
Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་འགྲུབ་མཚན་ལོ་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual, we will engage in our meditation practice. We have just recited the Refuge and Bodhichitta prayer, and with that motivation in mind, we can engage in the practice. [meditation]

Generate a positive motivation for receiving the teaching, which primarily consists of the wish to benefit other sentient beings.

B. CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HIGH STATUS

2. ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HIGH STATUS

2.2. Forsaking the causes of bad transmigrations

2.2.2. Extensive explanation (cont.)

2.2.2.4. STOPPING HUNTING

This is sub-divided into three:

2.2.2.4.1. Forsaking killing

2.2.2.4.2. Forsaking generating fear in others

2.2.2.4.3. Generating pleasure in others

2.2.2.4.1. Forsaking killing

The advice on forsaking killing should be taken at a personal level, rather than regarding it as advice for others to follow. In order to make it a personal advice, we need to ask questions about the necessity for avoiding the act of killing. What does 'forsake killing' mean? Why should we forsake killing? What are the consequences if we don't avoid killing? When we avoid killing, what are the positive consequences?

As the teachings indicate, we need to understand both the positive effects of avoiding killing and the negative effects if we engage in the act of killing. If, after relating the advice to ourselves we recall past act(s) of killing, then we need to generate strong regret. Then, to purify that negative act, we need to engage in purification practice. Furthermore, we also need to make a commitment to not engage in any further acts of killing; so we make the vow to not kill in the future.

Nagarjuna intended this to be personal advice. However, we should not implement the practice of avoiding killing just because Nagarjuna said so! Thus, we need an understanding of the sound reasons as to why we must avoid killing, and then our understanding and confidence in the law of cause and effect or karma will become stronger. The correct understanding of karma will serve as a sound basis for developing our practice and eventually gaining higher realisations; that is the basis of abiding by the law of karma.

It is totally impossible to achieve higher realisations if one neglects abiding by the law of karma. Therefore we need to establish the basis, and then we can further develop ourselves. At our beginner's level it might not be possible for us to put *all* of Nagarjuna's advice into practice right away, but we do need to practise with whatever ability we have now. The practice of the morality of avoiding killing can be seen as a very practical way of understanding karma, in terms of the positive effects of avoiding killing and the negative effects of taking the life of another being.

The harm caused by the act of killing is very obvious. The benefits of some practices of moral conduct may be obscure to us. We may not really understand why we should avoid certain kinds of actions because it is too hard for us to see the negative consequences of those acts and the positive effects of avoiding such acts. With the act of killing, however, it is very obvious that it will render harmful results.

If we were to witness an act of killing we would see the tremendous terror and suffering that is experienced. It is really obvious that even the prospect of death is very frightening to any living being. How much fear would we feel if our own life was threatened in any way? Our fear would be so tremendous that we would attempt to protect our life in every possible way. From our own experience, we know that one of the most precious things that we wish to protect is our own life, and that any harm inflicted upon our own life causes tremendous suffering.

As explained in the teachings, there are three types of effects of karma: the ripened effects, the effects that are similar to the cause, and the environmental effects. Although the karmas relating to other kinds of deeds might be a bit more obscure, the karma of the act of killing is quite obvious. Those who engage in the act of killing end up becoming quite miserable, and their life is shortened with illness and so forth. So these kinds of effects are quite obvious, and seeing the obvious consequences of the negative act of killing can give us a further determination to avoid killing.

Because the suffering experienced by the victim of killing is very obvious; if you don't wish to cause others to suffer, then you would necessarily want to avoid the act of killing. And at a personal level, we would not want to experience the effects of the negative karma of killing.

If we have engaged in the act of killing and we do not purify the negative karma, then an imprint of that action is left on the mind which, if it is not purified, will remain in one's mind until conditions are right for that imprint to be awakened. When the imprint is activated, one will immediately experience the result of suffering. It is explained in great detail in the teachings how the cause and effect of karma works, and how it is experienced. So understanding this in greater detail will give us more confidence about karma and its effects, and the initiative to engage in the practice. The first of the moral ethics presented by the Buddha was to abandon the act of killing, which is very obvious and so a practical practice for us beginners.

