
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པོའི་འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པོ།

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Based on the motivation we generated earlier, we can now engage in the practice of meditation, which serves the purpose of subduing one's mind. Otherwise, the mind would remain in its natural unsubdued state.

Subduing the mind involves overcoming:

1. Grasping at the affairs of this life, which is an obstacle to our aspirations for our next life.
2. Grasping at cyclic existence, which is an obstacle to achieving liberation.
3. Grasping at self interest, which is an obstacle to developing the mind of bodhicitta, the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings.

We can see that all three aspects of subduing the mind involve overcoming grasping at some level. If we don't attempt to overcome these three forms of grasping, then there is no possible way that we can ensure that whatever we do carries the fruit of Dharma practice. These are really essential points to keep in mind.

At the very least our attempts to engage in the practice of meditation need to serve the purpose of transforming our clinging to the mere affairs of this life into a keen aspiration to ensure our welfare in future lives. Next, we focus our meditation at a higher level, where it should serve as a means to transform clinging to samsaric pleasures into a mind that aspires to achieve liberation and to be free from samsara. At the highest level, our meditation practice needs to serve the purpose of transforming our self-cherishing mind into a mind that aspires to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings.

If our meditation practice does not serve to transform these three different levels of clinging or grasping, then from the Dharma point of view our meditation practice has not become an authentic practice. No matter what we do, it will not bear the ultimate result or fruit. In fact it may serve to strengthen a mere worldly concern, where we might, for example, engage in the practice as a way merely to impress others. This would be a superficial and pretentious form of practice. If our practice does not serve the purpose of overcoming the different levels of clinging then, as mentioned previously, it does not serve the purpose of a real practice of Dharma. This is something that we really need to keep in mind.

As you would all be aware, there is no other way of ensuring that our practice is a pure Dharma practice either than by making sure that it falls into one of the three scopes. And it is not that we lack the knowledge of the three scopes and the practices that each scope entails; we are definitely not deprived of that! Personally, I can attest to having spent most of my life studying the texts. My early life was entirely dedicated to study, and although in my old age, it is harder to spend much time and energy in study, I still make the attempt to continue to study the texts. I have spent an enormous amount of time and energy in studying these

topics, and when I look back, I feel I can rejoice about that. You, too, have not been deprived of a basic understanding and knowledge of what the practice of the three scopes entails. What we do find lacking however is the actual practice of them. It is because we lack that practice that we find that our minds are still not subdued and that we still have strong clinging and grasping. We really need to understand that we are not deprived of the knowledge, but we are definitely lacking the practice.

There is no better reference for how to engage in practices than the present text we are studying, *Precious Garland*. We would be fooling ourselves if we thought that we could find some other form of practice that is not subsumed in this text and the three scopes. That would be quite a presumptuous thought! These are really essential points to consider if we are keen to engage in the practice of the Dharma, and so I wanted to share them with you.

We can now return to our practice of meditation which is based on the *tong len* practice, the practice of giving and taking. As I have described previously, this is essentially a technique to transform the self-cherishing mind into a mind of love and compassion. With that understanding, we need to make an attempt to overcome the self-cherishing attitude, which thinks only about oneself and one's own interests; and transform that mind into one based on love and compassion, which thinks about the welfare of others and how to benefit them.

When we have the right intention and the right techniques, then we are bound to benefit from it. Over time, we will see a gradual transformation taking place. Even though I cannot claim that I have significantly developed any true sense of love and compassion, a similitude of love and compassion does seem to arise when one makes repeated attempts. Even a similitude of love and compassion really moves the mind, and one feels a deeper sense of joy and happiness taking root. That sort of contemplation on love and compassion can move one to tears.

These things occur when one has spent significant time and energy practising in this way. As mentioned earlier we don't lack knowledge of the techniques. If we find that we are unable to hit the target of our practice, then we need to take the initiative to ensure that our practice is not superficial, but rather an authentic means to transform the self-cherishing mind and self-centred mind into a true sense of love and compassion. With that intention in our mind, we can now engage in the practice. *[meditation]*

The incident I am about to relate shows why we should not readily give into simple assumptions. Recently (on August 6 to be precise) I went down at St Kilda with Margot and Carol for lunch. As we were coming back and strolling along the pier there was a person who was selling magazines, one of which had an image of His Holiness on the front. When I noticed that I said, 'I would like to buy one of those', but when I approached the person he looked at me and said 'Oh, you don't have to pay for it. It's OK, you can have it for free!' He was selling the magazine for \$5, and I then learnt this person actually sells these magazines as a way to make a living, because he is a homeless. So selling these magazines is his livelihood. I don't know what percentage he makes from the sale of each issue, but he was willing to forsake that and his own livelihood by giving the magazine to me. So I ended up giving him \$10.

