
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པོའི་བཀའ་འགྲུབ་མཚན་ལོ་

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As usual we will spend some time in meditation. (*meditation*)

We need to set the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teaching, such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings by liberating them from all suffering and leading them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put its meaning into practice well'.

F. BENEFITS ARISING TO ONE WHO AMASSES MERIT

1. ARISING OF FIVE COMMON GOOD QUALITIES

4. We are up to the fourth of the five common good qualities.

The relevant lines of the root text read:

*280ab. Through the practices you will sleep happily
And will awaken happily*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary gives this explanation:

(4) If you harm others you will not sleep well and even while you are awake you will not be happy. If, however, you refrain from harming others, you will not fear enemies, thus *through the practices you will sleep happily and will awaken happily*.

The point being emphasised here, which is really quite straightforward is that *if you harm others you will not be able to sleep in comfort, out of fear that others might harm you, and even when you are awake you will not be happy. So if you refrain from harming others, you will not fear enemies, thus through the practices you will sleep happily and will awaken happily*. For those who are quite influential or well known, there is always the fear of that they might be attacked by enemies. This is particularly so for those who have the power to inflict harm on others, as that harm naturally causes enemies, and if one has enemies then there is cause to be fearful at all times. Whereas those with a compassionate attitude towards others, and who engage in positive actions, don't create any enemies. So they have no fear of enemies and are able to rest quite happily. Although this advice is given to the king, we definitely need to relate this advice to our personal life and practice.

The main point being raised here is that anyone who engages in the Dharma practice of engaging collecting merit and wisdom will naturally enjoy a life of ease and happiness during the day, and will be able to sleep soundly at night. That is an immediate result of engaging in the practices of collecting merit and wisdom.

As long as we lack a sufficient collection of merit and wisdom we will experience inner disturbances. Some will actually experience harm, so there are external conditions that make one feel uncomfortable and unhappy. Yet there are others who, even though there are no external harmful conditions, find that their mind is not really joyful and happy and they feel agitated and disturbed. That is because they lack a sufficient collection of merit and wisdom, which is why it is essential that we endeavour to accumulate merit, and engage in purification practices and so forth.

As virtue is the direct cause of a happy state of mind and a sense of well-being, we need to accumulate virtue. Whereas engaging in non-virtue or having a negative state of mind is the cause of an unhappy mind. We can see for ourselves that if we have become agitated during the day through conflict with others, or some dispute or argument and so forth, then we don't feel very settled before going to bed, which in turn disturbs our sleep. When we wake up the next day, there will be the unease of not feeling settled. So if you wish to enjoy a calm state of mind during sleep and when you wake up, you need to engage in accumulating merit and wisdom.

An appropriate way of going to sleep with a positive state of mind would be with the bodhicitta attitude. When we have that attitude in our mind before we go to sleep, then our sleep will naturally be very sound, and we will wake up in a clear and bright state of mind. With that positive energy we will be able to face the day with a positive mind.

5. The fifth common good quality is covered in these lines:

*280cd. Because your inner nature will be without defect,
Even your dreams will be happy*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

5. As a result of having a pure mind, *because your inner nature will be without defect, even your dreams will be happy*. Thus endeavour to practise Dharma.

This is very clearly explaining that a happy state of mind, even to the extent of having good dreams, is a result of maintaining a pure mind. In contrast, if we have a mind infested with delusions, such as strong anger, desire, pride and so forth then, we will have an unsettled state of mind, to the extent of having nightmares and disturbed sleep. So troubled sleep is none other than the consequence of an impure, and thus disturbed mind.

