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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

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Using the motivation we have generated with the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer that we have just recited, we can now engage in the meditation practice. [meditation]

Just like the attempt to meditate that we have just made, it is really good to implement the practice into our daily life. Spending some time practising meditation helps to subdue our mind, and thus achieve our objectives. However, because our ignorance is so deep-rooted, practising a focused meditation alone won't suffice to subdue our mind. If we are to really tackle that ignorance we have no choice but to learn and understand more about how to overcome that ignorance, which is where study comes in. So meditation and the study of Dharma work hand in hand to complement each other.

As Lama Tsong Khapa mentioned in the *Lam Rim Chen Mo* (the *Great Exposition of the Stages to Enlightenment*), the way to implement the practice of gaining the realisations of all three scopes of the path is to combine single-pointed meditation with analytical meditation. These two meditation practices of complement each other and help us to engage in the practice of the three scopes. This is really essential advice.

We might have noticed through experience that, when we spend time studying, by analysing and thinking about the material, the essential points remain firmly established in our mind. That is because we have worked hard to gain that understanding, which helps to increase our wisdom and intelligence. These benefits can definitely be seen.

However it is important to understand the difference between general analysis and analytical meditation. Some may feel that any form of analysis of Dharma material is analytical meditation, but that is not the case. Specifically, analytical meditation is when, having initially analysed a topic and reached some understanding of it, one places one's full attention and focus on that topic and nothing else. Furthermore, analytical meditation also requires us to be able to maintain a focus that is free from any laxity and excitement. For these reasons analytical meditation is regarded as a meditation practice. If the mind is not focused on any particular object then it is difficult to posit that it is a meditation practice. So we need to understand the real implication of analytical meditation, which is to maintain a single-pointed focus while analysing a particular topic.

Of course, as beginners we are a long way from experiencing the real danger of subtle laxity and subtle excitement in our meditation. However, if we really make an attempt to maintain our focus on the topic we are analysing then, by training our mind in that way, we will begin to develop an authentic basis for analytical meditation.

If analytical meditation was not considered to be a form of meditation, we would also have to say that special insight is also not a form of meditation. As we understand from the teachings, we need to first develop calm abiding followed by special insight. Then we further develop the meditation practice to achieve the union of both calm abiding and

special insight. It is at that stage that we achieve a really significant level of meditation practice as a basis for higher realisations. This is how we need to understand the significance of analytical meditation.

You will be familiar with the analogy that illustrates the union of calm abiding and special insight. Just as a small fish moving about under the surface of a clear pond does not disturb the pond by causing ripples on the surface; likewise when one develops the state of special insight based on calm abiding and they are in unison, then analysing an object will not disturb or hinder a single-pointed focus on that same object. This is how the union of calm abiding and special insight is to be understood.

Even at a beginner's level, it is good to work towards that goal by making genuine attempts to implement analytical meditation in our daily practice. We initially try to develop a single-pointed focus on the object, and when we have developed some capacity to do so, then we can begin to analyse the object within that single-pointed focus. If we train our mind in such a way then, even at a beginner's level, we are leaving the positive imprints and the potential to further develop that later. The goal is to develop the ability to single-pointedly focus on emptiness while using one's wisdom to analyse it in order to understand more profound levels of emptiness. This is how one eventually develops that actual state of the union of calm abiding and special insight directly focussing on emptiness.

## 1.1. Extensive explanation of fifty-seven defects to be forsaken

### 1.1.2. From hypocrisy to the forty-first, not thinking of death (cont.)

Gyaltsab Je's commentary doesn't go into very much detail about the following defects, so we can cover them quite rapidly.

#### (21) Repeating faults

The root text reads:

415cd *Repeating faults is to recite again and again  
The mistakes made by others.*

Gyaltsab Je's basically reiterates the root text:

The twenty-first, *repeating faults is to recite again and again whatever mistakes made by others.*

This is something that we really need to be mindful about in our personal practice. Although bodhisattvas will never engage in mentioning the faults of others, we can be very prone to engaging in this misdeed. When we talk about the faults of others again and again, we are letting everyone know about fault or mistake. The fault itself might be quite insignificant, but by repeating it again and again, it becomes a major issue and we might even become obsessed about it. Ultimately, it won't harm the other person, but repeating it to others again and again will actually harm us.