What struck me was how, even though he was homeless and so forth, he actually appeared to be quite joyful and happy. His clothes were shabby and he hadn't had a shower for a

while so with his unshaven face he looked a bit rough. Nevertheless he appeared to be quite joyful and happy, willing to share and give away something that was a means for his livelihood. This story can be a reminder that we should not make assumptions on the basis of superficial appearances.

Conversely (and to try and get to the moral of the story) there are those businessmen who, although they might have a million dollars in their bank account, are not really willing to take any loss, and when it comes to doing business they are not willing to make any compromises. Yet, here was a homeless person, owning hardly any possessions, willing to forsake his meagre livelihood and give it away. These are really significant points for us to consider.

Apparently selling these magazines is the only way he can earn an income because begging is not allowed, and in any case begging is not really that good a way to get money. This reminds me of when I was sitting in a cafeteria in Singapore and someone came by and placed a small packet of tissues on the table, apparently as a way to sell them. I was thinking 'How much could he make by just selling small packets of tissues?' Then I was told that he needed money, but because he was not allowed to beg, this was the only way he could get some money. When I heard that, I ended up giving more than what the tissues would have cost, as a contribution to his livelihood.

Now let us return to where we left off last time.

2.1.2. Good qualities of the ten grounds

2.1.2.1. GENERAL MEANING (CONT.)

In the last teaching the **four attributes of the grounds** were introduced as part of Gyalsab Je's commentary.

(1) We were at the point of defining the **nature** of a 'ground'. We had completed the quotation from *Clear Words* after which Gyalsab Je's commentary says:

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.

Following that, Gyalsab Je's commentary continues:

In the state subsequent to meditative equipoise, the consciousness manifests, stained by the imprints of ignorance. The stains of deluded ignorance can occur up until the seventh ground. Whereas from the eighth ground and for the foe destroyers, they cannot be stained because they have already extinguished deluded ignorance. However they can still be stained with the imprints of ignorance.

The commentary is explaining how ignorance is overcome or abandoned, in accordance with the Prasangika point of view. Deluded ignorance, is of course, overcome first, followed by the imprints of the ignorance. In relation to the grounds, deluded ignorance is progressively reduced up until it is completely eliminated on the seventh ground. From the eighth ground onwards, the imprints of ignorance are also worked on, and eventually overcome. This of course was explained in great detail when we studied the *Madhyamakavatara*.

2. We now come to the second, which is an explanation of the **qualities**.

With respect to this Gyalsab Je states:

2) They possess great compassion, the twelve hundred qualities and so forth.

Again, this is just a brief summary. You will find more detail about the qualities of each ground in the *Madhyamaka* teachings. Basically, the detailed explanation that is presented in the *Madhyamakavatara* is derived from the explanations given in commentaries such as *Precious Garland* and *Root Wisdom*, which are in turn based on the commentaries given in the Buddha's *Sutra of the Ten Grounds*. The *Madhyamakavatara* clarifies the points explained in the earlier texts.

The previous translator, Ven. Fedor, mentioned to me that he had done quite a thorough translation of the commentary itself and he is quite confident that he has further clarified points, and that it is ready to be printed as a book. However, there are no funds so it has not been published yet. You already have copies of these teachings and it would be good to refer to them again and refresh your memory. These are really essential points on the path, and the way to do that is to refresh your memory by referring back to that text and commentary.

3) The third attribute, is the **reason** the term 'ground' is used. As Gyalsab Je explains:

3) The term ground is given because it serves as a base or support for qualities.

4) The fourth attribute is **meaning**. Here Gyalsab Je's commentary states:

4) The meaning is also likewise.

In other words the etymology of 'ground' is the same as the previous explanation of the term.

In his commentary Gyalsab Je goes on to explain:

The reason Very Joyful for the first ground and so forth is because of four unique features ...

The **four unique features** are then presented as a way to explain the significance of each of the grounds. As one moves through the ten grounds the number of qualities of each increase exponentially. You will recall that when we did the *Madhyamakavatara*, we had a bit of difficulty trying to find the right terms for the numbers, as there are no direct English equivalent to the Tibetan term. The Western way of counting is based on the terms 'hundred' and 'thousand' and you say ten thousand or one hundred thousand. In India *lakh* is a specific term for one hundred thousand, and it is called *bum* in Tibetan (which is derived from the Indian way of counting). In fact there are up to sixty different terms for specific numbers. In the Western system, there are the specific terms 'million' and 'billion' but I don't know how far it goes after that.

Student: A trillion.

I remember that there was some difficulty in grasping the concept of how much that is!