If we really look into ourselves we can detect how supposedly external reasons for problems and so forth are really the outcome of negative attitudes, which are influenced by delusions such as strong anger and attachment. As we are familiar with the Dharma, it is not as if we don't know the ill-effects of attachment and anger, but nevertheless we resort to finding those faults in others. We think, 'Attachment is not good, anger is not good. He or she is so negative with lots of anger and desire', so, all too easily, we find the faults of these negative states of mind in others. Our problem is not that we don't know the faults of anger and attachment, but rather we are not willing to acknowledge those faults within ourselves. We need to see that the fault is the attachment and anger within our own mind, and that is what causes our agitation and problems.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentioned recently, prominent scientists now believe that that 95% of negative attributes come from one's own mind rather than from the object's side. His Holiness said that this is really quite a remarkable finding. It is really quite significant that someone, who is not from a religious background, has found through scientific investigation that 95% of problems actually come from one's mind rather than existing objectively. Of course Buddhism explains that it is our own mental projections that cause us to see faults in others, but here we have someone from a scientific background, coming to the same conclusion through scientific investigation! So we really need to pay attention to this very significant point.

As explained in the teachings, when a state of mind of anger, for example, perceives an object, it exaggerates the faults of that object. Therefore the faults that are perceived in the

object are mostly projected by the exaggerated faulty mind, rather than being an actual negative attribute of the object itself. Thus the scientific investigation is completely in accordance with the teachings, which explain that it is an inappropriate attention that exaggerates the faults of the object (in the case of anger), which makes us see the faults in the object. However we still find it hard to be convinced about that, even though we have heard it again and again in the teachings, and which is now supported by a purely empirical investigation.

To further emphasise the parallel between the scientific investigation and the Buddha's teaching, you will recall that it has been explained that there is no denying that an object of desire or attraction does have an attractive attribute or quality. The problem is that the mind of attachment exaggerates the attributes of that object to the point where the mind of attachment views those exaggerated qualities as being actual qualities of the object. Likewise with anger; if the question is whether there is some faults in the object, then the answer is that there are faults, but when anger views the object it exaggerates those faults.

Anger and attachment are said to be wrong consciousness because they perceive an exaggerated fault or quality of the object, which does not in fact exist. Similarly when the scientist explains that 5% of the fault lies in the object, he is not denying that there is a fault in the object. Rather, he is saying that while 5% of the fault lies in the object the remaining 95% of perceived faults come from one's own perception.

Even though the scientist may not use the same terminology, the conclusion is the same. There is no denying that there is a fault in the object, which is confirmed by scientific investigation, but 95% of the fault that is perceived comes from one's own mind, and only 5% lies with the object itself. I think that this scientific investigation is really quite significant because empirical scientific reasoning is supporting the Buddha's explanation.

The main point in the verse is that if your inner nature is without defect then even your dreams will be happy. To understand the full context of this, we need to understand that the opposite is also true; if the mind has defects then everything, even to the extent of our dreams will be unhappy. Having a happy or an unhappy state of mind is all dependent on our own inner state of mind, rather than external conditions.

2. ARISING OF TWENTY-FIVE PARTICULAR GOOD QUALITIES

1. The first particular good quality is covered by the next two verses, the first of which reads:

281. (1) *Intent on serving your parents,
Respectful to the principals of your lineage,
Using your resources well, patient, generous,
With kindly speech, without divisiveness, and
truthful,*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

(1) *Intent on serving your parents* by providing them with food, clothing and so forth, and be *respectful to the principals of your lineage*. *Using your resources well*, means that food and so forth are not obtained through non-virtuous means. Be *patient, generous, with kindly speech, without divisiveness and truthful*.

This is a description of eight disciplines to be performed throughout one's lifetime, all of which have been explained earlier. 1) *Serve your parents by providing them with food and*

clothing and so forth; 2) *be respectful to the principals of your lineage*; 3) *use your resources well* which, as the commentary explains, *means that food and so forth are not obtained through non-virtuous means*. Whatever our need for food and clothing and other resources to sustain ourselves, we need to ensure that they are free from being obtained through wrong deeds; 4) *be patient*; 5) *generous*; 6) *with kindly speech*; 7) *without divisiveness*; and 8) *truthful*.

282. *Through performing such discipline for one lifetime
You will become a monarch of gods
Whereupon even more so you will be a monarch
of gods.
Therefore observe such practices.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Through performing such discipline as these eight, during this very one *lifetime*, its effect is that *you will become a monarch of gods whereupon even more so you will perform deeds to be a monarch of gods* [in the future]. *Therefore observe such practices*.

