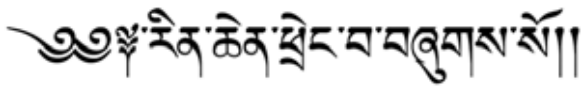

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Following the motivation we generated with the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the meditation practice. *[meditation]*

Now we can generate the exceptional motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: In order to benefit all sentient beings by liberating them from all suffering, and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the Mahayana teachings and put them into practice well. We need to ensure that we engage in any practice with this motivation.

Having generated the determination to put the teaching into practice, a question arises. How do we put it into practice? That essentially comes down to ensuring what we have understood from the teachings that meditation serves as a means to subdue the mind. That is the essential point. Assuming that one can engage in the practice of meditation while maintaining an unruly mind doesn't really serve the purpose! If we are not mindful of this then, even though everything might seem to be going well during our meditation practice, as soon as we come out of it, the slightest provocation might cause us to become upset and angry again.

It is similar to when we go to sleep, when everything temporarily shuts down, and because we are not actively engaged with the outside world, we get a good rest. Thus when we wake up our body is rejuvenated and we are able to engage in the world again with a fresh state of mind, but after a while we become exhausted again. Likewise, if we don't ensure that our meditation practice serves its intended purpose from the beginning, then even though our mind will seem quite subdued just after we come out of meditation, the delusions will gradually arise when we engage with the outside world again.

With respect to the giving and taking meditation practice, it is really worthwhile to ensure that we actually do the practice with the main elements of developing love and compassion intact. The practice of giving is a way to further cultivate and strengthen our sense of love for sentient beings, while the practice of taking strengthens the compassion that we generate for sentient beings. So with these two elements of giving and taking we ensure that our love and compassion increases, and then the practice will have served its purpose.

I have mentioned several times in the past that there is a distinction between meditating on love and meditating on emptiness. What is the difference? Meditating on love and compassion involves generating a state of mind of love and compassion within oneself, whereas meditating on emptiness involves focussing on an object. This is clearly presented in the Lam Rim teachings.

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

Following the presentation of the fifty-seven defects, which concluded with verse 433, Gyaltshab Je's commentary explains that:

Most of the fifty seven defects are within the classification of abandonments. Some are identified as mental factors, as a way to indicate the cause and effect of the defects, thus they need to be abandoned. Most of them are presented as subjects to be explained followed by the explanation; however some are presented just as a subject.

Some of the fifty-seven defects fall within the classification of mental factors. Some, drowsiness and sleep for example, are just presented solely as a subject. Whereas the presentation of others consists of both the subject and an explanation. Specifically, this refers to how some of the subjects are presented in the root text: first a sutra is quoted and then the root text gives a further explanation of what that particular defect means.

1.2. Summation

Verse 434 is a summary statement, which reads:

*434ab [Householder] bodhisattvas abandon those.
Those diligent in [monastic] vows abandon more.*

As Gyaltshab Je explains in his commentary:

While all the previously presented defects are to be abandoned by householder *bodhisattvas* as well, *those* bodhisattvas who are *diligent in monastic vows* abandon even more.

It is clearly explained here that the fifty-seven defects that have been presented are to be abandoned by householder or lay bodhisattvas who have not taken the ordination vows, while bodhisattva monastics need to abandon even more than these fifty-seven defects. With respect to the three trainings, monastics are committed to observing ethics to a higher degree than householders, and it is the same with concentration and developing wisdom, and this is the hallmark of the distinction between householders and monastics. The term 'monastic' in itself is not sufficient to make this distinction between householders and monastics. This is a really significant point about how to engage in practice.

To give an illustration of how a practice can become a higher form of practice, ethics observed in conjunction with renunciation is a higher form of ethics than the observance of ethics alone, and ethics conjoined with bodhicitta is an even higher degree of practice, because of the altruistic mind with which it is conjoined. Likewise ethics conjoined with the realisation of emptiness is a much higher form of ethics than the observance of ethics alone. Thus observing ethics conjoined with a higher state of mind or realisation naturally makes it a much higher form of practice. This really shows how, as practitioners, we need to ensure that our practice is, at the very least, conjoined with a strong determination to develop renunciation and bodhicitta, as well as the view of realising emptiness. All three are essential if we are to engage in a full form of practice.