Of course going around and talking about the faults of others is the fault of idle gossip, but it may also turn into the fault of divisive speech. When you continue to highlight the faults of a particular person, it can influence others. Although they have little to do with that person, they feel antagonistic towards them, just because of what has been said about their faults. So we need to be really mindful and careful about discussing the faults of others. Otherwise, talking about these faults again and again, whenever the opportunity arises might become like reciting a mantra!

The last person we might approach to speak about these faults is the person themselves. If we can muster up enough

courage to face the person, and address the fault with them, then there may be some benefit for them. Otherwise we end up telling everyone about the fault except the person with the fault, who we don't dare face. We need to be really mindful about this.

It seems that part of our worldly activities consists of gathering together to talk about the faults of others. 'They are doing this, or they are doing that' and going on and on about the kind of mistakes that people make and so forth. Indeed we sometimes call that socialising with others.

The great Kadampa master Atisha advised that we should talk about our own mistakes, while hiding the faults of others, and talk about the qualities of others while hiding our own qualities. This essential instruction is the ideal approach. If one goes on and on about the mistakes of others it just causes more and more disharmony and negativity for both ourselves and those who hear about those mistakes. Eventually when the particular individual hears what has been said, it also causes them unhappiness. So there is really no benefit in talking about the mistakes of others, as it will only cause more confusion and conflict.

On the other hand, talking about the qualities of others really helps us to develop respect for others. How wonderful it would be if we were to do that! We would then be able to encompass others in our scope rather than being judgemental and hostile towards them. When we think about the good qualities of others, we will have good thoughts about them. This is the way we need to practice, in order to protect our own mind as well as the minds of others.

## (22) Non-collectedness

*416ab Non-collectedness is inconsiderate irritation  
Arisen from illness.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The twenty-second, *non-collectedness, is inconsiderate irritation arisen from illness.*

Although there is no specific commentary on it, one of the Tibetan words used here, and in Indian commentaries on Nagarjuna's work, relates specifically to a mind of attachment that causes distress within one's own state of mind. So it has the connotation of a mind based on attachment, which then develops into a state of mind of *inconsiderate irritation*.

## (23) Clinging

*416cd Clinging is the attachment  
Of the lazy to their bad possessions.*

Again Gyaltsab Je's commentary reiterates the text:

The twenty-third, *clinging*, arises due to three causes, i.e. the earlier two plus *attachment to bad possessions*. This is a trend *of the lazy*.

As the commentary explains, *clinging arises due to three causes*. The earlier two causes may refer to attachment to goods and respect, and thus for the sake of obtaining them to engage in deceitful means such as hypocrisy and so forth. As explained, these attachments come from a lazy mind, and this is the main point that we need to understand. As explained here, attachment to goods such as offerings or gifts made by others, as well as praise plus attachment to bad possessions come from a lazy state of mind.

Here we need to understand laziness as the opposite to virtuous effort. The definition of virtuous effort is a mind that is inclined to joyously engage in virtue. Thus we need to understand that a mind that is obsessed with clinging or

attachment to these three particular objects, goods, respect and bad possessions, come from a mind of laziness, which is the opposite to a virtuous mind.

At a personal level we need to determine whether we fit into category of having a tendency to be lazy. How much are we inclined to willingly and joyfully take up practising virtue in our daily life? How much of our life is dedicated to attachment to bad possessions and so forth? This is how we need to assess ourselves.

As mentioned earlier, when we assess our life we need to see how much time we spend pursuing these objects of attachment—praise, gifts, promotions, and non-virtuous objects. If we find ourselves spending most of our time and energy in pursuit of these things, then we can safely assume that we fit into the category of being lazy. As the Buddha himself mentioned, 'There is no possibility of cultivating any virtue in the person who is lazy'. We need to understand how to recognise the faults of laziness along those lines.

