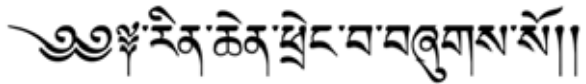


# Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



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Based on the motivation that we have just generated in reciting the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [Meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself, so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

## B. FAULTS OF NOT RELYING ON A TEACHER AND QUALIFICATIONS OF A TEACHER

### 2. THE QUALITIES OF A TEACHER (CONT.)

492 *You should know in brief  
The qualifications of spiritual guides.  
If you are taught by those knowing  
contentment  
And having compassion and ethics,*

493ab *As well as wisdom that can drive out your  
afflictive emotions,  
You should realise [what they teach] and  
respect them.*

Gyaltsab's commentary on these lines reads:

If asked: What kind of a virtuous friend does one need to rely upon? *You should know in brief* the five qualifications of spiritual guides. *If you are taught by* those 1) *knowing contentment*, 2) *not having desire for gain and respect* and 3) *having compassion* and 4) *ethics, as well as* 5) *wisdom, that can drive out your afflictive emotions*. Thus when they give you instructions, *you should realise* what they teach and *respect them*. *You will attain the supreme achievement of buddhahood, by following this excellent system* presented below.

These lines explicitly present the qualities of a spiritual guide. In addition to the qualities mentioned in the root text, Gyaltsab Je adds having less desire for gain and respect. In both the root text and the commentary, *knowing contentment* is the first of the necessary qualities, which is, of course, based on having less desire. This quality of having contentment is very important for a spiritual guide, because if they lack contentment themselves then how could they possibly encourage their followers and disciples to have less contentment. So this is a really important quality for a spiritual guide to possess. Having *ethics* is also extremely important; if the teacher is not ethical themselves, then it is very hard to encourage others to observe ethics. It is the same with *compassion*; it is essential to have compassion in teaching and imparting the Dharma.

*Wisdom that can drive out your afflictive emotions*, particularly relates to the wisdom realising emptiness.

The view of emptiness is the ultimate antidote for removing delusions from the minds of sentient beings, so it is essential that a spiritual guide has an unmistakable understanding of emptiness. Such wisdom is required in order to know the minds of the disciples, and how to present it unmistakably, in order to remove ignorance from the disciples' minds.

Here afflictive emotions particularly relates to the fundamental delusion, which is grasping at the self. That which serves as the optimum antidote for overcoming grasping at the self is the realisation of selflessness or emptiness. Therefore, having a profound understanding and, at best, a realisation of emptiness is essential. Knowing contentment, having compassion and ethics compromise the qualities of method, while realising selflessness or emptiness is the quality of wisdom. So in brief this is saying that the qualities of a spiritual guide are based on possessing both method and wisdom, which is essential in order to impart the unmistakable teachings to the disciples.

This section concludes by saying, '*You should realise* the qualities of the spiritual guide and having done so, generate great *respect* for *them*'. Here, the connotation of *respect* is to abide by the advice and instructions given to help develop the mind. Thus it is essential to rely upon the teacher who has these qualities.

## C. THE SUPREME FRUIT IS ACHIEVED THROUGH EXCELLENT BEHAVIOUR

We can see what will be explained in this section just from the outline. There is no other way to achieve a supreme fruit or the ultimate result than adopting faultless and excellent behaviour. So this very clearly presents the cause and effect sequence of Dharma practice.

This section is sub-divided into two:

1. Achieving the supreme fruit
2. Advice to perform the special deeds

### 1. ACHIEVING THE SUPREME FRUIT

The last two lines of verse 493 relate to this outline:

493cd *You will attain the supreme achievement  
By following this excellent system:*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*You will attain the supreme achievement of buddhahood, by following this excellent system* presented below.

This is saying that the excellent *supreme* fruit of *buddhahood* is achieved *by following* the *excellent system* presented here.

This sub-heading is further divided into three:

- 2.1. Extensive mode of behaviour
- 2.2. Condensed mode of behaviour
- 2.3. Very condensed mode of behaviour

#### 2.1. Extensive mode of behaviour

494 *Speak the truth, speak gently to sentient  
beings.  
Be of pleasant nature, compelling.  
Be politic, do not wish to defame,  
Be independent, and speak well.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary describes the qualities of proper speech in more detail:

*To all sentient beings, speak the truth, speak gently and of pleasant nature, compelling* i.e. words that are the cause for merit.

