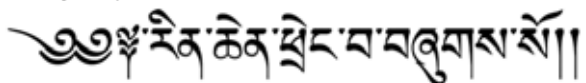


Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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With a motivation generated from the meaning of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* that we have just recited, we can engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of benefitting all sentient beings, to remove all suffering and bring 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.

3.2.1.2. PROVING THAT THE GREAT VEHICLE SCRIPTURES ARE THE WORD OF BUDDHA

3.2.1.2.1. Deeds of the six perfections (cont.)

3.2.1.2.1.2. The aims of the Great Vehicle are taught in the Great Vehicle scriptures

The verse relating to this heading is:

381. *Others aims are [achieved] through giving and ethics.*

One's own are [achieved] through patience and effort.

Concentration and wisdom are causes of liberation.

These epitomise the sense of the Great Vehicle.

Here, the aim of practising each of the six perfections of the Great Vehicle is presented in terms of their accomplishments. Although the commentary will further explain the aims of the six perfections, you also need to have a general idea of how the six perfections assist a bodhisattva to complete their deed of benefitting other sentient beings.

It is said the bodhisattvas make the vow to remain in samsara to benefit other sentient beings. Thus, it is due to their aspirations and prayers that they intentionally remain in samsara, and not because of afflictions and delusions.

- In order to be able to practise the Dharma, generate the paths and benefit other sentient beings, one needs to have a life that is intact with the eight freedoms and ten endowments. These are obtained through the practice of morality, which is the first perfection.
- However, it is not sufficient just to have good physical conditions. One also needs to have adequate external conditions such as having sufficient means in order to sustain one's practice on the path. These are obtained through the practice of generosity.
- Furthermore, one needs to have a good retinue of followers in order to benefit others, and that is obtained through the practice of patience.
- Then, in order to engage in practice to accomplish the aims of oneself and others, one needs to have joyous effort.
- In order to ensure that the practice and accomplishments of the first four perfections do not become causes for delusions to be generated in one's mind, one needs to protect one's mind. This can be done by developing stable concentration on a virtuous

object. Thus the perfection of concentration helps one to not be overwhelmed by the delusions.

- Lastly, with the aid of the perfection of wisdom, one will be completely liberated and freed one from the grip of the delusions.

So the last two perfections ensure that the first four perfections are not corrupted or stained by delusions.

Earlier, the text advised us to use this life as means to further accumulate merit, rather than use up what we have already accumulated. The text that we studied during the recent Easter Retreat also indicated that now is the time for us to utilise our existing merit and virtue to accumulate even more virtue. It is not the time to use up all our good karma and thus completely waste it. What is being explained here is also in line with that advice. We need to utilise whatever merit and virtue we already have as a means to accumulate further virtue, in order to secure perfect conditions for our next life, which will enable us to continue practising the Dharma. That is how we need to understand this advice.

The way to accumulate sufficient virtue and merit to secure good physical conditions in a future life is the practice of **morality**.

We know, from our own experience, that without sufficient resources it is very difficult for us to maintain our practice, let alone benefitting others. Thus we need to have sufficient resources, thus the practice of **generosity**, will secure such resources in the next life.

We also need to have assistants, companions and so forth (described in the teachings as a retinue) for our study and practice, and for that we need **patience**. Other results achieved through the practice of patience include having a sound body, good features, a good complexion and so forth.

However just having those conditions alone are not sufficient, as we might fall victim to laziness. We know all too well how easy it is to fall victim to the laziness of procrastination, when we think, 'I'll do it later on', or when we feel overwhelmed, and think, 'Oh, I'm not able to do this practice, so why bother?'. Such laziness can consume us to a point where we do not actually engage in Dharma practice. So we need to apply **joyous effort** to ensure we are diligent with our practice of Dharma and meditation.

Yet when we accumulate all of those conditions, such as having a good sound body, sufficient wealth and a good retinue, it is all too easy for those very conditions to become a means for delusions to arise in the mind. Thus, through attachment we may waste those very good conditions. Here, **concentration** helps us to withdraw from the delusions by focusing on a virtuous object.

Finally, it is by developing **wisdom**, in particular, the wisdom of special insight based upon focussing on emptiness that we will be thoroughly released from the delusions. Here, we need to understand that developing calm abiding through concentration and developing special insight are equally important, as it is through the union of calm abiding and special insight that we will be completely released from the delusions.

