

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བཀའ་ལྟོས་པའི་གསུང་རྒྱུ་ལོ་ལོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Having generated our motivation during the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the meditation practice. [meditation]

We can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: In order to benefit all sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching, and put it into practice well.

2. INSTRUCTION IN NON-DEGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

2.2.1. Achieving practices (cont.)

2.2.1.2. EXAMPLES

There are three verses relating to this, the first of which is:

340. *The birds of the populace will alight upon
The royal tree providing the shade of patience,
Flourishing flowers of respect,
And large fruits of resplendent giving.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je states:

The birds of the populace will alight upon the royal tree providing the shade of patience, flourishing flowers of respect, and large fruits of vast and resplendent giving.

The next verse is:

341. *Monarchs whose nature is generosity
Are liked if they are strong,
Like a sweet hardened outside
With cardamom and pepper.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins by posing this rhetorical question:

If asked whether it is sufficient for the King just to be patient?...

In response to this the commentary explains:

...Even though *monarchs whose nature is generosity*, in the face of intolerable crimes *they are liked if slightly wrathful and strong*. It is *like a sweet hardened outside with cardamom and pepper*, which is bitter on the outside but sweet inside. ...

Here, the English translation uses 'cardamom and pepper'. The Tibetan word describes a type of herb that I have actually tasted; it initially tastes bitter and as it is chewed there is a sweetness like molasses or sugar inside. There is a similar herb that is said to be very good for stomach ailments, which again is a little bit hot on the outside but sweet in the inside. It is said to have a poisonous element, but can work towards curing ailments such as stomach aches. In any case, the text is using an analogy of something that is bitter and a little hot on the outside but sweet like sugar or molasses in the inside.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

...Likewise you must be soft on the inside but wrathful on the outside while being heedful

The king is being advised that under certain circumstances he may need to show an aspect of wrathfulness towards

difficult citizens, such as criminals. Although he may need to show an aspect of wrathfulness on the outside, seemingly without patience, he is advised that when he does so he needs to maintain and never lose the sense of love and compassion within. Thus he must always be softened with compassion in his heart. Here, it advised that practising patience does not necessarily mean that one needs to be jovial and smiling all the time. Under certain circumstances the king may need to show wrath, nevertheless he should always maintain compassion and a sense of joy within his heart.

When one maintains an internal sense of joy without losing the sense of compassion towards others, one will not fall victim to anger or hate. Although one may need to show wrathfulness on the outside in order to control a situation, one needs to always maintain a sense of inner joy, and maintain a sense of compassion, and a kind mind. Whilst this advice is directed to the king, we also definitely need to take it as a personal instruction. The main point of the advice is that practising patience does not mean that we cannot show an aspect of wrathfulness on the outside. Rather it means that we should not become internally angry and upset and thereby lose our sense of inner joy.

342. *If you analyse with reason thus,
Your governance will not degenerate.
It will not be without principle
Nor become unreligious but be religious*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

If you analyse what has been explained previously with reason, your governance will not be corrupt and degenerate. It will not be without principle nor become unreligious; in fact the irreligious will become religious. Thus engage in the practices accordingly.

If the profound advice about the manner of governing the country, which has been *previously presented with reason*, is put into practice, the beneficial result will be that the *governance will not be corrupt and degenerate* and order will be maintained in the kingdom. Saying *it will not be without principle nor become unreligious, in fact the unreligious will become religious*, means that although practices which may seem unreligious from a conventional standpoint (e.g. to those in the prison system, prison guards and so forth who have the authority to administer punishments) they will become religious if they are carried out in accordance with the Dharma.

Even measures that conventionally seem unreligious become religious if the manner in which they are conducted is with the motivation of genuine compassion and concern for the other. The main point to be derived and taken as personal instruction is that when the method of the Dharma is applied, what may otherwise be unreligious can actually be transformed into a Dharma practice. This is an essential point that we need to understand in order to apply it in our daily life. If the motivation and thought behind any action is accordance with the Dharma, then the actions will be religious, and that in itself is very profound advice.

