
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བཞུགས་མོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual we can do the meditation. From the depth of our heart we first generate our motivation, in accordance with the meaning of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*. With this appropriate motivation intact we can now engage in the meditation practice. [meditation]

Let us now generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines: To benefit all sentient beings I need to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, and in order to do that I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

In relation to the meditation practice, as we recite the line 'And thus, O venerable compassionate gurus, we seek your blessings' the visualisation can be the one described in the guru yoga practice, i.e. to visualise Lama Tsong Khapa, Buddha Shakyamuni and Vajradhara combined into one. As the manifestation of one's own guru, we visualise Lama Tsong Khapa, and at his heart is Buddha Shakyamuni and at the heart of Buddha Shakyamuni is Vajradhara. Thus, we make requests and receive their blessings to be able to do the *tong len* practice of giving and taking. In a simpler form, we can visualise Buddha Shakyamuni, who is the supreme Guru embodying every aspect of the guru. As mentioned in the *Thirty-five Buddhas Confession Prayer*, the supreme Guru is more supreme than the supreme, and higher than the highest.

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

Gyaltsab Je's begins his commentary on verse 386 with this introduction to the verse:

Because 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,...

In the context of the *Lower Vehicle*, knowledge of extinction refers to the extinction of all delusions and causes of samsara, by reaching the state of nirvana. In the Great Vehicle, extinction, no production and so forth have the same meaning, in that they refer to understanding emptiness.

Next the commentary states:

...a commentary on Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning quotes from a Mahayana sutra:...

The commentary on Nagarjuna's *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning* might have been composed by Nagarjuna himself. I'm not entirely sure about this, but amongst the works of Nagarjuna there is a self-commentary, which I

think is for the *Sixty Stanzas*. I may even have that text, but I haven't had time to read it on this occasion. The commentary on the *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning* quotes from a Mahayana sutra as follows:

This, which is complete abandonment of these sufferings, definite abandonment, purification, extinction, separation from desire, cessation, thorough pacification, disappearance, non-connection to other suffering, non-arising, and non-production is peace, is auspiciousness. It is like this: the definite abandonment of all aggregates, the extinction of cyclic existence, freedom from desire, cessation, nirvana.

Again, in another sutra it says:

All birth is extinguished, abiding in pure conduct, all activities have been performed, and no other existence is known.

When the meaning of the above is condensed, it is, as stated in the *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning*, 'what is extinction?'...and so forth.

So the *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning* explains the meaning of these quotes and that explanation is presented by Gyaltsab Je in his commentary:

Thus, when a Lesser Vehicle trainee obtains the state of an arhat and thinks 'I have extinguished all rebirths', this has to be definitely understood in the context of the extinction of non-inherent rebirths.

When the *Lesser Vehicle trainee obtains the state of an arhat* indicates that having followed the path, and reached their ultimate goal of liberation and obtained the state of an arhat, the Lower Vehicle trainee thinks, 'I have extinguished all rebirths', which refers to achieving a state of cessation of suffering. However, as explained here, this definitely has to be understood in the context of the extinction of non-inherent rebirths. Thus the extinction of rebirths is understood as being *the extinction of non-inherent rebirths* i.e. rebirths that are free from inherent existence. So the meaning of emptiness is definitely applied to the Lower Vehicle scriptures as well.

Then Gyaltsab Je continues:

Otherwise it contradicts the meaning of the earlier quote of the sutra.

In other words, when the sutra says that it is *definite abandonment, purification, extinction, cessation, thorough pacification* and so forth, it is indicating the extinction of non-inherent rebirths.

Gyaltsab Je then goes on to explain:

It should not be understood as merely the extinction of rebirth between lives in cyclic existence,...

This indicates that while achieving the state of an arhat is indeed an extinction of rebirth, it should not be understood as being merely an extinction of rebirth, lacking the characteristic of being an extinction of an inherently existent rebirth. Such an interpretation does not carry the full meaning of the extinction of rebirth.

As the commentary continues:

... for even during the time as a remainder-arhat, the meaning of extinction of rebirth is to be applied.

