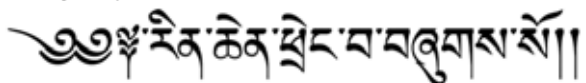


# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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Bearing in the mind the motivation that we need to cultivate for the practice of meditation, we can reflect upon the meaning of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* that we have just recited. Everyone is aware of the physical posture needed for the practice of meditation, so we can adopt the appropriate physical posture as well. Although we are fortunate in having all the physical and mental conditions for the practice of meditation, whether we put them into practice or not depends on ourselves. Since we already have the right conditions, it is our responsibility to actually engage in meditation if we are to subdue our own minds. We can now begin the meditation. [meditation]

It is really worthwhile to engage in a daily meditation practice just as we have done so now, as a means to enhance the seed of love and compassion that we already have within us.

## 3.1.1.1. REFUTING REAL FEELINGS OF PLEASURE

### 3.1.1.1.3. Extensive explanation (cont.)

#### 3.1.1.1.3.2. Refuting the entity of real pleasure

We need to bear in mind that the real pleasure that is identified here as the object of refutation refers to inherently existent pleasure, pleasure existing from its own side, or independently. If someone were to ask, 'Is there pleasure?' then the correct answer is, 'Yes, there is pleasure'. But what is being refuted here is the existence of independently or inherently existent pleasure. The term 'emptiness' refers to the negation of inherent existence of all phenomena, so we need to apply this understanding whenever emptiness is mentioned in the teachings.

Time and again, the teachings remind us how we have the misconception of seeing objects that we perceive as being inherently existent. We totally believe in that mistaken appearance and then grasp at as being inherently existent.

When we relate to pleasure, it appears to us as if the pleasure actually exists from its own side, as if it is an independently existent, solid, concrete pleasure. When we strongly believe that pleasure exists from its own side, then our attachment or grasping at the pleasure increases. So we need to train our mind in understanding that pleasure does not exist in the way that it appears to us, but rather in dependence on name and mental imputation. In other words, we are merely labelling pleasure as pleasure on a suitable base to be labelled pleasure.

Apart from the name and label there is no truly existent pleasure from its own side, so the more we familiarise ourselves with this understanding the more it helps us to definitely reduce strong grasping, and longing for pleasurable experience. In that way our understanding actually helps us to reduce our attachment, and thus the pain and complications arising from attachment are also reduced. When we gain the actual realisation of emptiness, we will be able to subdue our mind and free it from the control of the delusions such as attachment. Meanwhile, even just a correct intellectual understanding can also help

us to reduce strong attachment. So to that effect it is good for us to really see the significance of this presentation.

We need to gain a good understanding of how things actually exist in mere name and label through mental imputation. When it is explained that a label is merely imputed upon a valid base, this negates existence from its own side. This is completely opposite to how things appear to us. When we see a beautiful object, the quality of beauty appears to us as existing from its own side, as actually existing on the basis on which the label 'beauty' is imputed. We don't perceive it as being merely labelled, or merely imputed on a base. Rather we see it as existing from its own side, and when we totally believe that the beauty truly exists from its own side, our attachment to the object increases. So, we need to really understand how beauty exists in mere name and label.

It is also important that we gain the correct understanding of what is being refuted. The Prasangika point of view does not refute the existence of beauty altogether. If the question is whether there is beauty, then the answer is 'Yes, beauty does exist, but not independently from its own side'. However, as mentioned earlier, when we perceive beauty in an object, it appears to our ordinary minds as existing from its own side. As explained in the teachings, if beauty actually existed from its own side, or independently, then we would have to be able to find it when we search for that beauty in the object. However with thorough analysis of the basis of imputation, there is no possible way that we can find beauty existing independently from its own side. Based on that analysis we arrive at the correct understanding that beauty does exist, but not independently, and that beauty exists merely as a name and a label imputed by our mind.

