
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བཞུགས་མོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Based on the motivation we have generated during the refuge prayer, we can now engage in the practice of meditation.

It is good to know the difference between generating a motivation and acting upon an already generated motivation. One implication of generating a proper motivation is the intent to transform one's mind from otherwise a state of mind that is influenced by delusions or negative emotions, into a positive state of mind. This also implies that we need to avoid having any self-interest in our intention to engage in virtuous activity. Even though one is inclined to engage in virtue, one has to transform any self-interest into a bodhicitta attitude, which is done by reminding oneself that the practice is to be dedicated for the purpose of benefitting all sentient beings, not just oneself. So, that is what generating a positive motivation means.

Whereas acting upon a motivation means that one's mind is already imbued with love and compassion and bodhicitta, and so there is no need to purposely generate a motivation in order to transform the mind from a non-virtuous state. Rather within that virtuous and positive frame of mind we engage in the practice. It is good to note what generating a motivation actually implies. So we can now see the difference between already having a good motivation and generating a good motivation.

As mentioned earlier, we have already set our mind with the proper motivation, based on the prayers that we have recited. In particular through the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer we have generated what is called exceptional refuge which is the Mahayana refuge, i.e. refuge combined with the bodhicitta attitude, which encompasses the Mahayana path. So, this is the optimum motivation that one can generate.

Being familiar with generating and adopting the appropriate motivation is an essential asset for one's practice, as it makes any virtuous activity or practice, whether it be meditation or prayers, so much more meaningful. Whenever we are inclined to engage in practice, our motivation is the basis that ensures our practice is fruitful and most meaningful. That is why it is really significant to think about the proper motivation. We can now engage in the practice of meditation.

[meditation]

It would be really meaningful and worthwhile to incorporate a meditation practice, such as the one we have just attempted now, into our daily life and make an attempt to stabilise our mind. Otherwise our focus will be scattered in every direction. So we need to exert some effort in order to stabilise our mind and, within that, generate a kind mind. That is a most worthwhile

objective of meditation practice. If one wishes to be happy it is essential we have a kind mind. This implies that without a kind mind, there is no possibility of having a happy mind.

In our last session, the actual body of the text from the root text *The Precious Garland* was completed.

At this point Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

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.

This summarises the essential point of the whole text, in which Nagarjuna very compassionately gives very meaningful and practical advice, not only for the benefit of the king, but for all monastics and householders, or lay people.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary goes on to explain:

In most printed copies of this text, the name of the fifth chapter is not mentioned. However it is obvious from all the previous chapters that it is reasonable for the name for this chapter to be mentioned as well. The great and superior being Nagarjuna presented the chapters of the treatise with a hundred verses each, with a sum of five hundred verses for the body of the text. Thus it is not tenable to assert that the earlier chapters are presented with a name whilst the fifth chapter isn't.

Here Gyaltsab Je explains that even though the name of the fifth chapter is not presented in most printed copies of the text, each of the chapters has one hundred verses and Chapters 1 to 4 conclude with the name of the chapter, so the obvious conclusion is that Chapter 5 would also have the name of the chapter at the end as well.

Gyaltsab Je goes on to explain:

Because the meanings of the words in this text are clear and easy to comprehend, the commentary is thus considered complete. However a more extensive explanation of how to practise the paths leading to high status and definite goodness, and an extensive presentation on Nagarjuna's reasonings to establish the view of emptiness is presented in Je Rinpoche Losang Drakpa's *Lam Rim (Graduated Path to Enlightenment)*, as well as in *Madhyamaka-Karika (Root Knowledge of the Middle Way)* and *Madhyamakavatara (Entering the Middle Way)*. Thus I have not further elaborated the meanings in this commentary.

Gyaltsab Rinpoche states that the words of the text are clear and easy to comprehend. Of course, for a great scholar like Gyaltsab Rinpoche it might be easy to comprehend, but it is not so easy for us! So when he says that the commentary is considered complete, he is implying that he has not left out any parts of the text, and that he has presented a comprehensive commentary on all of the words of the root text. This is in contrast to other commentaries which might provide an elaborate explanation of one part, but leave out other parts. However in this commentary on Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*, as Gyaltsab Je himself mentions, and as we have

found throughout the text, he has explained the meaning of every verse.

Gyaltsab Je however lists other treatises that give more extensive explanations of the two main points of *Precious Garland*, which are how to practise the paths leading to high status and definite goodness and Nagarjuna's reasonings that establish the view of emptiness. These two main points are presented extensively in Lama Tsong Khapa's *Lam Rim*, which we have covered previously. When you refer to the texts, you will find that they contain really extensive explanations of how to obtain high status and definite goodness.

The lam rim also contains a very clear and extensive logical explanation of the view of emptiness. It also explains the method of generating bodhicitta through the method of exchanging self with others, the Tong Len practice, which is the topic of your next few discussion sessions. It would be good to refer to these explanations and base your discussions around them. Then further clarifications can arise from that.

