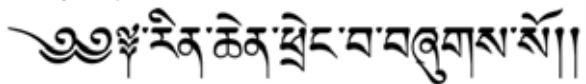


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# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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As usual, we can spend some time in meditation.

Our motivation can be based on the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer that we have just recited. At our level even generating the thought, 'I will dedicate myself to do whatever I can to benefit other sentient beings' may be the equivalent of generating a bodhicitta attitude.

However, if we were to go into further detail, there is, as the teachings explain, a distinction between an uncontrived bodhicitta attitude and a contrived bodhicitta attitude. The uncontrived bodhicitta attitude refers to a spontaneous aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings that arises without effort. Whereas the contrived bodhicitta attitude is based on having contemplated the sequence of the six causes, such as recognising all beings as one's mother, remembering their kindness and wishing to repay the kindness and so forth, and then intentionally generating the attitude of wishing all beings to be free from suffering, and for that reason wishing to achieve enlightenment. In order to develop an uncontrived bodhicitta attitude, one has to have first generated a contrived bodhicitta attitude. Therefore every attempt that we make now towards developing even a contrived bodhicitta attitude is highly meaningful and beneficial.

The main thing for us to do on a regular basis is to try to cultivate and strengthen the seed of bodhicitta that has already been implanted in our mind, as a consequence of having repeatedly heard what bodhicitta means from many different teachings. We have also spent some time contemplating it. This is a significant point to remember. So the main point is for us to generate that bodhicitta attitude for our practice of meditation now.

*[Meditation]*

Now we can come out of our meditation session, to engage in the teachings. Only a buddha is capable of teaching while in meditative equipoise. Indeed, this quality of the Buddha is signified by the mudra in which his left hand is in meditative equipoise, and the right is in the teaching mudra. This signifies the Buddha's unsurpassed quality of being able to teach while simultaneously being in meditative equipoise, which is well beyond the capacity of any sentient being. If we are meditating, then we aren't able to engage in the teachings at the same time.

In the opening lines of the *Vajra Cutter sutra* it mentions that the Buddha, having undertaken his alms rounds, sits on the throne with mindfulness to engage in the teaching of Dharma. This indicates that prior to engaging in teaching, the Buddha intentionally generated mindfulness. Of course, it goes without saying that as an enlightened being the Buddha was in a perpetually

mindful state; thus the Buddha's deeds are a reminder for us to practise mindfulness. Also, the reason why the teachers snap their fingers after reciting a verse prior to sitting on the throne, is to remember impermanence, as way to remove any pride about giving the teaching. When a teacher is mindful of the subject matter of the teaching, then there is no room for pride to arise in their mind, because the very point of the Dharma is to overcome delusions such as pride. These are important points for us to keep in mind.

## 2. ADOPTING GOOD QUALITIES

### 2.1. Temporary good qualities

#### 2.1.1. General teaching (cont.)

In our last session, we concluded with the verse that explained the individual effects of the six perfections.

##### 2.1.1.4. GENERAL EFFECT

The verse relating to this heading reads:

*439 From the simultaneous perfection  
Of all those seven is attained  
The sphere of inconceivable wisdom,  
The protectorship of the world.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation:

*From the simultaneous perfection of all those seven qualities, which are practised on the trainee's path, one attains the sphere of inconceivable wisdom, the protectorship of the world that is perfect buddhahood.*

The essential point here is that achieving the result of perfect buddhahood is dependent upon practising the six perfections while on the trainee's path. We really need to understand that the state of perfect buddhahood or enlightenment does not spontaneously materialise out of nothing!

At this point we can consider the unique presentation of the Buddhist path. Of course, I cannot claim that I know much about the presentations of other faiths and traditions, but it seems that they hold the view that God has existed since primordial times. The explanation of God seems to be, that he is an entity who is intrinsically pure, possessing only divine qualities, and that he is the creator and saviour of the world. This seems to imply that if you have faith in God, he will reach down to save you.