We can further relate this to the basis of taking vows. As many of you might be aware, taking self-liberation vows

has to be based on the motivation of renunciation, i.e. having the determination to develop renunciation is the basis for taking self-liberation vows. To take the bodhisattva vows one needs to have the basis of the bodhicitta motivation, which is the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings i.e. bodhisattva vows are obtained on the basis of that bodhicitta motivation. Whereas tantric vows are obtained on the basis of this superior or special bodhicitta motivation: In order to liberate all sentient beings from suffering, I need to achieve enlightenment very, very quickly; not at some distant time in the future, but even in this very life time!! This level of determination comes with the special bodhicitta motivation.

It is also good to take note of the duration of the vows themselves. Self-liberation vows are based on the intention, 'I will keep the vows until the end of my life'. So when this life ends, one loses the self-liberation vows that one has taken. Whereas when one takes the bodhisattva vows, the very intention of taking these vows is 'until I achieve enlightenment'. Thus, when one dies, one does not lose the bodhisattva vows, and they remain intact in one's mental continuum. These are also significant points to consider.

2. ADOPTING GOOD QUALITIES

Again it is really worthwhile for us to note the significance of sequence of the presentation, which is highly meaningful. It is a very significant indication of how to engage in the practice, and we should follow that advice.

In the earlier part of the chapter, rather than saying that we need to forsake the defects and just leaving it at that, the text goes into an extensive explanation identifying what the defects are, and each and every defect is explained very specifically and clearly. Having clearly presented the defects that are to be forsaken, what follows next is the qualities to be adopted. Again, rather than just leaving the advice at that, the text then proceeds to present and extensively explain the qualities that we need to adopt. This is the very meticulous way in which the teaching is presented.

Studying the order in which the material of the text is presented really helps to develop a heightened state of wisdom, in particular the analytical wisdom that is able to distinguish between faults or defects that are to be abandoned, and qualities that are to be adopted. That type of analytical wisdom is really strengthened and further developed by studying this text.

The manner of adopting good qualities is presented under two main headings:

2.1. Temporary good qualities

2.2. Final good qualities

We are inclined to focus on our ultimate goal, which is to develop the final good qualities. However, in order to obtain those final good qualities, one needs to firstly acquaint ourselves with the temporary good qualities and cultivate them. From this presentation we can also derive the understanding that there is a sequential way of proceeding towards obtaining our goals. We cannot assume that we can jump straight into achieving our ultimate goals. Rather we have to train by starting at the

beginner's level to obtain the temporary good qualities, and gradually move onto achieving our ultimate goals.

2.1. Temporary good qualities

This section is sub-divided into two:

2.1.1. General teaching

2.1.2 Good qualities of the ten grounds

2.1.1. General teaching

This section is presented in four sub-divisions:

2.1.1.1. Brief description of the entities of good qualities

2.1.1.2. Identifying the individual entities of good qualities

2.1.1.3. Individual effects

2.1.1.4. General effect

Again the very meticulous presentation is evident in the layout of the sub-divisions.

2.1.1.1. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE ENTITIES OF GOOD QUALITIES

The two lines from the root text relating to this read:

*434cd Freed from these defects
Good qualities are easily observed.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further expands on this point:

When bodhisattvas are freed from these defects, good qualities are easily observed. Thus be intent on abandoning defects and acquiring good qualities!

If we intend to develop good qualities, it is essential to first of all free ourselves from defects. In fact, we may find from our own experience that even though we might wish for a particular good quality, and attempt to adopt that good quality, it is very hard to maintain that quality if we have not already worked on overcoming the defect that hinders that quality. So a defect is really an opposing factor to a good quality. Thus in order to acquire a particular good quality, one needs to initially work on overcoming its opposing factor, which is the defect. Then, as the defect itself starts to weaken, the good quality will naturally strengthen. That's how things work in nature. When an opposing factor is weakened, then the opposite to that will increase and become stronger. That is how we need to understand the procedure of developing the good qualities.