At this point we need to understand that 'mental imputation' does not mean that we can impute any label on any object. In order to remove that doubt, the teachings explain that a name and label can be imputed only upon a valid base. When a name and label is imputed upon a valid base, that object actually needs to be able to function in accordance with the label. For example, when the label 'person' is given to a valid base, i.e. the parts of a person, which are the five aggregates, there is actually a person that exists conventionally and functions as a person. However that person does not function ultimately or independently. Likewise, when the name and label 'clock' is imputed upon a suitable base, it has to be able to function as a clock. So when we refer to this clock on the table, it does exist and function conventionally by giving us the correct time. Thus, it has to be understood that a name and label can be only imputed upon a valid base. So that when the name and label is imputed, the basis actually functions in accordance with that label.

The verse relating to this outline reads:

361. *Also because consciousnesses, feelings, Discriminations, and compositional factors Altogether and individually are without essential factuality, [Pleasures] are not ultimately meaningful.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse by first presenting the assertion that is to be refuted:

If you say: Because *feelings, consciousness, discrimination, and compositional factors* occur simultaneously, they exist inherently.

Of the five aggregates, the form aggregate was the subject of the previous verses, and here the remaining four aggregates,

listed as feeling, consciousness, discrimination and compositional factors, are asserted as occurring simultaneously.

The five aggregates are.

- The form aggregate, which relates to our physical body.
- The aggregate of feeling determines whether we have pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings or neutral feelings.
- The aggregate of consciousness refers to our primary consciousnesses.
- The aggregate of discrimination is a specific mental function that identifies aspects of an object, such as its shape and colour and so forth.
- The compositional factor encompasses all of the other functions that do not fit into the other four aggregates, such as our negative emotions of anger, jealousy, and hatred and positive emotions such as love and compassion and so forth.

Gyaltsab Je then presents the refutation of this assertion.

[Refutation:] That is not possible, *because consciousnesses, feelings, discriminations, and compositional factors, altogether and individually are without essential factuality.* Thus, pleasures are *not ultimately meaningful.*

The five aggregates either combined together or individually, are without essential factuality. This means that, just like the elements, the five aggregates cannot exist inherently, either combined together or individually. *Thus, the conclusion is that pleasures are not ultimately meaningful, indicating that they cannot exist ultimately or inherently.*

The refutation of the five aggregates existing inherently either as a combination or individually uses the same logic as that used to refute the elements, which was presented last week.

### 3.1.1.2. REFUTING INHERENTLY EXISTING PAIN

Just as with pleasure, the answer to the question, 'Does pain exist?' is that, 'Yes, pain does exist'. What is refuted here then is inherently existent pain. So while pain does exist, inherently existent pain does not exist.

As the relevant verse reads:

*362. Just as lessening of pain  
Is fancied to be pleasure in fact,  
So destruction of pleasure  
Is also fancied to be pain.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Having negated that desirable objects are causes for meaningful pleasure, by establishing their nature and reasons, the negation of undesirable objects as causes for inherently existent suffering is now being established.

Just as the text refuted the assertion that the pleasure caused by a desirable object is *meaningful* or inherently existent, this presentation refutes *inherently existent suffering* caused by *undesirable* or unpleasant objects.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

*Just as lessening of the feeling of pain is fancied to be meaningful pleasure in fact, so destruction of pleasure, where one does not experience the slightest manifest pleasure, is also fancied to be inherently existent pain.* However, pain does not exist inherently even in the slightest, for it is merely a dependent phenomenon.

As explained in the past, what we experience as pleasure that is none other than the lessening of pain. When there is a lessening of pain then that is experienced as pleasure. The

Tibetan term for what is translated here as 'fancied' also has the connotation of taking pride in what is considered to be pleasure. So the text is explaining that the pleasure we take pride in is none other than the lessening of pain.

In the event where pleasure is removed, we experience pain and we don't experience even the slightest manifest pleasure. And we perceive the pain as being truly or inherently existent pain. But, *inherently existent pain does not exist even in the slightest, for it is merely a dependent phenomenon.*

As with all other refutations of inherent existence, this refutation of inherently existent pain is based on the fact that it is an interdependent phenomenon, and thus it cannot exist inherently.

### 3.1.1.3. RESULT OF THE REFUTATION

What is the result of having refuted the inherent existence of pleasure and pain? Do we gain anything? This is explained in two subdivisions.

