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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བུ་བླ་མ་གྱི་སྒྲིབ་པ།

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As we have generated our motivation along the lines of the refuge and bodhicitta prayer that we have just recited, we can engage in the practice of meditation now.

[meditation]

You can set your motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the purpose of benefiting 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 teaching and put it into practice well.

Setting a good motivation for whatever we do is essential for a positive outcome. The teachings always stress that we need to have a motivation that is of a special and pure intention before we engage in any practice. This is to ensure that the practice itself becomes meaningful and focused towards an appropriate end. Indeed, when we have a good motivation that is imbued with kindness and a genuine concern for others, then whatever we do will be meaningful and worthwhile.

In the study of the Dharma we particularly need to ensure that our study and practice becomes a means to overcome the delusions in our mind, such as pride, envy, sense of competitiveness and so forth. We first study the Dharma then practise it, in order to work towards the end of subduing the mind by overcoming the delusions. Otherwise, if we don't pay careful attention, the opposite may occur, where the more we study and gain knowledge, the more we become proud and pompous. We may also become competitive or jealous of others who are studying and practising. If this occurs then it is a clear sign that one has not been mindful of one's motivation, and that the whole purpose of one's practice and study has not been carefully considered. Our practice needs to be the means to subdue the mind, not to increase the delusions. Therefore we need to be really mindful and try to ensure that we carry that positive attitude into our daily life.

In order to subdue the mind the Buddha taught methods to overcome negative states of mind, so we need to identify the negative states of mind such as pride, envy and so forth. If they are not harmful then there would have been no reason for the Buddha to have prescribed antidotes for overcoming these negative states of mind. So we need to really recognise these states of mind as being detrimental to our wellbeing.

## 1. ROYAL POLICIES

### 1.1. Increasing giving

Of the two verses under this heading we have covered the first, and the second is:

308. *Here in the world workers do not carry Provisions for a journey unpaid, But lowly beggars, without payment, carry to your future life [What you give them] multiplied a hundred times.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Here in the world workers do not carry provisions for a journey unpaid, but lowly beggars, who ask you for food, clothing and so forth, without payment carry the effects to your future life, i.e. what you give them plus the interest, multiplied a hundred times. Thus, it is appropriate to appreciate beggars and to take great pleasure in practising generosity.*

There is nothing obscure about this, as it is quite clearly explained and therefore easy to understand. Normal workers, porters and so forth depend on payment for carrying your load. However when you give beggars even meagre provisions such as food and clothing, or some other minor thing, they help to carry the effects of your generosity multiplied a hundred times over into your future life, without any payment. Here a hundred times is not meant to be an exact figure, but an indication that the effect of generosity is greatly multiplied in future lifetimes.

The main point here is that even with minor acts of generosity, giving meagre food and clothing and so forth, to a beggar in this life, the positive effect of that is that those beggars will help you gain positive effects in a future lifetime. Even though it is without payment and you don't ask them to do so, the beggar provides the condition for you to experience the positive effect of that generous deed a hundred times over in your future lifetime. So the conclusion is that it is appropriate to appreciate beggars and to take great pleasure in practising generosity with them.

Sometimes we might become a bit annoyed when we encounter beggars, and even if we do give something we might give it out of annoyance. At worst we might end up not giving them anything. What is being indicated here is that we need not feel annoyed with beggars if we see that they provide the potential for us to accrue extensive benefits for the future. Thus, one should give to beggars with a great sense of gratitude and joy in one's mind. This is really profound advice.

An analogy is that if you were to give someone a watch knowing that you will receive a hundred watches in return, then you would be very glad to give your watch away. Far from being an act that deprives one of wealth and so forth, generosity is actually a cause for wealth to increase. Of course, there may be no immediate results, but with faith in karma then there will definitely be positive results in a future lifetime.