An example of how a seemingly unreligious action becomes a religious one by virtue of the motivation is, for example, the action of placing one's body on the ground repeatedly. Generally speaking it is just a physical gesture, and not necessarily a religious practice. However, when it is done with the proper motivation, understanding and respect, then it is called *the act of prostration*. As we all know, prostrating is a great way to accumulate merit and a great method of

purification. So it is the motivation behind that physical activity which makes it a Dharma practice.

Likewise we cannot claim that, in general, walking is a religious practice. However if we are walking to receive a teaching or going on a pilgrimage, the very act of walking is said to become a Dharma practice by virtue of its purpose. We are walking to receive a teaching with the intention of gaining wisdom in order to benefit other sentient beings. So with that motivation in our mind, walking to the teachings becomes a great virtuous practice. Thus walking to and from the teachings can be incorporated into the practice of Dharma because of the motivation behind it

Conversely, if one is walking towards something that will harm other beings, then every step taken towards that action will create negative karma. Although the act of walking itself does not create the negative karma, when it is done with a negative motivation it will become negative karma. So one needs to understand that what determines whether an act is in the nature of a practice is determined by the motivation. Through that, one can turn something not normally considered as a religious practice into a religious or Dharma practice.

It is through this explanation that we begin to understand how the accumulation of virtue or negativity in our actions of body, speech and mind is dependent on the motivation behind it. There is no other way for us to engage in either virtue or negativity other than through the three aspects of oneself which are the body, speech and mind. With a positive motivation in mind, every gesture and movement we make through our body, speech and mind is said to become virtuous by virtue of that motivation. When in a negative state of mind, every action created by our body, speech and mind becomes non-virtuous, thereby creating negative karmas. This is a very profound way of integrating the Dharma into our everyday life, and become a way to create virtue. That is the benefit of receiving the teachings and instructions.

While we may lead a seemingly normal life, going to work and engaging in normal worldly activities, we can make every act a virtuous one by beginning our day with a proper motivation. Rather than setting out for work thinking 'I have to go to work because I need to make money', if we generate a proper motivation such as 'May my work become a means to benefit other sentient beings' and we do not specifically think about the money—although there is no question that we need it to sustain ourselves—then our work will become a virtuous act.

Indeed when we engage in our work with a positive motivation, the immediate beneficiary is the boss. If we become slack and neglect our work then that will upset and harm our boss, who pays us to fulfil certain tasks, whereas if we undertake our work with efficiency and a good intention our boss will thus gain immediate benefits, and we will have engaged in a right livelihood. So we really need to understand how we can turn engaging in work, which is the means for our survival, into a practice of Dharma. This is a practical way of understanding how we are not deprived of the conditions to practise Dharma and accumulate virtue if we generate a proper motivation. So we need to incorporate this practice into our daily life.

Furthermore, if we can apply the practice of patience in our daily life, we will see the benefits when we go to work. As mentioned previously if we make it a priority to apply patience to whatever activity we are engaged in then, when we encounter someone who is difficult to deal with, rather

than them becoming an object of distress, they can actually become an object to further enhance our practice of patience. Rather than being regarded as someone to scorn and avoid they can be used as an object of great learning. This is how we need to see the value of the practice of patience.

People often lament, 'Oh I had a very difficult day today because there was someone who caused so many problems'. When others are seen as being a problem then that in itself becomes a problem for ourselves; we have allowed it to become a problem because we have not practised patience. Just today, a young man told me about someone who was causing him difficulty at work. He said, 'having heard and seen the value of the teachings, even though the person was difficult, I didn't allow them to disturb me, because I applied whatever practice of patience that I have to the situation'.

This shows that if one takes the initiative, then a seemingly difficult situation will cause only minimal disturbance. As I emphasise again and again in my teachings, we need to maintain a sense of love and compassion in our heart in whatever activity we engage in. We always need to remind ourselves, 'may my actions not become a cause to harm others but only a means to benefit them'.

As I often emphasise, I can't claim to have engaged in any high level of practices, but I can at least say that every day, I pay close attention to ensure that my state of mind is one of genuine consideration for others. I avoid any hostile thoughts and harmful intentions in my mind. I always try to maintain a sense of love and compassion in my mind. This is something to which I pay specific attention.