With respect to the term *remainder-arhat* there is a distinction between the highest Prasangika School's explanation of what remainder and non-remainder mean, as opposed to the explanation of the lower schools.

According to the lower Buddhist schools, 'remainder' indicates a remainder of the contaminated aggregates, which are in the nature of suffering. So, achieving the state of a remainder-arhat means still having the remainder of the contaminated aggregates; whereas non-remainder refers to having completely abandoned the contaminated physical aggregate.

In the Prasangika presentation, a remainder-arhat refers to an arhat who is in the post-meditative state; whereas a non-remainder-arhat is an arhat who is in meditative equipoise. According to the Prasangika School, remainder refers to having the appearance of inherent existence. Thus, for an arhat who is in the post-meditative state, and not in meditative equipoise, there is still an appearance of true existence. However when that arhat goes into the meditative state, even the appearance of inherent existence completely ceases, and so they are a non-remainder arhat at that point.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Thus, in the sutra's quote *this* indicates a close proximity and *non-connection to other suffering* all the way up to *nirvana*, indicates the extinction of rebirth in samsara.

When the sutra says, *This, which is complete abandonment of these sufferings, these sufferings* relate to both remainder and non-remainder arhats, and thus to having extinguished future rebirths in samsara. This is a further indication that an extinction of rebirths has to be understood as a non-inherent extinction of rebirths, rather than the mere extinction of rebirths.

There is also a significant distinction between Prasangika presentation of how the state of remainder and non-remainder are obtained, and that of the lower schools. According to the Prasangika, the sequence is that a trainee on the path first obtains the state of a non-remainder-arhat, which is obtained in meditative equipoise. In a state of single-pointed meditative equipoise on emptiness, there is no dualistic appearance at all, thus no appearance of inherent existence and that is why they are called a non-remainder arhat. Whereas when they come out of that meditative equipoise, there will still be the appearance of true or inherent existence. So even though they are an arhat, they are referred to as a remainder-arhat, because they still have the remainder of the appearance of inherent or true existence.

According to the lower schools, remainder and non-remainder are, as mentioned earlier, understood in relation to the physical contaminated aggregates. When the trainee on the Lower Vehicle obtains arhatship, they first obtain the cessation of suffering while they are still in their physical body, meaning they still have the contaminated aggregates. So while they still have that

physical body they are called a remainder-arhat, and when they abandon that body, i.e. after passing away, they reach a state of being a non-remainder arhat in which all future rebirths in samsara have ceased.

Of the lower schools, the Vaibhashika assert that Buddha Shakyamuni's body is still a contaminated body which is in the nature of suffering, because it is a body that is propelled by previous karma and delusions. According to the Vaibhashika system, when the Buddha passed into nirvana he completely ceased taking rebirth in samsara. They consider that extinction a complete state of nirvana or peace, and that is why they adhere to the view that the Buddha does not return to this world.

As I have explained on many occasions in previous teachings, according to the Prasangika, cessation refers to the ultimate nature of the mind, which is the emptiness of the mind. When, through meditation, one gains an understanding of the ultimate nature of the mind, one obtains a certain degree of cessation at first. As one gains a more profound understanding and realisation of the emptiness of mind, one obtains higher levels of cessation, leading all the way up to ultimate cessation. That is how cessation is to be understood according to the Prasangika system.

Then Gyaltsab Je raises a query:

If you say: 'This *suffering*' which is a specific term, is applied here to the general, and thus implies the extinction and non-arising of all delusions.

[Response] Although it is necessary to apply the meaning of a general term to a specific meaning if it does not fit into the context of the general meaning. In this case however, there is no contradiction in applying the meaning to the general.

This refers to the cessation of suffering, as was explained earlier.

Now we come to verse 386 which reads:

*386. The absence of production taught in the
Great Vehicle
And the extinction of the others are in fact
the same emptiness
[Since they indicate] the non-existence of
[inherently existent] production and the
extinction [of inherent]
Therefore let [the Great Vehicle] be allowed
[as Buddha's word].*

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

Thus, *the absence of inherent production taught in the Great Vehicle and the extinction presented in the other sutras that you hearers accept as Lesser Vehicle scriptures, are in fact the same emptiness*, for they both indicate *the non-existence of inherently existent production and the extinction of inherent existence*. Since the meaning of knowledge of extinction is the same, *therefore let the Great Vehicle be allowed as Buddha's words and bear it in mind*.