As will be indicated in the following verses, it is far better to invest one's wealth by being generous with it in order to secure a good future lifetime. The following verses are explicitly directed to the king, but as personal advice for ourselves we need to understand that whatever we may have now, it will be of no use at the time of death and beyond. In other words, if we don't utilise our wealth in an appropriate way now, then we will be impoverished

both in this lifetime and will fail to secure good conditions for our future lifetime, which would be a great pity. If one is suffering from poor conditions in this life and fails to engage in acts of generosity then one will be impoverished in the next lifetime as well.

Not only is the act of giving appreciated by others, but in some cultures it is known to be an actual means to gain more wealth. There is Chinese saying that if you give one Yuan away, you will receive a hundred in return. So they engage in the act of generosity, albeit with a temporary worldly concern of gaining more wealth in this life.

When we engage in the act of generosity, our intention should not be one of concern merely for this lifetime, but with a focus on the benefit for a future lifetime. To give with this attitude will ensure the practice is free from the stains of a temporary worldly concern. It is a good investment for our future life, as we need the stable conditions to practise the Dharma. When we have the good conditions then we can practice without worries. Being impoverished and lacking sufficient means is not comfortable, so it is worthwhile to consider our future lifetime as well.

The heading 'increasing giving' relates to the fact that since the good conditions we enjoy in this lifetime are a result of having been generous in the past, we need to increase our giving now, in order to secure our future lifetimes. This understanding will help us to actually engage in the act of generosity.

## 1.2. Founding temples

This heading is subdivided into three:

1.2.1. Training in exalted thoughts and deeds

1.2.2. Establishing good foundations<sup>1</sup>

1.2.3. Special achievement

### 1.2.1. Training in exalted thoughts and deeds

The relevant verse is:

*309. Always be of exalted mind  
And take delight in exalted deeds.  
From exalted actions arise  
All effects that are exalted.*

As Gyalsab Je explains in his commentary:

*Always be of exalted mind with the wish to benefit others, and take delight in exalted and extensive deeds. From exalted actions that are the cause, arise all effects that are exalted.*

All the effects that arise from exalted actions are exalted. This point is quite straightforward and not very obscure either. One always needs to be mindful of having an *exalted mind*, which is the *wish to benefit others*. With that mind as a motivation one will naturally *take delight in exalted and extensive deeds* that actually benefit others. Therefore, as explained here, *from exalted actions that are the cause, all the effects that naturally arise will be exalted effects*.

As I regularly emphasise, we need to have a good intention in whatever we do. Whether in our practice or in dealing with others, we should always try to maintain a good intention, and have a kind, considerate and compassionate attitude. When we secure that as our basis

then whatever deeds we engage in, in relation to dealing with others and so forth, it will be virtuous deeds bearing good fruit. We really need to be mindful about that.

One of the points being presented here is that if one wishes for exalted effects, then one needs to engage in the cause which is exalted deeds. In other words, without creating an exalted action as a cause, one cannot expect to experience an exalted effect as a result. An exalted action encompasses a good motivation of benefiting others, as well as the actual deed that is beneficial for others. Generosity is explicitly being presented here, however there are many other good deeds that are of benefit for others.

When deeds of generosity and so forth are complemented with the genuine and unique attitude of compassion and kindness then, due to the accompanying exalted state of mind that is the motivation, the deeds naturally become exalted deeds, and thus they bring about positive exalted effects. This clearly points out the cause and effect sequence of positive actions leading to positive effects, which is based on the karmic consequences. This is something we need to bear in mind.

There are two main components to any action that we undertake: the thought and the action. It is this combination of thought and the action that determines whether the deeds are positive or negative ones. If it is a positive thought, an altruistic state of mind, then the deed that accompanies that positive state of mind will naturally be a positive action. Whereas if the thought is influenced by a state of mind such as pride or greed and hatred and so forth, then the actions that follow will also be negative actions, and the deeds will be negative deeds. In this way we can understand that everything that we do, positive or negative is encompassed in these two main points—thoughts and actions.

I don't know about you, but I find this a very powerful and essential instruction. If one finds that one's mind is influenced by negative state such as anger, it is best not to utter anything, or engage in any physical action. Through experience we might have noticed the consequences of saying something when our mind is influenced by anger. What kind of words come out? We all know that they will not be pleasant ones. Likewise when our mind is influenced by intense anger, our physical actions are not very appropriate, and rather than being constructive actions, they become destructive ones.

