
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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With an appropriate motivation, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. (*meditation*)

As usual, it is appropriate to set a motivation for receiving the teachings 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 them into practice well'.

Regardless of the practice or activity one is doing, the main thing is to try to maintain a kind mind and be compassionate to others. With a kind and compassionate mind, and in addition to remaining joyful and peaceful, whatever activities we engage in become very meaningful, and we can actually benefit others. So it is really essential to secure this positive state of mind. We need to consider the positive attitude of kindness and compassion as being our most valuable inner asset. In other words, if we are looking for a state of mind that secures our general wellbeing, then a compassionate attitude is essential.

When we acquaint ourselves with this positive attitude again and again, our mind will not be deterred by negative states of mind, or feelings of hostility that may arise at times, and thus we will be able to maintain a general sense of wellbeing. On the other hand, if we have a selfish attitude, being concerned only with our own wellbeing, then we will find that we are never really successful whenever we try to practise and meditate. That is because the selfishness attitude is hindering our practice.

Furthermore, when we investigate the attitude that pervades our daily activities, we will detect that it is one that is merely concerned for this life's enjoyments and wellbeing. When we acknowledge that, we will have found the cause of all the disturbing thoughts and problems that we face in life. When we think about it, all our anxieties arise from the attitude of being concerned merely about our wellbeing in this life. If we don't do anything to overcome that underlying motivation, then we will always seem to be restless and never satisfied with whatever we do. Whatever we engage in, there will always be that nagging feeling of dissatisfaction and being unsettled. Whereas when we let go of the concerns merely about this life and take into consideration our long term goal for future lifetimes, then we can see our mind becoming a little bit more content and relaxed, and a reduction in our agitation and anxiety. That is the positive effect when the affairs of this life are not of primary concern.

Try to think about this daily, for half an hour, or even a few minutes and when you detect the concern merely for this life, try to combat that. Try to see how it is not fitting to be concerned only about this life. Then, when we let go of that attitude, we will begin to feel a genuine sense of wellbeing.

Furthermore, we really need to understand the meaning of the advice in the teachings about practising less desire and having more contentment. It doesn't mean that we get rid of

all our possessions. We must understand this advice in its right context, because practising less desire and having more contentment is a positive state of mind developed within and not related to external conditions. Getting rid of one's possessions will not necessarily guarantee less desire and more contentment. In fact, one might even feel a sense of loss after giving everything away.

The main point is that practising less desire and more contentment is a mental attitude. We need to cultivate that attitude while we utilise what we have around us, which will naturally release the grip of excessive attachment to material things and a self-centred attitude. Then we can begin to expand our mind to think about the wellbeing and welfare of others.

If we are really honest with ourselves, we will find that most of the time our primary concern is about our own personal wellbeing; we seem to be preoccupied with our own wellbeing. It is very rare to find an attitude where the main concern is for others. We so often hear the lamentation, 'Oh, things are not going well for me, I've got all these problems and difficulties' and so forth; but we rarely hear, 'I feel so sad because things are not going well for others. I'm really concerned about how to bring joy and happiness for others'.

There are, however, a few occasions where people have said to me, 'Even though it does not accord with my own wishes, I agreed because it made the other happy'. When Regina and Cody, who used to come here, bought a house, Cody said that he didn't like the colours in kitchen, but Regina did. Regina said 'I am very bad because he always does what I want'. Cody's view was, 'I don't like it, but I love her dearly, and if Regina likes it, then I'll agree to it'.

Too often we say 'I like' or 'I don't like' and don't enter into any discussion about a compromise. We hardly take into consideration 'What's she thinking?', or 'What's he thinking?' He thinks he's better, she thinks she's better and on it goes. It's always better to discuss things. Otherwise it's 'Whatever you do I don't like it'. Cody and Regina have spent twenty happy years together. They have a very open relationship, they can tell each other what they like or dislike but in the end it comes down to 'If she's happy I'm happy', and 'If he's happy I'm happy'.

Cody and Regina's relationship is such that they can say to each other, 'Even though it doesn't accord with my wishes it's OK if it makes you happy'. That is a much better attitude than thinking, 'That doesn't suit me so I am not going to accept it'. Thinking of the other will make the situation much more relaxed and the relationship will be much better.