We really need to take heed of this incredibly essential and practical advice that Nagarjuna is presenting. Many of the qualities mentioned here have been covered previously, but it is useful to review them again. **Serving one's parents** is an extremely practical, meaningful and fitting practice, because it is a way to repay their kindness. At the very start of our lives, we were extremely vulnerable as we were not able to eat by ourselves or go to the toilet by ourselves; if left by ourselves we would not have survived for even a day. It is due to the kindness of our parents at the very beginning of our life that we have been able to get this far in life.

Reflecting on those kind acts will be sufficient motivation for us to engage in respecting and serving our parents now. Unfortunately this practice of service seems to be lacking in many places, but if it were to be established in the world, it would cause so much natural goodness in the world.

Kindly speech, without divisiveness and being **truthful**, are also extremely important points for us to consider, as so much conflict arises from harmful and harsh speech. So we need to be really mindful, because so often we don't consider how our speech could affect someone else, and we speak in a manner that could be hurtful, and which causes discomfort and conflict. A lot of unnecessary conflict comes none other than not being mindful of one's speech. If we could be a little bit more mindful and use kind speech rather than a harsh speech, then whatever we say will be more effective. Rather than causing disharmony and conflict, it will result in well-being. Therefore, we should never underestimate the importance of kind speech.

Equally important is not using divisive speech, because a lot of conflict within families and communities, and so forth, is caused by divisive speech. Through uttering something divisive to someone else, just one person can cause many others to have doubts and conflicts. If we are not mindful, we can go round spreading rumours and spreading ill-will just through our divisive speech. It is also essential to use truthful speech. These practices are not beyond our reach; they are not some really profound level of practice that we are not able to engage in, and in fact it is just a matter of implementing them. As we all recognise this as being righteous way of living and conducting ourselves, why not implement it in our life?

Nagarjuna's advice is thus very practical advice. In fact Nagarjuna is renowned as being the second buddha; he is revered as he was equal to the Buddha in terms of knowledge, wisdom, and skill in imparting the teaching. It

is due Nagarjuna's kindness that we have access to so many levels of the profound teachings of the Buddha in our age. It was Nagarjuna who revived the Buddha's teachings after a period of decline, re-establishing them and disseminating them so effectively that they have lasted until now. So Nagarjuna's advice is not to be taken lightly, as it is very profound and it arises from his real compassion. Knowing that his advice is really beneficial and useful for all of mankind, it is worthwhile that we try to implement it in our daily life.

2. The second of the particular qualities is described in three verses, the first of which is:

283. (2) *Even three times a day to offer:
Three hundred cooking pots of food
Does not match a portion of the merit
In one instant of love.*

Gyalsab Je's begins his explanation by stating:

(2) Lest one wonders whether it would be possible to accumulate the collection of merit if one lacks material things to be generous with, the following is an example how one can gain even more merit.

Sometimes we may feel, 'How can I accumulate merit if I don't have *material things to be generous with* and so forth?' To remove that doubt, it is indicated that there is a possibility of accumulating much more merit than by giving material wealth and so forth, Gyalsab Je explains:

Even to offer three hundred [clay] cooking pots of food with sixty different type of dishes which are prepared with the finest ingredients three times a day, does not match a portion of the merit in one instant of love that wishes other beings to be happy.

These few lines describe the unimaginable benefit of cultivating love and compassion for all sentient beings. As mentioned here, if one were to cook great lavish meal, with *three hundred different pots of food*, all with *sixty different types of dishes*, using *the finest ingredients* and offer that *three times a day* to others, then that would be considered as a very generous act, as it involves a lot of cost and effort and preparation. However contemplating love and compassion, even for an *instant*, by thinking about the welfare of sentient beings and genuinely wishing them to be free from all sufferings and endowed with all the causes of happiness, is said to be far more meritorious than giving material aid.