When we begin to understand this, then the truth of this advice will be very evident—when the mind is influenced by intense anger, it is better not to say or do anything. That is the way to prevent further negativity and non-virtue from being created. So, this is really very profound advice.

We know from our own experience that a negative state of mind influences our speech and actions in a negative way. Although this is a very obvious fact, we might not really pay heed to this advice and just think, 'Oh yeah, I've heard that before'. Some new students, who have not really studied Buddhism very much, have confided that they find this point to be very meaningful, worthwhile and practical advice. Some older students, on the other hand, might be a bit complacent, thinking, 'Oh yeah, I

<sup>1</sup> Translated in the text as 'Achieving the four good qualities'.

have heard that before'. We can become complacent if we feel that this advice doesn't apply to us personally.

There is a Tibetan term which literally translates as 'blocked ears' which indicates feeling that the advice doesn't apply to oneself. I personally don't feel that my ears are blocked when I hear this advice. For me it still sounds very fresh and pungent. Those who experience blocked ears when they hear this instruction would be those who have done a bit of study, and who assume that they are at an advanced level of the teachings. With a feeling of pride they may think, 'Oh, this is simplistic advice, I know it already' and so their ears are blocked against accepting it as a personal instruction.

There is an analogy for how even profound advice may not be heard by someone who is propped up with pride. The analogy is, like a drop of water on a balloon, which never stays put but just rolls off. Also if a container is upright, water can be poured in and it will stay there, but if the container is upside down you can't fill it with water. A person without pride is able to accept and implement any personal instructions and sound advice, whereas the advice will not be received as personal instruction by someone who is propped up with pride. Another analogy often used in Tibet is that new grass begins to grow at the bottom of a hill and then slowly grows upwards. It never grows down from the top of the hill.

### 1.2.2. establishing good foundations

The verse relating to this is:

310. *Create foundations of doctrine, abodes  
Of the Three Jewels—fraught with glory and  
fame—  
That lowly kings have not even  
Conceived in their minds.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

*Create foundations of doctrine that lowly kings have not even conceived or could ever fathom in their minds. By creating abodes and representations of the Three Jewels, you will be fraught with glory and fame. Thus engage in the practice.*

The main point presented here is how to create the foundation; the very basis of the doctrine. It can also relate to creating representations of the Three Jewels as an object for others to develop faith and generate virtue. Thus the representation of the Three Jewels is related to the foundation of the doctrine. As mentioned here, by engaging in the noble act of creating the foundations of the doctrine, which previous kings may not have even conceived of doing, one's own fame and glory and so forth will definitely increase as a positive result of that.

### 1.2.3. Special achievement

The first verse relating to this heading is:

311. *O King, it is preferable not to create  
Foundations of doctrine that do not stir  
The hairs of wealthy kings  
Because [those centres] will not become  
famous even after your death.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary does not make any additional comment beyond basically reiterating the verse. However there is another commentary which explains the term

*foundations of doctrine* as being that which represents the doctrine and which generates faith and so forth.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*O King, it is preferable not to create foundations of doctrine that do not stir the hairs of wealthy kings, who are of equal status or lower than yourself, because those centres will not become famous even after your death.*

Another commentary explains that it is the deeds and so forth of those who do not have the proper intention will not be reputable, and thus not be considered as good deeds after their death. In other words their deeds have no worth.

*Does not stir the hairs of wealthy kings* has the connotation of not causing any emotion or feeling for other kings, i.e. the creation of foundations of doctrine will actually make wealthy kings angry and spiteful and so forth.

The next verse in this outline reads:

312. *Through your great exaltation use even all  
your wealth  
Such that the exalted become free from pride,  
[The equal] become delighted,  
And the inclinations of the lowly are  
reversed.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation in his commentary reads:

*Through your great exaltation, construct temples and so forth. Use even all your wealth, such that the exalted kings become free of pride, the equal become delighted, and the inclinations i.e. thoughts of inability, of the lowly are reversed. 'Your great exaltation' can refer to quelling pride in kings who are more powerful.*

This explanation is clear enough.

