Therefore it is very important to use our own intelligence and wisdom to discern whether an action is positive or not. We can see so many people who have many regrets about the great mistakes they have made in their life, all because they have not analysed and thought it through before engaging in some action.

That completes the twenty-five branches of the collection of wisdom.

## F. BENEFITS ARISING TO ONE WHO AMASSES MERIT

The next question which may arise is, what kind of benefits are experienced by one who actually collects merit? The answer is given in two subdivisions.

1. Arising of five common good qualities
2. Arising of twenty-five particular good qualities

### 1. ARISING OF THE FIVE COMMON QUALITIES

1. The first of the five common qualities is

*277a. Through these practices your realm will be happy*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Through engaging in these Dharma practices your realm will be happy.*

That is quite clear: if one engages in the practice then naturally one's own existence will be happy.

2. The second common quality is:

*277bcd. A broad canopy of fame  
Will rise in all directions,  
And your officials will respect you fully.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

By proclaiming that you have done such and such deeds for Buddhadharmā, *a broad canopy of fame will rise in all directions*

Here the king is being told, 'If you engage in Dharma activities, then it will be *proclaimed that you have done such and such deeds for Buddhadharmā*. As a result there will be a *canopy of fame*, which *will rise in all the directions* of the earth.

3. The third common quality is covered in the last line of verse 277, and two more verses:

*277d. Your officials will respect you fully.  
278. The causes of death are many,  
Those of staying alive are few,  
These too can become causes of death,  
Therefore always perform the practices.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of these lines is:

The sole means to gather devout followers is through the Dharma, and because you have adopted the practices, *your officials will respect you fully*. To further exhort the king to swiftly put the Dharma into practice, the text explains that *the causes of death*, even within one's own body, *are many*. *Those of staying alive are few* ...

Having explained to the king how to practise the Dharma, Nagarjuna is now exhorting the king to actually put it into practice immediately, because there *are many causes for death*, which can happen at any time, and also because the *causes of staying alive are few*.

The commentary continues:

*Those of staying alive are few, and these too can become causes of death* such as being cheated by loved ones,

dwelling, such as houses, that fall apart, and indigestion and so forth.

These are examples of conditions that usually sustain life, such as *loved ones*, and *houses* that are meant to protect us from elements and so forth, and the food that we consume to sustain ourselves. But even that which sustains us can end up as a *cause of death*. It is very clear that *loved ones* can betray one and even to the point of murder and so forth; *houses* cave in, crushing people to death; and food, as we all know, can become a cause of death through *indigestion* and food poisoning and so forth.

*279. If you always perform thus the practices,  
The mental happiness which arises  
In the world and in yourself  
Is most favourable.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Therefore, since there are numerous *causes of death*, *always perform the practices*. *If you always perform thus the practices, the mental happiness which arises as the experiential sign of development in the world and in yourself, is most favourable*. Thus it is appropriate to engage in the practice of Dharma.

As clearly explained here, the natural consequence of sincerely *engaging in the practice of Dharma* is that one will have a happy state of mind, and external conditions will be favourable but, most importantly, the mind will be in a happy state. That is the ultimate result of the practice of Dharma: when someone sincerely and whole heartedly engages in the practice of Dharma, they will experience the natural consequence of a happy mind. Then, as mentioned here, *the world and yourself will be most favourable* — there are no disadvantages and only advantages in practising Dharma. So, as Gyaltsab Je exhorts us, *it is appropriate to engage in the practice of Dharma*.

We need to really pay heed to this advice. If we want a happy state of mind, and if we want good conditions, then the practice of Dharma is the most beneficial way to gain what we want. Alternatively if we are experiencing a chaotic, scattered and quite hectic environment, full of mental turmoil, then that is because we have not implemented the Dharma into our life.

As the great master Nagarjuna, and other masters, emphasised, the true sign of having practised the Dharma is when the mind becomes gentler and calmer. Specifically, when mental delusions begin to lessen then that is a true mark that the practice of Dharma has had an effect, i.e. there is a mental transformation as a result of practising the Dharma. When the delusions in one's mind lessen, then negative states of mind lessen, and they are naturally replaced by a calmer, more gentle and more compassionate state of mind, as oppose to a chaotic and neurotically busy state of mind.

Then, as a result of the transformation taking place, we naturally develop more faith and respect for the teachings and so forth. So generating more faith is also to be said one of the signs of the practice of Dharma.

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