Proper speech means speaking *the truth*, and speaking *gently* with a *pleasant nature*, using words that have a soothing effect, and which are *compelling*. Proper speech uses *words that are the cause for merit*, implying that any speech with a basis of non-virtue is to be avoided. So here we can clearly see that any kind of gossip that involves criticising or ridiculing others and so forth, is non-virtuous speech, and is to be avoided. This is a very meticulous explanation of how our speech needs to become a cause for accumulating merit.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

*Be politic* in presenting the Dharma to followers, i.e. that which is difficult to find, majestic and profound should be presented gradually, in stages, to those who are disciplined.

The literal meaning of the Tibetan word translated here as 'politic' has the connotation of being that which is profound. So the meaning here is ensuring that the presentation of the Dharma reflects its profundity. The commentary also explains that the Dharma should be presented in the proper sequence to those who are proper recipients for the Dharma. Hence the teachings are to be presented in a systematic and sequential way in order to guide the disciples.

Next, the commentary explains:

*Do not wish to defame* those who may be inferior.

This again, is very profound advice that we need to take to heart.

The commentary further explains:

When the senses engage in objects, don't allow them to be under the dominance of the delusions but rather *be independent*...

This is a very significant point that I regularly emphasise. If we train our mind in a formal way through the practice of meditation, in not allowing it to be influenced by the sense objects, then one will naturally become less and less prone to the influence of the desirous objects of the senses.

Gyaltsab Je then concludes his commentary on this verse with:

*...and speak well*, i.e. words that are not harsh.

*Speak well*, means using *words that are not harsh*.

So it is quite obvious that this verse relates particularly to having correct or proper speech.

The next verse under this outline reads:

*495 Be well disciplined, contained, generous, Magnificent, of peaceful mind, Not excitable, not procrastinating, Not deceitful, but amiable*

As the commentary thus explains the meaning of this verse:

*Be well-disciplined, contained*—free from being resentful—*generous, magnificent, of peaceful mind, not excitable* and steady, free from the laziness of

*procrastinating, not being deceitful but amiable*. Some commentaries explain that this verse refers to being firm in one's promises.

These qualities are quite easy to relate to. Having a *peaceful mind*, indicates that one needs to have a calm mind. *Not being excitable* refers to having a steady mind. Being *free from the laziness of procrastinating* is obvious. We need to be very mindful to develop each of these qualities, which all relate to observing our own states of mind.

## 2.2. Condensed mode of behaviour

*496 Be gentle like a full moon.  
Be lustrous like the sun in autumn.  
Be deep like the ocean.  
Be firm like Mount Meru.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins:

*Be gentle and noble like a full moon.*

The full moon has a soothing quality, and using it as an analogy indicates that we need to adopt the qualities of being gentle and noble. When the *moon* is *full* it is at its most fully developed phase, unlike the partial phases which is not fully developed. So the full moon represents a fully developed state of mind in relation to kindness and so forth. When such qualities are fully developed then one naturally gains nobility.

The commentary then reiterates the verse:

*Be lustrous like the sun in autumn.*

The *sun in autumn* has rays that have the most comfortable temperature, and the analogy here is to *be lustrous like the sun in autumn*.

The commentary continues:

Don't let others disturb you and let your mind *be deep like the ocean*.

The analogy of the *ocean* is used because the depths of the ocean are not easily disturbed by external elements. It is used as an analogy to show how we need to adopt a state of mind that is not easily disturbed or influenced by others.

Gyaltsab Je then exhorts us:

Don't let your qualities decline, but *be firm like Mount Meru*.

We need to firmly hold onto the qualities we have acquired and adopted, and not be easily influenced by external distractions and so forth. Adopting such a mind is analogous to Mount Meru, the king of mountains, which cannot be shaken by external factors.

These are really very significant points of advice that we must to try to adopt. They remind us to avoid being easily influenced by others.

