

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

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

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The prayer of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta that we have just recited will suffice as the motivation for the meditation practice. However it is essential that we remember the real meaning: taking refuge ensures turning away from a faulty path, while generating the bodhicitta motivation secures our practice as being in line with the Mahayana path. So, keeping this in mind, we can now engage in the meditation practice. [meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of all sentient beings, in order to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. For that purpose I will engage in listening to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

3.2.1. Stopping Forsaking the Scriptures of the Great Vehicles

3.2.1.4. PURPOSE OF TEACHING THREE VEHICLES (CONT.)

We have come to the second verse relating to this outline:

396. *To some, doctrines based on non-duality;
To some what is profound and frightening to
the fearful—
Having an essence of emptiness and
compassion—
The means of achieving [unsurpassed]
enlightenment.*

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

To some disciples, who understand emptiness as object and object-perceivers being substantially different, doctrines based on non-duality were presented to establish the ultimate; ...

Reiterating the points made last week, the teachings that were presented to the lower schools of the Sautrantika and Vaibhashika are topics such as the *thirty-seven auxiliaries to enlightenment*, the *sixteen attributes of the four noble truths* and so forth. However, the selflessness of phenomena was not introduced to the lower schools, thus there is no presentation about the substantial difference between *object and object-perceiver*. In the higher schools the selflessness of phenomena is gradually introduced beginning with the Mind-only school to which the *non-duality* of object and object-perceiver was presented. The selflessness of phenomena was further refined in the Svatantrika School, and finalised to the subtlest level in the Prasangika School. So selflessness of phenomena is progressively elaborated through the different schools. I have explained this extensively in the teachings on tenets.¹

Although you can refer to the earlier teachings on tenets, to give a brief overview follows. The reason why Sautrantika and Vaibhashika schools do not establish the non-duality of

form and the consciousness perceiving form as being substantially the same, because they assert that consciousness perceiving form is a result of form. They say that a consciousness perceiving form is produced by observing an object such as form. Thus, because form and the consciousness perceiving form are cause and effect, they could not be of the same substance. Furthermore, the reason why selflessness of phenomena is not established in the lower schools is because they posit that things exist from their own side i.e. that there is external existence. Thus they do not assert selflessness but rather a truly existent self of phenomena.

On the other hand, for the **Mind-only** School, the consciousness perceiving form is not a result of form, because they are in fact substantially the same and thus non-dual. According to the Mind-only School what appears as form is none other than an imprint on a mind one part of which, when activated, manifests as form, and the other part manifests as the consciousness perceiving form. Thus things do not exist externally; there is no external existence because all phenomena manifest as part of the imprint on the mind itself, hence the term 'mind only'. Therefore to the Mind-only the term 'selflessness of phenomena' is established as being the non-duality of subject and object such as form and the consciousness that perceives form.

The Svatantrika School assert that while phenomena do not exist entirely from their own side, they do have an inherent existence.

The presentation of the Prasangika School is that there is nothing that exists truly and inherently from their own side. Thus, all phenomena are empty of true and inherent existence. This is just a brief explanation and you can refer to the teachings on the tenets to get a better understanding.

To continue Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

... to some disciples, the doctrine on emptiness that which is profound and frightening to the fearful – thus having an essence of emptiness and compassion – was presented as the means of achieving unsurpassed enlightenment.

For the lower schools such as the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika, the selflessness of phenomena is not presented because their mental faculty is not sharp or mature enough. Because they are temporarily unable to accept it, the selflessness of phenomena is not presented to them. As the Mind-only are of sharper faculty, the selflessness of phenomena is presented as the emptiness of non-duality which, as mentioned previously, is the non-duality of object and subject. For the Svatantrika School the selflessness of phenomena is presented as the lack of true existence, or the lack of things existing entirely from their own side. Of the four schools, the Prasangika have the sharpest mental faculty thus having the intellectual capacity to fully comprehend the selflessness of phenomena at the subtlest level. So what is presented to the Prasangika is the lack of inherent existence i.e. that there is not even an atom of inherent establishment in any phenomena. That is how the selflessness of phenomena is progressively presented to trainees.

3.2.2. Summation

The first verse of the summary of this section reads:

397. *Therefore the wise should extinguish
Any belligerence toward the Great Vehicle
And generate special faith
For the sake of achieving perfect enlightenment.*

¹ In 2001.

In his commentary Gyaltzab Je basically quotes the verse, as its meaning is quite explicit:

Therefore the wise should extinguish any belligerence toward the Great Vehicle and generate faith for the sake of achieving perfect enlightenment.

