

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇིག་རྟེན་ཆེན་མེད་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

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With the motivation we have just generated, we can now engage in our practice of meditation. [meditation]

Now we can generate the positive motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings, in order to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

The following verses, while quite easy to understand, are actually very profound and moving aspirations. As we go through them, we will come to understand that they are all different ways of dedicating all of the merit that has been accumulated from previous practices, to the welfare of all sentient beings. It is also good for us to adopt these aspirations on a personal level. Then, whenever we get an opportunity to engage in practice, we can make our dedications in a similar fashion. As presented here, these aspirations are dedications of one's merit for the welfare of other sentient beings—that they may experience every goodness and wellbeing that they wish for.

2.2.2. Causes for generating belief and faith in the limitless good qualities of buddhas

2.2.2.2. LIMITLESSNESS OF THE CAUSES BECAUSE OF ASPIRING TO HELP LIMITLESS BEINGS (CONT.)

Verse 473 reads:

*473 May embodied beings have a pleasant complexion,
Good physique, great splendour,
A pleasing appearance, freedom from disease,
Strength, and long life.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains this very meaningful verse as follows:

May all embodied beings have a pleasant complexion, a pleasant body with a good physique, great splendour, a pleasing appearance, freedom from disease, strength and long life. In brief may they be endowed with the seven qualities of a high status.

As explained here, this is an aspiration for all beings to be endowed with a good complexion, a good physique and so forth.

These aspirations are really very profound, as they are motivated by a completely unbiased compassionate mind, which embraces all beings. The way in which Nagarjuna presents these aspirations implicitly shows the greatness of Nagarjuna himself - someone endowed with great compassion and bodhicitta. From these aspirations we can gain further insight to his greatness.

For our own personal practice, we need to acknowledge that these aspirations are focused on all living beings without discrimination. They are not just for those following the Buddhist tradition, rather they encompass all beings regardless of whether they follow any particular religion or not. As these dedications are directed at all living beings,

whatever their status may be, no living being is left out. By familiarising our own mind with these aspirations, we will also be able to view others without discrimination, free from being attached to some and feeling aversion to others. We really need to familiarise our mind with those positive attitudes, so that we are able to incorporate them into every aspect of our life.

The seven qualities of a high status are:

1. A good family lineage
2. Attractive physical features
3. Long life
4. Being free from illness
5. Good fortune
6. Having wealth
7. Having wisdom

If we are endowed with these seven qualities then we have the perfect conditions for spiritual practice and so forth. So dedicating our merits for others to be endowed with these seven qualities is a very meaningful dedication. If we wonder how to conclude any practice, be it meditation or any other form of practice, or wonder how to dedicate our merits, then this is the very way. Generating such aspirations and dedicating the specific merits of our practice to these aspirations is the ultimate dedication. As explained in the teachings, when we dedicate our merit to the ultimate goals of other beings, then the practice carries a lot of weight.

The next verse reads:

*474 May all be skilled in the means [to extinguish suffering]
And have liberation from all suffering,
Inclination to the Three Jewels,
And the great wealth of Buddha's doctrine.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

May all embodied beings be skilled in the means to extinguish suffering, and have liberation from all suffering; have an inclination to the three jewels by taking refuge in the causal and resultant refuges; and great wealth, through possessing the ten powers of Buddha's doctrine.

May all embodied beings be skilled in the means to extinguish suffering corresponds to the verse in Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, where he explains that while beings do not wish for suffering, they run towards it, creating the causes for their own suffering. Although beings wish to experience happiness, they destroy their own causes for happiness like they would destroy an enemy. The same points are being made here. Even though beings may not wish for any kind of suffering, if they lack the skill and means to extinguish the causes for suffering, then they cannot free themselves from suffering. These are very significant points.

As explained in the teachings, shunning negativity and adopting virtue is the way to extinguish suffering. But if one lacks the knowledge of that, then one may in fact engage in the opposite, by adopting negativity and shunning virtue. That is why Shantideva says that even though we don't wish to experience suffering, it seems as if we are voluntarily adopting its causes. Realising that, one generates the aspiration, 'May all beings be free from lacking the skills and knowledge to extinguish suffering, and may they adopt those skills and thus be liberated from suffering'.

Following that, the commentary gives a presentation of the way to be free from suffering, which is to rely on both the

causal and resultant refuges. I have explained previously that *causal refuge* refers to the objects of refuge that are the causes for one to adopt the means for accumulating virtue and shunning negativity, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of enlightenment oneself. Buddha Shakyamuni is the causal Buddha refuge, and by relying on Buddha Shakyamuni, his teachings or doctrine, and the Sangha, we create causes to achieve the ultimate goal.

