

When falsely praising others if they engage in senseless behaviour, it is because even if it is *useful but unpleasant*, then those words are hard to speak to anyone else. Hence *what could I, a monk, say to you, a king who is a lord of the great earth?*

Even when ordinary people are *engaging in senseless inappropriate behaviour*, it is *hard to speak unpleasant salutary words*, even though they are *useful*. That being the case, Nagarjuna is saying, "*How could I a simple monk approach you, a king, a mighty one, with unpleasant words?*" The main point that Nagarjuna is presenting here is how it is difficult to use words that are unpleasant to hear, even though they may be helpful. If that is hard for anyone in general, then how could a monk such as himself, (indicating a simple monk who depends on alms like a beggar, and who is in a lowly position) reproach a king, who as mentioned here, is *the lord of the great earth*, implying that he is the ruler of so many people on earth. Addressing the king in this way also shows Nagarjuna's great modesty and humility.

The third and final verse of this section reads:

*303. But because of my affection for you
And from compassion for all beings,
I tell you without hesitation
That which is useful but unpleasant.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

However, because of my affection for you and from compassion for all beings, I tell you without hesitation that which is useful and beneficial, even if it is unpleasant.

Out of his *affection* for the king as well as *compassion for all other beings*, Nagarjuna explains, '*I tell you without hesitation*'. The Tibetan word has the connotation of letting go of his personal concerns. Thus, Nagarjuna is saying that out the concern for the king and other beings he will speak these words because they are beneficial even though it is unpleasant to hear them. Here, Nagarjuna is explaining that there is no hint of self-interest in what he is about to tell the king, as it is for the sole benefit of the king and other beings.

2. INSTRUCTION TO LISTEN TO HELPFUL WORDS IN ACCORDANCE WITH BUDDHA'S ADVICE

*304. The Supramundane Victor said that students
are to be told
The truth — gentle, meaningful, and salutary —
At the proper time and from compassion.
That is why you are being told all this.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

It is appropriate to relay this to you O King, because the Supramundane Victor said that students are to be told the truth — gentle, meaningful and salutary — at the proper time and from compassion. That is why you are being told all this.

As presented here very clearly to the king, the Buddha explained that one's students or disciples, who are eager to learn must be told the truth. The manner of giving the advice is that it has to be the *truth*; that it has to be presented with a *gentle* approach; that what is being relayed has to be *meaningful and salutary*. It has to be mentioned at an appropriate time and to protect others from danger; and most importantly that it must arise *from compassion*. Here compassion relates to the motivation for presenting whatever is to be said to the students. The

motivation has to be out of compassion, and this is the reason why Nagarjuna is presenting these words to the king.

As many of us here are actively engaged in teaching or sharing the Dharma with others, this advice is really important. What type of motivation and in what manner should the Dharma be shared? When any advice from the Dharma is to be shared with others, whether it is on a general level or at a personal level to disciples, then what is to be uttered has to be the truth, and be conveyed in as gentle a manner as possible. It must also be meaningful and salutary, and delivered at a proper time, which indicates that even though it may be the truth and have all the other qualities, if it is not an appropriate time, then one may need to hold back for the time being. Then, when it is an appropriate time, and with the attributes that have just been described and a motivation of compassion, the advice is presented. It is important to keep in mind that we need to take this advice from the Buddha as a personal instruction when we engage in the sharing of Dharma and so forth.

The main point here is that when whatever is being presented is intact with the qualities of being the truth, meaningful and salutary, and is gently presented at appropriate time and with the motivation of compassion then, even though it may be temporarily unpleasant to hear, it is fitting to speak those words. It may initially sound unpleasant but if one's motivation is one of compassion, which indicates that there is no hint of personal gain or any ulterior motive and is only for the sole benefit of the other, then it will serve the purpose of benefiting the other. As mentioned earlier, this advice is not limited to sharing the teachings in a formal way, but to any advice or any communication one has with others. This is a really useful and important point to bear in mind.