Regina is very nice, with a big heart, and she works very hard. When they go camping in the bush she even digs the toilet. When Cody first came to Australia from Czechoslovakia he didn't speak the language at all. He said that on the day he landed in Adelaide he went out to look for a job. He found one, and when they asked, 'Do you want the job?', he said 'Yes'. They asked, 'When can you start?' He said, 'Today'. 'When did you arrive?' 'I arrived today'. When he was asked 'Where is your luggage?' he showed them a small bag.

Despite his lack of language and culture and so forth when he started, because of his enthusiasm and zealous approach to work he now does very well. The reason I relate this story is because sometimes it is good to look at how when others persevere, despite hardships and difficulties, things work out quite well in their life. So that is a good example for us to recall.

There is another Polish lady who I met when I was doing a course at Mt. Martha. She said that when she first came here she spent a whole year living in a tent. Then she moved into a one-bedroom flat where she spent three years. By the time she came to the course she was quite well off. At one point we were having breakfast and a piece of bread was left to be thrown away. She felt, 'Oh, we shouldn't be throwing that away' and it brought back memories of being back in Poland where it was hard to find enough food to eat. With that background she found it hard to see bread being wasted like that.

Of course, those who are poverty stricken would not waste even a small piece of bread. They really work at using their limited means in very efficient ways. Even some wealthy families I visit don't waste food and put leftover food away. Of course, there are many such stories to share from my own experiences in Tibet and so forth, and these real life experiences are worthwhile to reflect upon, because they encourage us, and help us to appreciate what we have. However, we will not take more time now.

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

20. The twentieth particular good quality of the collections is:

295. (20) *Through giving shoes and conveyances, Through serving the feeble, And through providing teachers with transport You will attain the skill to create magical emanations.*

With respect to this, Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

(20) *Through giving shoes and conveyances to the needy, and through serving the feeble by offering to lift or carry them, and through providing teachers with transport, you will attain the skill to create magical emanations.*

These are very practical ways of assisting those who are in need, even to the point of *giving shoes* to those in need of them. If we have some spare shoes we can give them to those who are needy. *Serving the feeble*, means to help those who are weak or disabled, e.g. carrying a disabled person across the water or assisting them to cross the road. These are very practical ways of benefiting others. Providing service and giving one's time to help others are very practical acts of generosity that benefit others. Of course, the advice to provide transport for those who need it is directed to the king, who has the means and the wealth to provide this assistance.

Nagarjuna is exhorting the king to share his wealth and use it to help the needy. The king would definitely have many pairs of shoes, and giving a pair of shoes to others who need it, would be a very practical help. This is in contrast to Imelda Marcos, the wife of President Marcos in the Philippines, who had something like 4000 pairs of shoes. When you think about it, how many pairs could she have put on each day in order to actually be able to use all of her shoes?

Here, Nagarjuna is telling the king that the result of sharing his wealth with others is that he will attain *the skill to create magical emanations*. When one has attained this *siddhi* then it will be possible to benefit others through many emanations. We are limited to this one aspect of ourselves, but with this *siddhi* of being able to create magical emanations, we will be able to manifest many times over to benefit others. So the main point here is to contemplate the great virtue of being generous to others.

21. The twenty-first of the qualities is explained in the following verse:

296. (21) *Through acting for the doctrine, Remembering books of doctrine and their meaning, And through stainless giving of the doctrine You will attain memory of your continuum of lives.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je elaborates on the meaning of the verse:

(21) *Through acting for the doctrine by enduring hardships and constructing temples. Likewise not forgetting and remembering books of doctrine and their meaning, and through stainless giving of the doctrine, i.e. giving without hope of reward, you will attain the clairvoyance and memory of your and other's continuum of lives.*

As explained in the commentary, *through acting for the doctrine* or practices of the Dharma, refers to *enduring hardships* and engaging in activities such as *constructing temples*. For example, a certain amount of time and hardship was needed to acquire these premises for Tara Institute, which serves as a good deed according to this explanation. *Likewise not forgetting and remembering books of the doctrine*, means endeavouring to remember the meaning of the doctrine and not forget the points made in the Dharma. *Stainless giving of the doctrine*, refers to giving whatever understanding one has gained from the doctrine or teachings, without any anticipation of either praise or material rewards, but with the sole intention to benefit the other. The result of engaging in these virtuous deeds is that you *will attain the clairvoyance of remembering your previous lifetimes*.

