

# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པོའི་བཀའ་བཀའ་ལྟོས་པའི་སྐུ་ལོ་ལོ་ལོ།།

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Along the lines of the motivation generated by reciting the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the meditation practice. When we recite the refuge prayer, we need to bring to mind the full implication of what refuge entails, and when reciting the prayer of aspiration for bodhicitta, we need to recall what bodhicitta implies and bring that to mind. Doing that will suffice as a good motivation for whatever practice we do. It is good to keep this in mind.

[meditation]

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings. We reaffirm the motivation that we established earlier, and then contemplate these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the Mahayana teachings and put them into practice well.

## 2.1.2.2. MAKING ONESELF COMPASSIONATE

This has three sub-divisions:

2.1.2.2.1. Providing out of compassion

2.1.2.2.2. Being compassionate especially to the wicked

2.1.2.2.3. The correctness of the above

### 2.1.2.2.1. Providing out of compassion

This is explained in the following verse, which relates to being compassionate to others, and in particular to criminals and so forth.

330. *Even to those whom they have rightfully fined,  
Bound, punished, and so forth,  
You, being moistened with compassion,  
Should always be caring.*

Gyaltshab Je's commentary explains the meaning of the verse in this way:

*Even to those they have been rightly fined with penalties of wealth, bound in prison, punished with beatings and so forth by governing bodies, you, being moistened with compassion should always be caring, such as pardoning those who seek forgiveness.*

The governing powers, or those in authority, determine the punishments for those who break the law or who have acted inappropriately. As mentioned here, these punishments include being *fined with penalties of wealth, or bound in prison* (which means imprisonment), or *punished with beatings* (which occurred in the past) *and so forth*. Even though others may consider such punishment appropriate, 'You, the king, *being moistened with compassion*, should not follow suit and administer such harsh punishments'.

This indicates that the king should practise forgiveness; those who have transgressed are in a pitiful situation and are therefore objects of compassion. They are not objects of scorn and further suffering should not be inflicted upon them. As they are already experiencing great suffering they are objects of compassion. So the king is being exhorted to display

compassion by pardoning those who seek forgiveness and so forth.

We need to derive the essence of this advice and apply it as a personal instruction. The king, as the direct recipient of this advice, is being exhorted to exercise a genuine sense of love and concern, not only for his subjects in general but in particular the pitiful criminals. Although governing bodies may use their authority to determine the severity of a punishment, Nagarjuna is exhorting the king to use his powers as a ruler to take the initiative intervene and pardon or reduce the punishment for those who have committed an offence.

We should gain a real understanding of the essential point that is being explained here and apply it to our own personal life. If we encounter others of a wicked nature then, instead of feeling angry, we need to develop a genuine sense of compassion for them. They may have done wrong, but they have done so out of confusion and delusion, which is a really pitiful state. So we should feel compassion for them.

By relating to their plight we can generate a greater sense of compassion. We don't readily develop compassion for those who are doing quite well (having wealth and so forth); our usual object of our compassion is those who are in a pitiful state, who undergo real hardship and difficulty. This is where we can increase our compassion. Rather than focusing on those who are doing well, we focus on those who are suffering, and who are thus objects of our compassion.

The great master Chandrakirti mentioned in his *Madhyamaka* text that the way to develop a deeper sense of compassion is to think about the plight of sentient beings who are in samsara. Their constant suffering is due to the interdependence of the twelve links, and contemplating these points becomes an impetus for us to develop a really deep sense of love and compassion for other beings. Chandrakirti really emphasised this point and it is important for us to pay attention to that. Thinking about beings who are suffering instils a sense of compassion within us.

Another essential point explained in the text is that the king should always be caring, which has the connotation of continuous, ongoing love and compassion for other beings. We have all experienced occasional feelings of love and compassion, but that is not sufficient to cultivate an unceasing love and compassion towards other beings. Rather our sense of love and compassion needs to be continuous and ongoing. Just as the king is being exhorted to always care for those beings, we too need to take that as a personal instruction. If we are to develop a genuine sense of love and compassion, we need to meditate and think about compassion on a continual basis.

We also need to derive a deeper understanding of the points that are mentioned here. Even when others are *bound in prison* and *harshly punished with beatings by governing bodies*, *you, being moistened by compassion*, need to *pardon those who seek forgiveness* and so forth. So the main point for us to understand is that the king is being exhorted to practise a true sense of non-violence. If he were to agree with the delivery of harsh punishment, there would be an aspect of harmful intent, because punishment (whether it be a financial penalty, imprisonment or beatings) definitely involves harm.

