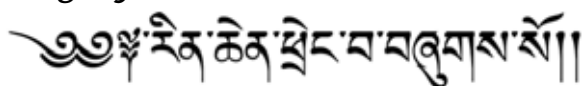


Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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

We can now generate the appropriate motivation for receiving the teaching from the depths of our hearts. The motivation can be along these lines: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings by freeing them from all suffering and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and will put them into practice well'.

2. ARISING OF TWENTY-FIVE PARTICULAR GOOD QUALITIES (CONT.)

This refers to the results of engaging in the collections to accumulate merit.

4. The fourth of these qualities is:

287a. Through faith you will not be without leisure

It is good to bring to mind what these words mean. i.e. that with *faith* one will be able to obtain all the right conditions for practising the Dharma. To be in a condition without leisure includes being born human but without access to the Dharma, or holding wrong views which means that even if were to be born in places where the Dharma flourishes one will not be receptive to the Dharma teachings. So we can rejoice in the fact that we enjoy all the conditions to practise the Dharma now, while engaging in practices to obtain such conditions again in future.

5. The relevant line from the root text is:

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

Basically this means that observing moral ethics now will be the cause to be reborn in the human and god realms in the future. So we need to remember how important it is that we actually engage in accumulating the causes for a good rebirth. What is being explained here is that through practising good ethics one will have a higher rebirth in the next lifetime. It needs to be understood that moral ethics is something that we need to practice for ourselves. It is not as if associating with others who have good moral ethics will help us to have a good rebirth—the only thing that will help us to have a good rebirth is our own moral ethics.

The teachings explain that the Dharma is the actual refuge, which means the real protector. This is very clear in the context of how practising morality will prevent one from being reborn in the lower realms. It is the ethics that we personally observe that protects us from the lower realms. This means we need apply ethics in our daily life to the best of our ability and then slowly increase the level of our practice. For example, we can start by making the strong commitment, 'Even for a few moments I will not harm any sentient being; I will refrain from harming other sentient beings'. Observing that commitment, even for just for a few moments, becomes a powerful cause to secure a good rebirth in a future lifetime. This is a practical way of applying the

practice in daily life. It is not sufficient to just repeat these lines and have some sort of general understanding of them. Rather, we need to actually apply them in our practice.

Through reading and studying this text and receiving explanations of its meaning we gain the resources to practice the Dharma. Otherwise we might be like those who, despite having studied for a while, have to ask, 'How do I practice? What is the Dharma that I need to practice?' That just goes to show that they have missed the point, which is that we need to put into practice the material that we are studying, at every opportunity. The way to practise is to incorporate the teachings into our daily life. The teachings need to be regarded as personal instructions to be implemented in our daily practice. This is how we derive the essence and our study will have served its purpose.

The way that we relate the teaching to our personal life is to see it as a means to transform ourselves. What we need to keep in mind is that transforming ourselves is a gradual process, where one practice is gradually complemented by another. Then we will begin to see our mind gradually becoming calmer, gentler and more peaceful. When we investigate we will find that a real sense of calm and tranquillity is experienced every time we practise ethics. That is the immediate benefit that we are able to experience.

6. Sixth is:

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

This has been explained previously. So what does it mean? Although only two lines, their meaning is incredibly profound, so it is essential that we understand that meaning. As it says, if you meditate on emptiness you will not be attached to all worldly phenomena. So how does that work?

Student: By realising that everything is empty, there will be no grasping at the self or other things, so then it is not possible to have attachment.

Here we need to be careful. Some misinterpret these lines to mean that since everything is empty, nothing really exists, and thus there are no objects to become attached to. This is based on the misconception that that nothing really exists, and if one realises that then one will not have attachment. That would be a misinterpretation, right?

To derive a more essential understanding of these two lines, we need to relate to how becoming familiar with emptiness, by realising and meditating on it, serves as the antidote to overcome the root of all delusions, which is grasping at an inherently existent self, or grasping at the 'I'. As explained in the teachings, the root of all delusions is grasping at the self or 'I', and the antidote that overcomes that grasping is the realisation of emptiness or selflessness. Thus, the realisation of emptiness is the direct opponent that overcomes grasping at the self or 'I'. As the grasping at a self is weakened, the delusions that arise from that grasping, i.e. attachment, anger and so forth, also become weaker and less intense.

As Gyalsab Je's commentary 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.

As explained in the commentary, one develops conscientiousness through becoming *familiar with emptiness*. Understanding emptiness is the direct antidote that overcomes grasping at the self or 'I', which is the root cause

of all the delusions. When that grasping is weakened, then one naturally develops the conscientiousness of becoming very wary, and not allowing the delusions to gain a foothold. It is essential that we understand that in order to overcome the delusions, we need to tackle their root cause. Otherwise, as we have all experienced, if we find a technique that overcomes one delusion, such as meditating on the faults or unappealing attributes of the object to overcome attachment, then that may seem to work for a while but later, under different circumstances, the delusion arises again. When we try to tackle each individual delusion with a specific antidote, then it seems that we never seem to get a grip on actually eliminating the delusions. We are unable to stop them from arising because we have failed to deal with their root cause, which is why the realisation of emptiness is essential.