As Gyaltsab Je further explains, the two main points of *Precious Garland* are also presented in the *Madhyamaka-Karika (Root Knowledge of the Middle Way)*, which is an incredibly profound teaching including very meticulous and logical explanations on the view of emptiness. The *Madhyamakavatara (Entering the Middle Way)* and Lama Tsong Khapa's commentary on that, '*Illumination of the Thought, An Extensive Explanation of Chandrakirti's 'Entering the Middle Way'*' also have very extensive explanations. I have taught the *Madhyamakavatara* in past years, and by referring to those texts and familiarising yourself with those explanations again and again, you will gain a clearer understanding of emptiness.

Thus far the main headings in Gyaltsab's commentary on this text have been: 1) The meaning of the name 2) salutation of the translator, 3) The presentation of the treatise, and 3) the meaning of the end. We come now the fourth subdivision.

IV. THE MEANING OF THE END

The fourth, the meaning of the end, is subdivided into two categories: 1) the author of the treatise and 2) the translator of the treatise.

So this section has two parts:

1. The author of the treatise
2. Translator of the treatise

1. THE AUTHOR OF THE TREATISE

Here ends the *Precious Garland of Advice for a King* by the great master, the Superior Nagarjuna.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Here ends the *Precious Garland of Advice for a King*, which comprises the entire doctrine of Buddha Shakyamuni on sutra and tantra, composed by the great master, the Superior Nagarjuna, who had been prophesied in many sutras and tantras.

Following his reiteration of the words from the root text, Gyaltsab Je adds: *Here ends the Precious Garland of Advice for a King, which comprises the entire doctrine of Buddha Shakyamuni on sutra and tantra, composed by the great*

master, the Superior Nagarjuna, who himself had been prophesied in many sutras and tantras. Here prophesied refers to the prophecy by the Buddha, in many tantras and sutras, that the great master Nagarjuna would be the one who would reveal and clarify the main intent of Buddha Shakyamuni in his teachings. So in this way we can see that Nagarjuna was not just an ordinary being, but a supreme being prophesied by the Buddha himself.

2. THE TRANSLATOR OF THE TREATISE

Next, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reiterates the colophon relating to the translation process.

It was translated by the Indian professor Vidyakaraprabha and the Tibetan translator and monastic Bel-dzek. Consulting three Sanskrit editions, the Indian professor Kanakavarman and the Tibetan monastic Ba-tsap Nyi-ma-drak corrected translations and other points that did not accord with the unique thought of the Superior Nagarjuna and his spiritual son [Aryadeva]. It was printed at the great publishing house [the Potala in Lhasa].

I mentioned when I gave the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings that the three prominent masters of the Middle Way teachings all happen to have *Drakpa* in their name, which literally means renowned. These three are *Dawa Drakpa* (Chandrakirti) who is the author of the root text; *Lobsang Drakpa* (Lama Tsong Khapa) who composed *Illumination of the Thought* as a commentary, and *Nyi-ma-drak* the translator of *Madhyamakavatara*, who is also the translator of this text. So, these three masters, true to their name, are indeed renowned masters.

CONCLUDING VERSES

Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary with seven verses, the first of which reads:

I have presented a brief explanation on this elegant treatise,
A supreme jewel that removes the poverty of all migratory beings,
That comes from the excellent collections of oceans of scriptures,
Of the superior being - Depon Sangpo.

Here *superior being* can refer to Buddha Shakyamuni. Thus the *excellent collections of oceans of scriptures*, includes the sutras and tantras of the Buddha. This treatise is a *supreme panacea that removes the poverty of all migratory beings*, and overcomes all suffering.

Gyaltsab Je begins by saying that he has presented a brief explanation on this elegant treatise. Compare this with those who boast of their work saying, 'Oh, I've done a great thing! I have composed an extensive commentary'. In saying that he has presented a brief explanation Gyaltsab Je is implying that he does not have the capacity to provide an extensive explanation of these very profound teachings. This shows his great modesty.

The second concluding verse reads:

Oh how fortunate to have had this opportunity,
To contemplate the meaning properly with logical reasonings,
And to accomplish it accordingly and slightly acquaint myself with,

This path that definitely leads to high status and definite goodness.

Again, Gyaltsab Je is being very modest. He says he has been very fortunate to have had this opportunity *to contemplate the meaning properly with logical reasonings, and to accomplish it accordingly, and slightly acquaint himself with this path.* The implicit point here, that we need to try to adopt, is to acquaint ourselves with these *teachings, which are a path that definitely leads to high status and definite goodness.*

Gyaltsab Je's next verse indicates that he was encouraged to compose this text, alluding to his spiritual guides who are named later. It reads:

Not to decline from the intention to spread the Buddha's teachings,
Beautiful with glorious majesty and generosity,
And endowed with faith and discernment,
The exhortation [to compose this] was made with a gift.

The author is indicating here that he was exhorted to compose his commentary with the intention to spread the Buddha's teachings, which is *beautified with a glorious majesty and generosity and endowed with the faith and discernment* that is wisdom.

Next is:

I respectfully prostrate to the two venerable gurus,
Endowed with compassion for all that abide in the ocean of samsara,
Who had given me the eyes to perceive the vastness,
Whereby, my intention to travel to the supreme state has increased ever more.