We can see from the presentation how tactfully Nagarjuna establishes the Great Vehicle as the Buddha's authentic doctrine. He does not impose his presentation on others, demanding that they have to accept it because

it is the Buddha's words. Rather, Nagarjuna skilfully shows that the essential points that are presented in the Mahayana or Great Vehicle do not contradict that which is presented in the Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle scriptures.

When the lack of any contradiction is presented, then, by default, the Great Vehicle also has to be accepted as the Buddha's words. Nagarjuna says that if you adhere to what you believe to be the Buddha's words, as explained in the Lower Vehicle scriptures, then, since the views on emptiness are exactly the same, this proves that the Great Vehicle is the word of the Buddha as well. So, by using profound logic, Nagarjuna proves the validity of the Great Vehicle.

We can see the very tactful way in which Nagarjuna presents his thesis by reasoning, rather than requiring a dogmatic acceptance by the other. His use of systematic reasoning and logic is very useful for us as well. For when we study this text we can get a real understanding of it through its use of reasoning and logic, and we don't have to accept it out of mere faith.

The next verse under this heading reads:

*387. If emptiness and the great nature of a Buddha
Are viewed in this way with reason,
How could what is taught in the Great
Vehicle and the other
Be unequal for the wise?*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

If emptiness, which is perceived on the path, and the great nature of a Buddha, which is the embodiment of dharmakaya, are viewed in this way with logical reason, then how could what is taught in the Great Vehicle and the other taught in the Lesser Vehicle be unequal for the wise? There is no reason for it to be unequal but in fact many reasons for them to be the same.

In addition to the earlier logical explanation, this further emphasises that the Great Vehicle and the Lower Vehicle are to be seen as having the same meaning. Both knowledge of extinction as explained in the Lower Vehicle and extinction as explained in the Great Vehicle refer to the same extinction of inherent existence. Because they come to the same point there is every reason to see them as being equal, and no reason to see them as unequal. This presentation very clearly shows that because there would be no logical basis for differentiating the views, it would be an act of absurdity if the Great Vehicle view is not accepted by the other. Not accepting it would, in effect, be a flat declaration, 'I just don't want to accept it'.

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

Having explained that there is no reason to despise the Great Vehicle, the next verse says, 'If you can't accept it, at the very least you should not despise it'.

Here, verse 388 reads:

*388. What the One Gone Thus taught with a
special intention
Is not easy to understand.
Therefore since he taught one as well as three
vehicles,*

*You should protect yourself through
neutrality*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Because of the fact that *what the One Gone Thus taught with a special intention is not easy to understand. Therefore he taught one as well as three vehicles.* Since the three were taught with a special intention, you should not deprecate the one. If you don't comprehend the meaning, then it is best to *protect yourself through neutrality.*

On occasions the Buddha would teach *with a special intention*, which indicates that one should not take all his teachings literally, as there can be an implicit meaning in what was presented. For example, in the *Heart Sutra*, when we read the words 'There is no form' we know that the words 'no form' imply that there is no inherently existing form.

Thus, this verse is referring specifically to the Buddha's special intention when *he taught one as well as three vehicles.* It is to be understood that the Buddha's special intention was to lead all beings to the ultimate one goal of the Great Vehicle i.e. full enlightenment or buddhahood. It was with that special intention that the Buddha presented three vehicles. Thus, as the commentary explains *since the three were taught with a special intention, you should not deprecate the one.* This means that one should not deprecate the Great Vehicle, which leads to the ultimate goal. While the Buddha did teach the three vehicles, it was with a special intention leading onto the ultimate goal of one. This is how the Buddha gradually guided his disciples in a very skilful way. As indicated here, it was with these very skilful means that the Buddha gave these teachings as a gradual process leading to the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

From this we can also gain an understanding how, as the teachings mention, developing clairvoyance is one of the means to be able to skilfully help other beings. This is a clear indication that when you have clairvoyance you will know the mental dispositions of others. Thus, you will know how to present something in a way that will help to guide an individual towards a deeper understanding further down the line. So although some method or teaching may seem inappropriate, the clairvoyant will know how to present something in a manner that is most beneficial for particular individuals. Through this the presenter will gradually lead them in the right direction, towards an understanding of the ultimate meaning.