3.1.1.3.1. Liberation through realising emptiness

3.1.1.3.2. Identifying the mind realising emptiness

#### 3.1.1.3.1. Liberation through realising emptiness

The verse relating to this reads:

*363. Thus attachment to meeting with pleasure  
And attachment to separating from pain  
Are to be abandoned because they do not  
inherently exist.  
Thereby those who see thus are liberated.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je states:

As mentioned previously, both desire and the object of desire lack inherent existence. *Thus, by meditating on the emptiness of inherent existence, attachment to meeting with pleasure, and attachment to separating from pain will be abandoned, because they do not inherently exist.*

*Thereby, having abandoned desire one does not create any karma, thus those who see this are liberated.* It is when one sees interdependent origination as being free from all extreme fabrications that one is liberated. Thus, you must strive to realise emptiness.

Here Gyaltsab Je is very compassionately encouraging us to gain the realisation of emptiness, for all of the reasons that have been presented earlier. *Attachment to meeting with pleasure, and the attachment to separating from pain* arises as a consequence of adhering to the misconception that pleasure and pain are inherently existent. That attachment will be abandoned when one meditates on the emptiness of inherently existent pleasure and pain.

*Thereby as mentioned here, having abandoned desire one does not create any karma, thus those who see this are liberated.* When one ceases to create karma, one will obtain the state of liberation, being free from the karmic consequences of attachment to pleasures and the lessening of pain. Here, not creating any karma refers particularly to not creating the propelling karma to be reborn in cyclic existence. One would still create other karma, but the particular karma of being propelled into cyclic existence, or samsara, will be abandoned.

Having exhorted one to realise emptiness, the next question presented in the text is: How do we identify the mind that realises emptiness? What is that mind? What type of mind realises emptiness? In this way we can see Nagarjuna's skilful method in presenting the teaching very systematically with logical reasons. He presents the material just as one

would educate young children—an important point being clearly presented, followed by another to point to back that up, and so on.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, identifying the mind realising emptiness relates to the misconception held by some that emptiness means not seeing anything at all. The doubt that arises here is: Why is it called the mind realising emptiness? Is it because it sees nothing or is it because things are merely imputed? The fundamental question to be answered is: Do you call it the mind realising emptiness because things are merely imputed, and if not why is it called the mind realising emptiness?

### 3.1.1.3.2. Identifying the mind realising emptiness

As explained in the commentary the mind realising emptiness is mind of an arya being in meditative equipoise, which realises emptiness directly, thus overcoming the very root of ignorance (i.e. grasping to the self), as well as all the misconceptions that are present with that ignorance. The actual realisation of emptiness is when those misconceptions are completely removed. Thus one must guard against the misconception that negates actual existence, establishing nothingness. Some non-Buddhist schools, such as the Forders, reached that very conclusion i.e. that they would reach a state of mind of nothingness. They assert a state of no-consciousness as being the highest state of realisation. There is a great danger in making that assumption.

The verse that relates to this reads:

364. *What sees [reality]?  
Conventionally it is said to be the mind  
[For] without mental factors there is no mind  
[And hence minds and mental factors] are  
meaningless, due to which it is not asserted  
that they are simultaneous.'*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

If asked: *What sees* reality then?

[Response:] The mind that sees ultimate reality does not itself exist ultimately, for *conventionally it is said to be the mind* of meditative equipoise characterised by the absence of dualistic appearance with respect to emptiness, and which is produced and disintegrates moment by moment.

Older students will be familiar with this point, as I have explained it in detail many times previously. However, as a reminder, what is being identified here is how the mind perceives emptiness directly in meditative equipoise, which, as mentioned here, is characterised by the absence of dualistic appearance. As explained many times previously, the absence of dualistic appearance refers to the absence of three appearances:

- The appearance of subject and object as being separate
- The appearance of true existence
- The appearance of conventional existence or conventionality.

All of these three appearances are absent for the mind in meditative equipoise that is directly realising emptiness. The only thing that appears to the mind in meditative equipoise meditating on realising emptiness is emptiness. Nothing else but emptiness appears to that mind.