This is an essential point that we really need to consider. We might feel that we do not have the capacity to create a big generous deed, but we do have the capacity to generate love and compassion. We know how to cultivate and meditate on love and compassion; we know how to contemplate the suffering of sentient beings not wishing them to suffer and wishing all beings to be happy. We are all capable of doing that, so it is just a matter of generating that attitude.

Personally I feel that this is one of the most beneficial practices of my daily practice. Periodically, during the day, I try to spend a few minutes contemplating the plight of all beings. When one brings to mind the suffering nature of sentient beings in samsara, it seems to move the mind towards really wishing them to be free from their suffering and wishing them happiness. I am not in any way claiming that I have developed any profound level of compassion and love, however, when I do spend some time just contemplating that, I can safely say that it definitely moves my mind, and gives me a real sense of encouragement. I also feel that as a result my mind naturally becomes very settled, very calm and also very focused. From my limited personal

experience, I have a high regard for this practice of meditating on love and compassion by focusing on sentient beings.

There are not enough words to express the real benefit of such a meditation practice. Based on my limited experiences I can confidently say that it is a really powerful practice. It is just a matter of using some time in daily life, if possible throughout the day. But even if it is just a few minutes, bring to mind the suffering nature of sentient beings, and then wish them to be free from suffering, and to enjoy a genuine state of happiness.

As many teachings emphasise this powerful practice is a very practical way for us to accumulate merit. In *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, Shantideva mentions again and again the great benefit of developing great love and compassion for all sentient beings. Like all other teachers, Shantideva emphasises that meditating on the bodhicitta attitude is the most supreme way to accumulate merit, and the most powerful practice to purify negative karma. What more do we need to than an essential practice that is powerful for both accumulating merit and for purification?

284. *Though [through love] you are not liberated
You will attain the eight good qualities of love—
Gods and humans will be friendly,
Even [nonhumans] will protect you,*

285. *You will have mental pleasures and many [physical]
pleasures,
Poison and weapons will not harm you,
Without striving you will attain your aims,
And be reborn in the world of Brahma.*

These two verses cover the eight qualities of love. In his commentary Gyalsab Je explains the first verse thus:

The benefits of love are: *in this very life, you will attain the good qualities of 1) love, expressed by gods and humans, thus they will be friendly,*

The *first* quality is that if you cultivate love you will actually attain the benefit of the *love expressed by gods and humans*, which means that *gods and humans will be friendly* to you. When one expresses genuine love and compassion for others then the natural response from them, humans and gods alike, will be to express love for you. As I emphasise regularly, expressing love for others is the optimum way to find a genuine companion. The main point here is that as a result of expressing love and compassion for others, one will not be deprived of companions, and true friends.

Then *second* quality of love is that:

2) *Even non-humans will protect you.*

If you develop genuine love and compassion for all beings then rather than harming you, *even non-humans*, such as spirits and so forth, *will protect you.*

Thirdly:

3) *You will have mental pleasures*

Expressing love and compassion naturally brings about a joyful and happy state of mind. The more one cultivates and expresses love and compassion, the more the mind will naturally be in tune with love and compassion, and with a loving and compassionate state of mind only joy and happiness will be experienced. That is how expressing love and compassion naturally leads to a happy state of mind.

As a result the *fourth* quality is:

and 4) *many physical pleasures.*

As emphasised again and again in the teachings, having a happy state of mind contributes to physical well-being. It

has also been proven scientifically that those who have a happy and joyous state of mind also seem to enjoy natural good health.

Then we go on to the *fifth* and *sixth* qualities which are:

5) *Poison and 6) weapons will not harm you;*

The *seventh* quality is:

7) *without striving, you will attain your aims.*

Without much effort, due to their positive consequences or effects, expressing love and compassion will also have a personal benefit in that one's goals will be naturally be fulfilled without much effort.

The *eighth* and final quality is:

In the future lifetimes, you will *be reborn in the world of Brahma.*

Here, *being reborn in the world of Brahma* can be taken literally or, as some teachings indicate, it also has the connotation of being liberated from suffering. If we were take it literally then that means being born in the highest state within cyclic existence. Some teachings further emphasise this point by saying that if when one develops love and compassion for other sentient beings, one actually creates the merit to be born in the world of Brahma as many times as there are beings for whom one has expressed love and compassion.