## 2.3. Very condensed mode of behaviour

The next verse reads:

*497 Freed from all defects  
And adorned with all good qualities,  
Become a sustenance for all sentient beings  
And become omniscient.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with:

*Freed from all defects such as attachments and so forth, and adorned with all good qualities such as faith...*

Even though not specifically mentioned here, *such as faith* refers to the seven qualities of an arya, or noble being, which are:

1. Faith
2. Hearing (many teachings)
3. Ethics
4. Giving
5. Knowing shame
6. Knowing embarrassment
7. Having wisdom.

These seven qualities are listed many times in other teachings. At the end of *The Jewel Rosary of the Bodhisattvas*, which I have taught in the past, there is a list of these seven qualities of an arya or noble being. Towards the end of this text there is some very pungent advice: 'When you are in a gathering, watch your speech; when you are alone, watch your mind'.

It is essential to check our speech when we are with others. As you know, when we engage in gossip and so forth, then that is when we are most likely to use speech that can be harmful to others. So, as mentioned earlier, we need to be mindful of our conduct in respect of the qualities of our speech. Likewise, when we are alone we have to watch our mind, otherwise we can become consumed with all sorts of negative states of mind. This is really pungent advice.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

*...become sustenance, bringing benefit and happiness for all sentient beings, and become omniscient.*

*Become sustenance, bringing benefit and happiness for all sentient beings, and become omniscient*, is a very significant point for contemplation and practice. Even as an aspiration it is incredibly meaningful and powerful, and so it is a very significant point. This concludes the very condensed advice.

#### **D. THESE DOCTRINES ARE NOT JUST FOR MONARCHS BUT ALSO FOR ALL OTHERS**

The verse which relates to this reads as follows:

*498 These doctrines were not just taught  
Only for monarchs  
But were taught with a wish to help  
Other sentient beings as befits them.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary gives this explanation of the meaning of this verse:

Except for some exclusive cautionary advice to the king, *this doctrine*—the Precious Garland—*was not just taught only for monarchs but was taught with a wish to help other sentient beings, monarchs as well as householders, as befits them*, so that they may also become enthusiastic with training in the paths to obtain high status and definite goodness.

Nagarjuna is renowned as having been exceptionally kind in the way he presented the Buddhist teachings, in such a manner that they benefit a whole range of different beings. Nagarjuna's collected works include treatises on medicine, the sciences, logic and mathematics. So we can see how he covered a range of topics that benefit so many

people in so many different ways. He truly was incomparably kind!

Nagarjuna explicitly mentions that, except for some *cautionary advice specifically for the king* (relating to his status as a monarch, and how he should exercise his powers properly), the main body of the treatise is not just for *monastics* but also for *householders* or lay people. It was composed with an intention to benefit all, that *they may also become enthusiastic with training in the paths to obtain high status and definite goodness*.

Many of the presentations within this text, specifically, the presentations of how accumulating a particular set of causes will bring about a particular type of consequence or a result, can be classified as part of Nagarjuna's scientific works. That is because they use the same methodology as science, a methodology based on logic. Nagarjuna applies the cause and effect logic used in relation to external factors to inner factors in a very systematic and logical way. Indeed, it is said that many consider the Buddhist teachings to be more like a science than a religion, because it is based on logic and systematic explanations.

#### **E. EXHORTING THE KING TO HEED THE ADVICE**

This is sub-divided into two:

1. Suitability of continuously thinking of the welfare of others
2. Suitability of adopting virtues

##### **1. SUITABILITY OF CONTINUOUSLY THINKING OF THE WELFARE OF OTHERS**

The verse relating to this heading reads:

*499 O King, it would be right for you  
Each day to think about this advice  
So that you and others may achieve  
Complete and perfect enlightenment.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of the meaning of this verse reads:

*O King, it would be right for you to think about this advice*, on how to obtain high status and definite goodness *each day, so that you and others may achieve complete and perfect enlightenment*.