If we are inclined to a lazy state of mind, there is no possibility of developing a genuinely joyous mind in accumulating virtue, and so one would lack joyous effort. If we lack joyous effort, then there is no possibility of consistently engaging in virtue, because we would be more inclined to pursue those objects of attachment. We really need to assess ourselves in this way. If we are to engage in a practice of pure Dharma, then it is essential that we assess ourselves in this way, so as to ensure that we are practising in a pure form. Otherwise it is very easy for us to lapse from the actual practice of virtue, which can only result in further decline for ourselves.

The Buddha mentioned in a sutra, 'At one time we were equals, but due to exertion and joyous effort in practising, I have freed myself, while out of laziness you are still circling in samsara'. Thus, by developing disenchantment for the pleasures of samsara and an earnest mind seeking liberation, the Buddha was claiming that he was freed from samsara and had obtained the state of liberation and enlightenment. However, we are still in samsara due to laziness and attachment to the pleasures of samsara. We need to apply that statement to ourselves. The Buddha was not talking about some other beings on another planet, but to us personally. We are still in samsara because of our laziness, and with that in mind we need to take the initiative to overcome laziness. In these few lines, the Buddha is giving us very profound advice.

## (24) Discrimination of difference

*417ab Discrimination of differences is discrimination  
Impeded by desire, hatred, or obscuration.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The twenty-fourth, *discrimination of difference* between self and others *is discrimination impeded by desire, hatred or obscuration of dullness*.

Here *discrimination* is specifically the *discrimination between self and others*. When such discrimination is impeded by any one of the three delusions of *desire, hatred* or, what is translated here as *obscuration*, which is basically a form of dullness or ignorance, there is a discrimination of difference between self and others. We need to understand that the discrimination mentioned here is a faulty discrimination.

We can also relate this to the sequence in which the five aggregates are presented. As explained in past teachings that sequence shows the way delusions develop in our mind: form is followed by feeling, and then discrimination. First we come into contact with forms, which give rise to feelings

—pleasant forms induce a pleasant feeling and unpleasant forms induce unpleasant feelings. On the basis of the nature of those feelings. Thus we generate attachment to the pleasant feelings induced by pleasant objects, and generate aversion to the unpleasant feelings induced by unpleasant objects. This is how attachment and anger (or aversion) arise in our mind. Thus, the sequencing of the five aggregates is in relation to the sequence of how delusions arise in our mind.

## (25) Not looking into the mind

*417cd Not looking into the mind is explained as not applying it to anything.'*

Gyaltsab Je states:

The twenty fifth, *not looking into the mind is explained as not applying* the mind to *anything* impeded by desire, hatred or ignorance or nothing virtuous or non-virtuous.

As the Kadampa masters have mentioned, the best instruction is to look into one's mind. Conversely, it is a fault to not pay any attention at all to what is arising in one's mind. Regardless of whether there is negativity or virtue, it is a fault to completely let the mind run free and not periodically check it. In order to be free from this defect or fault we need actually look into our minds and check what is arising. If it is a virtuous state of mind we further develop it, but if it is negative, then we need to recognise it and find ways to apply the antidotes for overcoming those negative attitudes and states of mind. We can only recognise whether something arising in our mind is virtuous or non-virtuous when we actually take the initiative to look into our own mind. Thus we need to engage this form of practice.

There is no extensive explanation on this point, but I suppose we need to understand that although this presentation of the defects doesn't necessarily mean they are delusions in their own right, they do need to be abandoned. So we need to understand how not looking into one's mind is a defect, which needs to be abandoned.