(1) The first unique feature of a ground is the **basis**.

As Gyalsab Je explains:

The reason Very Joyful is used for the first ground and so forth is because of four unique features. The first feature is in relation to their basis: the first ground possesses twelve hundred qualities, the second ground twelve thousand and so forth, in which the number of qualities increases further and further.

The first ground has a set of twelve qualities multiplied by a hundred times. On the second ground the twelve qualities are multiplied by a thousand times, on the third ground by one hundred thousand, on the fourth by ten million and so on.

The qualities that are multiplied on each of the ten grounds can be subsumed into the five paths. The significance of studying this is that it can serve as an inspiration, as we can see how the Buddha (the perfect enlightened being) was not a supreme being who became enlightened in a single step by skipping the ten grounds, or by taking a shorter path. Rather, the supreme enlightened being, who is now endowed with all good qualities, sequentially practised the path to obtain the realisations on each of the ten grounds, all the way up to obtaining the ultimate state of enlightenment. When it comes to our own personal practice, we need to remind ourselves that the only way to achieve enlightenment is by engaging in the practices in a sequential manner, gaining realisations at appropriate levels, leading up to the next level and so forth. Thinking that we can jump some of the sequence and become enlightened sooner than how long it took the Buddha would be very presumptuous indeed.

(2) The second unique feature is the **power of purifying the defilements**.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The second feature is, because the power of purifying the defilements and the power of travelling on the path on each ground continually grows ever greater, the power of majesty increases forevermore.

Due to *the power of purifying* certain defilements at a particular level, *the power of travelling on that path on each ground continually grows* and becomes more majestic and *increases forevermore*.

(3) The third unique feature is **surpassing the perfections**.

As explained in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

The third feature is, on the first ground the perfection of generosity is surpassed; on the second ground the perfection of morality is surpassed and so forth; i.e. on each subsequent ground the later perfections are surpassed.

We covered this in detail in our study of the *Madhyamakavatara*, but to refresh your memory, the ten perfections are related to each of the ten grounds. On each ground, the earlier perfection is said to be surpassed. Thus on the first ground, the perfection of generosity is surpassed. The perfection of morality is not yet surpassed on the first ground, because the practice of morality is said to be a little bit harder than the practice of generosity. So, in comparison to morality, the practice of generosity is a bit easier to engage in. Thus, on the first ground, the first of the ten perfections is surpassing the perfection of generosity. This is followed by the second ground, surpassing the perfection of morality, followed by surpassing the perfection of patience on the third ground and so forth.

As I have mentioned previously, we studied this in the past, so it is good to refer to the text and really understand the significance of these points. The main point here is that as the practice of the ten perfections becomes increasingly more difficult, surpassing each one is only achieved on its subsequent ground.

(4) The fourth feature is the fruition (or the **ripening result**) of each of those grounds. Thus as explained in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

The fourth feature is, on the first ground one rules over the Southern Continent, on the second ground one is reborn as a king that rules over the four continents and so forth; i.e. the status of the fruitional rebirths increases ever more. The [qualities] of the

grounds are completed in the state subsequent to meditative equipoise and not exclusively in the state of meditative equipoise.

As the commentary explains, these *qualities of the grounds* are *not exclusively* completed *in the state of meditative equipoise*. This implies that engaging in the practice of obtaining these qualities and completing them has to be done through a union of both meditative equipoise and the subsequent post-meditative equipoise state. In other words, being in meditative equipoise is not sufficient by itself.

In order to be able to engage in successful meditative equipoise, one needs to accumulate merit, which is only possible in the post-meditative state. Thus both the meditative state and the post-meditative state are equally necessary if one is to acquire the conditions for obtaining the qualities of the grounds. In the state of meditative equipoise, one is able to engage in the accumulation of wisdom, however one is not able to complete the accumulation of merit in that state.

Now of course a unique feature of tantric practice is it is possible to accumulate merit even while in meditative equipoise. Thus in meditative equipoise one can actually engage in both of the accumulations. Specifically, meditating on the self-generation of the deity by focusing on the image of the deity is a means to accumulate merit. When this is conjoined with an understanding that while the image of the deity appears on one's mind, it does not exist inherently, (even though it appears, it does not exist in the way that it appears to exist), then one is engaged in the accumulation of wisdom. When one meditates on that understanding of emptiness, then that is the means to accumulate the wisdom aspect. Thus in meditative equipoise, by focusing on the image of the deity while realising its emptiness, one is able to accumulate both merit and wisdom. Of course it is not easy to engage with the appearance of the deity while maintaining an understanding of emptiness; however this is the unique feature in tantra.