Because I am engaged in sharing the Dharma I take this point about the stainless giving of the doctrine as personal advice. Stainless giving means giving the doctrine free from worldly concerns, ensuring that one is not teaching the doctrine in order to become famous, praised for one's knowledge, or seeking material gain. It implies that one needs to be free from strong attachment to one's own doctrine while having aversion to the views and doctrine of others. It also means not engaging in giving teachings out of a sense out competition with others — if others are teaching then I need teach it better. That would be imparting the doctrine out of jealousy. This is how one needs to protect oneself when sharing the doctrine. Many of you are also in the position of teaching others and sharing whatever knowledge you have, so it is good to be mindful about sharing in a stainless pure way. If your attitude is not pure and stainless but mixed with worldly concern then, if others don't appreciate what you are teaching or don't take your advice, you will feel hurt and be uncomfortable. That is a clear sign that one's sharing was not free from worldly concerns.

22. The verse that relates to the twenty-second quality is:

297. (22) *Through knowing thoroughly, correctly, and truly That all phenomena lack inherent existence, You will attain the sixth clairvoyance— The excellent extinction of all contamination.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains:

(22) *Through knowing thoroughly, correctly and truly that all phenomena lack true and inherent existence, you will attain the sixth clairvoyance, the cessation of deluded*

obscurations, and *the excellent extinction of all contamination* i.e. attain the liberated path.

This is another really profound point that is being re-emphasised. It refers to the correct understanding of the lack of inherent existence of phenomena, i.e. the emptiness of phenomena. As the commentary explains, as a result of *knowing thoroughly and correctly that all phenomena lack true inherent existence, you will attain the sixth clairvoyance.*

Of the six types of clairvoyance, the sixth includes the cessation of all deluded obscurations. As explained previously, there are two obscurations, the first of which is the deluded obscuration, and the realisation of emptiness serves as the antidote that overcomes all those delusions. As explained here, the result of gaining that understanding is that one will obtain *the cessation of deluded obscurations, and attain the excellent extinction of all contamination.* This refers to obtaining the liberated path. That is the end result of having the endurance to understand the lack of inherent existence of phenomena.

23. The twenty-third quality is:

*298. (23) Through meditatively cultivating the wisdom of reality
Which is the same [for all phenomena] and is moistened with compassion
For the sake of liberating all sentient beings,
You will become a conqueror endowed with all supreme aspects.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je elaborates on this further:

(23) Through meditatively cultivating the wisdom of reality, which is the same for all phenomena, and is moistened with compassion – i.e. the wisdom realising emptiness combined with the essence of compassion - for the sake of liberating all sentient beings, you will become a conqueror endowed with all supreme qualities such as the perfection of generosity and so forth.

As explained here, when one cultivates the *wisdom realising emptiness*, combining it *with essence of compassion* it becomes the means to obtain all the supreme qualities of the perfections of generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort, and concentration. When one obtains the state of buddhahood one obtains the supreme qualities of all six perfections.

In summary, what is being explained is that through the combination of method and wisdom, complemented with the practices of the six perfections, one will become a conqueror endowed with all of the supreme qualities. This is the path that leads to the ultimate state of enlightenment.

There is another point that we need to bear in mind; the phrase *with all supreme qualities* means that we need to incorporate all of the perfections — generosity, patience and so forth — into our practice. All of these must be intact otherwise we will not obtain all the supreme qualities.

24. We come now to the second last of the twenty-five qualities, which is covered in these two lines:

*299ab. (24) Through multitudes of pure wishes
Your buddha land will be purified.*

Having referred to the causes for becoming a conqueror, the question of where a buddha resides may arise. This is answered here, where it states that the specific cause of the *purified* abode of the enlightened is a *multitude of pure wishes*. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

(24) Through multitudes of pure wishes, such as billions of infinite aspirational prayers, your buddha land will be purified.

This indicates that *billions of infinite aspirational prayers* over many lifetimes secures the attainment of the purified abode that is called the buddha land.

25. The last quality is:

*299cd. (25) Through offering gems to the Kings of Subduers,
You will obtain the state of emitting infinite light.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

(25) Through offering gems to the Kings of Subduers you will emit infinite light.