However the mind that realises emptiness directly is itself a conventional truth, or conventionality. Even though the mind is realising an ultimate truth, the subject itself, which is the mind realising emptiness or ultimate truth, is itself a

conventional phenomenon. That is because it is a mind that is produced and disintegrates moment by moment.

Furthermore, a mind that perceives the mind that directly realises emptiness, apprehends it only as a conventional phenomenon. What appears as ultimate is only emptiness, so conventional phenomena cannot appear as being the ultimate to a mind that sees the conventional.

The main point here is that the mind itself is a conventional truth. Thus while the meditative equipoise single-pointedly perceiving emptiness sees the ultimate, that mind itself is not the ultimate. Although it is a mind characterised by the absence of dualistic appearance with respect to emptiness, it is itself produced and disintegrating moment by moment, and is thus a conventionality.

Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse in this way:

That mind is merely a dependent arising and does not exist inherently. For *without mental factors there is no mind and no mind without mental factors and hence minds and mental factors are meaningless.*

Furthermore, mind cannot possibly see itself, just as the tip of a finger cannot touch itself, and *it is not asserted that two separate minds could possibly be simultaneous.*

Basically this is refuting the assertion that there is a separate mind that knows the mind because the mind has the ability to see itself. *Furthermore, no two separate minds could possibly exist simultaneously*, refers to the mind and the mental factors. As the mind functions in relation to its mental factors, the mind and mental factors are dependent on each other and so cannot arise distinctively and simultaneously in the one mind. They are always dependent on each other.

The main point this subdivision is to clearly identify the actual mind realising emptiness.

### 3.1.2. Both Lesser Vehicle practitioners and Great Vehicle practitioners equally realise subtle emptiness

This is explained in two subdivisions:

3.1.2.1. Necessity of realising subtle emptiness even to attain liberation

3.1.2.2. Difference between the Lesser Vehicle and the Great Vehicle

#### 3.1.2.1. NECESSITY OF REALISING SUBTLE EMPTINESS EVEN TO ATTAIN LIBERATION

The Tibetan word, *teg pa* translated here as 'vehicle' has the connotation of being able to hold or carry. So the terms 'Lesser Vehicle' and 'Great Vehicle' refer to the size of the load that can be carried or held.

The Lesser Vehicle is referred as such because it holds primarily one's own purpose, which is self-liberation. Whereas, the Great Vehicle upholds the aspiration and determination to liberate all sentient beings from sufferings. So the distinction between the Great and Lesser vehicle relates to the number of beings to be liberated.

The point here is that regardless of whether one is inclined to practise the Great Vehicle or the Lesser Vehicle, one needs to gain the realisation of emptiness in order to be liberated. Without the realisation of emptiness there is no way a practitioner of the Great Vehicle, can liberate themselves, let alone liberate others.

At a personal level, if one wishes to be liberated there is no other way than to gain the realisation of emptiness. As there is no-one who does not wish for liberation from suffering, and everyone naturally wishes for liberation, we need to

understand that the ultimate method for gaining liberation is through the realisation of emptiness.

The significance of this presentation is the importance of understanding that one needs to gain the realisation of subtle emptiness. This implies gaining the most subtle realisation of emptiness as presented by the Prasangika or Consequentialist school, i.e. the emptiness of things existing from their own side or inherent existence. One needs to gain an understanding of that level of emptiness, in contrast to the emptiness that is presented by the lower schools.

The verse that relates to this explanation reads:

365. *Knowing thus correctly, just as it is,  
That transmigrating beings do not exist in fact,  
One passes [from suffering] not subject [to  
rebirth and hence] without appropriating  
[rebirth],  
Like a fire without its cause.*

Gyalsab Je's commentary explains:

*Knowing thus correctly, just as it is, that transmigrating beings do not exist inherently in fact, one passes from suffering not subject to rebirth and hence without appropriating rebirth, like a fire without its cause.*

*Knowing thus correctly* means knowing without any fault, to the subtlest level, that *transmigrating beings do not exist inherently in fact*. Emptiness is classified into the emptiness of person and the emptiness of other phenomena. Basically, when the emptiness of person and the emptiness of phenomena are realised correctly without any error, then *one passes from suffering, not subject to rebirth and hence without appropriating rebirth*. *One passes from suffering not subject to rebirth* refers to the fact that once the cause of rebirth, which is the ignorance of grasping at a self, is removed, one passes beyond, which means abandoning the cause to ever be reborn again uncontrollably in samsara.