In this the verse, *the wise* refers to those who have the wisdom and sufficient capacity to analyse and check things thoroughly. Such beings of sharp faculty should *extinguish any belligerence* or contempt for *the Great Vehicle and generate strong faith for the purpose of achieving enlightenment*. This is good point to take as a personal instruction for our own practice.

The second summary verse reads:

**398. Through faith in the Great Vehicle
And through practising what is explained in it
The highest enlightenment is attained
And, along the way, even all [worldly]
pleasures.**

Gyaltzab Je's commentary explains:

Through faith in the Great Vehicle scriptures, and through one's conduct in practising what is explained in it, the highest enlightenment is attained. And along the way, even all worldly pleasures will be naturally obtained. Thus, it is appropriate to particularly have faith in the Great Vehicle scriptures and put the meaning into practice.

Again, the central meaning of this verse is a very profound instruction that we should relate to ourselves.

Engaging in the practices presented in the Mahayana scriptures and incorporating them into one's conduct is a means to achieve the ultimate purpose, a state of enlightenment. As long as that is our ultimate purpose our temporary goals relating to our worldly needs will be naturally fulfilled. Lama Tsong Khapa also mentions that if one is focusing on the welfare of others, then one will not need to focus on one's own welfare, because it will be naturally fulfilled as well. This is similar to what is being explained here. Lest we feel that in aiming for the highest goal of enlightenment we might be deprived of temporary needs and welfare, the advice is that we do not have to worry about that, because even our temporary needs will be naturally fulfilled.

As we are exhorted to do here, it is appropriate to have faith in the Great Vehicle scriptures and put their meaning into practice. This is the most essential point that we need to take as personal instruction. Having been given all the reasons for the appropriateness of engaging in the Mahayana scriptures and putting them into practice, we need to take the initiative to put them into practice ourselves. That is essential if we are to derive any benefit from these explanations.

I cannot claim that I have achieved any significant major result or realisations from my meagre attempts at practice. However I can say with certainty that there is definitely benefit from the attempts that one makes. Based on the limited experience that I have, I can confirm that there is a benefit to be gained from practice. If you were also to take heed and put these instructions into practice, it would be really meaningful.

It is good to understand the process of actually putting the teachings into practice. As explained in the teachings, the procedure begins with first listening to the Dharma—an essential and obvious point. Without first hearing the Dharma we cannot possibly contemplate it and put it into practice, because we have not developed the basis. From

hearing the Dharma, one acquires a certain amount of knowledge and wisdom. This knowledge can then be utilised to further analyse and think about the points of the Dharma, at which point our wisdom increases and becomes firmer. Finally, we put it into practice by meditating on the points we have analysed. It is good to keep in mind this instruction about how to practise the Dharma.

In fact, there is no real basis on which to engage in meditation prior to hearing the instructions, and analysing and thinking about them. Without having gained some knowledge or wisdom from having heard and analysed the Dharma, there is no basis upon which to meditate. When the teachings emphasise the practice of meditation, we need to understand that the practice of meditation is based upon having acquired wisdom from listening to the Dharma, and having analysed and thought about the points it contains. That is something that we really need to understand.

With a clear blueprint of how to engage in the practice, we will not be deprived of the means to practise meditation, and, in addition we will have plenty of different ways to engage in the practice of meditation. In the Lam Rim, Lama Tsong Khapa admonishes the trainees, saying 'If, after having heard the Dharma extensively if you are still asking what to practise, then you have completely missed the point!'

This often happens. If, after having heard the Dharma, you still wonder 'How do I practise?' then you have not spend time analysing and thinking about what you have heard. It is also the case that even though we gain some wisdom and knowledge from hearing the Dharma, it is not a very stable or firm understanding, and we can still be easily influenced when we hear something else that sounds rather convincing. So, as explained in the teachings, the understanding or wisdom gained merely from hearing the teachings is not very firm and stable. When we enhance our understanding by thinking and analysing, then it becomes firmer, and it becomes even more firm and stable when we develop the wisdom gained from meditation. The wisdom that we gain from thinking and analysing develops conviction, and based on that conviction, we put the understanding that we have gained into practice and meditate. This is how we develop the ultimate wisdom and realisations.

Also what we gain from hearing is derived from others, while whatever understanding and faith that we gain from thinking and analysing the Dharma is derived from ourselves. This is a very important point. Listening to the Dharma is dependent upon others, and we have to rely on them to gain an understanding from listening to what they explain. However because it is gained from others, it is not yet stable or firmly established in our own mind. Whereas when we further analyse and think about the points we have heard, and gain a real understanding derived from our own analysis, then that understanding becomes stable and firm. We then use that much more stable and firm faith or conviction for our practice of meditation.