The relevance of contemplating and analysing the cause and effect sequences of the act of killing is that our commitment to avoid killing becomes much stronger. Furthermore, if one recalls having engaged in an act of killing during the past, then by contemplating the specific details of the karmic consequences one will develop a very strong sense of regret. Such regret will only become apparent when one really contemplates the details of the suffering of the other being, as well as that great suffering that one will experience in the future, because of the karma one has created. Using this two-fold combination of contemplating the suffering of the other and contemplating one's own suffering, will definitely result in developing very strong regret about having committed such negative deeds in the past. Most importantly, a very strong commitment to not engage in such negative deeds in the future will spontaneously arise. When that combination takes place, then the purification is completed.

Based on strong regret, the commitment to not engage in such negative acts in the future can be developed. If, because one sees the ill effects of deeds one has committed in the

past, one has developed strong regret, then one will take the initiative to make a strong commitment not to engage in those negative deeds again in the future. Then we will have developed a very strong basis for avoiding such negative deeds again in the future. This analysis and understanding of karmic consequences not only helps us to abide by the law of karma, but it also allows us to develop a strong sense of compassion for other beings. Contemplating the suffering that one has caused in the past, and how much suffering others experience as a result of their acts of killing, will initiate a strong sense of compassion. That is why this is such a very profound practice for our development.

The verse relating to this topic is:

171 *To hunt game is a horrible
Cause of short life,
Fear, suffering, and hell,
Therefore always steadfastly keep from killing*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further adds to the meaning of the verse:

To hunt game is horrible because the ripening results of having killed in past lives, as well as karmic results that are similar to that cause, will cause a short life, fear, suffering and hell. Therefore always steadfastly keep from killing.

As the commentary explains, if one engages in the act of killing, for example hunting, then because of the specific karmic results called ripening results, as well as the karmic results that are similar to the cause, the consequences in a future life will be that one's own life will be short. We see many examples of individual who experience a short life; as explained here, this is the consequence of having taken life in the past. A further karmic result is living in fear. We may wonder why some beings live in great fear, or we may wonder why we experience fear sometimes. Fear is said to be a result of the act of killing, or shortening the life of other beings in the past. Further suffering that could be experienced in future lifetimes is the suffering of the hells.

Here Nagarjuna is advising the king to stop killing through acts of hunting and so forth, because of the negative consequences that the king will experience in the future. Thus, Nagarjuna cautions the king, 'even though you may be mighty and majestic now and you may feel that you have great power, nevertheless you will not always remain strong and healthy. You will have to pass on to a future life. So even though you may not experience these results now, take your future lives into consideration so that you will not have to experience suffering then'. So Nagarjuna is giving this personal advice out of compassion for the king, as well for those living beings who would be otherwise killed by the king.

I feel that Nagarjuna is giving us incredibly practical advice. Using sound reasoning and practical analogies, his very sound advice is clearly given out of his compassion and love for us. Nagarjuna's advice to the king is to 'always steadfastly keep from killing and avoid killing because of all of the negative consequences that would otherwise be experienced. To do that you must therefore abide by the morality of avoiding killing, and steadfastly abide by that discipline'.

We can also further understand that Nagarjuna is making predictions about the future, and that these predictions are based on valid reasons. Normally when we talk about predictions we think that there must be something paranormal about them, but the predictions made by Nagarjuna are very clear and soundly based. The prediction

is that if one engages in certain acts, then the definite result will be such and such, and if one doesn't wish for that prediction to be fulfilled, then one needs to practice counter-measures. That is how Nagarjuna's advice is of such great benefit.