The main point we need to understand here is that familiarising ourselves with emptiness, by meditating on it, and then eventually realising emptiness, serves as the ultimate antidote for overcoming all delusions. That is why it is so essential that we gain the realisation of emptiness. Otherwise, as mentioned earlier, we might find that even though we are beginning to develop some awareness and avoid becoming angry, attachment starts to arise. Worse, if we have been able to deal with our anger and attachment, the delusion of pride arises as we think, 'Oh, I am really reaching some level here'. Then before we realise it, we are being affected by pride or jealousy when we see someone else doing better.

In this way it seems that the delusions are competing with each other; while we try to subdue one, another one rises spontaneously. The reason we are not able to effectively combat the delusions is because we are not dealing with the root cause, and it is the realisation of emptiness that overcomes the root cause of all delusions.

As Lama Tsongkapa very compassionately advised us that when we do any practice we need to be really mindful about not becoming stuck with only one form of practice, losing our conscientiousness and failing to detect other faults that may arise. The way to engage in practice is to applying the understanding one has gained from extensive study of the teachings, using all the tools to tackle the delusions in every aspect. That is how we can begin to really subdue our own mind. When we are meditating on one aspect of the teachings, we need to be mindful of other practices as well, and always be wary about the different delusions that may creep in at any time. Being vigilant about one's state of mind is essential to personal transformation and progress. In summary, Lama Tsong Khapa is pointing out that the study of the Dharma and subduing one's mind need to work hand in hand.

7. the root text reads:

288a. (7) Through not wavering you will attain mindfulness,

With respect to this Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

(7) *Through not wavering*, which is obtained by listening to the doctrine and so forth, *you will attain mindfulness* with an intelligent mind.

Another essential quality that we need obtain is *mindfulness* and an *intelligent mind*. *Not wavering* means trying to develop a stable unwavering and intelligent mind, which is obtained by listening to the doctrine and understanding its meaning. That combination of mindfulness and an intelligent mind is essential to maintain a really good focus.

The main implication of *not wavering* is having a truthful and stable mind, whenever one engages in practice. For example, when listening to the teaching and engaging in any practice there is a strong emphasis on developing a positive motivation, which is also a way of making the mind stable and very pure. That combination of a pure and stable mind allows the mind to be firm and unwavering. If one lacks a stable mind then one's mind is prone to being persuaded by faults, negative intentions and so forth. So techniques that develop a stable, pure and truthful mind are essential.

8. The eighth particular good quality is:

288b. (8) Through thinking you will attain intelligence

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

(8) *Through thinking* about the doctrine, *you will attain the intelligence* of great wisdom.

The earlier point referred to the qualities that one obtains from listening to the doctrine, and now the emphasis is on thinking about the doctrine. Here, *intelligence* refers to *great wisdom*. While it is important to listen to the Dharma, it is just as important to contemplate and think about the meaning of the doctrine that one has heard. The more we apply ourselves to *thinking about* the meaning of *the doctrine*, the deeper our understanding of the Dharma will be, and in this way our intelligence or wisdom will naturally increase.

As explained in other teachings, the way to gain realisations about the Dharma is by first listening, then thinking about or contemplating it, and finally meditating on the points one has understood. This text is emphasising that you really need to think about the Dharma or doctrine not just once or twice, but again and again. It is only through really analysing and thinking about the Dharma that one gains intelligence or wisdom.

9. Ninth is:

288c. (9) Through respect you will be endowed with realisation of meaning,

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je states:

(9) *Through respect* for the Dharma and its propounder, *you will be endowed with realisation of the meaning* of the Dharma.

Here we need to understand that we will naturally develop *respect for the Dharma* when we listen to it and then analyse and think about it, because we will see its value. Then we will develop respect for *those who propound* the Dharma—the teachers of Dharma.

A simple way to understand this is that when we begin to see the value of the Dharma, we gain a natural respect for it, and then naturally we expand that respect to those who teach the Dharma, sharing its great meaning. Then, through that combination of respect for both the Dharma and those who propound it, one will be endowed with the realisation of the meaning of the Dharma. So the cause and effect sequence is that respect for the Dharma and the teachers leads one to realisations about the meaning of the Dharma. An essential point here is that when we begin to see the Dharma as valuable and sacred, then those who propound that Dharma will naturally be seen in the same light.

10. Tenth is:

288d. (10) Through guarding the doctrine you will become wise.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

(10) *Through guarding the doctrine*, that you have heard, *you will become wise*.