The very manner in which the Buddha presented his teachings is really remarkable and quite astonishing! From it we can see how Buddhism differs from other traditions. The Buddha didn't present his teachings by saying, 'You have got to accept it because I said so. Whether it suits you or not, you have to accept what I say!' Rather, when the Buddha shared his knowledge and insight, he said, 'Use your own intelligence and wisdom to analyse it. Don't accept it just because I said so. Scrutinise and analyse it thoroughly yourselves. When you find it to be true and faultless then, as

a way to ultimately establish it in your own mind, you need to engage in practice'. So for an earnest Buddhist the real practice comes at the end of analysis and investigation, not right at the beginning. The Buddha presented his insights and then allowed his listeners and disciples to analyse and think about them. Then, as the Buddha said, 'When you find it is suitable, you can practise it'. This is a really profound, yet unrestricted way to engage in practice.

Even in this day and age, we find people in normal walks of life saying, 'Oh, I appreciate Buddhism because it does not appear to be dogmatic. It seems to be quite unrestricted and gives us the space to think about it rather than having to accept it blindly'. This remarkable attribute of allowing the trainee to have time before making a full commitment to Buddhism, is very appealing to many people these days.

Returning to the point of the text, Nagarjuna would have really investigated the reasons why the Buddha presented the three types of vehicles too. Thus through his analysis, Nagarjuna found many valid reasons why the Buddha presented the three vehicles.

C. SUMMATION²

The second-last verse of the chapter reads:

*399. At that time [when you are a ruler] you should internalise
Firmly the practices of giving, ethics, and
patience,
Which were especially taught for householders
And which have an essence of compassion.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

At that time when you are a ruler, you should internalise firmly the practices of giving, ethics—such as taking lay vows and one-day precepts—and cultivate patience, which are easier for householders to accomplish and thus were especially taught for householders.

In saying *at that the time when you are a ruler*, the text is relating to the king as a householder or layperson. The practices prescribed for a layperson are generosity, ethics—such as taking the five layperson vows and one-day precepts—and cultivating patience.

In essence the first three of the six perfections are specifically outlined as a practice for laypersons or *householders* because, as mentioned here, they are easier for householders to accomplish. So it is good to gain a full understanding of what these practices entail. The definition of giving or generosity is the mind wishing to give; the definition of ethics is the mind that refrains from ill-deeds; the definition of patience is the mind that refrains from becoming disturbed. The actual practice entails cultivating a conscious intention within one's mind, and based on that the respective activities will follow. So that is how we need to understand the essence.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je goes on to say:

The connotation of 'especially' does not mean that these practices were taught more extensively to householders than the ordained, but rather because from within the six perfections the earlier three are easier for them to practice. Furthermore the first three perfections *have an essence of compassion*, i.e. firmly

stabilising compassion. Thus it is appropriate for you to familiarise yourself with these practices.

To derive a personal practice according to the explanations here we need to really familiarise ourselves with what these practices actually entail. What does generosity mean? What does the perfection of generosity entail? Although generosity can be practised by any individual being, the perfection of generosity is associated with the bodhicitta motivation. So the addition of a bodhicitta motivation makes the practice of generosity the perfection of generosity.

First we need to really contemplate what generosity means and then understand the different types of generosity there are. We also need to contemplate the meaning of ethics and then implement in our practice, by taking different levels of vows and precepts. Then there is patience and the perfection of patience, and what that entails. Next are the perfections of joyous effort, concentration and wisdom. You can contemplate from generosity up to the perfection of wisdom and in reverse order how wisdom relates to the earlier perfections. Just thinking about these points is, in itself, a meditation practice and very beneficial for one's mind.

We come now the final sub-division of the chapter.

D. ADVICE TO BECOME A MONASTIC IF UNABLE TO LEARN THE SPECIAL ROYAL WAYS

We can see how very skilfully, Nagarjuna presents his essential advice to the king. As a layperson or a householder, the king has his royal duties to perform. Thus Nagarjuna says to the king, 'If you find it difficult to engage in your lay practices because of your royal duties and so forth, then it could be advisable for you to be ordained as a monk.

The final verse of the chapter reads:

*400. However, if from the unrighteousness of the world
It is difficult to rule religiously,
Then it is right for you to become a monastic
For the sake of practice and grandeur.*

As the Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

However, if from the unrighteousness of the world, it is difficult, because of abstaining from the six actions of killing and so forth, to rule religiously...