2.2.2.4.2. *Forsaking generating fear in others*

What follows is more practical advice to the king, as Nagarjuna advises the king to forsake generating fear in others. For example, fear can be used as a means of intimidation, 'if you don't follow my orders, I will punish you', and in the past punishment could have meant the severing of limbs and so forth. Even if the orders were rescinded, the fear would remain, and in the past a person sentenced by the king might not be able to sleep out of great fear about what they will have to experience. So Nagarjuna is cautioning the king to not to use his might and power to cause fear in others. We, too, can take this advice at a personal level and not intimidate or cause fear in others.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

172 *Those who frighten embodied beings
When they encounter them are malevolent
Like a snake spitting poison,
Its body completely stained with impurity.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je adds a few points:

Those who frighten embodied beings through harmfulness when they encounter them are malevolent, and thus must be completely forsaken. They cause fear like a snake spitting poison, its body completely stained with impurity.

A snake is used as an illustration of what causes fear in others. A very venomous snake not only bites, but also spits poison to harm others. Anyone encountering such a snake is immediately fearful, and tries to evade, or even destroy it. Nobody wants to encounter such a poisonous snake, because of the fear it causes. Likewise, anyone who is malevolent or harmful to others, making them fearful, would not be pleasant to encounter. With this illustration, the king is advised to avoid causing fear in others.

The main point of the advice here is to not cause others fear through harmfulness. As with the case of the poisonous snake, fear is generated due to the potential harm it can cause. Likewise, causing fear out of threats or harmful attitudes and behaviour is an ill deed, and so it must be overcome and avoided.

2.2.2.4.3. *Generating pleasure in others*

The relevant verse from the root text is:

173 *Just as farmers are gladdened
When a great rain-cloud gathers,
So those who gladden embodied beings
When encountering them are beneficent.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Just as farmers are gladdened when a great rain-cloud gathers; so those like a king, who gladdens embodied beings with good conduct when encountering them are beneficent and enacting dharma conduct. Thus, this must be practiced at all times.

The analogy here is of farmers whose crops haven't had rain for some time. As soon as rain-clouds gather, with the prospect of rainfall, the farmers are gladdened. Through this analogy the king is being advised to help others and to show good conduct by gladdening other beings. Here 'gladden other beings' refers to making other beings both physically and mentally happy. This is achieved by being beneficial to them through Dharma conduct. It is not just any conduct,

but specifically Dharma conduct that benefits others on a physical and mental level.

Thus, in summary, the king is being advised that it is to his advantage to engage in good conduct, which is explained here as being conduct that is beneficial to others. Such beneficial conduct is based on avoiding harm to others, which, as explained earlier, means avoiding the acts of killing and causing fear in others and so forth. These acts are considered to run counter to the well-being and welfare of others. On the other hand, benefiting others on a physical and mental level, brings them a real sense of joy and happiness, and so it is Dharma conduct.

Clearly, the king is being advised in a very practical way that he should avoid certain kinds of misconduct, and engage in the positive and good conduct, or Dharma conduct. Again, this advice can be applied on a personal level, and we should try to implement it in our daily life, for our own benefit as well as for others.

2.3. Summary: Abandoning non-practices and achieving the practices

The explanation of this heading comes in the first half of Verse 174, which reads:

*174ab Thus observe the practices incessantly
And abandon those counter to them.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary elaborates:

Thus, as has been extensively explained previously,
observe the practices incessantly...

Earlier in the text there was an extensive and detailed explanation about the need to avoid the ten non-virtuous deeds, and other misdeeds as well. This part of the text has explained the need to avoid the act of killing and causing fear in others, leading to this summary: one needs to observe and incessantly practice those things that we need to adopt.

The next point Gyaltsab Je makes is:

...abandoning non-Dharma practices which harm oneself and which are counter to Dharma practices.

The two main points being concisely explained here are the need to engage in conducive practices in accordance with the Dharma, and to avoid or abandon non-Dharma practices and deeds.

This summary by Nagarjuna is the same as the advice that His Holiness the Dalai Lama presents. His Holiness shares his practical advice about making the commitment 'I will not harm any other living being in even the slightest way, and I will engage in whatever possible way to benefit other sentient beings'. Making this commitment on a daily basis is, as His Holiness advised, highly beneficial.