The actual description of the entities of good qualities is contained the next verse, which reads:

*435 Briefly the good qualities
Observed by bodhisattvas are
Giving, ethics, patience, effort,
Concentration, wisdom, compassion, and so forth.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

If asked what are, briefly, the good qualities observed by bodhisattvas? They are giving, ethics, patience, effort, concentration, wisdom, and bodhicitta which is motivated by compassion and so forth.

The entire practice of a bodhisattva is presented in this one verse. As other teachings also present, the state of mind of a bodhisattva is having the altruistic mind of bodhicitta, and the actions in which a bodhisattva engages are the six perfections. This really summarises the description of a bodhisattva; a being who has generated the awaking mind and thus engages in the

practice of the six perfections. It is compassion that motivates the spontaneous, altruistic mind that aspires to achieve enlightenment, the awakening mind, which, in turn, motivates the practice of six perfections, which are the deeds of the bodhisattva.

Since I have presented the six perfections in detail many times previously, I don't not have to describe them to you in great detail. However the text presents the meaning of each one individually.

2.1.1.2. IDENTIFYING THE INDIVIDUAL ENTITIES OF GOOD QUALITIES

The first four perfections are:

*436 Giving is to give away one's wealth.
Ethics is to help others.
Patience is to have forsaken anger.
Effort is enthusiasm for virtues*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

Giving is the intent to thoroughly give away one's wealth to others, as well as the physical and verbal actions motivated by that intent.

As presented here, the definition of **giving** is the intent to thoroughly give, which is said to be the entity of generosity. The substance of one's generosity is what one actually gives, whether it be material wealth, Dharma or whatever else. But the actual entity of giving is the intention to give that is developed in one's mind.

Ethics as presented by Gyaltsab Je is:

Ethics is, with the intent to help others, abandoning to strive merely for one's own benefit.

Although we might be familiar with the definition of ethics as generally being the intention to refrain from misdeeds, in this context, it relates to the ethics observed by a bodhisattva. The specific definition here is the intent to help others by abandoning striving merely for one's own benefit. Thus the intention to help others has no stains of self-interest or ulterior motives, and is practised solely to benefit others. The definition thus implies that because there is the intent to help others, there is no way that one could engage in harmful deeds or acts. Thus the implicit presentation here is that ethics enables one to restrain from harmful deeds with the intention to always benefit others.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary presents **patience** as:

Patience is to have forsaken anger, such as by thinking definitely about the Dharma and so forth

The first part of the definition of patience is to forsake anger, which is specifically a state of mind devoid of anger and any sense of retaliation. We really need to understand what patience actually means. Avoiding retaliation is not patience if one still harbours thoughts of anger. So we need to understand that the real mark of patience is when there is no trace of anger within one's mind.

The words 'and so forth' in the commentary refer to the patience of willingly enduring hardships as well as the patience of not retaliating when someone harms us. We also need to understand the definition of patience that is presented in other sources, which refer to the state of mind that is not disturbed in the event of harm, suffering or adversity. These are really essential points to

understand, not just intellectually, but to be developed personally.

The commentary specifically mentions the patience to definitely think about Dharma. As Geshe Chekawa mentioned, there is no way we can seriously engage in Dharma practice without developing patience. Patience is essential if we are to engage in the practice of Dharma, because there are bound to be adversities and difficulties and so forth.

We need to understand the three types of patience:

- The patience of not allowing our mind to become disturbed in the event of experiencing suffering;
- The patience of not allowing our mind to become disturbed in the event of experiencing adversity; and
- The patience of definitely thinking about the Dharma.

The next perfection is effort, although a more complete translation would be **joyous effort**. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

[Joyous] effort is enthusiasm merely for virtuous deeds.

As other teachings also indicate, all good qualities come about from joyous effort, which indicates that without joyous effort we cannot acquire any of the good qualities we wish to obtain. Here, we need to note the difference between the Tibetan word *tsundu* which we translate into English as 'joyous effort', and *dugri*, which is a general kind of effort, where we exert ourselves to complete a task but not necessarily in a happy state of mind.