This is basically indicating a measure of how much merit one accumulates. Accumulating the merit to be born in the world of Brahma is mainly a measure of how much merit one has accumulated because vast amounts of merit are needed to be born in that state. When it is related to liberation, then even more merit has to be accumulated to free oneself from suffering of samsara.

The amount of merit that one accumulates by developing love and compassion is large enough to be born many times over in the world of Brahma. And then, of course, one can use that merit in more effective ways for one's practice. The commentary further explains that even if one is not liberated in this lifetime, by meditating on love you will attain the eight qualities of love.

In conclusion, as Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Though through love you may not be liberated [in this life-time], by meditating on love you will attain the eight good qualities.

By cultivating and expressing love and compassion for other sentient beings one will, at best, achieve personal liberation or freedom from suffering and the trappings of samsara. But even if that were not to happen in this lifetime, the definite benefit that one will achieve in this lifetime is the eight good qualities of love that were explained earlier. So the main point being emphasised here is that it is worthwhile to develop, cultivate and express love and compassion, because of the great benefits that will ensue.

3. We come to the third of the twenty-five qualities.

286. (3) *If you cause sentient beings to generate The altruistic aspiration to enlightenment and make it firm, You will always attain an altruistic aspiration to enlightenment Firm like the monarch of mountains.*

The explanation of this verse in Gyaltsab Je's commentary is:

(3) *If you cause sentient beings to generate the altruistic aspiration to enlightenment and teach methods to make it firm so that it does not decline, you will always attain, in this and future lives, an altruistic aspiration to*

enlightenment, which is firm like the monarch of mountains.

If, at the same time as one is developing bodhicitta, one were to *teach methods* and encourage others to develop the valuable and extremely precious bodhicitta attitude, which is *the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment*, and *make it firm* in others, then one could *attain* or realise the bodhicitta attitude *in this* lifetime. And even if it is not developed in this lifetime, it will definitely create the cause to generate that bodhicitta mind in a future lifetime, which will remain very stable like *the monarch of mountains.*

4. The fourth particular good quality is indicated in this line:

287a. *Through faith you will not be without leisure*

As this is quite easy to comprehend Gyaltsab Je's commentary just repeats the main point

(4) *Within the collections, through faith you will not be without leisure.*

Developing faith is one of the collections of merit, and the consequence of developing faith that is one will not be without leisure. In a precious human rebirth one can be fortunate enough to enjoy leisure, but one can also be reborn in a life without leisure which includes being born with defects. Basically this is indicating that faith will protect one from a life without leisure.

The *fifth* particular good quality is

287b. (5) *Through good ethics you will move in good transmigrations*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads,

(5) *Through good ethics you will move in good transmigrations of human and god realms.*

Adhering to moral *ethics* will be a cause to be reborn *in a good transmigration* which, as the commentary indicates, will be rebirth in the *human and god realms.*

The *sixth* of the particular good qualities is:

287cd. (6) *Through becoming familiar with emptiness You will attain detachment from all phenomena.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains

(6) *Through becoming familiar with emptiness by realising and meditating on it, you will attain the conscientiousness of not declining from virtue, thus gaining detachment from all phenomena.*

When one *becomes familiar with emptiness, by meditating on it* and thus *realising* emptiness, then by the virtue of realising emptiness *you will* develop that unceasing constant vigilance or conscientious mind that protects one from *declining* from *virtue*. In other words, from the moment that one has realised emptiness, one will be perpetually engaged in virtue, and one will always be protected from non-virtue. In that way one gains *detachment from all phenomena*, which means that one will be free from the trappings of desire and attachment to worldly phenomena.

The main points here are that faith is part of the collection of merit, which was explained previously in more detail. Likewise moral discipline or ethics is part of the collection of merit, as has also been explained previously. The realisation of emptiness is the collection of wisdom, and although the benefits of emptiness have been explained in great detail previously, they are mentioned here again briefly.

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