Whenever a harmful action is carried out, a harmful intention is also involved. Therefore if the king were to approve harsh punishments, there would be harmful intention from the king's side as well. The king would then

be forsaking non-violence, which would go against the fundamental principle of the Buddha's teachings — the Buddhadharma. The teachings explain that the basis of the Buddha's doctrine is non-violence. So the king is reminded of this essential practice of the Buddha's teachings, 'Lest you forsake an act of non-violence, you must ensure that you do not engage in punishments that will cause harm to other beings'.

As mentioned previously, we need to derive the essence of the advice given here and really try to apply it to our daily practice. If one develops and practises love and compassion for others, then naturally the sense of harming others will not occur. We never have any intention of harming those for whom we have a true sense of caring and love and compassion - that is only natural. Conversely, when the sense of love and compassion for others begins to decline then a sense of wanting to harm them could occur. Therefore, as the advice presented here indicates, when one develops a true sense of love and compassion for others, any intention to harm them will naturally be removed.

#### 2.1.2.2.2. *Being compassionate especially to the wicked*

For those of a particularly wicked nature, one needs to develop the sense of love and compassion even further.

The verse relating to this reads:

*331. O King, through compassion you should  
Always generate just an attitude of altruism  
Even for all those embodied beings  
Who have committed awful ill deeds.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Even for all those embodied beings who have committed awful deeds, such as the heinous crime, O King, through compassion you should always generate just an attitude of altruism with the wish to benefit them, and not to forsake them or ever generate harmful intentions.*

This advice relates to those beings of a wicked nature who have committed particularly heavy negative karma, such as the *heinous crimes*, another translation of which is *immediate retribution*. The Tibetan word has the meaning of there being no break in-between. This means once the negative karma of a heinous crime (for example, killing one's mother) is committed, then the immediate next lifetime will be an unfortunate re-birth in the lower realms, unless that negative deed is purified in this lifetime. The term *immediate retribution* carries the meaning that, such is the gravity of the negative karma, the consequence of the negative karma from the heinous ill-deed in this lifetime will be experienced in the immediate next lifetime. Beings who have engaged in such negative deeds as killing their own mother may seem oblivious, lack in any sense of remorse and seemingly live a happy life now. However if we were to consider the consequences, and the great suffering they would have to experience in the future, then it becomes very clear why they are an object of immense compassion.

Understanding why an individual who has committed such a hideously negative deed is an object of great compassion, is very much dependent on a profound understanding of karma. When one has a deep understanding of karma, one will be able to realise that although engaging in such a negative deed may not render immediate karmic consequences in this lifetime, the consequences will definitely be experienced in a future lifetime. Thus a profound understanding of karma will actually prevent one from engaging in negative deeds. We may have a general understanding of karma, knowing that if we engage in

negative deeds, we will experience negative consequences and that if we engage in positive deeds, we will reap the positive results. However a simplified interpretation of karma may not suffice to move one's mind to be cautious about engaging in negative deeds.

We may find ourselves engaging in negative deeds without really paying much heed to the consequences. If we find that whatever practice we do, meditation for example, is not bringing about any change to our mind, then that is said to be the consequence of negative karma. Having a mind that remains very rough and self-centred, and showing no real improvement, is said to be the consequence of the negative karma that we have created in the past. If we fail to purify our negative karma, then whatever practice we do will not have much effect in transforming our minds, which will remain very solid and stubborn.

While a very profound understanding of karma will result in one being very conscientious and cautious about not engaging in negative deeds now, it will also instil a profound level of intention to purify the negative karmas that one has accrued in the past. Recalling all the negative deeds that one has committed in previous lifetimes will be an impetus to employ really strong purification practices. The combination of purifying previous negative karmas, while henceforth avoiding creating any new negative karma, is a means for real personal transformation to take place. So we need to understand that a real sense of compassion for those who engage in negative deeds will only come about if we have a profound understanding of karma, knowing how they will experience the negative consequences of their act, if not in this lifetime, then definitely in future lifetimes. With the prospect of great suffering in the future, they are an object for great compassion.

The essential point to be understood from this presentation is the importance of gaining a profound understanding of the interdependent connection between cause and effect. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama emphasises in his teachings again and again, it is essential to gain a deep understanding of the interdependent connection between cause and effect. Such an understanding is really the basis for understanding karma and based on that, one will be able to relate pleasant and unpleasant experiences to the previous causes that one has created. With such an understanding we will gain a more profound and deeper level of understanding of what practice involves.