Whereas the unique Buddhist explanation is that an enlightened being is not an entity which has always existed, nor do they materialise out of nothing. Rather, an enlightened being is someone who has gone through all of the trainings on the trainee's path to develop the necessary qualities leading to enlightenment. Furthermore all the qualities were developed step-by-step, sequentially. They engaged in the six perfections and practised them sequentially on each level to achieve further realisations, leading all the way up to enlightenment. These are really significant points for us to contemplate, as they also indicate the way that we need to train.

When we hear about the amazing qualities of enlightenment, we might be inspired to achieve enlightenment ourselves. We might think that we can go straight to that state without engaging in the trainings at the lower levels, but that is just not possible. The cessation of suffering to be obtained is dependent on the

path, which is to be actualised and realised sequentially. Thus, in order to achieve ultimate cessation, one needs to train from the beginner's level, working sequentially through all the practices leading up to the ultimate goal. That is something we need to understand.

Here we are using the word 'unique' in the sense of how Buddhism differs from other traditions. None of these traditions with respect to God suggest that it is possible to become God oneself. To them that is inconceivable and may even be blasphemous. The reason for that is because there is no explanation of the sequence of causes and effects that lead to achieving a state of Godhood.

However the unique feature of the Buddhism is that we revere our teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni as an incomparably kind and compassionate enlightened being, who achieved that state through none other than by developing the causes, which are, in brief, the six perfections. We can also engage in those very same causes that lead an individual being to the state of enlightenment. It is because we can engage in and cultivate those very causes right now that it is possible for us to conceive the possibility of achieving the state of enlightenment.

Returning to the text and Gyaltsab Je's explanation of it, the commentary states:

*From the simultaneous perfection of all those seven qualities, which are practised on the trainee's path...*

Here, we need to understand that the reference to the *simultaneous perfection of all of those seven qualities* indicates that it is not sufficient to engage in and perfect just one of these practices, for example, practising only generosity, ethics or just patience. Rather, *simultaneous* indicates that one must engage in the practice of all seven qualities and perfect them all. One engages in these practices on the trainee's path to reach the perfected level of all seven qualities. This will be the cause for one to attain *the sphere of inconceivable wisdom*.

The lower Buddhist schools relate the six perfections to the ultimate perfected state of enlightenment. Whereas the unique feature of the Prasangika presentation is that the six perfections are practised on the trainee's path. Thus when Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland* says, *from the simultaneous perfection of all those seven*, it is indicating that these seven are practised on the trainee's path, it is a presentation of the Prasangika view. If you can recall, I have mentioned in the past that *perfection* incorporates three main features, which are the bodhicitta attitude, a unique dedication and the view realising emptiness. Thus an act of generosity, for example, that is intact with all three features is a perfection of generosity. This explanation is to be applied to the rest of the perfections.

The last two lines of the verse are explained in this way by Gyaltsab Je:

*... one attains the sphere of inconceivable wisdom, the protectorship of the world that is perfect buddhahood.*

This indicates that having engaged simultaneously in the practice of the six perfections on the trainee's path, the goal that will be obtained is *the sphere of inconceivable wisdom, the protectorship of the world, which is buddhahood*.

That is the ultimate goal that one obtains by practising the six perfections.

In order to better understand the practices of the six perfections it is good to identify the opposite of each of the seven practices. In fact, relating those opposites to ourselves can serve as an impetus to overcome these faults. Thus the opposite of generosity or giving is miserliness; the opposite of ethics is unethical behaviour or faulty ethics; the opposite of patience is anger; the opposite of joyous effort is laziness; the opposite of concentration is a completely distracted mind; the opposite of wisdom is corrupt wisdom; and the opposite of compassion is harmful intent or violence. When we check within, as the teachings indicate, and we find ourselves being miserly, then we need to engage in the opposite, which is generosity.