It is really important to gain a personal understanding of how the six perfections help us to develop and transform ourselves. The six perfections serve as specific antidotes for overcoming specific delusions or faults in our mind. Morality helps to protect us from unethical and immoral behaviour; generosity protects us from the fault of miserliness; patience protects us from anger; joyous effort

protects us from laziness; concentration protects us from deluded distractions; and wisdom protects us from corrupt wisdom.

It is good for us to understand how all of the bodhisattva deeds are contained within the six perfections. Bodhisattvas' deeds can be categorised into two:

- The deeds that are done to fulfil the aims of others, also called the purpose of others.
- The deeds that are done in order to fulfil one's own aims, also called one's own purpose.

The first three of the six perfections, morality, generosity and patience, are deeds to accomplish others purpose. The last two, concentration and wisdom, are said to be primarily for fulfilling one's own purpose. The fourth, which is the perfection of joyous effort, is applied to serving both one's own purpose and the purpose of others.

It is quite clear that by practising morality and observing ethics, one is refraining from harming other beings, so that serves the purpose of others. Likewise, there is no question that generosity is a way to benefit others; as is practising patience by not retaliating when others inflict harm upon oneself.

However, when one is in deep concentration, i.e. meditating on emptiness, one may not be directly engaged in benefitting others. So in that sense, cultivating concentration and wisdom is for the purpose of further enhancing one's own practices and realisations.

And, lest we fall victim to laziness, we need to have joyous effort so we can serve the purpose of others, and accomplish one's own purpose.

This is how bodhisattvas engage in their deeds with the practices along the path leading to enlightenment. Another way to refer to the bodhisattvas deeds is that the practice of the six perfections is primarily a means to develop oneself, and enacting the four means of gathering disciples is a means to benefit others.

We need to further understand that these practices are a sequential step-by-step process, and are thus developed gradually—otherwise we might become overwhelmed. Whatever our level right now, observing just one aspect of morality at the beginning, will become a means to develop our mind further to observe two points of morality, and in that way our practice of morality will naturally increase. With respect to generosity, no teaching suggests we give away all our wealth and possessions right now. Rather, first we need to develop a mind wishing to give, and then based on the genuine wish to give, we gradually begin by giving away small material objects, which serves as the basis to engage in further great acts of generosity.

The teachings tell us that the great bodhisattvas who eventually become buddhas did not engage in these practices all at once! They all started with modest beginnings and gradually progressed. We need to relate this to whatever practice that we are engaged in. We all have a certain level of morality and observe ethical standards, which means that we already possess the virtues of ethics and morality. Another virtue that we already possess is generosity, and thus we practise generosity in accordance with our capacity. Furthermore, we all have a certain level of patience and joyous effort, as well as concentration. We may not have yet developed single-pointed concentration, however we are all making the attempt to meditate and practise, and it is the same with developing wisdom.

So we can encourage ourselves by acknowledging that we are already engaged in some level of these practices now. We also have the potential to further enhance our practice on the basis of what we already possess. Thus we need to further develop our practices so that they become perfections. We need to transform whatever level of morality or generosity that we have now into the perfection of morality and the perfection of generosity. In order to do that, we need to develop bodhicitta or the awakening mind.

It is this precious mind that ensures our practice becomes a perfection, and the awakening mind is based upon having developed an altruistic intention of personally taking responsibility to benefit other sentient beings. So that altruistic intention is the state of mind that immediately precedes bodhicitta or the awakening mind.

In order to develop an altruistic mind or special intention, we need to develop great compassion, which is dependent upon developing the heart-warming love or great love. That in turn is dependent on the wish to repay the kindness of sentient beings; which is based upon remembering the kindness of sentient beings; which is based upon recognising all mothers as having been one's mother; which is based upon developing an unbiased state of mind of equilibrium.

This sequence runs from the result to the cause. We can also think of it from the causal aspect, where causes lead on to the ultimate effects. Interchanging the causal sequences with the resultant sequence is very effective to further enhance our understanding and transform and develop our minds. Merely thinking about these points and reflecting on them makes our minds joyful and happy.