3. ACTUAL EXHORTATION TO LISTEN TO WORDS HELPFUL TO ONESELF AND OTHERS

*305. O Steadfast One, when true words
Are spoken without belligerence,
They should be taken as fit to be heard,
Like water fit for bathing.*

Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning:

By addressing the king as O Steadfast One, Nagarjuna explains that wisdom endowed with joyous effort and concentration is steadfast and a distinctive feature of that is when true words are spoken without belligerence. Thus, they should be taken as fit to be heard, like seasonal water that is fit for bathing.

When wisdom is complemented with the qualities of *joyous effort and concentration* then it is *steadfast*, meaning that it is very firm and unshakeable. Ultimately we need to have the discriminating wisdom of knowing what is right and what is wrong, and that discriminating wisdom needs to be endowed with joyous effort and concentration. Then it becomes steadfast. The feature of a wisdom that is derived from joyous effort and concentration is that *true words are spoken without belligerence* or anger, and the words are *fit to be heard* because of the qualities they encompass. The analogy here is *seasonal water that is fit for bathing*, because of all the distinctive features it encompasses.

When we reflect back on the earlier points, we can see that there is an explicit sequence to giving advice or practising the Dharma. What we need to understand is that whatever virtue that we engage in, whether it is teaching others, or acquiring the qualities to incorporate into one's practice, the main point is that one needs to first have a good motivation, which is imbued with compassion.

Next, whatever practice we engage in needs to be endowed with joyous effort, which means that the practice is not done as if it is a chore, or with a heavy mind. Rather, when practices are engaged in with a joyous mind, voluntarily and through an understanding of their benefits, then they are fitting practices, and one does them with a happy mind. Thus there has to be joyous effort.

However if one's concentration is not so good, then one will not be able to derive the essence and full benefit of one's practice. Therefore concentration is essential.

Thus, one needs to complement joyous effort with concentration, then the wisdom that one ultimately gains from that is a sound discriminating wisdom that knows what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded. Then, when one engages in practices or as just explained, imparts advice or teachings to others, it will be without anger, without belligerence and will be beneficial. Thus, as the text says, *it is fit to be heard*.

This means that one recognises advice that comes with these qualities as being advice that will be beneficial for both the recipient and the one who is presenting it. On a wider scale, implementing that advice will be of benefit for others. So it is fit to be heard because it is a beneficial advice. If we slowly and gradually implement this into our life, we will definitely progress.

The next verse reads:

*306. Realise that I am telling you
What is useful here and otherwise.
Act on it so as to help
Yourself and also others*

As Gyalsab Je explains in his commentary:

*O King, realise that I am telling you what is useful and valuable here in this life, and otherwise in the next life.
Act on it so as to help yourself and also others.*

Then Gyalsab Je provides another way of interpreting the meaning of the words *here* and *otherwise*.

Here can also be interpreted to mean the benefit of stabilising your dominion, and *otherwise* to mean the benefit of spreading the Dharma.

Nagarjuna is saying "the advice that I am giving to you, O King, is to be understood as useful and valuable in this life, and in future lives". Thus it is extremely valuable advice because it has the temporary benefit of improving one's behaviour and so forth in this life, and also benefitting future lives. As the commentary explains, the advice can also benefit the king's citizens, as well as having the benefit of spreading the Dharma. Thus the advice being given to the king is beneficial all round.

The line *Act on it so as to help yourself and also others*, incorporates the main point of the advice, which is that when it benefits oneself it also has direct benefit for

others, and so it is fitting to act upon it. This point has been emphasised again and again in the teachings, where we are advised about how to engage in activities of benefiting other sentient beings. The recurring point, emphasised again and again is to engage in activities, whether they are verbal or physical, that always serve to benefit other sentient beings.

The real message that we need to derive from the text is to try to cultivate the mind of wishing to benefit others, which means lessening the grip of the self-cherishing mind. The direct opponent of the wish to benefit others is the mind that cherishes and is only interested in oneself. Thus, in order to generate the mind of wishing to benefit others, we need to release that grip of the self-centred mind. That is the essential practice; if we assume that we can find some high level practice somewhere else, we are completely missing the point.