We have now covered four of the six perfections: giving, ethics, patience and joyous effort.

The next verse presents the last two perfections:

*437 Concentration is unafflicted one-pointedness.
Wisdom is ascertainment of the meaning of the truths.
Compassion is a mind having the one savour
Of mercy for all sentient beings.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Concentration is a virtuous one-pointedness, unafflicted by the savour [temptations] of laxity and excitement.

As clearly presented here, **concentration** is a state of mind that focuses one-pointedly on a virtuous object. This perfection of concentration is in contrast to a mind that seems to be focussed, but which is still affected by the savour of laxity and excitement, and therefore not a genuine concentration. While one may seem quite focussed, if one doesn't pay attention to the clarity of the single-pointed focus, then subtle laxity and excitement could become involved in that seemingly focussed state of mind, which would not be a genuine concentration. Rather it would actually be another more subtle form of savouring laxity and excitement.

So we need to be mindful from the beginning about what concentration actually is. As presented in other teachings, the definition of concentration is a mind that has arisen from one's own side and not dependent on others, which is able to focus single-pointedly on a virtuous object. As presented here, this is also related to developing calm abiding. There are some who seem to have a general

understanding of calm abiding, but who seem to have doubts about what concentration actually implies. So we really need to understand that calm abiding is derived from concentration and thus based on developing concentration.

Gyaltsab Je then presents this definition of **wisdom**:

Wisdom is ascertainment of the meaning of the two truths, four truths, and so forth.

Wisdom is presented as that which is able to clearly ascertain the meaning of the two truths, and is able to identify and distinguish between them, as well as being able to clearly identify and ascertain what the four noble truths are and so forth. So the wisdom presented here is a specific type of wisdom.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Great compassion is a mind that focuses on sentient beings and has the one savour of mercy, of freeing all sentient beings from suffering.

This adds to the meaning of the verse, by explaining that great **compassion** is a state of mind that focuses on sentient beings, and has the taste (or savour) of mercy, or compassion, which is the intention of freeing all sentient beings from suffering. Great compassion, as presented here, is wishing from the depths of one's heart for all beings to be free from suffering. You will be aware from the seven-point cause and effect sequence that for great compassion to become a cause for bodhicitta, one needs to then further develop that compassion into superior intention. This means developing a state of mind where one takes personal responsibility for freeing all beings from suffering: 'I will free all beings from suffering. I will take it upon myself to free all beings from suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness'.

This state of mind called superior intention is in contrast to the earlier aspirations, 'How wonderful it would be if all beings are free from suffering', which is great compassion, and 'how wonderful it would be if all beings obtain the state of happiness', which is great love. Although these are incredibly noble thoughts and aspirations, they do not directly help to alleviate suffering and provide happiness to others. Superior intention, on the other hand, is developed when one takes on personal responsibility for freeing all beings from suffering and leading them to the state of ultimate happiness. It is when we develop this superior intention that sentient beings are actually benefited.

2.1.1.3. INDIVIDUAL EFFECTS

This section is a presentation of the individual effects or positive results of each of the six perfections of generosity and so forth.

As the verse reads:

*438 From giving there arises wealth, from ethics
happiness,
From patience a good appearance, from
[effort in] virtue brilliance,
From concentration peace, from wisdom
liberation,
From compassion all aims are achieved.*

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

From the results of *giving there arises wealth; from ethics, happiness* of a happy transmigration; *from patience, a good appearance; from effort in virtue, brilliance; from concentration, peace* through pacifying the delusions such as excitement and laxity; *from wisdom, liberation* from cyclic existence. *From compassion, all aims of self and others are achieved.*

As mentioned earlier, this verse summarises all the virtuous deeds of the bodhisattvas, which are subsumed into the six perfections. Really comprehending and understanding what the six perfections entail is a means to understand the practices in which the bodhisattvas engage.