## 26. Degeneration of respect and reverence for deeds concordant with the practices

*418ab Degeneration of respect and reverence for deeds Concordant with the practices occurs through laziness.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary is:

The twenty-sixth, *degeneration of respect and reverence for deeds concordant with the practices, occurs thorough laziness.*

The way to understand this is in relation to oneself. *Degeneration of respect and reverence for deeds concordant with the practices, which occurs through laziness* means that if we don't apply ourselves to engage in the practices of accumulating merit and virtues, then we will not be worthy of respect and *reverence for deeds concordant with the practice*. Because we are not engaging the practice, we would be guilty of the defect of degeneration, and to avoid that we need to apply the opposite, joyous effort, to our practices. So if one overcomes laziness, then one can overcome this fault of degeneration of respect.

## (27) Being a bad person

*418cd A bad person is regarded as being a spiritual guide [Pretending] to have the ways of the Supramundane Victor*

Again, Gyaltsab Je basically reiterates the verse:

The twenty-seventh, *a bad person is regarded as being a spiritual guide pretending to have the ways of the Supramundane Victor.*

It would not be in accordance with the ways of the Supramundane Victor, or the Buddha, if someone regarded as a spiritual guide or teacher were to engage in the act of teaching and so forth with the mere intention of personal gain, such as receiving offerings and respect. The Buddha engaged in giving teachings and advice solely for the benefit of others, and not for any personal gain.

Here we can recall the daily activities of the Buddha, as stated in *Vajra Cutter sutra*, which you have recited many times:

Then, in the morning, having put on the lower and upper Dharma robes and carried the begging bowl, the Bhagavan entered the great city of Shravasti to request alms. Then, having gone to the great city of Shravasti to request alms, the Bhagavan afterwards enjoyed the alms food, and having performed the activity of food, since he had given up alms of later food, put away the begging bowl and upper robe. He washed his feet, sat upon the prepared cushion, and having assumed the cross-legged posture, straightened the body upright and placed mindfulness in front.

From this account we can see how the Buddha, even while engaging in seemingly normal activities such as going out on an alms round and so forth, was always conscious of what would be presented in his teaching. With 'mindfulness in front', indicates that even the Buddha paid particular attention to ensuring he had a vividly clear mind, focussed on what was to be presented in the teachings.

This is another essential point for us to keep in mind. When we are presenting teachings and so forth, we should not to take it lightly and do it in a seemingly distracted way. Rather we should have it consciously in our mind at all times if we are to present it to others. This is quite a significant point that we can gain from this account. Reading these passages can really move our mind tremendously, as they show how immaculately the Buddha engaged in deeds to benefit sentient beings.

## (28) Yearning

*419ab Yearning is a small entanglement Arising from lustful desire.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The twenty-eighth, *yearning though manifest, is a small entanglement arising from lustful desire.*

This reminds me of the remark I once made to someone, which I have already shared with you. When they asked me whether they had to give up all attachments, I said, 'Perhaps it would be okay to keep some small attachments'; they were very glad to hear that! It gave them a sense of temporary relief because we all have the notion that without attachment, there can't be any pleasure.

## (29) Obsession

*419cd Obsession, a great entanglement Arising from desire.*

Here Gyaltsab Je explains:

The twenty-ninth, *obsession is a great entanglement arising from desire* for the five sensual objects of forms, sounds and so forth.

What is translated here as *obsession, is a great entanglement arising from desire for the five sensual objects*, which are visual forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile feelings. It is

because of our obsession with these five objects that we are constantly drawn towards them as a source of pleasure. An obsession is, as explained here, a great entanglement arising when we completely fall for beautiful objects. If we see beautiful objects then a strong desire for the beautiful objects to arises. Similarly we develop very strong desires for beautiful sounds, delicious tastes, and things that feel or smell nice, which then develop into an obsession.

### 30. Avarice

*420ab Avarice is an attitude  
Of clinging to one's own property,*

The commentary basically reiterates the verse:

The thirtieth, *avarice is an attitude of clinging to one's own property.*

### 31. Inopportune avarice

*420cd Inopportune avarice is attachment  
To the property of others.*

Here the commentary reads:

The thirty-first, *inopportune avarice is attachment to the property of others.*

This is quite clear.