If we are overcome with anger, then we need to practice patience. If someone approaches you and says 'I have a problem with anger, what do I need to do?' you can say, 'Oh, practice patience!', but just saying that, without explaining how to do so, would not be sufficient. When patients go to see a doctor, for example, if there is any indication that they are very nervous, upset or angry and agitated, then the doctor will more than likely advise, 'You should be a bit more patient'. It is quite significant that doctors these days even suggest doing meditation, because they see it as a technique that helps to calm the mind. So they are now acknowledging meditation as a technique that helps to settle and calm the mind.

I mentioned earlier that the opposite of compassion is violence or harmful intent, so we need to be mindful about avoiding that. An earlier verse in the text mentioned that compassion is an essential practice, which should be practiced from the very outset. As presented in the teachings, it is the result of having developed compassion that one engages in the practices of the six perfections. As indicated in the teachings, compassion is essential in the beginning, in the middle, as well as at the end. So it is a practice which encompasses all aspects of the path.

As indicated in some teachings, the stronger the expression of compassion and its cultivation within one's heart, the easier it becomes to develop the actual bodhicitta. Apparently, compassion can be developed to such a strong and intense level. As the earlier verses said, compassion is that which can accomplish all of our purposes, for the benefit of oneself and others.

### 2.1.2 Good qualities of the ten grounds

The verses in this section of the text are a presentation of the ten grounds of the bodhisattva's path. As we have already covered the ten bodhisattva grounds in previous teachings, perhaps someone can name them?

*Student: The joyful, the stainless, luminous, radiant, difficult to overcome, and the manifest...*

Ven. Fedor and I worked quite hard to present the entire *Madhyamakavatara* teaching. Initially, Ven. Fedor's commitment was to come to Tara Institute only for one year, however when I indicated when I was going to teach the *Madhyamaka*, Fedor took the initiative, saying 'If Geshe-la teaches the *Madhyamaka*, then I will stay until that is complete!' At the time I mentioned that it would

be difficult to start it and not complete it. So having worked hard at it, the implication is that it would be a pity to let it go. I don't know about the students, but the translator, Fedor, took the initiative, and has definitely become much more familiar with the *Madhyamakavatara*!

It happened that His Holiness made one of his visits when I was teaching the *Madhyamaka* text. So when His Holiness asked me, 'What teachings are you teaching at the centre?' I said, 'On one evening, I am teaching the *Madhyamaka* text and on another evening the *Thirty-Seven Practices* are being taught'. His Holiness actually put the palms of his hands together, brought them to his forehead and said, 'That is really incredible. To be able to present both method and wisdom aspects of the teaching to the students is really wonderful!'

*Precious Garland* gives a sequential presentation of the ten grounds. However as an assignment, you can familiarise yourselves with them in advance. Denis mentioned quite a few of them, so it was a good attempt!

This reminds me of a story from the past. When we were studying in India, some of the senior teachers and geshe were selected to undertake some special classes in Mussoorie, including Hindi as well as some English. I heard from one of the abbots, who attended those classes as a geshe, that everyone was very zealous, so they sat quite close to the teacher. However when the English teacher, who happened to be a woman, used to very forcefully say the letter 'F', a lot of spit would come out!! So the geshe in the front row started to back away. No-one wanted to sit in the front row anymore!!

As Hindi was also being taught, one particular geshe, Yeshe Gawa from the Ganden Jangtse monastery was very zealous about learning to count in Hindi. At one point he and as well as the late ex-abbot of Sera Monastery Khensur Lobsang Wangchuk, who was a great master and scholar, went out to a shop together. They didn't really know the name of the object they wanted to buy, but they finally saw it on display, and indicated that they wanted to buy it. When they asked how much it was, the shop owner said *oonis* in Hindi. Then Khensur Rinpoche looked at Yeshe Gawa, who was counting through the numbers in Hindi, but seemed not to be able to go much beyond ten or eleven. He never reached *oonis*, which is nineteen! So Geshe Lobsang Wangchuk, who was a very realised being, unassumingly said, 'Oh, I think it must be around nineteen or twenty, in fact, it might be nineteen!'