The definition of negative karma, or negativity, is that which brings about an unpleasant result. So having an understanding of the meaning of non-virtue and negative karma will instil a wish to avoid creating negative karma and non-virtuous deeds. The only resolution for the negative deeds and non-virtuous karma that have already been created in the past is to engage in purification practice. When we engage in a purification practice which incorporates all of the four opponent powers, then it is possible to purify any negative karma that has been created. One needs to have a complete understanding of the gravity of the negative deeds one has committed in the past, and develop a real sense of regret and a strong wish to not create negative karma again in the future. Then one engages in purifying those acts by doing whatever practice is necessary to purify the negative karmas. This is another way to develop a positive state of mind such as compassion.

At our basic level, living a spiritual life or a life of Dharma practice, from a Buddhist point of view, is subsumed into two main points. First of all we need to consider two

questions. What is it that I wish for? And what is it that I do not wish to experience? The answer to the first is happiness and well-being. And the second is not to experience any unpleasantness or suffering.

Based on our wish of not wanting to experience any suffering, unpleasantness, problems or difficulties and wanting to experience well-being and happiness, we then contemplate the definition of virtue. The very definition of virtue is that which brings about the result of joy and happiness or pleasantness. In contemplating what virtue means, and the consequence of that in relation to our own experiences of non-virtue, one then considers the state of mind with which one is most familiar. Is it a non-virtuous or a virtuous state of mind that I am more acquainted with?

If one finds more acquaintance with virtue and a virtuous state of mind, then the natural consequence will be happiness and well-being. One will experience the result even if one does not actively wish for it — happiness is a natural consequence of having a virtuous state of mind. Even if you were to say 'I don't want happiness' it will still naturally come about through acquaintance with a virtuous state of mind! [*Geshe-la laughs*]. Conversely if one was more acquainted with a non-virtuous state of mind in the past, one will naturally experience the results of unpleasantness, problems and difficulties now, and will do so again in the future. That will be the case for as long as we harbour a non-virtuous state of mind.

So if we were to simplify our practice, it falls into these two crucial points: If I do not wish to experience suffering and unpleasantness then I need to avoid creating the cause, which is non-virtue, and if I wish experience happiness and well-being, then I will have to employ the cause which is virtue. As I regularly say, I never claim to have high levels of experience or realisations, or that I engage in high levels of practice. On a daily basis I do simple practices, and that is what I share with you. So if you find this is too simplistic and you have other means of engaging in higher levels of practice, then you're welcome to do so! [*laughter*]. If you intend to engage in higher levels of practices meditating on deities and so forth and whatever else you may be interested in, leaving aside love and compassion and the understanding of karma, then that is up to you. However it is doubtful that you will ever achieve the intended results.

#### 2.1.2.2.3. The correctness of the above

This heading relates to the appropriateness of generating compassion — why that is so and why it is correct.

The verse relating to this reads:

332. *Especially generate compassion  
For those whose ill deeds are horrible, the  
murderers.  
Those of fallen nature are receptacles  
Of compassion from those whose nature is  
magnanimous.*

There are five particularly evil and negative ill-deeds: *killing one's mother*, killing one's father, killing a foe-destroyer or arhat, drawing blood from a buddha or an enlightened being with evil intention, and creating a schism amongst the Sangha. These are called the five heinous crimes, although there are of course many other heavy negative deeds as well. These five heinous crimes are crimes of immediate retribution.

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

It is appropriate to *generate compassion especially for those whose ill deeds are horrible* such as those who engage in the heinous crime of killing one's mother and so forth, because *those of fallen nature are receptacles of compassion from those buddhas and bodhisattvas, whose nature is magnanimous.*

In explaining the appropriateness of generating compassion, the word *especially* has the connotation of applying *compassion* particularly to those of a wicked nature who engage in wicked deeds, because they are *of fallen nature*. The Tibetan word translated here as *fallen nature* has the meaning of falling from the essence of the Dharma. If we understand the essence of the Dharma as being non-violence, then those who have engaged in such heavy negative deeds have fallen from the very essence or nature of the Dharma. Because they are in such a predicament, they are objects of compassion and thus *receptacles of compassion from those buddhas and bodhisattvas, whose nature is magnanimous.*

To back up this point, the commentary quotes from the *Four Hundred Verses of Yogic Deeds*.

Just as a mother is especially,  
Anxious about a sick child,  
Bodhisattvas are especially,  
Compassionate toward the unwise.

This verse uses an analogy to explain why bodhisattvas are especially compassionate towards those who are unwise or, more literally, un-noble. Here the unwise or un-noble are those who have engaged in heinous crimes, such as killing their own mother. Everyone accepts that killing one's mother is a particularly horrific negative deed, because there has been no-one kinder than our own mother. She conceived and gave birth to us, and nurtured us when we were growing up. Whatever we have achieved thus far is due to the kindness our mother. Taking her life instead of repaying her kindness is accepted by all as a most negative deed.