Of course, that is not to say that I don't make an attempt to engage in other levels of practice, for example, the generation and the completion stages of tantra, emptiness and so forth. These are very profound high levels of practice and I cannot in any way claim to have mastered any of these, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't make an attempt to acquaint ourselves with these very precious practices. Of course we need to make attempts to engage in higher forms of practices, but on the practical level we must maintain the practice of patience, love and compassion in our daily life.

Patience, love and compassion are accessible practices, and it is essential that we practise and a genuine consideration for others on a daily basis. This is something that I regularly emphasise, and it is really important to keep this in mind.

As the teachings advise, we need to engage in the practices of purification and accumulation. The Tibetan word for practice incorporates both; the practice of purification is to purify negative karma and the practice of accumulation is to accumulate virtue.

Practising *virtue* means increasing virtue in one's mind and the most extensive way to do that is to meditate on love and compassion. All the masters agree that the most practical way for us to increase virtue is by developing love and compassion in our hearts. The practice of *purifying negativity* is to acknowledge negative karmas we have created in the past and to engage in a practice with the intent to purify them so that we don't have to experience the consequences of those negative karmic imprints.

2.2.2. Ceasing non-virtues

The first verse relating to this outline is:

343. *You did not bring your dominion with you from your former life
Nor will you take it to the next.
Since it was gained through religious practice,
You would be wrong to act against the practices.*

The condensed advice in this verse is a very profound instruction to the king.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

O King, *you did not bring your dominion with you from your former worldly existence, nor will you take it to the next. Since it was gained through religious practice, it would be wrong for you to act against the practice for the sake of your dominion, which was obtained through the practices.*

This is simply saying that there is no doubt that the king's dominion and majesty are great, however he is being told that he didn't bring his present regal status from a past life, and nor can he take it with him into the future. His status is none other than the result of former practice; *it was gained through the religious practice* that was done in the past. That being the case, the king is told, it would be wrong to now engage in activities which are against Dharma practice *for the sake of your dominion, which was itself obtained through the practices.*

There are a lot of profound points mentioned in this seemingly simple advice. It incorporates the understanding of impermanence and an understanding of karma in that what is experienced now is the result of previous virtuous deeds. It also points out the practices for overcoming a great sense of pride. Lest the king falls victim to pride about his own majesty and regal status, he is being reminded that 'What you experience now is none other than the results of previous good deeds and is not something you have brought with you into this life'.

We can incorporate this instruction and advice at a personal level by thinking about our own precious human rebirth. As explained in the teachings, our present precious human life is a result of practices such as observing morality and making stainless prayers in the past. It is through those conditions, aided by the practice of generosity and so forth, that we have obtained this precious human life.

However we will not necessarily take our precious human rebirth with us to a future lifetime, which is why a human rebirth is considered as a very rare and precious condition. We worked very hard in our past lives to obtain what we have now, so it would be a great pity and loss if we were to completely waste it by engaging in negativities that will prevent us from obtaining precious human rebirths again in the future. We need to interpret the advice as being directed to ourselves and incorporate the main points into our own personal life.

Furthermore, we need to understand the great and precise reasoning that is being presented here. It is pointed out to the king that, 'Whatever regal majesty you now experience, your dominion is not something you found by mere chance. It is none other than the result of having engaged in the practice of Dharma'. Presenting the advice to the king in this way provides many reasons to assist the contemplation of these essential points.

When applying this advice to ourselves, we need to incorporate an understanding of how the conditions we

enjoy now with our own precious human rebirth did not come about by mere chance, and it was not easily obtained. Rather it is a result of many virtuous causes and conditions that we had created in the past. By using such reasoning we remind ourselves that wasting our precious human life would be really shameful. Just as we have obtained this precious human life as a consequence of previous practices of virtue, we must continue to apply those practices now, in order to achieve a precious human rebirth in the future.

The profound and logical reasoning presented here is that our present good fortune is the result of previous virtue, which indirectly encourages us to further engage in virtue continuously.