This is another essential point that we need to bear in mind. As much as we might put some effort in listening to the doctrine, and reading texts, it is equally important to guard the doctrine. Here *guarding the doctrine* has the connotation of retaining what one has heard. If we don't retain what we have heard we will be like a vase with a hole in it. No matter how much water you put in the vase it never fills up, because water keeps dripping out of the hole—nothing is retained. Similarly if we don't put some effort into retaining and recollecting what we have heard, then the Dharma will not really have much effect on our minds. Then we will lack the ability to become really intelligent and wise.

In summary, in order to gain wisdom we need to first listen to the Dharma, because we gain certain amount of wisdom just through listening. When that wisdom is used to further analyse and think about the Dharma, we reach another level of wisdom, which is then used for meditation. This point is the same as that made in *Bodhisattvacharyavata*, where Shantideva explains that if one does not make an effort to retain whatever Dharma one has heard it will be similar to a vessel with a hole in it. If one does not guard or retain the meaning of the Dharma one has heard, then one will gain the wisdom of the dharma. Therefore the way to retain the meaning of the Dharma is by applying mindfulness to remember its meaning.

11. Eleventh is:

**289. (11) Through making the hearing and the giving
Of the doctrine be unobstructed
You will company with buddhas
And will quickly attain your wishes**

As Gyaltsab Je makes clear in his commentary:

(11) *Through making the hearing and the giving of the doctrine be unobstructed*, by removing faults of being miserly with the teachings, concealing it and so forth, *you will company with buddhas and you will quickly attain your wishes*.

As explained here, whether listening to the Dharma or if one is in the position of explaining Dharma to others, then that explanation should not be obstructed by concealment, or given in a miserly manner. Here *miserly* means being unwilling to share what one has understood or giving only partial advice, thinking, 'If I were to explain the full meaning of what I have understood then I will no longer be wiser than them'. Being miserly with one's understanding of the teachings is a faulty state of mind. *Concealing it* means not imparting the full meaning but offering some sort of contrived meaning. If someone were to ask, 'What does *conventional truth* mean' and one replies with the definition of ultimate truth, then that would be an example of concealment.

The main point here is the need to be really mindful about having a pure motivation that is free from the defect of conceit or desire for personal gain, while listening to the teachings, or while sharing them with others. Of course, many of us here are engaged in both listening to and sharing the Dharma, but sharing the teachings is not necessarily a formal teaching. It can just be a sincere answer to a question someone asks. The main thing is to have the pure wish to benefit the other and sincerely share one's understanding without withholding anything.

12. The twelfth is quite clear:

**290a. (12) Through non-attachment you will achieve
the meaning [of doctrines]**

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

(12) *Through non-attachment to sensual pleasures, you will achieve the meaning of the doctrine.*

13. Next is:

**290b. (13) Through not being miserly, your resources
will increase.**

Nagarjuna talks a lot about the faults of being miserly. It is also said that the result of being generous and not miserly is that one's resources will increase naturally. Gyaltsab Je's commentary repeats the main point:

(13) *Through not being miserly, your resources will increase.*

14. The fourteenth good quality is:

**290c. (14) Through not being proud you will become
chief [of those respected],**

As Gyaltsab Je says in his commentary:

(14) *Through not being proud you will be honoured by all and become chief of those respected.*

Again, this is quite straightforward. Any individual who practices genuine modesty and who is *not proud* will naturally be *respected and honoured* by others. We can all see examples of this.

15. As the text reads:

**290d. (15) Through enduring the doctrine you will
attain retention.**

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

(15) *Through enduring the doctrine on emptiness, you will attain retention*—the siddhi of non-forgetfulness.

Here the word *enduring* has the connotation of the patience of applying the Dharma, which is one of the categories of patience. The patience of applying Dharma refers to understanding the Dharma. The main emphasis here is the doctrine on emptiness; when one gains an understanding of emptiness then that becomes the main realisation that combats our negativities and delusions.

When we categorise emptiness, there is the emptiness or selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena. So first of all we need to think about why there are two categories of emptiness or selflessness. Then we think about what emptiness or selflessness of a person means. What does the emptiness of an individual person mean and what does the selflessness or emptiness of other phenomena imply? We need to think about these points again and again. So here *endurance* means having a willingness to engage in this contemplation and think about emptiness and selflessness again and again, without any sense of it being a chore.

The natural result of engaging in that way is that one will gain the type of retention that is called the *siddhi of non-forgetfulness*. Although the root text refers to *retention*, this means, as the commentary explains, obtaining the siddhi of non-forgetfulness. It would be wonderful to achieve that siddhi, as we would never forget the main points we have understood from the teachings.