From then on Geshe Lobsang Wangchuk used to advise the younger monks, 'It's good to pay attention to the Hindi language. We are living in India, so you need to have enough Hindi to be able to go to the shops and buy something to eat and so forth'. There were those of course, who didn't have any tuition in Hindi; some of them actually tried to memorise dictionaries, which of course, is not sufficient to be able to actually use a language.

There is also the story of the geshe who went to a clinic because had a lot of stomach pain. He asked a Tibetan who was supposed to know Hindi to come along as an interpreter. The supposed interpreter apparently said to

the doctor, in Tibetan, 'His stomach is not well' so there had been no point of taking him along as an interpreter!

Another incident that became the talk of the town for quite a while concerned the geshe and monks who attempted to make the journey to Dharamsala. They went to the train station, and as they didn't have much command of the language they relied upon a monk called Chonzay who was considered to be diligent in studying Hindi and more likely to know the language—apparently he was the one who had memorised the dictionary! They wanted to know which platform they should go to, so they said to Chonzay, 'Come on, find out where the right platform and the train that we need to catch is'. He then replied, 'Oh, hang on, hang on, my language is in my bag, I have to look for it!', and he started to search for his dictionary. That's another story about having learned and memorised something, but not being able to use it. These stories came to mind when you were attempting to name the ten grounds.

With respect to this section Good Qualities of the Ten Grounds, the commentary adds two sub-divisions that are not included in the root text. They are:

2.1.2.1. General meaning

2.1.2.2. Branch meaning

### 2.1.2.1. GENERAL MEANING

Gyaltsab Je included this section as a way of giving a general presentation of the ten grounds. His commentary begins:

In the commentary on the *Madhyamakavatara* it states:

This commentary of the *Madhyamakavatara* is Chandrakirti's auto-commentary. Then Gyaltsab Je quotes from this commentary:

When the uncontaminated wisdom of bodhisattvas is conjoined with compassion and the like, they obtain the state that is called 'ground'. That is because they have become the support or basis for [higher] qualities.

Here, *ground* refers specifically to the ground that is part of the classification of 'grounds and paths', rather than its ordinary meaning. The definition of ground, as presented in other texts is, that which serves as the basis for achieving many qualities, and which is a clear realisation within a continuum of one who has entered the path.

The term 'ground' generally refers to the ground beneath us, and the ground that is part of the classification of grounds and paths is so named because, just as the earthly ground serves as the basis for many plants and trees and so forth to be cultivated, likewise the ground that is classified within the grounds and paths also serves as the basis for the cultivation and development of many higher qualities.

Although this has been presented previously, I remind you that 'ground', 'path' and 'clear realisation' are synonymous.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

This passage presents the following four attributes in relation to grounds—nature, type of qualities possessed, how the term 'ground' is obtained, and the meaning of the term 'ground'.

The attributes of a ground, are presented in four categories. This relates to the quote from Chandrakirti's *Auto-commentary on the Madhyamakavatara* which refers to the uncontaminated wisdom of a bodhisattva. That uncontaminated wisdom actually relates to the ground. Thus, the identification of ground presents a distinction between what is contaminated and what is uncontaminated.

This presentation of 'uncontaminated' is in accord with the unique Prasangika presentation of uncontaminated wisdom as being free from any stains. According to the lower schools, as presented in the *Abhidharmakosha*, the distinction between 'contaminated' and 'uncontaminated' lies in the fact that contaminated objects are a cause of delusions such as attachment, while uncontaminated objects do not cause any delusions to arise.

(1) The first attribute of a ground is **nature**. Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

- 1) That which is stained by the deluded ignorance of grasping at true existence or its imprints are a contamination, while the wisdom that is free from those stains is uncontaminated.

Here the distinction between *contaminated* and *uncontaminated* is made clear.