The one who commits such a horrific deed is an object of compassion because the gravity of their misdeed is such that there will be very grave consequences. Bodhisattvas feel compassion for such a being *just as a mother is especially anxious about a sick child*. This analogy refers to a mother's paramount concern for her beloved child's illness and her desire to cure the child.

A mother of, say, four or five children will have more concern and love for the child that is sick. Just as the mother is anxious and concerned about her sick child, the bodhisattvas are especially compassionate towards those who are unwise or, more literally, un-noble. The translation refers to beings of a wicked nature as being un-noble in order to contrast them with noble beings who have such great qualities and a virtuous state of mind. Those who have engaged in grave negative deeds such as killing their own mother are the complete opposite of those with a virtuous state of mind, so they are called un-noble.

Bodhisattvas have great compassion for such unwise beings, because of the gravity of their misdeed and the consequences of their negative karma that will inevitably be experienced in their very next life. In this way they are analogous to those who are gravely ill — their illness is that they will have to experience considerable suffering in the future. So by seeing such a prospect for these beings, a bodhisattva will feel great compassion for them.

### 2.1.2.3. FREEING PRISONERS AND MAKING PRISONS COMFORTABLE

This is divided into two sub-divisions, [which is not specified in the translation of the text that we are using.]

The subdivisions are:

2.1.2.3.1 Releasing them from prison

2.1.2.3.2 Ensuring the prisons are comfortable.

#### 2.1.2.3.1 *Releasing them from prison*

The first verse relating to this heading reads:

*333. Free the weaker prisoners  
After a day or five days.  
Do not think the others  
Are not to be freed under any conditions.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Free the weaker prisoners, who are less powerful and so forth, after a day or five days. However do not think the others who are more powerful are not to be freed under any conditions.*

The next verse in this outline reads:

*334. For each one whom you do not think to free  
You will lose the [layperson's] vow.  
Due to having lost the vow,  
Faults will constantly be amassed.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*For each one whom you do not think to free, you will lose the laypersons vow and incur a non-virtuous vow. Due to having lost the vow you will not be able to take the one-day vow, and due to incurring a non-virtuous vow, even though you may not be actively engaged in a non-virtue such as killing, nevertheless faults will constantly be amassed that serve as causes to be reborn in the lower realms.*

Here the king is being exhorted to free prisoners. Each prisoner the king does *not think to free*, will cause him to *lose the laypersons vow and incur a non-virtuous vow*. We make vows in a positive sense when we vow not to kill and so forth. A non-virtuous vow is the opposite to that - one may make a vow to commit a negative act such as vowing to kill. For example, I'm not sure if it still occurs now, but I once heard that when you enter the army, you have to pledge that you will go to war and engage in acts of killing. When such a pledge is made then, from that day onwards, even if one is not actively engaged in killing, one will experience the negative results of that on a constant basis, because of the non-virtuous vow one has taken. As you have heard, the benefit of making positive commitments and taking vows such as not killing, is that from that time onwards, as long as one observes the vow, one will be unceasingly obtaining the virtue of keeping that vow. The virtue created by making that vow continues even during one's sleep and so forth.

Therefore, if the king were to harbour thoughts of not freeing prisoners, that would become a non-virtuous vow. Through having lost the layperson's vow, he would not be able to take the one-day vow, because if one does not have the layperson's vow as a basis, there is nothing on which to base the one-day vow. So, as the commentary reads, *having lost the vow you will not be able to take the one-day vow, and due to incurring a non-virtuous vow, even though you may not be actively engaged in a non-virtue such as killing, nevertheless faults will constantly be amassed that serve as causes to be reborn in the lower realms*. Thus the king is exhorted to not engage in any grave misdeed, which is yet another reason for him to free prisoners.

We need to know that just as there are positive vows, there can also be negative vows such as making a vow to kill. For as long as one does not relinquish that negative vow, one will continue to incur negative deeds from that non-virtuous vow.

The main thing is to try to put it into practice. You may not pay heed to everything I say, however Nagarjuna's advice is extremely profound, kind and beneficial. It covers everyone, lay people and ordained Sangha, as well as those who wish to practise tantra and undertake further practices. He presents the basis for all levels of practice, and so his advice is appropriate for the whole range of beings. The advice Nagarjuna gives in his treatise *Letter to a King* is also particularly intended for the lay community.

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*Edited Version*

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