For an arhat, that means overcoming the very seed of ignorance, which is the grasping at a self. Because the arhats lack any grasping at a self through gaining the realisation of emptiness, they have removed the seed that is the very cause of samsara. So there is no cause for them to reborn again in cyclic existence. Thus they are liberated. But although they have removed the seed of ignorance they have not abandoned its imprint.

Whereas on the Mahayana path, at the level of path of meditation on the eight ground (when the delusions have been completely eradicated), the arya being will not be reborn again in samsara as a result of grasping at true existence or grasping at a self. Not *appropriating a rebirth* means that they will not be reborn again in cyclic existence, and from then on, cyclic existence completely ceases. The analogy used here is *like a fire without its cause*. Just as there cannot be fire without its cause, likewise rebirth is not possible without the cause for appropriating rebirth. That is how the rebirth in samsara ceases completely.

The essence of this explanation is that the way to achieve the cessation of the causes for samsara is to completely overcome their root cause, which is the misconception of grasping at a self. That misconception is overcome by applying an appropriate and powerful antidote. As explained in the teachings that antidote is the mind that focuses on the same object as the mistaken mind that grasps at a self, but with a diametrically opposed apprehension.

The misconception that grasps at the self focuses on the self, and the mind that realises selflessness also focuses on the self, but they are the antithesis of each other. While the mind

that grasps at a self focuses on the object of the self, apprehending the self to be inherently or truly existent, the mind that realises selflessness, which has the same object of focus, the self, apprehends it as being totally empty of inherent existence. Both minds focus on the same object but have diametrically opposed apprehensions of that object which is the self or person.

That misconception that grasps at the self is the cause for samsara, so when that grasping at the self is overcome, then the cause for samsara is naturally eliminated. Then there is no cause to propel one into another rebirth in samsara. The powerful antidote that achieves this result is the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness, which completely destroys the apprehension of a truly existent or inherently existent self.

We can see from our own experience that all our desires and aversions arise because of an initial strong grasping at the self. Our strong attachment to what we want or aversion towards what we don't like, plus all of the other delusions propel us to create karma. The stronger our notion of a self or a stronger sense of 'me', the more we enhance the importance of that 'me' and 'I'. Then, in response to that strong grasping at the 'I', we create negative karma through our actions of body, speech and mind. It is that combination of our grasping at the self and the karma that we create that propels us into samsara.

By grasping at what is satisfactory to ourselves, and feeling aversion to that which opposes us, we create the karma that propels us into samsara. So one needs to understand clearly that it is only when one gains the realisation of emptiness that one is able to overcome the subtle grasping at a self.

The misconception of grasping at a self is grasping at a truly or inherently existent self. So when one realises that a truly or inherently existent self does not exist in any way, one gains the realisation of selflessness or emptiness.

Gyalsab Je's commentary continues:

This presentation clearly shows that even hearers and solitary realisers can have the realisation of subtle emptiness. As it is mentioned in the sutras, 'even those who wish to train on the hearers ground' and so forth....' and 'If you wonder how the Tathagata transforms a hearer'....' Also presented in the hearer's scriptures there are passages such as, 'Forms are likened to foam/ and so forth.

There are presentations of emptiness in the scriptures that are presented to hearers. However one needs to understand that the scriptures that are intended solely and uncommonly for the hearers do not have a presentation of emptiness, whereas the scriptures that are intended for both hearers and bodhisattvas do have a presentation of emptiness.