*Contaminated* refers to *that which is stained by the deluded ignorance of grasping at true existence*, which is deluded ignorance itself, or its *imprint*. So both the ignorance of grasping at true existence and the imprints of that ignorance are contaminated. The imprints of that grasping at true existence refers to the fact that even when one has actually overcome the ignorance of grasping at true existence, things still have the appearance of true existence. The imprints are the residue or the stain of that ignorance, which remains in the mental continuum, and which lead to a mistaken perception in relation to the appearance of true existence.

The analogy given in the teachings is the dream state. The reason why dreams are mistaken and not real or true is because the consciousness is affected by the sleep consciousness, which obscures the mind from perceiving real or actual objects. In sleep, things that are in fact, not true or real appear to be real. That which affects the consciousness in this way is the sleep consciousness. Similarly, that which causes the mind of a sentient being to grasp at the appearance of true existence is the imprints of the delusions on the mind. Even when the ignorance of grasping at true existence has been overcome, there can still be the appearance of true existence, due to the imprints of the original delusion.

Both the delusion of ignorance of grasping at true existence, and its imprints, serve as obscurations to achieving liberation and enlightenment. The first, the ignorance of grasping at true existence is referred to as a deluded obscuration, that which is the main obstacle for obtaining liberation, while the imprints of grasping at true existence are referred to as obscurations to omniscience. So even though one has overcome the deluded obscurations, the obscurations to omniscience, which are the imprints of the delusions, still remain in one's mental continuum, which hinder one from obtaining the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

As a way to back-up this point, Gyaltsab Je quotes from a commentary on Nagarjuna's *Root Wisdom* by Chandrakirti:

This is so, for as stated in *Clear Words*: That which is free from the defects of ignorance is uncontaminated wisdom, and thus it does not rely on the nature of the object.

*Uncontaminated wisdom* is defined as that which is free from the defects of ignorance; so it does not rely on the actual nature of the object, but rather the state of mind.

Following this quote from Chandrakirti's *Clear Words* the commentary continues:

That is to say, apart from an arya's non-conceptual wisdom of meditative equipoise, there is no consciousness that is not stained by the imprints of ignorance, prior to obtaining the buddha ground.

Apart from the consciousness of an arya's non-conceptual wisdom of meditative equipoise, all other consciousnesses are stained by the imprints of ignorance. So from the Prasangika point of view the consciousnesses of all ordinary sentient beings are necessarily stained by the imprints. This means that all of their five sense consciousnesses are stained by the imprints of ignorance. As mentioned earlier, the only exception is the non-conceptual wisdom of meditative equipoise, which is not stained by the imprints of grasping at true existence.

This means that for an ordinary being's mind or consciousness, there is necessarily the appearance of true existence, because their consciousness is tainted by the ignorance of grasping at true existence, as well as the imprints of that grasping. So it is as if we are doubly tainted.

When we think about how we perceive things, we see that we totally believe in how things appear to us. When someone says 'Can you bring that clock', the fact that we stand up, and go and fetch the clock is because it appears to our eye consciousness as being a truly existent clock. So we have no qualms about what actual clock is, because it appears to us as being a truly existent clock. That is how the ordinary consciousness is completely influenced or tainted by the appearance of true existence. The reason why we have that appearance of true existence is because our mind is tainted by the ignorance of grasping at true existence, as well as the imprints of that grasping at true existence.

When we think about it, we have that perception of things as existing from their own side without depending on anything else. For example, when someone says, 'Bring a book', we have in our mind an image of a solid book that exists from its own side, not depending on any other causes or conditions, but existing independently. We perceive the book as an independently existing book and our ability to fetch the book, is based on our perception of a truly and independently existent book. This perception of things as truly existent phenomena is identified as being a mistaken perception.

However, although an ordinary sentient being's mind (in contrast to the mind of arya being in meditative equipoise) is necessarily a mistaken consciousness, one must not confuse that mistaken consciousness with a

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wrong consciousness. That is another significant distinction that you also need to understand.