If one is able to apply this unique feature of tantra i.e. having a clear appearance of the deity conjoined with an understanding of the emptiness of the image of the deity while in meditative equipoise, then that can become a swift path to achieving enlightenment. However, it will not serve as a swift path if one is unable to practise at that level.

2.1.2.2. BRANCH MEANING

This is the second of the two subdivisions introduced in Gyaltsab Je's commentary. It is sub-divided into three, which brings us back to the subdivisions of the text.

2.1.2.2.1. Just as there are eight grounds of hearers, so there are ten bodhisattva grounds

2.1.2.2.2. Entities and good qualities of the ten grounds

2.1.2.2.3. Summation

2.1.2.2.1. Just as there are eight grounds of hearers, so there are ten bodhisattva grounds

The verse that relates to this section is:

*440 Just as eight grounds of hearers
Are described in the Hearers' Vehicle,
So ten grounds of bodhisattvas
Are described in the Great Vehicle.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary gives this explanation:

Just as the eight grounds of hearers are described in the Hearers' Vehicle as the ground of lineage, the eighth, seeing, diminishment, separation from attachment, realising all that is to be done, and hearer, plus the

ground of solitary realiser, making a total of *eight grounds*, likewise in the causal stage, *ten grounds of bodhisattvas* are described in the *Great Vehicle*.

With respect to the *eight grounds in the Hearers' Vehicle*, the *ground of lineage* refers to the clear realisation within the continuum of the path of preparation; the *eighth* refers to approacher to stream enterer; *seeing* refers to abider in the fruit of stream enterer; *diminishment* refers to approacher to non-returner; *separation from attachment* refers to abider in the fruit of non-returner; *realising all that is to be done* refers enterer into the fruit of a foe-destroyer; *hearer* refers to abider in the fruit of a foe-destroyer; and the *ground of the solitary realiser* refers to clear realisation within the mental continuum of a solitary realiser.

2.1.2.2.2. Entities and good qualities of the ten grounds

1. The first ground is called the **Very Joyful**. Of the ten perfections, the perfection of generosity is surpassed on the first ground.

To relevant verse from the text reads:

441 *The first of these is the Very Joyful
Because those bodhisattvas are rejoicing
From having forsaken the three entwinements
And being born into the lineage of Ones Gone
Thus.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

From these grounds, *the first of these is the Very Joyful*. As explained in the *Sutra on the Ten Grounds*, it is *because* having overcome the opposing factors abandoned by the path of seeing, *those bodhisattvas* have generated an uncommon extraordinary joy from *having* obtained the seven qualities and *forsaken* the principal hindrance to obtaining liberation...

As explained in the teachings, the unique feature of the first ground is that *those bodhisattvas have generated an uncommon extraordinary joy from having obtained the seven qualities*. If you recall, in the *Madhyamakavatara* text the joy of the first ground is explained as being the joy experienced merely by hearing someone asking for something. That mere sound of someone asking for something instils a great joy in their mind, and a spontaneous wish to be generous and give them whatever they are asked for arises. It is good to refer to the explanations in *Madhyamakavatara*.

As explained further in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

... *the three entwinements* which are the view of the transitory collection, afflicted doubt and holding bad ethics and discipline to be superior, and because they have gone beyond the hearers' and solitary realisers' grounds *and* particularly because they are concordant with the ground of constant illumination and have generated the path of seeing and are thus *born into the lineage of Ones Gone Thus*.

This is a clear explanation of how to identify *the three entwinements*.

The next verse reads:

442 *Through the maturation of those [good
qualities]
The perfection of giving becomes supreme.
They vibrate a hundred worlds
And become Great Lords of Jambudvipa.*

While the earlier verse was an explanation of the meaning of why the first ground is called Very Joyful, this second verse refers to the *qualities* that are obtained on this ground.

As the commentary further explains:

Through the maturation of those good qualities, consequently the perfection of giving becomes supreme or surpassed. This is particularly so for giving because the opposing factors of giving have been overcome while the other perfections are not yet surpassed. The distinctive feature of the number of qualities is that they vibrate and are able to perceive a hundred worlds and so forth. Becoming Great Lords of Jambudvipa is the distinctive feature indicating the increase of the fruitional result.

As indicated in the commentary, this verse particularly refers to the qualities of the ground.

The following verses basically cover the remaining nine grounds. The presentation of each consists of two verses, the first describing the nature of the ground, and why they are given their specific name, while the second verse describes the actual qualities of the ground. This is explained quite concisely in the following verses, which we can cover quite rapidly because of our previous study of the *Madhyamakavatara*. While we go through this part of the text quite rapidly, it is good to refer to those notes, transcripts and the text, to refresh your memory and gain a better understanding.

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