*As mentioned here, in the hearer scriptures there are passages such as 'Forms are likened to foam', and feelings are likened to water bubbles and so forth. In the hearer's scriptures there are examples of each of the five aggregates—form, feeling, discrimination, consciousness and compositional factors. Each one of the analogies indicates the non-inherent existence or emptiness of the five aggregates. Thus forms are likened to foam which is not very durable, and disintegrates very easily; feelings are like water bubbles, which can burst any moment; discrimination is like a mirage; consciousness is like an illusion; and compositional factors are like the plantain tree, which doesn't have any essence.*

This explanation of emptiness with these analogies is presented in the hearer's scriptures. And it is also explained

in the Madhyamika, or Middle Way teachings, and in the commentary on bodhicitta and so forth. The main point that one needs to understand is that the presentation of emptiness is not directed to the hearers who adhere to the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika tenets, but to hearers who are adherents of the Prasangika view. The conclusion we draw here, is that in order to realise emptiness it is necessary to adhere to the Prasangika view of emptiness.

### **3.1.2.2. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LESSER VEHICLE AND GREAT VEHICLE**

This section is a response to the valid question: What difference, then, is there between the Lesser Vehicle and Great Vehicle? In the Middle Way school there is a clear presentation that when the hearers and solitary realisers realise emptiness and then further enhance their understanding of emptiness they gain arhatship, which is the final goal of the Lower Vehicle.

On the Great Vehicle path, the bodhisattva path, when one reaches the eighth ground of the bodhisattva there is a cessation of the causes for rebirth in samsara, and they are free from the control of delusions and karma. However, while an arhat will remain in that blissful state of liberation, in a blissful meditative state, the bodhisattvas intentionally choose to be reborn in samsara. Because of their aspiration to benefit all sentient beings, they continuously choose to be reborn in samsara again and again, until all beings reach enlightenment. Without understanding this difference, one may question the distinction between the Lesser and Great Vehicle.

The following verse relates to this point:

*366. Bodhisattvas also who have seen it thus,  
Seek perfect enlightenment with certainty.  
They make the connection between lives  
Until enlightenment only through their  
compassion.*

In presenting the meaning of the verse Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with an assertion:

If you say: This was presented for the sake of obtaining the Mahayana liberation.

Then it presents the refutation:

[Refutation:] This is not so because *bodhisattvas* also, *who have seen emptiness thus, seek perfect enlightenment with certainty.* 'Bodhisattvas also' implies that hearers see emptiness.

The commentary continues with another assertion:

If you say: What difference is there then between the Great and Lesser vehicles and that there would be no cause for the bodhisattva to remain in samsara?

Bodhisattvas vow that they will remain in samsara until all sentient beings are free of samsara. So if they have achieved the cessation of the causes to be reborn in samsara then how can they actually come back to samsara?

As the commentary explains:

[Response:] There is no fault as such because *they [bodhisattvas] make the connection between lives until enlightenment only through their compassion;* and not by taking rebirth under the control of karma and delusions.

Even though bodhisattvas have removed the cause to be reborn involuntarily and uncontrollably in samsara, out of their compassion they vow to come back to samsara as a way of benefitting sentient beings. If they lacked compassion then when they reached the state where there is no more

suffering there would be nothing to stop them from remaining peacefully there, without having to bother about this complicated place called samsara. However the reason why they are compelled to come back to samsara again and again in order to benefit all sentient beings is their great compassion for sentient beings.

This point is emphasising the preciousness of compassion. As the Madhyamika teachings mention, compassion is important in all three instances, in the beginning, in the middle and at the end. For the bodhisattva, at very beginning this compassion compels them to practice on the bodhisattva path to reach enlightenment. In the middle when they have removed the cause of samsara, and have no more suffering, they voluntarily come back to samsara to benefit sentient beings. And even at the end, when they are enlightened, they continue to benefit sentient beings out of their compassion.

Bear in mind that next Tuesday is the discussion evening. It is the time for you to really revise the material and have a good discussion amongst yourselves, as a way to further your understanding of the presentation here. It will be very good to do the discussion with a sincere wish to benefit each other. On the following week there is the exam. Again, it is good for you to come and to write your answers, and in that way familiarise your mind with the material. It will be good to do that well.

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