Many of these defects are related to attachment. I was intending to give an explanation of attachment here, even though I have done so in the past. The main thing to understand about attachment is that because it is a delusion it is necessarily a faulty or mistaken state of mind. As I have explained previously, one needs to really understand what aspect is mistaken.

When attachment for a beautiful object arises, it is not mistaken in relation to the actual beauty of the object, as there is no denying that the object is beautiful. What it is mistaken about is the exaggeration of the beauty seen in the object. We need to really understand the distinction between the natural beauty of the object, which does exist, and the mistakenly exaggerated beauty, which does not exist but for which one develops attachment.

I mentioned the importance of making offerings of our food and drink last week. As I have mentioned in the past, we first recite the mantra OM AH HUM three times to consecrate the offering.

To understand the significance of the mantra and how it acts to consecrate and purify the offering we can consider the meaning of each syllable.

- HUM is the seed syllable of Akshobya, the enlightened mind. As there is nothing that an enlightened mind cannot purify, HUM signifies purifying all impurities of the substance to be offered. Thus the five contaminated sensual objects are transformed into the five uncontaminated pure substances.
- AH is the seed syllable of Buddha Amitabha, and it transforms the actual substance into nectar.
- OM is the seed syllable of Vairochana, and the significance of consecrating the offering with OM is that it increases the offering. So having consecrated the offering by purifying it and transforming it into nectar, OM has the effect of increasing the offering many times over. We need to understand here that increasing doesn't merely mean increasing in number; it means that it is inexhaustible, no matter how much you partake of it.

When we recite OM AH HUM three times before the offering, then with the first recitation you visualise that the mantra purifies and establishes and consecrates the offering. With the second recitation the mantra transforms the offering into uncontaminated nectar, while the third recitation makes it inexhaustible.

When we recite the blessing OM AH HUM three times, make the offering and recite the offering prayer, it is essential to incorporate visualising making the offering to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Regardless of whether we are able to visualise them well or not, just the thought that the buddhas and bodhisattvas are present is sufficient for them to actually receive our offerings—after all, they are present at all times.

So with an awareness of, and at best, a visualisation of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, we bring to mind that we are making this offering to these holy objects, or the merit field. Through the mantra we have purified the five contaminated sensual objects, transforming them into uncontaminated pure substances. So when we offer tea and food the form is the beautiful colours of the substance we are offering, and when we recite the offering prayer we make an offering of sound. Then there is the smell and the taste and then the feel of the object. So we are offering the five sensual objects to be enjoyed by the five senses of the enlightened beings.

The main part of the offering is when one imagines that the enlightened beings accept the offering, and in doing so, there is a newly developed uncontaminated bliss that they experience within their minds. So the actual offering is when one imagines the enlightened beings experiencing uncontaminated bliss. The term 'offering' refers to the Sanskrit term, *puja*, which some say is actually pronounced *purja*. The main meaning of a puja is to please the minds of the deities, the gurus, the buddhas and the bodhisattvas. Our actual offering is when we imagine that they have experienced uncontaminated bliss as a result of our offering, which they are extremely pleased with. That is how we need to understand it.

This is another way to accumulate great merit and virtue on a daily basis. Since we regard ourselves as practitioners, we need to use every opportunity of eating and drinking as a way to accumulate merit. A genuine offering with this awareness in our mind will definitely give us an opportunity to accumulate great virtue and merit. The more we eat and drink the more we accumulate merit, although of course we need to be mindful we don't overeat and get a stomach ache!

This is how we train our mind in accumulating virtue on a regular basis. As mentioned previously, since we eat and drink so many times a day, if we can start to develop our mindfulness and awareness by making that activity an opportunity to accumulate virtue and merit, then we will become more and more familiar with accumulating virtue, and in that way our mind will become more in tune with virtue.

If we can utilise whatever activity we engage in as a way to generate a virtuous mind, to busy ourselves with accumulating virtue, then it will be an appropriate sort of 'busyness', rather than just being completely immersed in worldly concerns and activities. When we utilise whatever activity we do as a means to accumulate virtue, then it serves its purpose and whatever activity we engage in will not waste our time.

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