Resultant refuge refers to one's own future state of buddhahood, where, having engaged in the practice and being released from the bondage of samsara, one actually becomes a buddha oneself. We rely upon the causal refuge now, and when that refuge is established within our own mental continuum and we obtain all the realisations, we ourselves become the objects of refuge, which is the resultant refuge (in relation to oneself). Furthermore, one generates the aspiration for other beings to be endowed with *wealth possessing the ten powers of the Buddha's doctrine*. We covered those ten powers previously.

The next aspiration reads:

475 *May they be adorned with love, compassion,
joy,
Even-mindedness [devoid of] the afflictive
emotions,
Giving, ethics, patience, effort,
Concentration, and wisdom.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates the verse:

May they be adorned with love, compassion, joy, even-mindedness devoid of the afflictive emotions such as attachment and hatred, giving, ethics, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom.

The first two lines of the verse refer to the four immeasurables, which are, as explained briefly in the past:

1. Immeasurable love
2. Immeasurable compassion
3. Immeasurable joy
4. Immeasurable even-mindedness¹

The meditation on the four immeasurables, begins by generating the bodhicitta motivation. Then one meditates on immeasurable love for all beings, immeasurable compassion, immeasurable joy, followed by immeasurable equanimity, which specifically refers wishing all beings to be completely *devoid of the afflictive emotions*. Gyaltsab Je's commentary specifically describes these afflictive motivations as *attachment* and *hatred*, which, at a subtle level, refers to grasping at true, or inherent existence. When one is free from that subtle grasping at the inherent or true existence of phenomena, one is released from the bondage of attachment, hatred and anger. That is to be understood as being part of the meditation on the four immeasurables.

The second half of the verse presents the six perfections: *giving, ethics, patience, effort, concentration and wisdom*. These are not just an aspiration but a form of practice, from which we can derive our personal practice. As mentioned previously, in the meditation on the four immeasurables one can expand on the four immeasurables by contemplating each point of love, compassion and so forth. That can then be followed by meditating on the six perfections. When thinking about the necessity of developing generosity, contemplate the meaning of generosity as being a mind having the intention to give, which serves as an antidote to miserliness. So as a way to quell miserliness one meditates

on cultivating generosity and further engages in the practice of ethics and so forth. Incorporating this into one's meditation is a very meaningful personal practice.

The main point is that while one adopts these points as one's own personal practice, the aspiration is that others are adorned with qualities of the four immeasurables and the six perfections. Of all ornaments, the best is the ornament possessing these qualities. When one's mental continuum is adorned with these qualities then, regardless of external status, there is no further need for any lavish external adornments, ornaments and so forth. Even if one is deprived of external ornaments, one's inner qualities will suffice as the best ornament. It is essential that we reflect upon this. We don't need to spend too much time and energy worrying about external ornaments such as jewellery, earrings and so forth—it's much better to spend time and energy on the qualities listed in this verse.

As mentioned in the teachings, one of the best ornaments to be adorned with is the ornament of patience. This is incredibly profound advice. With a mind dominated by intense anger, one's face and appearance becomes completely distorted, and beautiful external ornaments cannot hide that unappealing appearance. Whereas when we are adorned with the practice of patience we look beautiful. These are significant points to keep in mind.

The next verse is:

476 *Completing the two collections [of merit and
wisdom],
May they have the brilliant marks and
beautiful features [even while on the path],
And may they cross without interruption
The ten inconceivable grounds.*

Again, Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates the meaning of the verse

Completing the two collections of merit and wisdom, may they have the brilliant marks and beautiful features even while on the path. And may, the hearers and so forth cross without interruption the ten inconceivable grounds.

Here, *the brilliant marks and beautiful features* refers to the fact that bodhisattvas on the tenth ground receive a similitude of the marks and signs of the Buddha. Even though they have not yet achieved the ultimate state of enlightenment, they are adorned with the similitude of the marks and signs of the Buddha, because they are very close to achieving that state. As you will recall, we covered thirty-two major marks of a buddha earlier in the text in quite a bit of detail. However the text didn't go into much detail about the eighty minor marks.

You will recall that I mentioned at the time that it would be good to become familiar with these signs and marks as they come up quite regularly in various aspirations and practices. They appear here, in the form of an aspiration, 'May they be endowed with these signs and marks'. As with any other practice, when the topic of signs or marks comes up (as it often does) it is worthwhile to have some recollection of what the signs refer to. Even if we are unable to remember all of the details, just having some grasp of what they are referring to will make our practice much more meaningful and leave positive imprints on our mind.