Here the advice to the king is that *it would be right for you to think about this advice each day*. The king is being exhorted to keep in mind all the advice that was presented earlier, and to think about it, not just occasionally, but each and every day. In summary the advice is about how to *obtain high status and definite goodness*. "Contemplating these points each day also has the ultimate purpose for you, *O king*, as well as those you may be guiding, or to whom you are imparting knowledge, so *that you and others may achieve complete and perfect enlightenment*". This is most compassionate and profound advice.

At a personal level this advice is to remind ourselves that whenever we attempt to engage in practice, we should commence with a proper motivation, i.e. we are not doing this practice just for ourselves, but for the benefit of all sentient beings. This motivation is followed by the practice itself and then the dedication at the end, where one dedicates the practice and virtues to the ultimate goal

of benefitting others. This is how to conduct our daily practice.

Nagarjuna is exhorting us to use every possible moment to contemplate how to achieve high status and definite goodness, which basically relates to a virtuous state of mind. Furthermore, we need to adopt a mind of virtue; at every opportunity, we have to try to remind ourselves of the need to have a virtuous mind. Then, having reminded ourselves of that, we need to recall that being in a virtuous frame of mind is for the sake of our own ultimate goodness as well as for other sentient beings. This is a very meticulous presentation. Nothing is omitted, and every aspect of the Buddha's teaching is included. So there can be no doubts about who this teaching is intended for—it is for everyone.

The essential point we can derive from this explanation is that engaging in practice occasionally doesn't bring about the desired result. We need to maintain a continuous form of practice, rather than having bursts of engagement in practice followed by none at all. It is much more practical to adopt a practice one is able to maintain, for it's a continuous stream of practice that will lead us to the ultimate goal.

## 2. SUITABILITY OF ADOPTING VIRTUES

The last verse of the text reads:

*500 For the sake of enlightenment aspirants  
should always apply themselves  
To ethics, supreme respect for teachers,  
patience, non-jealousy, non-miserliness,  
Endowment with the wealth of altruism  
without hope for reward, helping the  
destitute,  
Remaining with supreme people, leaving the  
non-supreme, and thoroughly maintaining  
the doctrine.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation opens with the line:

*Aspirants of the Dharma should always apply themselves.*

This is followed by a presentation of what is to be applied. If we consider ourselves Dharma practitioners, then we can check how much of the following we actually apply to our daily life.

Gyaltsab Je begins with a question:

*If asked: For what purpose? For the sake of enlightenment.*

This is explaining the motivation, or the intended purpose of the practice.

The commentary continues:

*If asked: What should they apply themselves to? To abandoning the seven non-virtues and accompanying virtues such as observing ethics: ...*

Abandoning the *seven non-virtues* refers to the first seven of the ten non-virtuous deeds, which are: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle gossip. The *accompanying virtues* include avoiding the three non-virtuous states of mind. These are said to be extremely important practices, which serve as a basis for our ethics, as well as other practices. How much do we avoid the seven non-virtues, and how much do we practice virtue? In a systematic way Nagarjuna is

advising us how we need to conduct ourselves as aspirants of the Dharma. First he indicates that we should always apply ourselves, and *if asked, 'For what purpose?'*, the answer is *for the sake of enlightenment*.

The commentary continues:

*...having supreme respect for teachers which is the root of the path...*

This indicates that relying on a proper spiritual guide is an essential basis for engaging in following the path. The Lam Rim teachings begin by explaining how relying on a spiritual guide is the root of the path, followed by an explanation of how to rely on the spiritual guide.

The next virtue is:

*...patience...*

Patience is, as regularly mentioned, most essential for our practice. As presented in the teachings, without patience one is not able to maintain one's Dharma practice, so an essential element of one's Dharma practice is patience. As I regularly remind you, the definition of patience is not allowing the mind to become disturbed in the face of suffering or any harm.

The commentary continues:

*...non-jealousy with the excellences of others...*

In relation to the *excellence of others*, or the good things they have acquired, one needs to adopt a mind of refraining from *jealousy*. Jealousy is, as I also remind you regularly, one of the factors that brings us a lot of mental pain and which makes us feel very uncomfortable and unhappy. So to protect ourselves from this unhappy and painful state, we need to overcome jealousy.

The next virtue is:

*...non-miserliness...*

*Non-miserliness* relates to one's own wealth and excellences. If one does not avoid miserliness, that too can cause uneasiness and mental pain, resulting in an unhappy state of mind.