The very process by which one gains a realisation is by thinking about an essential point again and again. If we can't recollect a certain point of a Dharma explanation, then that is because we haven't given enough time to think about it. We gain some understanding, but we fail to put more time into it, and then later on when we have to try to recall what we have understood, it has gone from our memory. The fact that we don't remember it is because we haven't given much time to thinking about it again and again. What is implied

here is that we need to apply that process of thinking again and again about the Dharma, especially in relation to emptiness. By thinking about it again and again, we will obtain that siddhi of retention or non-forgetfulness.

16. The root text reads:

291 (16) *Through giving the five essentials
As well as non-fright to the frightened
You will not be harmed by any demons
And will become the best of the mighty.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary adds some points to make the meaning clear:

(16) *Through giving the five essentials—molasses, ghee, honey, sesame oil and salt—as well as non-fright, such as an escort to those who are frightened of enemies and so forth, you will not be harmed by any demons and will become the best of the mighty.*

As explained here, by engaging in the act of generosity with material things, such as *giving the five essentials*, as well providing an *escort* for those who are travelling to places where there known to be *enemies* or bandits and so forth, the positive result is that *you will not be harmed by demons and become mighty* or powerful.

17. The next verse reads:

292. (17) *Through offering series of lamps at monuments
And through offering lamps in dark places
As well as the oil for them
You will attain the divine eye.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads

(17) *Through offering series of lamps at monuments and through offering lamps in places that are engulfed in darkness, as well as the oil for them, you will attain the clairvoyance of the divine eye.*

This is quite straightforward. By engaging in these positive deeds of *offering* lights and *lamps* to holy objects, as well as *in dark places*, the positive result is that one *will attain the divine eye*, which is one of the five types of clairvoyance that are obtained through practice.

Offering light is a practice for gaining merit. One can offer light to the enlightened beings, holy objects, monuments, statues and so forth, as well as offering light for those who are in dark places. In addition, if there are oil lamps one can offer oil. That kind of generosity will become the cause for obtaining the clairvoyance of the divine eye. When we go on pilgrimage or visit holy places, we naturally offer a lamp or light, so it is good to know the significance of that offering and the kind of results that one will obtain by offering light for the benefit of others. These are the things to keep in mind when we make an offering of light.

18. The eighteenth good quality is covered in the next verse:

293. (18) *Through offering musical instruments and bells
For the worship of monuments
And through offering drums and trumpets
You will attain the divine ear.*

Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation:

(18) For the purpose of making offerings, *through offering musical instruments and bells for the worship of monuments* and through offering drums and trumpets, *you will attain the clairvoyance of the divine ear.*

Again, this is quite straightforward. *Offerings to monuments* and holy objects can include *musical instruments* or putting

bells on holy objects, as well as making offerings for musical instruments such as *drums and trumpets* and so forth. Making these offerings will be the cause to obtain the *clairvoyance* called *divine ear*, another of the five types of clairvoyance.

19. The next verse reads:

294. (19) *Through not mentioning others' mistakes
And not talking of others' defective limbs
But protecting their minds
You will attain knowledge of others' minds.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

(19) *Through not mentioning other's faults because of their mistakes and not talking of other's defective limbs such as of a blind person, but protecting their minds, you will attain the clairvoyance of knowing others' minds.*

As mentioned here, we need to be really diligent and mindful about not talking casually about the faults of others. If we get into a habit of talking about the faults of others then that will prevent us from obtaining the clairvoyance of knowing the minds of others. So it is good to know that that we need to protect ourselves from gossip and finding faults in others.

Furthermore, when we encounter someone who has defective limbs or, as mentioned here, someone who is blind, then even though it is a fact that they have some defect, it would hurt them if we were to talk about that in derogatory terms in front of them. Therefore we need to be mindful of not using derogatory language that will harm the minds of others. The positive result of practising in that way is that one will create the cause to obtain the clairvoyance of knowing the minds of others.

There is nothing that we can disagree with here. This very practical advice is presented by the great compassionate master, Nagarjuna, who was not only great scholar but an enlightened being. He presents us with very manageable advice that we can apply in our daily life. If we were to neglect this advice or not apply it in our daily life, thinking that we need some sort of special technique or method to practise, then we have completely missed the point.

The advice given here is so practical, beneficial and meaningful. It would be a great pity if we were to assume that we have to look somewhere else for some sort of profound instruction. To do that would be a waste of the great opportunity that we have here now.

So we need to resolve to try to use whatever means we have to put this essential advice into practice right now. It would be good to also make strong aspirational prayers such as, 'May I be able to apply that practical advice, and put into practice all the other essential advice and the practices that are found in the teachings of Nagarjuna, who expounded the essential advice of Buddha Shakyamuni himself. May I be able to apply that advice in this life, and in future lifetimes may I again be able to meet with these great teachings, so that I can further develop myself. From life to life may I never be parted from such profound advice'. To make such aspirational prayers would be really meaningful and useful.

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