Here Gyaltsab Je is prostrating *to his two venerable gurus, Rendawa and Lama Tsong Khapa, from whom he received the teachings.* This is further explained later.

Then comes a verse seeking forgiveness for any mistakes, which reads:

Although I present this with the strength of enthusiasm and discernment,
However the intent of the Superior is deep and profound and thus difficult to fathom,
Hence, whatever errors and mistakes there may be [in this commentary],
It is suitable for those who are endowed with Dharma eyes, to be patient.

Although this commentary was composed *with the great strength of enthusiasm and discernment based on logic, reasoning and wisdom, the ultimate intent of the Superior Being (the Buddha) is deep and profound, and thus difficult to fathom.* Because of its profundity, it is really difficult to fully understand the subtleties within *Precious Garland, hence whatever errors and mistakes there may be in this commentary, it is suitable for those who are endowed with Dharma to be patient.* Gyaltsab Je is thus seeking forgiveness for any mistakes that he may have made when composing his commentary. Basically he is saying, 'Please don't be upset or angry if there are any mistakes'.

The next verse is a verse of dedication, which is common to all authors of all treatises. Gyaltsab Je's dedication is:

From whatever virtue there may be from this endeavour,
I dedicate to my mothers who have nurtured me from beginningless time,
May the darkness of the evil spirit of grasping at phenomena be cleared away,
And the light of the meaning of reality increase.

The author is basically dedicating the virtue of all of his work on this composition, on which he has expended so much energy and effort, to all *mothers who have nurtured him from beginningless time.* This indicates that Gyaltsab Je has not omitted any living being from his dedication. He prays that *the darkness of the grasping at truly existent phenomena, presented here as analogous to an evil spirit, which causes one all of the suffering, be cleared away, and that the light of the meaning of reality (i.e. understanding suchness or emptiness) increase* in the minds of all sentient beings. This is an extremely profound dedication.

It is really good for us to try to incorporate a dedication such as this into our own daily practice, and dedicate whatever practice we do towards all sentient beings, remembering their kindness from beginningless life times. This would be an optimum way to make our dedications.

The last of these concluding verses, and the final part of the dedication reads:

May I never be separated from this profound doctrine,
May I sever all the fetters of attachment to objects,
And having leaped over the wall of cyclic existence,
May I enter the supreme state of fearlessness.

This is an extremely profound way of presenting a dedication at a personal level.

May I never be separated from this profound doctrine, refers to the presentation of supreme advice and instruction. It is said that one of the main things that binds us to samsara is the attachments that we have in cyclic existence. So for as long as we have attachment to the pleasures of cyclic existence, there is no way we will be able to be free from it. This is very profound.

In order to be free from samsara, *May I sever all the fetters of attachment to objects.* We can take leaping *over the wall of cyclic existence* almost literally. There is a barrier (or wall) between our own existence now and that of liberation and that barrier is cyclic existence. Using that as an analogy, 'May I be able to leap over this barrier of cyclic existence, to enter the supreme state of fearlessness'. *Fearlessness* refers to the state of liberation and ultimately, enlightenment, which is the ultimate goal.

Then the commentary reads:

This text called *The Precious Garland of Advice to the King* presents the essence of the meaning in a very clear and concise way.

In one of his earlier dedication verses Gyaltsab Je mentioned that he had been exhorted to compose this commentary. In this next part, Gyaltsab Je introduces those who exhorted him to compose the text.

Tri Namkai Wangpo exhorted me to compose this text, and the source of these teachings was Lama Tsong Khapa, and Lama Tsong Khapa's main guru Rendawa.

So, the two venerable gurus that he mentioned in the earlier verse, are the Venerable Rendawa, and Lama Tsong Khapa. Rendawa was an incomparably great master from the Sakya tradition who was Lama Tsong Khapa's main teacher. Lama Tsong Khapa had such great veneration for Rendawa, that he composed the *Mig me tse wai* verse that we recite regularly for him. Originally it had Rendawa's name in the last line, but Rendawa offered it back to Lama Tsong Khapa by saying 'This praise is actually suitable for yourself'. So he returned the praise to Lama Tsong Khapa, inserting Lama Tsong Khapa's name in lieu of his own. This is the background to the praise that we regularly recite to Lama Tsong Khapa.

Thus we conclude the text. I must acknowledge that the teachings have been incredibly very well attended. So well done. Over the last two years, most of you have attended almost every class, which is really remarkable.

Now we should not idly think 'I have completed the text' and put it aside. In addition to the explanations we have gone through, you have received transcripts on a regular basis that have been so kindly supervised by Adair and her team. Thus we can use the textbook itself, the commentaries and the transcripts as a basis to familiarise ourselves with the text again and again to further enhance our understanding. Then we need to try to practise what has been presented.

The text itself, along with the commentary, presents the whole range of practice very clearly. Nothing is missing, so with the proper aspiration and determination we can put it into practice. Furthermore, this is a text that can be used as a basis to present advice and instruction on Buddhism to others.

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Edited Version*

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