While I have presented these points many times in the past, it is best to emphasise them again in case you have had a lapse of memory. It is good to try to keep in mind that the mistaken perception of grasping at true existence, or grasping at a self, relates to our unquestioning belief in that perception. For example, when we see a friend coming, we immediately think 'Oh, there's my friend'. The moment that we have that perception, we believe that what we are seeing is our friend, which, in itself, is an indication that our perception is tainted by grasping at true existence. We apprehend and grasp at an independently existent friend, believing them to exist from their own side. The moment we believe, 'That is my friend who's coming towards me', we are tainted by that mistaken conception.

When we relate to our own appearance and believe that is who we are, then that is the grasping at a self. The appearance of ourselves is not in accordance to how we actually exist. That is because we appear to ourselves as an inherently and independently existent self, which is not dependent on other causes and conditions. When we believe that what we refer to as 'me' is really me, then that is an indication of our mistaken conception of true existence, or grasping at a truly existent self.

There is also a distinction between the appearance of true existence and grasping at true existence. If there is an appearance of true existence, it doesn't necessarily have to be grasping at true existence. My feeling is that in order to apprehend something as being truly existent, there has to be a thought of actually believing that what one is referring to as a friend for example, actually exists as a friend. As explained in the teachings, it is only when one actually grasps onto an appearance that there is grasping at truly existent phenomena. Whereas if there is an appearance, but one does not believe in that appearance and is able to distinguish between the appearance and how it actually exists (even if it appears to exist truly), and understand that it doesn't actually exist in the way that it appears to exist, then there is no grasping involved. So the main point is that there has to be a thought of true existence for there to be grasping at true existence.

This coming Sunday is the discussion seminar, so have a good discussion on that day. On Saturday I begin my retreat for the initiation. Normally, I try to ensure my retreat coincides with the Study Group discussion and exam nights. However, that was hard to schedule this year. So I request you to do your discussion next week, followed by the exam the following week, and then classes will resume after that. So it seems that we will miss one Tuesday from our block, however I don't have much choice. While I will come down for the Wednesday evening, Tuesday requires more preparation so you will have to excuse me for this change. So next Tuesday will be the discussion, followed by the exam. Is that clear?

We have to be mindful of what comes first and what comes next. If one actually trains one's mind now with order and sequence, then that will help to maintain mindfulness throughout life. Then, in old age it will be quite natural to be mindful, which could in fact prevent

dementia. I wonder if dementia could be a consequence of having little to no order in one's thinking earlier in life. It seems that if you think of too many things too randomly, then later on you will have no real recollection or knowledge of the order of things.

However from another perspective, it seems that dementia may not such a bad thing. It appears that people with dementia don't have any worries about a lot of things. Just recently, I heard about a mother who was in a state of dementia; when she was informed that her own daughter had passed away, she didn't seem to show much concern about it. She didn't understand what was going on, so it didn't seem to affect her too much.

On earlier occasions, I have mentioned that when someone loses their ability to remember and so forth, it might be that their mind becomes a little bit more joyful. If that were the case then that could be significant. We have the problem of trying to remember too many things, which causes a lot of anxiety and mental chaos. Indeed, Vasubandhu mentions in the *Abhidharmakosha* that it is the superficial or nonsensical conceptual thoughts that are the main cause of unhappiness in the mind, and that seems to be very true.

In his works Aryadeva mentioned that those who are deprived of sufficient means, and so forth, endure more physical suffering, while those of high social status (having wealth and so forth) experience more mental suffering. It is good for us to remember these points which seem to be very true. It is good to remind ourselves that our overall happiness and well-being are not dependent on our social status, or our wealth and so forth. Having wealth does not necessarily mean that one will be relieved from all forms of suffering, and, in fact, if we are not careful it can even be a cause for mental suffering.

As I have mentioned previously, there are only very rare cases of suicide because people find themselves in an impoverished state—impoverishment rarely seems to be a cause for suicide. Those who do commit suicide seem to be come from conditions where they are not deprived of the basics of food and drink and so forth, but somehow some are not really satisfied with that. These are points to really consider.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright  
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