As indicated here, even the similitude of the signs and marks on the tenth ground is a result of having accumulated the two collections of merit and wisdom. This implies that without the collections of merit and wisdom, there is no

¹ Other translations use 'equanimity', rather than 'even-mindedness'.

² In the root text the agitation caused by delusions has been translated

possibility of obtaining these qualities, let alone obtaining enlightenment. So if we wish for realisations along the path, as well as the ultimate goal of enlightenment, we have to engage in the practices of accumulating merit and wisdom. We need to understand that point.

The next verse reads as follows:

*477 May I also be adorned completely
With those and all other good qualities,
Be freed from all defects,
And have superior love for all sentient beings.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je begins his explanation of the meaning of the verse thus:

Having dedicated the merits of one's virtues, and so forth, for the sake of others, one will also be adorned with all good qualities oneself....

When we dedicate all our merits to the welfare of other beings, we may feel that we are deprived of obtaining good qualities for ourselves. However the teachings emphasise that through the very act of the dedication of one's merits and virtues for the sake of others, one will naturally be adorned with all good qualities oneself. This is another significant point to note.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

...Thus the aspirations that they may transform into the means to serve others are: *May I also be adorned completely with those previously mentioned qualities, as well as all other good qualities, not mentioned here but in the sutras, such as to be freed from all defects, and have superior love for all sentient beings.*

In addition to the qualities that are specifically mentioned here, there are others mentioned in the sutras in great detail. The aspiration is to be adorned with these qualities as a way to further benefit sentient beings. It is actually very meaningful to recite and contemplate these verses. Merely reciting and thinking about the meaning of, '*May I also be adorned completely with those and all other qualities, be freed from all defects, and have superior love for all sentient beings*', can have a very good effect on our mind. It can release any ill-will or negative thoughts, leading to the experience of a more settled and calmer mind. To that extent, it can be a really good practice. These lines also have another very important implication. They are a significant way of protecting one's mind from developing pride, and the like, that could arise with the prospect of being adorned by good qualities oneself.

As mentioned previously, these verses are not complex or hard to understand. But if we don't actually try to incorporate them into our practice, then they won't really serve much purpose for us. In order to derive some worthwhile meaning from them we need to try to incorporate them into our practice.

The next verse reads:

*478 May I perfect all the virtues
For which all sentient beings hope,
And may I always relieve
The sufferings of all embodied beings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates the verse, as it is quite easy to comprehend:

May I perfect all the virtues for which all sentient beings have placed hope in, and may I always relieve the sufferings of all embodied beings.

As I regularly emphasise, the main point is for us to try to incorporate into our daily life aspirations such as, 'May I in

every way be of benefit to other beings' and 'May I serve to fulfil all their hopes and whatever benefit I can render them', and 'May I not be a cause for any harm to other sentient beings'. These summarise the main points, and developing such aspirations is highly meaningful for our daily practice.

When we familiarise our mind with these positive attitudes and develop the determination to be of benefit in every way to others, and not to become a cause for the slightest harm to other sentient beings, then that, in itself, becomes our ultimate protection. If, wherever we go, and whatever we do, we remind ourselves of this, then that very awareness of these attitudes, in itself, protects us from engaging in negativity. If we are about to generate a negative mind which may hurt or harm others, then reminding ourselves of this attitude will protect our minds. The more we familiarise ourselves with these attitudes, the more they become part of our daily mindset and a means to conduct ourselves in a positive light.

*479 May those beings in all worlds
Who are distressed through fear
Become entirely fearless
Even through merely hearing my name.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

May those beings in all worlds who are distressed through fear, of enemies, evil spirits, bad transmigrations and the like, become entirely fearless even through merely hearing my name.

The enlightened beings constantly generated such aspirations while they were engaged in practising on the path. These aspirations became the impetus for their practice, and acquiring all of the qualities on the path. As a mark of those aspirations having been fulfilled, we pray to these enlightened beings in times of fear, or difficulty, or problems, and we recite their names. Then, as a mark of their aspirations having been fulfilled, we receive the positive effects of being released from fears and dangers and so forth. So it is very important that we familiarise our mind with these aspirations, because they can also become an impetus for us to engage in the practice of Dharma, thus serving and benefitting other sentient beings in the future.