This raises the issue about how practising certain aspects of the Dharma could be difficult for the king. *From the unrighteousness of the world* indicates how beings in the world are extremely unsubdued and unruly. Because there is so much turmoil in the World, the king would find it hard to abstain from the six actions of killing and so forth. As a king there will be times when the king will have to wage war upon others and actually engage in acts taking the life of another human being. The imposition of heavy taxes is a form of stealing from the public. Sexual misconduct is of course a possibility. There might be occasions when one has to engage in lying when presenting one's policies and so forth. Likewise harsh speech and divisive speech or slander may also occur. By virtue of his position the king could easily engage in all of these non-virtues.

So, the commentary concludes:

...then it is right for you to become a monastic for the sake of practice, renown and grandeur.

Again we can see that there is a very profound point being very skilfully presented to the king. Having indicated that the king might find it difficult to abstain from the six actions such as killing and so forth, he is advised to consider becoming a monastic, i.e. becoming ordained. We can see

² The fourfold structure of the chapter Advice to Train in Flawless Policy is:

A. Transition

B. Extensive exposition of flawless policy

C. Summation

D. Advice to become a monastic if unable to learn the special royal ways

here the very skilful means with which Nagarjuna presented his advice. While the king may acknowledge the need to engage in practice and abstain from the wrong deeds, deep inside he might not be so willing to give up his sovereignty by becoming ordained. He might think 'I might be ridiculed and I might lose my fame'. Apparently the hardest thing to relinquish as an ordinary being is one's fame. Knowing that this would be most difficult for the king, Nagarjuna very skilfully encourages the king not to be daunted and not to worry about fame because, 'If you were to become ordained, you would actually be even more *renowned* and have *grandeur!* How true this is from the Dharma point of view.

Even in a worldly context when someone gives up everything (riches, fame, high position) for the sake of Dharma, they are known as someone who is courageous and brave. So lest the king feels daunted by the prospect of becoming ordained because he is going to lose his fame, Nagarjuna says to the king, 'You need not worry because you will become even more renowned and more famous if you were to adopt the monastic life'. The fact that Nagarjuna said this to the king at this point must mean that Nagarjuna considered it to be an appropriate time to present such teachings to the king.

Of the ten non-virtues the six referred to in this verse are the very basis of morality. When we really think about it, refraining from these six misdeeds, and thus observing the ethics of their virtues, is the basis for all other forms of ethics, vows and precepts that we might take. Although the ten non-virtuous deeds and their opposites, the ten virtuous deeds, are presented specifically in the small scope, we must really understand that these form the basis of all other practice. We must not take them lightly thinking, 'Oh because this is presented in the small scope, it might not be so important!'

In fact they are the most relevant for our practice, whatever other vows we may have taken. A layperson may take bodhisattva vows and tantric vows, and for an ordained person there are the additional self-liberation vows. The ability to uphold those vows really comes down to the basics of refraining from these physical and verbal six misdeeds. If one is unable to observe those vows then it is evident where the fault lies. Thus, we need to understand that we should not take these six misdeeds lightly, and really make an effort to understand and establish these basic ethical values within our minds.

The very first precept or ethic that the Buddha presented is to refrain from killing. To this day Buddhism in general is renowned for its value of non-violence. Indeed, all the Buddha's teachings are based upon non-violence and compassion for others. The act of not killing is really an act of non-violence. The most harm one can inflict on any other being is to take their life, which is the most prized possession of any living being. So when we intentionally refrain from killing other beings, that is the very first step in refraining from being violent towards other beings, and it is thus a practice of non-violence

Thus we need to understand how the basis of the practice of Buddhism is non-violence, and it is on that basis that we engage in further practice. As the Buddha said in the sutras harming other sentient beings is non-Dharma—it is non-virtue. This is very profound advice.

Lastly the name of the chapter is presented:

The fourth chapter of the Precious Garland, an Indication of Royal Policy, is finished.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary concludes:

From the *Precious Garland of Advice to a King*, the commentary to the fourth chapter—an Indication of Royal Policy—is complete.

In our next session we will commence the fifth chapter, the title of which is Advice for Even Bodhisattvas Wishing Quickly to Attain Liberation to Become Monastics. Basically the advice that is presented in the fifth chapter is for laypersons as well as for bodhisattvas. It is always worth bearing in mind that someone who is inclined to practise as a bodhisattva need not be ordained. In other words a bodhisattva can be a layperson. We can also see that how there has always been this non-biased way of presenting the teachings—practitioners can either be ordained or laypeople.

As explained in the Vinaya the four circles of disciples are: fully ordained monks, fully ordained nuns, lay men who uphold lay *upasika* vows, and lay women who uphold lay *upasika* vows. This summarises the entourage of the disciples of the Buddha.

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