However we don't stop there, we go further into the causes for reaching the point of equilibrium of an unbiased state of mind. First of all, we develop a keen wish and interest in being free from suffering. In order to develop that uncontrived aspiration to be free from suffering, we need to develop renunciation. So we contemplate the importance of renunciation. Then, in order to develop renunciation, we need to clearly recognise the faults of samsara. We need to see how the worldly pleasures lack any essence, and that they will not last. Thinking about the faults of worldly pleasures will lead us to recognise the consequences of engaging and indulging in such pleasures, and to think about the karmic aspects. That is, in turn, based on recognising that one has a precious human rebirth now, which doesn't last, and shouldn't be wasted. So in this way we meditate on that precious rebirth. The understanding of all this depends on having a perfect teacher, who teaches us these unmistakable methods and how to develop them.

We need to rely on this progress from the resultant stage to the causes for our practice. Then, having progressed from the causal levels up to the effects, and developed bodhicitta or the awakening mind, we need to contemplate the process that leads us to enlightenment. We need to reflect on all of the stages of the paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, and meditation, culminating in the ten grounds of the bodhisattva on the path of no-more learning¹. In this way, one gains a glimpse of the path, which leaves a positive imprint on the mind, and reminds us of what our ultimate goal is. So this practice is a very meaningful one.

¹ A comprehensive account of these stages and paths is found in the teachings of 13 November 2011, and 20 November 2001, at the end of the teachings on tenets.

With respect to verse 381 Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

In relation to their resultant accomplishment, *giving and ethics* establishes the body and wealth of a high status; thus temporarily they are for the sake of *other's aims*. While temporarily, *one's own aim* is established through *patience and effort*. *Concentration and wisdom*, as stated in the *Samyak-samgraha Sutra*, 'when the mind is placed in meditative equipoise, all will be known just as it is', thus they are *causes of liberation*.

Here, *concentration and wisdom* are explained as ways to develop *one's own aims*. As mentioned previously, these two are based upon first developing calm abiding, and then, having developed calm abiding, focussing on emptiness. When, on the basis of sound concentration, one develops physical and mental pliancy and the physical and mental bliss associated with pliancy, one has developed calm abiding. The specific characteristic of calm abiding is when one develops physical and mental pliancy and the bliss that comes along with that. Then having developed calm abiding, special insight is used to further enhance one's understanding of emptiness. When one has developed the union of special insight and calm abiding then one has actually developed the perfections of concentration and wisdom. As explained earlier, it is on the basis of the union of calm abiding and wisdom that liberation is achieved.

Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary on this verse with:

These six perfections epitomise the sense of the Great Vehicle. Thus, if you apprehend the meaning of this, you apprehend the meaning of the Great Vehicle and if you apprehend the words of this, you apprehend the words of the Great Vehicle.

The essence, in brief, is when that one understands *the words of the Great Vehicle*, one has understood the intent or *the meaning of the Great Vehicle*.

3.2.1.2.1.3. Therefore, those scriptures are proved to be the word of Buddha

Here, 'scriptures' refers to the Great Vehicle scriptures.

The relevant verse reads:

382. The aims of benefiting oneself and others and the meaning of liberation as briefly taught by the Buddha [in the hearers vehicle] are contained in the six perfections. Therefore these [scriptures of the Great Vehicle] are the word of Buddha.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

The temporary aims of benefiting oneself and others, as well as the meaning of liberation as briefly taught by the Buddha in the Hearers' Vehicle, are contained in the six perfections even more extensively. Therefore these scriptures of the Great Vehicle are the word of Buddha.

The teachings and practices that are presented in the Hearers Vehicle are also presented in the Great Vehicle—nothing is left out or missing. In fact, the Great Vehicle has more extensive explanations. So, in lay terms, the question is: For what reason do despise and denounce the Great Vehicle, when it is clear that is the word of the Buddha?

3.2.1.2.2. Necessity of knowing the complete path of great enlightenment from the Great Vehicle scriptures

This section explains the necessity of knowing the complete path to enlightenment, according to the scriptures of the Great Vehicle.

The relevant verse is:

383. Those blind with ignorance cannot stand This Great Vehicle where buddhas taught The great path of enlightenment Consisting of merit and wisdom.

Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

Those who are blind with ignorance, not knowing the extensive nature of the two collections cannot stand this Great Vehicle where Buddha taught the great path, to obtain unsurpassable enlightenment, consisting of the two collections of merit and wisdom.

The Great Vehicle has an extensive presentation of the two collections, but *those who are blind with ignorance* fail to recognise that, and despise and denounce the Great Vehicle.