The Lam Rim commentaries use the analogy that just as a bird without wings will not be able to soar into the sky, likewise without clairvoyance, one will not be able to skilfully guide a student or a disciple to enlightenment. Also, in both the *Mandala Offering* and the *Hundreds of Deities of the Land of Joy* prayers we recite the lines, 'Please release a rain of vast and profound Dharma precisely in accordance with the needs of those to be trained'. So even in our prayers we regularly relate to this significant point.

I regularly remind the presenters of the Monday evening meditation sessions to be really mindful of how they present the teachings. They need to be careful not to overload those who attend, lest it further confuses them. You need to take into consideration how those who

attend are coming along with a lot of questions and doubts. You need to remember that when you first began studying the Dharma, your mind was very fragile and not able to cope with too much information at that time. We must always bear that in mind when we present the Dharma to others, and ensure that it is a gradual process.

The second verse in this section is:

*389. There is no fault with neutrality, but there is fault
from despising it. How could there be virtue?
Therefore those who seek good for themselves
Should not despise the Great Vehicle.*

Even though the verse does not specifically present a query, in effect it is asking: Is there any advantage in remaining neutral? Would there any fault if one despises the Great Vehicle? This verse resolves that sort of doubt or question.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

There is no fault or negativity with remaining neutral by not doubting, but there is fault or negativity from despising it. How could there be virtue? There is no virtue in fact by despising it! Therefore those who seek good for themselves should be extremely careful, and not despise the Great Vehicle.

As the meaning of the verse is quite clear, Gyaltsab Je emphasises this point as a way of reminding us that we should be extremely careful, because of the gravity of the negativities that one would incur if one were to despise the Great Vehicle. We often find that element of caution about creating great misdeeds in Gyaltsab Je's works.

As Gyaltsab Je states, *There is no virtue in fact by despising it! Therefore those who seek good for themselves should be extremely careful, and not despise the Great Vehicle.* When we decide whether or not to adopt an action, we need to check whether there is any virtue in it. If there is virtue in engaging in the action, then by all means adopt it, but if there is non-virtue and negativity in the action, one who wishes to have goodness will avoid such an action. That is the essential meaning that we need to derive at a personal level.

3.2.1.3. INCOMPLETENESS OF THE PATHS AND FRUITS OF THE GREAT VEHICLE AS EXPLAINED IN THE LESSER VEHICLE SCRIPTURES

The following presentation, as clarified by the subdivisions, is a very significant one. It follows on from the earlier explanation which established that there is no contradiction in the essential meaning of both the Great and Lesser Vehicles. As they are both words of the Buddha, what difference is there between the Lesser and Great Vehicles? The verses in this section of the text are presented in order to resolve that question.

This outline is divided into three sub-divisions:

3.2.1.3.1. The deeds of bodhisattvas are not completely explained in the Lesser Vehicle scriptures

3.2.1.3.2. Buddhahood cannot be achieved through practising just the four noble truths and the auxiliaries to enlightenment

3.2.1.3.3. The Great Vehicle scriptures are suitable to be considered by the wise as the word of Buddha

3.2.1.3.1. The deeds of bodhisattvas are not completely explained in the Lesser Vehicle scriptures

The verse relating to this heading reads:

*390. Bodhisattvas' aspirational wishes, deeds,
and dedications [of merit]
Were not described in the Hearers' Vehicle.
Therefore how could one become
A bodhisattva through it?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of the verse very clearly:

In the Lesser Vehicle scriptures, which describe *the Hearer's Vehicle*, the *bodhisattvas' aspirational wishes, deeds, and dedications* of merit as well as their great compassion, the grounds and the perfections such as generosity, and the extensive collections, *were not described*. They were described in the Great Vehicle scriptures, which are beyond the scope of ordinary beings and hearers and solitary realisers. As these extensive practices are accomplished over three countless eons in order to become a buddha, they were not described in their scriptures, *therefore how could one become a bodhisattva through it?* One cannot do so, since the bodhisattva path is incomplete.