The next verse reads:

344. *O King, exert yourself
To avert a sequence
Of miserable supplies for the realm
Through [misuse of] royal resources.*

The advice in this verse seems to relate particularly to paying heed when engaging in trading - buying and selling merchandise and so forth.

In relation to this Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

O King, exert yourself to avert a sequence of miserable supplies (which, if of good value when purchased gives rise to pleasure and if bad to suffering) for the realm through misuse of royal resources. If your dominion is not sustained by Dharma now, the future generations will result in mass suffering. Thus you must resolve, 'I will not allow this to happen'.

Again, this is very profound advice. Generally, if one purchases something of value, it gives rise to pleasure which would be a cause for developing strong attachment, while purchasing something that is not of any value will result in unpleasantness and suffering that will be a cause for anger to arise. When the activity of trading causes either attachment or anger to arise, then those activities will become a means to acquire non-virtue, which is contrary to Dharma practice.

The king is, 'You must pay heed and not *misuse the royal resources*'. He is advised, '*If your dominion is not sustained by the Dharma now, your future generations will result in mass sufferings, so you must resolve to not allow this to happen*'. Thus the king is being exhorted to be mindful that he is not a cause for this to happen.

The next verse reads:

345. *O King, exert yourself
To increase the succession
Of the dominion's resources
Through [proper use of] royal resources.*

Although these verses are not ambiguous or difficult to understand, we must ensure that our understanding is not superficial, thinking 'Oh yes, I understand what this means'. Rather, we must go beyond the surface to determine where and how the verse is related to the previous advice. We need to understand the depth and profundity of the reasoning and the manner in which it has been presented. Then our understanding of the meaning of the verses will be much more profound, rather than just skimming the surface.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

O King, exert yourself to increase the succession of the dominion's resources, so as to ensure the benefit of future generations, through proper use of royal resources. You must ensure that the resources of your dominion don't become the means to buy succession

of suffering, but rather that it becomes the means to buy a succession of dominions.

This is presenting the king with another essential point: make sure that you use the resources of the dominion in the proper way, so they don't *become a means to buy* future suffering. This is saying in a very straightforward and simple way to the king, 'Don't use your resources now to purchase future suffering, which will be the case if they are used now to engage in non-virtue'. Misusing \ resources to engage in non-virtue now, is equivalent to purchasing future suffering, which of course is the case with respect to karma. By creating non-virtue now, it's as if one is buying suffering to be experienced in the future.

In conclusion, as the commentary says, *rather* you must use your resources now as a *means to buy a succession of dominions*. This means the king should ensure both his own well-being, and that of future generations, by using his wealth to gather further resources and *dominions* for the future. This implies that if we use our resources in a proper way, in accordance with the Dharma, to accumulate virtue, then they become a means to secure further well-being and dominions in the future. This is, again, very practical advice.

The king is being advised here in a very simple way to not use his resources to buy suffering, but rather to use it to purchase further dominions. We can also apply this advice at a personal level. We need to understand how we must pay heed to not using our time and energy to acquire further suffering, but rather utilise our time and energy to create virtue, and in that way secure future happiness for ourselves.

3. ACHIEVING LIBERATION AND NOT FORSAKING THE SCRIPTURES OF THE GREAT VEHICLE

This section of the text is sub-divided into two:

- 3.1. Training in the path of liberation
- 3.2. Stopping forsaking the scriptures of the Great Vehicle

3.1. Training in the path of liberation

Here there are two sub-divisions:

- 3.1.1. Refuting inherently existent objects of attachment, pleasant and painful feelings
- 3.1.2. Both Lesser Vehicle practitioners and Great Vehicle practitioners equally realise the subtle emptiness

3.1.1. Refuting inherently existent objects of attachment, pleasant and painful feelings

This is sub-divided into three:

- 3.1.1.1. Refuting real feelings of pleasure
- 3.1.1.2. Refuting inherently existing pain
- 3.1.1.3. Result of the refutation

3.1.1.1. REFUTING REAL FEELINGS OF PLEASURE

This again is sub-divided into three:

- 3.1.1.1.1. Transition
- 3.1.1.1.2. Brief indication
- 3.1.1.1.3. Extensive explanation

Having gone through the headings now, we can leave the explanation of them for our next session.

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