As explained in the commentary, the cause for *unsurpassable enlightenment* is the *two collections*—the collections of *merit and wisdom*. One needs to understand that the collection of merit is a cause for the form body of the Buddha, while the collection of wisdom is a cause for the wisdom body of the Buddha.

The six perfections are a more extensive way of understanding the two collections. The first four, morality, generosity, patience and joyous effort are the means to accumulate merit, and are thus the causes for developing the Buddha's form body. Concentration is an auxiliary cause that is sometimes categorised as belonging in the first four perfections are a cause for a form body. However it can be also understood as being the cause for developing the wisdom body of the Buddha. In this way we can understand the whole structure of the path to enlightenment, which is:

- The **basis** is the Two Truths.
- The **path** is condensed into the two collections of merit and wisdom.
- The **result** is the two bodies of the Buddha (the form body and the wisdom body).

As was explained extensively in the teachings on the *Four Hundred Verses*, the six perfections can be categorised in the context of the Two Truths; the paths of the first five perfections are based on conventional truth, and the perfection of wisdom is a path based upon the ultimate truth.

3.2.1.2.3. Necessity of knowing the great nature of a buddha from the Great Vehicle which therefore is the word of Buddha

This is sub-divided into three:

3.2.1.2.3.1. Limitless causes of the form body are explained in the Great Vehicle

3.2.1.2.3.2. Knowledge of extinction described in the Lesser Vehicle and extinction and no production described in the Great Vehicle have the same meaning of the realisation of emptiness

3.2.1.2.3.3. If the meaning of the Great Vehicle is not understood, it is right to be indifferent toward it but not to despise it

We can see from this the extremely profound nature of the advice that is being presented in this section of the text, which we can take as personal instruction for ourselves.

3.2.1.2.3.1. Limitless causes of the form body are explained in the Great Vehicle

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

384. Conquerors are said to have inconceivable good qualities

Because the [causal] good qualities are inconceivable like the sky.

Therefore let this great nature of a Buddha Explained in the Great Vehicle be allowed.

We can relate this verse to the qualities of the Buddha, which were extensively explained earlier in the text. The thirty-two major marks were explained in detail, with a briefer explanation of the eighty-two minor marks.² The text itself says, 'Fearing it will take too much time, I will just explain briefly', so the eighty-two minor marks were covered in one verse!

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

At the time of achieving the optimum result, conquerors are said to have inconceivable good qualities because the casual good qualities are inconceivable like the sky.

At this point we should remember that, as mentioned earlier, we need to rely on whatever small qualities we have now as a basis to achieve the great qualities of enlightenment.

The qualities of the Buddha are amazing: the magnificence of his physical features, the magnificence of his speech and the magnificence of his mind are just *inconceivable*. The analogy is that the Buddha's qualities are as vast as *the sky*. However they didn't materialise just out of nothing and suddenly appear. Rather they were dependent on specific causes, which were accumulated before the Buddha became enlightened. He began the process of creating the causes for those qualities when he was an ordinary being.

We can apply the causes of the Buddha's achievement to our own level. When he started to accumulate the causes for the inconceivable qualities that he now possesses, the Buddha was just like us—an ordinary being. When we reflect upon the qualities of the Buddha in this way we see their relevance for our own practice.

The remainder of the commentary on this verse reads:

Therefore let this great nature of a Buddha explained by the Conqueror in the Great Vehicle be borne and allowed.

The next verse further explains the qualities of the Buddha:

385. Even [Buddha's] ethics were beyond

The scope of Shariputra.

So why is the inconceivable great nature Of a Buddha not accepted?

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse, which is very clear:

If asked: Why is it inconceivable?

[Response] When the Conqueror had asked Shariputra 'Do you know the extent of the Buddha's limitless qualities such as the component of moral discipline?', Arya *Shariputra* responded, 'Let alone knowing the extent of the limitless qualities of the Buddha, even the *ethics are beyond my scope*'. *So why is the inconceivable great nature of Buddha not accepted?* One can believe in Buddha's inconceivable qualities, for without previously creating limitless causes,

limitless results cannot arise. Thus, because the Buddha has limitless qualities, their causes, which are the two collections, are limitless, and these are presented in the Great Vehicle scriptures. Therefore these must definitely be accepted as the Buddha's word.

We can conclude here for this evening.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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² Teachings of 5 April 2011, 12 April 2011, 19 April 2011 and 10 May 2011.