So in relation to the excellences of others, one has to adopt non-jealousy, and in relation to one's own wealth, one has to practice non-miserliness.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

*...endowment with wealth of altruism; and without hope for reward helping the destitute who lack food and clothing...*

This is very significant advice. We need to use the *wealth of altruism*—helping others *without hope for reward*. In other words, we should help others without any ulterior motive, being free from self-centredness and self-interest. *Helping the destitute, who lack food and clothing* relates to those who are destitute from the material point of view. Helping those who are in such an impoverished state is really quite significant.

As the commentary continues:

*...remaining with supreme people even if they are not spiritual teachers and masters; leaving or discarding non-supreme people...*

In contrast to supreme beings, *non-supreme people* have a negative influence on others. Another term we use for people who influence us to engage in non-virtuous acts or

deeds is negative friends. Basically they are friends who influence us to engage in negativity.

It seems that we don't have an exact English equivalent for the Tibetan word *digpa* which is usually translated as negative karma, unwholesome deeds or negative deeds. But there is a difference between negativity and negative karma.

*[There was a general discussion of a variety of possible terms. Sin was suggested but some felt it had too many overtones. Also if we replaced 'negativity' with 'sin' then we would be talking about sinful friends, which may have a connotation that they are evil. Geshe-la commented that if non-virtue is the opposite of virtue, then just being the opposite of virtue does not necessarily mean that it is negative or bad. If negative is the opposite of something how can we relate it to negative karma. He felt that 'bad friends' worked but wasn't sure about 'negative friends'.]*

There is quote from the sutras that summarises the Buddha's teaching:

Do not commit any evil (*digpa*),  
Engage in all virtue,  
Subdue one's mind,  
This is the teaching of the Buddha.

In any case the advice here to *discard non-supreme people* refers to friends that influence you to engage in negativity and non-virtue. Thus 'non-supreme' relates to bad friends who mislead you. 'Non-supreme' can also have the connotation of just being the opposite of 'supreme'. In this case, as I'm non-supreme, do you want to discard me as well? *[laughter]*. A virtuous friend is someone who is virtuous and who encourages others to adopt virtue and engage in good deeds. A non-virtuous friend is one who misleads you and influences you to adopt unwholesome deeds.

However, one needs to be mindful not to misinterpret this advice to mean that you must give up compassion for negative friends. It does not indicate that one should abandon love and compassion for those evil or non-virtuous beings. In fact, these beings who are completely under the influence of delusions are the very beings that are the objects of our compassion!

We know from our own experience that if we see someone who is engaging in evil and unwholesome deeds, we feel, 'How unfortunate that they are engaging in such negative deeds' because we know the grave consequences they will have to experience. So based on that, we must feel great love and compassion for them, rather than feeling hostile. So the advice is to avoid bad friends so we will not be influenced by them, but not to abandon love and compassion for them.

The main point here is not to adopt the conduct of non-virtuous friends; in other words we need to avoid negative and unwholesome influences. There are many stories of non-drinkers who go out with those who drink all the time, and who end up drinking as well. And once it becomes a habit it is very hard to overcome. There are many other instances where one can be influenced by the negative, unwholesome actions of others. If one associates with these people too frequently then it is possible that we will be influenced by their ill-behaviour, so we need to protect ourselves from that. If we find ourselves

becoming acquainted with those who are engaging in unwholesome, negative deeds, and see ourselves being influenced by these actions and deeds then we are falling short in protecting ourselves. So it is best if, from the very outset, we try to protect ourselves.

The commentary concludes:

...in brief, *thoroughly maintaining the doctrine* of the buddhas.

The text concludes with:

**The fifth chapter of the *Precious Garland, An Indication of the Bodhisattva Deeds, is finished.***

Gyaltsab Je's commentary ends:

The *fifth chapter of the Precious Garland of Advice for a King, an Indication of the Bodhisattva Deeds*, a teaching on the conduct of all monastics and householders, *is finished.*

While the actual body of the text is completed, there is a fourth subdivision included in the commentary, which we can complete next week.

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