We will not be able derive any essence from any other practice or teachings if we underestimate the point being emphasised here, which is the need to develop compassion and a good heart, loving kindness and the wish to benefit others. This is really the basis of all other practices, and this point is emphasised again and again. We need to really take this to heart and dedicate ourselves to that end, dedicating whatever we engage in to the benefit of others, thinking, "May it be of benefit for others. May it become a means to be of service to benefit others".

If we keep that in mind and remind ourselves of it again and again then we are actually putting into practice the advice that is given here. And this becomes our main practice. We need not feel that we are missing out on some other high level of practice if we are actually implementing what is being presented here in our daily life. If we can actually do that then we can be satisfied that we are practising appropriately. Too often we might think that we need to find some other high level practice or even another teaching. But where could we find another teaching that is greater than the Buddha's teachings, which emphasise the benefits of cultivating love and compassion and kindness for others. This is what we need to keep in our hearts.

B. EXTENSIVE EXPOSITION OF FLAWLESS POLICY

This section has three main subdivisions:

1. Royal policies
2. Instruction in non-degeneration and development
3. Achieving liberation and not forsaking the scriptures of the Great Vehicle

1. ROYAL POLICIES

This section is subdivided into five.

- 1.1. Increasing giving
- 1.2. Founding temples
- 1.3. Maintaining what was established earlier
- 1.4. Providing even for those who do not seek it
- 1.5. Way of appointing ministers

1.1. Increasing giving

This subdivision is covered in two verses, the first of which is:

*307. If you do not make contributions of the wealth
Obtained from former giving to the needy,*

*Through your ingratitude and attachment
You will not obtain wealth in the future.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

If you do not make contributions of wealth such as food and clothing, obtained from former giving in past lives, to the needy; ...

The heading *Increasing giving* indicates that one may be engaged in some form of giving right now but it may not be sufficient, and so one may actually have to increase one's level of giving. What is being explained here is that we have obtained the wealth, food and clothing that we have now from *former giving in past lives*, so it is fitting now to present that wealth to the *needy*.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues

...through your ingratitude and attachment, you will not obtain wealth in the future; thus it is appropriate to be generous now.

Here we (the king and ourselves) are being exhorted to engage in the acts of generosity, being mindful of the fact that what one has now, such as clothing, food and so forth, is none other than a result of one's generosity in the past.

It would be *ingratitude* to be hesitant about give to the needy now, because what one has obtained now is in fact a gift from those beggars and so forth who initiated our act of giving in the past. So it is due to the kindness of those beggars in the past that one has wealth now. Even though we may feel, "Oh, I worked to achieve this wealth", in reality it is due to none other than the kindness of the beggars in the past that we have wealth now. Our present wealth, such as food and clothing and shelter and so forth, is the result of generosity in the past, and one could not have engaged in the act of generosity without there being beggars. Therefore it is actually through the kindness of the beggars in the past that one has obtained wealth now, thus it would be ingratitude if one didn't give to the needy now.

Bring to mind that our present condition of having wealth and sufficient means is due to the kindness of others in the past. Because they have allowed us to engage in acts of generosity in the past, we have wealth and sufficient means now, so it is fitting to engage in acts of generosity now, so as to secure one's own future. Thinking in that way becomes an impetus to engage in the act of giving. Not only does it actually benefit others but it also secures our own well-being in the future. So it is fitting and appropriate to be generous now.

In simple terms what is being explicitly explained to the king (and ourselves) is that there is no point in being conceited and pompous about your wealth now, when in fact it is only result of your generous acts in the past. Nor is there any point in being miserly and having strong attachment to possessions now — it is far better to be generous and give to the needy and share with others. This is really profound advice.

Everything in relation to our current well-being is a result of acts in our previous lives. So we can be grateful that whoever we were in our past lives engaged in positive, virtuous deeds. Being grateful to that continuum of our past existence for our good fortune now is a reminder that if we don't continuously engage in virtuous deeds

now, such as generosity and so forth, then we will not there will be nothing left for our future lifetimes. So appreciating and feeling grateful for the good deeds done by our former existence can also be a reminder to continuously engage in good deeds now, in order to secure our future well being.

Ultimately this is an impetus to encourage us, and to show us many different ways to engage in virtue, to engage in Dharma practice. That is really the main point.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*