The following two verses are:

313. *Having let go of all possessions,  
[At death] powerless you must go elsewhere,  
But all that has been used for the doctrine  
Precedes you [as good karma].*

314. *When all the possessions of a previous  
monarch  
Come under the control of the successor,  
Of what use are they then to the former  
monarch  
For practice, happiness, or fame?*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je states:

*Without delay quickly engage in the practices for you will have to let go of all possessions, at death, powerless you must go elsewhere; but all that has been used for the doctrine, which is of sole benefit, precedes you as good karma. When all the possessions of a previous monarch come under the control of the successor, even if there is wealth left after death, of what use are they then to the former monarch, for practice, happiness or fame? In fact there is no use.*

These verses are exhorting the king to engage in the practice of Dharma without delay, by reminding him of the imminent prospect of death, when all possessions, wealth and power have to be left behind. However, it is explained, the positive effects of karma and virtue gained from acts of generosity and so forth will precede you into the next life. To further exhort the king he is reminded

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that at the time of death *all his possessions* and so forth will become the possessions of his *successor*.

Even if wealth does remain after death, it is of no use for practice because one cannot practice by being generous with it after death. Because the wealth is now under the control of the new monarch, it cannot be of any use for one's own happiness or fame. In saying *what use are they then to the former monarch, for practice, happiness or fame*, Nagarjuna is presenting a rhetorical question, and the obvious conclusion is that there is no use.

We need to take this as a personal advice. We need to bring to mind that it is good to try to use whatever wealth we have in a wise way, by being generous and so forth. Leaving a will seems to be a good practice but of course one is never sure whether one's wishes will be carried out. So it may be far better to use your wealth while you are still alive, rather than having to leave it for someone else to decide what to do with it. Nevertheless the idea of leaving a will is a good intention that tries to ensure that the wealth is put to a good use, as well as making preparation for one's death and so forth. In any case, the main thing is to use one's wealth and so forth in a wise way, for virtue.

The fifth verse under this heading is:

*315. Through using wealth there is happiness here  
in this life,  
Through giving there is happiness in the  
future,  
From wasting it without using or giving it  
away,  
There is only misery. How could there be  
happiness?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Through using your wealth, since you would not need to worry about protecting it, there is happiness here in this life. Through giving there is happiness in the future. From wasting it, through natural disasters such as fire and so forth, without using it for oneself or giving it away, there is only misery. How could there be happiness?*

If one has used one's *wealth* wisely there is *not* much *need to worry about protecting it*. And if you don't have too much wealth there is not much to protect so there will be less worry about that as well. By using your wealth wisely in providing help for others, you will enjoy the benefit of happiness in this life because you will be free from the worry of trying to protect that wealth and so forth. And if one actually engages in the act of being generous with one's wealth then there will be happiness in the future life.

If, by not *using wealth personally* or through generosity, that wealth is allowed to go to waste through natural disaster such as fire or theft and so forth, then *there is only misery*. In other words, if the wealth is lost through *natural disaster, fire and so forth*, one will not be able to use it oneself, which will be a waste. Likewise if one does not give it away, then the possessions and wealth will disappear. In that instance, the result will only be misery. The question *How could there be happiness?* indicates that there cannot be happiness.

We can definitely see many examples of people who experience great suffering when they lose all their wealth and money and so forth without having been able to use it for themselves or to give it away. I often joke that those who lost their wealth in the recession are now experiencing quite a bit of unhappiness, whereas those who didn't have money to lose in the recession are not sad because they didn't have anything to lose anyway. People who put their money into investments for the future have lost any possibility of using their wealth in the future.

Of course one must not misinterpret this to mean that we should not consider having wealth at all. Rather wealth needs to be used in a meaningful way. That is the main point. If one were not able to utilise wealth in a meaningful way then it would be a pity if it goes to waste.

It will be good to try to read the text periodically and try to derive the meaning from it. In that way you will benefit from studying it.

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