The deeds of a bodhisattva can be divided into the deeds that benefit others, and the deeds that benefit oneself. There are no other deeds of a bodhisattva that are not included in these two categories. Thus the first three perfections, generosity, ethics, patience are the deeds that directly benefit other beings, whilst concentration and wisdom are the two perfections that are essential for personal benefit or development. The perfection of joyous effort is said to be a perfection that relates to benefitting oneself as well as others. Without joyous effort, there is no way one can benefit others or oneself. In this way, all of the deeds of the bodhisattvas are subsumed into the six perfections.

Because they wish to provide continuous and unceasing benefit to sentient beings, bodhisattvas engage in being generous, observing ethics, showing patience and so forth, as well as further developing themselves over many successive lives. This is where the bodhisattvas' altruistic motivation—the aspiration to intentionally remain in samsara in order to benefit sentient beings—comes from. As bodhisattvas vow to benefit sentient beings in successive lives, it is good to understand how the individual effects of the six perfections are an aid to benefit sentient beings.

We need to understand the results in a sequential way. In order to benefit sentient beings, it is essential to have a good basis, which relates to a good rebirth. Without the basis of being in good physical conditions, there would be no way to benefit other beings. It is the practice of observing ethics that is the main cause to ensure that one obtains the most favourable physical conditions in a good rebirth, thereby ensuring that one has a good basis with which to benefit other sentient beings.

However having the basis of a good rebirth, while lacking sufficient means such as wealth, will not be sufficient to benefit sentient beings. Thus one needs to have a sufficient amount of wealth, and the cause for obtaining wealth is through the practice of generosity. Engaging in the act of generosity to directly benefit other sentient beings and to be able to continue to do so, is a cause for acquiring wealth in the future.

Then again, with the good physical conditions and good material resources there is no way one can benefit others if one lacks the conditions of a good entourage or a good following; as we can see the lack of good followers can lead to many complications. Having a good entourage or following is an essential way of benefitting others, and the cause for obtaining a good charismatic appearance and qualities is through the practice of patience.

Having acquired all of these good conditions, concentration is necessary to ensure that these conditions become a means for benefitting others, and not a cause for delusions to arise. The way to pacify the delusions is through concentration which, as presented earlier, is a single-pointed focus on virtue. If the mind is not single-pointedly focussed on virtue, then it will be prone to the influence of defilements or defects, which is why concentration is essential.

For all of these good conditions to become a means to liberation, to free oneself and others from the bondage of samsara, one needs to have wisdom. Thus cultivating wisdom is most essential.

The cause to acquire all of these good qualities as a way to benefit others and to further develop oneself is through enthusiasm or joyous effort. Without joyous effort none of these can be obtained and so joyous effort is also essential.

In this manner it is good to understand to how the six perfections serve as a means to benefit others by becoming a cause for acquiring further qualities and so forth in future lifetimes.

On a personal level, it is important that these practices are not dismissed as being practices specific to bodhisattvas and therefore not relevant to oneself. In fact, when we take them as a personal instruction, we can definitely see that it is all too easy for our good conditions to become a vehicle for delusions and defects to arise. We can see the importance of having a good healthy body, however, the times we are in sound health are the times when we might be more inclined to engage in negative deeds through our physical actions. So we can see how a good physical condition can become a cause for acquainting ourselves with negative activity.

It is the same with wealth. We may suffer when we have no wealth, but if we are not mindful when we do have sufficient wealth, that wealth can become a cause for one to further engage in negative activity, thereby increasing the defilements and delusions. This is why it is essential that we engage in the practice of meditation and develop concentration.

Then of course, there are our companions and friends, which can be related to the bodhisattva's entourage. Being deprived of friends and companions is a cause for suffering, but those companions and friends can also become a means to further increase negativity and conflict and so forth.

How wonderful it would be if we could secure a state where our good physical conditions, good resources and good companions don't become a cause for delusions to arise, but are utilised as means for further developing oneself and accumulating virtue! That would be a truly wonderful state.

When we are not able to properly utilise all of those conditions we experience so much angst and unhappiness in relation to our wealth, physical condition and companions or friendships. Therefore on a practical level, it is worthwhile endeavouring to secure ourselves against being affected in a negative way.

If we are inclined to engage in the practice of Dharma, these are really essential points that we should bear in mind, and try to implement.

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