As explained quite clearly, even though there is some explanation of the bodhisattva's deeds presented in the Hearer's Vehicle, the extensive deeds are not described in detail. In the Great Vehicle there is an incredible amount of detail about the grounds and the path of the bodhisattvas; the deeds and the realisations that are obtained at each of the bodhisattva levels are explained in great profundity and detail. So the conclusion is, *how could one become a bodhisattva through it? One cannot do so, since the bodhisattva path is incomplete.* As the presentation in the Hearer Vehicle is incomplete, one could not possibly rely upon that to become a Buddha.

Then, as a link to the next verse, Gyaltsab Je poses a question:

If you say: Since the paths of all three vehicles are presented in the Lesser Vehicle's scriptures, why wouldn't the Great Vehicle not be intact?

The response to this question is found in the next verse.

*391. [In the Hearers Vehicle] Buddha did not explain
The foundations for a bodhisattva's enlightenment.
What greater authority for this subject
Is there other than the Victor?*

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

[Response] In the Hearer Vehicle's scriptures *Buddha did not explain the foundations for a bodhisattva's enlightenment*, because temporarily the Buddha didn't present it to the hearers. It was rather intended for the bodhisattvas' enlightenment, and as a blessing that the Conqueror bestowed the Great Vehicle teaching. *What greater authority for this subject is there other than the Victor?* There isn't. Thus one should not forsake the Great Vehicle's scriptures.

We can derive some significant points from this explanation. First of all, it was not as if *the Buddha didn't present* those explanations in order to deprive the hearers

of that explanation! He didn't give that explanation because they were not yet ready for it. So *temporarily*, it was not presented to them.

Another significant point is that *it was rather intended for the bodhisattvas' enlightenment, and as a blessing the Conqueror bestowed the Great Vehicle teaching*. Where the bodhisattva's path is mentioned in the Lesser Vehicle, is in a form of a blessing for the hearers. Lest explaining it too much will confuse their minds because they are not yet ready for it, the Buddha mentioned the bodhisattva's path in the Lower Vehicle as a form of a blessing, which can also be understood as leaving an imprint on their mind. He did not explain it extensively, because they were not ready for it. That is the full context.

Another significant point from the explanation here is *what greater authority for this subject is there other than the Victor*, which is Buddha Shakyamuni? Since Buddha Shakyamuni presented both the Lesser and Great Vehicles who could have more authority than the presenter, which implies that no one could.

The conclusion is that since there isn't anyone who would know the Buddha's intentions better than the Buddha himself, *thus one should not forsake the Great Vehicle's Scriptures*.

None of this is too obscure; if we just pay a little bit more attention and read the text, we can get the gist of what is being explained. We are really very fortunate to have access to such clear explanations from the text, which is way to further develop our own understanding.

Right now, when we have a bit of merit, is the time to use that merit to try to understand this text, rather than just using our store of merit up! The fact that everything is going quite well is an indication that one has some good merit. Thinking one has sufficient merit and being idle doesn't seem to be the right way to go about it! Rather we should try to gain an understanding about how to collect more merit.

As everyone knows, the next session is the discussion session. It would be really beneficial to engage in the discussion well in the spirit of understanding, and sharing with a good attitude. Following that is the exam, so if there has been a good discussion, then the exam will go well too!

Having the proper intention to share whatever knowledge or understanding one has gained with others, who may be still struggling to understand, is really wondrous and a great act of giving, which is in line with the bodhisattva vows. As we have taken the bodhisattvas vows to assist and to benefit others, this is one way of upholding those vows. As those who are familiar with the bodhisattva vows would know, a breach of those vows would be to praise oneself and to despise others, and furthermore, not to give one's wealth and Dharma to others when they ask for it. This implies that if someone were to ask for something, even if it is just a bit, if we could give something it will protect us from breaching that vow. So giving even a little can still be significant practice.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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