There are many among you who have confided in me that, in times of difficulty and problems such as sickness, or when your mind is weighed down and a bit depressed, you rely wholeheartedly upon Tara and recite the praises or pray to her. You definitely feel the positive effects, as your mind is immediately released from these tensions, anxieties, fears and depression. That it is definitely an experience that can be gained from doing this practice wholeheartedly, and with strong faith.

Also, many of you would be familiar with the aspirations of each of the seven medicine buddhas, as presented in the medicine buddha practice. Each of these medicine buddhas have generated these aspirations and then fulfilled them. When we relate our practice to the seven medicine buddhas and pray to them, we gain great benefit from that. Of course, the medicine buddha practice that we do regularly is the short sadhana. There is an extensive sadhana where the extensive aspirations of each of the medicine buddhas are presented in great detail. These aspirations are incredibly profound and vast in scope in their wish to relieve the suffering of sentient beings.

We can conclude the evening with this verse:

*480 Through seeing or thinking of me or only
hearing my name*

*May beings attain great joy,
Naturalness free from error,
Definiteness toward complete enlightenment,*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Through seeing or thinking of me or only hearing my name,
may beings attain great joy, naturalness free from error of
the delusions, and definiteness toward irreversible
complete enlightenment.*

One needs to relate to this as being a mark of the fulfilment of our aspirations. Thinking, 'May the mere *seeing or merely thinking of me*', refers to being endowed with qualities that will serve as a means to relieve sentient beings of their problems, just as we rely on the enlightened beings now. Merely by thinking of them and hearing the name of enlightened beings such as Buddha Shakyamuni or Tara, or various different aspects of the enlightened beings, *beings attain great joy*.

Naturalness refers to the state of mind that is free from agitation caused by delusions.² When the mind is agitated by various delusions, then it is not in its natural calm state. A mind that is chaotic and in complete turmoil, is not a happy mind. Therefore, when we find ourselves in such a state of mind, we can remind ourselves that we have the means to overcome that state, and then focus our mind on enlightened beings such as Tara or the Buddha.

We already rely on them, we already know how to conduct the practices, and we know how to recite some of the prayers, salutations and verses of praise to these enlightened beings. It is not as though we are deprived of these means. But if we don't apply them, then we cannot expect our mind to be restored to a naturally calm and free state spontaneously, without any effort! We have to resort to the practices and methods that we already know. If we lacked the means and the methods, then of course we would have no choice and we would be immersed in a negative state of mind, which might escalate and become even worse. But because we have the knowledge, it just a matter of resorting to that and putting it into practice.

Enlightened beings are endowed with the qualities of all these aspirations. If they had not fulfilled these aspirations then who has? Who better could we find than the very enlightened beings with whom we now have a connection? They are the ones endowed with the fulfilment of these aspirations. These really significant points are being presented as a way for us to further develop the strong conviction that by relying on these enlightened beings, we will gain tremendous benefit.

You will recall that if, at the crucial moment just before passing on to the next life, you are able to recall an enlightened being as your very last thought, you will be freed from the lower realms in the immediate next life. Even just hearing the names of enlightened beings, such as the seven medicine buddhas, can help those who are not too familiar with them, or who are unable to generate the remembrance of the enlightened being. It is quite a common practice to recite the names of the medicine buddhas in the presence of someone who is about to pass away. This is said to be very powerful, as merely hearing the names of the buddhas can help them to have a good rebirth. This text is the very source that confirms this to be the case.

As mentioned previously, the extensive medicine buddha sadhana includes the qualities that each medicine buddha has obtained as a result of having made specific aspirations while they were training and developing their realisations on the path. It is these very aspirations that encouraged and motivated them to practice along the path, thus enabling them to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment. Their enlightened state is thus a result of those aspirations.

These aspirations of the medicine buddhas are very powerful in the sense that merely thinking about, or reciting, or even hearing their names is a very powerful means to protect the mind. As mentioned in the teachings, if one passes away while recalling the enlightened being (either through hearing the name or through their faith), then it is said that one will be protected from being born in the lower realms in the immediate next life. We may not be sure of the life beyond that, but one will definitely be protected from being born in the lower realms in the immediate next rebirth.

Trying to adopt a mind of Dharma, and gaining familiarity with it in this life through our practices and aspirations, is the basis for a good rebirth in the next life, where we can make further progress towards enlightenment. In each life, the familiarity gained in the previous life becomes the basis to further develop oneself. This is the practical way to view our journey towards enlightenment.

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² In the root text the agitation caused by delusions has been translated as 'error'.