When Buddha Shakyamuni manifested the attainment of enlightenment, his body started to radiate light in all directions. So one of the enlightened qualities of a buddha is emitting incredible light throughout the universe. What, then, are the causes that one can create now to obtain that enlightened quality of emitting light? The teachings explain here that *offering gems* to reliquaries or images of the Buddha will become the cause to obtain that quality of *emitting infinite light*. Nagarjuna is presenting this teaching in very systematic and practical way. We could say that it is like really teaching a child reading and reading, which is a very gradual process. This systematic presentation is very suitable for us, as we are really ignorant of the Dharma. So we can see the greatness of Nagarjuna from his very practical presentation.

Next is the verse that summarises the chapter:

*300. Therefore knowing the concordance
Of actions and their effects,
Always help beings in fact.
Just that will help yourself.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this last verse:

Therefore knowing the concordance of actions and their effects i.e. the inter-relationship between the collections and their results, always help beings. In fact just engaging in that will help yourself.

We should reflect on this really practical advice. Although it was presented to the king, it is extremely profound advice when we take it as a personal instruction. Having explained in detail how to engage in the accumulation of the collections and their effect, we now need to consider *the concordance of actions and their effects*. This refers to *the interrelationship between the collections* that were presented earlier, and the specific effects or results that follow from that. Having studied and understood that, one then resolves to help other sentient beings. When one sincerely and wholeheartedly commits oneself entirely to the service of others then that, in itself, is the best way to benefit oneself. This verse really summarises the main point that I emphasise again and again in all of my teachings.

In brief, the optimum way to secure personal wellbeing is by benefiting others at all times.

Then the name of the chapter is presented.

The third chapter of the Precious Garland, A Compendium of the Collections for Enlightenment, is finished.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

The commentary on the third chapter of the Precious Garland of Advice for the King, a Compendium of the Collections for Enlightenment is complete.

As you will be aware, the next session will be the discussion session and following that is the exam. As I always

encourage you, have a good discussion with good intentions, and really try to share your understanding. Following a good discussion, a very meaningful approach is to try to write down the main points.

You have just heard about the benefits of stainless giving of the doctrine, and because we are discussing points about the Dharma we are giving the Dharma. For one's discussion about the Dharma to become stainless, one needs to be mindful that it is free from judgemental thoughts about others and making sure that one doesn't become agitated. This will be the way to secure that one's giving of the Dharma in discussion will be really meaningful and stainless.

Part of the commitment for the Study Group, as most of you are aware, is to recite Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* or *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. When we did the recitation for Lama Zopa Rinpoche's health, I mentioned that attendance at that session would suffice as the Study Group commitment, and that those who were not present would have to complete the recitation themselves as a part of their commitment. How many have not done the recitation of the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*?

Since there seem to be quite a few of people who haven't done the recitation, I am wondering if it would be worthwhile to have a group recitation again. This recitation is a really meaningful practice, and in fact many other geshe have praised me for giving people this opportunity as part of their Study Group commitment.

As all other weekends are allocated, we can do the recitation on Sunday 30 October. It is, of course, a commitment for those who have not yet completed that recitation, but it would be good for those who have already done it to come along too. I will be coming, because I consider the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* to be a primary practice. Even though I can't recite it every day, I do try to recollect the essential points of the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, is like a good companion practice that really helps my mind. So if one can generate a good attitude, a good state of mind, relating to the text then what more do we need? Of course, with the different doctrines in Buddhism, there are many famous texts, however the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* has all the essential points. Nothing is more supreme, you could say, than the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*.

It will be good to announce the date in the newsletter, presenting it as an invitation to all, rather than a Study Group commitment. After all, the Study Group people already know their commitment, so it should be presented as an activity for the whole centre, and emphasise that everyone is welcome to join. We should be inclusive rather than exclusive.

When we did the recitation for the health of Lama Zopa Rinpoche we finished it before noon, but it would be good to have lunch as well. So if you can have the lunch ready then we can see how we go for time. The recitation can be done in the same manner as we did for Lama Zopa Rinpoche, where we omitted the meditation, and concentrated on the text. Sometimes the meditation can be a bit of a distraction, because we are not really sure about what to do. It is much more worthwhile to focus one's full attention just on the recitation, and then, when we think about the meaning of the text, that becomes the meditation. That is the best way to do the practice.

Transcribed by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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