If the advice of all the teachings were to be summarised, it really comes down to these two points: to avoid harming others even in the slightest way and to consciously engage in benefiting other sentient beings. I personally find this a very, very powerful point to contemplate. In your daily practice you can take the initiative, and spend a few minutes contemplating these points. Firstly contemplate the necessity for engaging in such a practice, and then make the commitment from the depths of your heart, 'today, I will intentionally avoid harming any living being in the slightest way, and I will actively engage in benefiting others'. Making that heartfelt commitment and contemplating that point really moves one's heart, and one can actually feel the blessing of that very powerful thought moving through oneself, because it is such a very altruistic and powerful state of mind.

Spending even just a few moments of your daily practice contemplating this point will be highly beneficial. So we will now actually contemplate this for a few minutes. *[Pause for meditation]*

The summary is 'to observe the Dharma practices incessantly and abandon those which are counter to them' can be amplified in these two thoughts to contemplate

- ∞ I will not engage in the slightest way to harm others;
- ∞ I will do everything possible to benefit other sentient beings.

Making that commitment from the depths of our heart and contemplating it is putting the essential points of Nagarjuna's summary into practice, and thus it is really beneficial.

C. CAUSE AND EFFECT OF DEFINITE GOODNESS

This section is sub-divided into four:

1. Condensing the principal causes of highest enlightenment into three and training in them
2. Training in the causes for achieving the thirty-two signs of a buddha
3. Reason for not elaborating here on the causes and effects of the beautiful features
4. Difference between the marks of a buddha and of a universal emperor

1. CONDENSING THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF HIGHEST ENLIGHTENMENT INTO THREE AND TRAINING IN THEM

The lines corresponding to this heading are the second half of verse 174 along with verse 175:

*174cd If you and the world wish to attain
Unparalleled enlightenment,*

*175 Its roots are the altruistic aspiration to
enlightenment
Firm like the monarch of mountains,
Compassion reaching to all quarters,
And wisdom not relying on duality.*

Those of you who studied the *Madhyamakavatara* will recall that these key points were also presented in that text. Of course the *Madhyamakavatara* is a commentary to Nagarjuna's work *Fundamental Wisdom*. This verse is reiterating the points that are presented in the *Madhyamakavatara*. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

If you, king, and the beings that dwell in the samsaric world wish to attain unparalleled enlightenment, then the roots of unparalleled enlightenment are:

If one were to ask 'what are the roots of unparalleled enlightenment?' then the response presented here, is that if you have the wish to obtain unparalleled enlightenment, then you need to consider the main causes for achieving unparalleled enlightenment.

Gyaltsab Je then lists three points:

The **first** is presented as *the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment* for the sake of all living beings and that which is produced by the four conditions, the four causes and the four powers, and which is *firm like the monarch of mountains*.

This corresponds to part of the first verse in the *Madhyamakavatara* root text:

The mind of compassion and non-dual awareness
And bodhichitta are the causes of conquerors'
children.

As presented by Gyaltsab Je the *altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings is produced by the four conditions, the four causes and the four powers*. The particularities of altruistic aspirations are further explained in *The Bodhisattva Grounds*. We need not go into the detail of these four conditions, four causes and four powers now, but those who are interested can refer to the *Lam Rim*, which explains them clearly. The main point is that one of the three roots of unparalleled enlightenment is the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. *That which is produced by the four conditions, four causes and four powers and which is firm like the monarch of mountains* means that it is very firm and stable.

The **second** of the three causes is:

Compassion focuses on the suffering of sentient beings reaching to all quarters and wishes them to be free from suffering

Thus the second root is compassion, which focuses on the suffering of sentient beings reaching out to all quarters of the universe.

The **third** root cause is

The wisdom that realises the lack of extremes that does not rely on duality.

In summary the three main roots are

- ∞ The altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings;
- ∞ The compassion that focuses on the suffering of sentient beings reaching to all quarters, and wishes them to be free from suffering;
- ∞ The wisdom that realises the lack of extremes that does not rely on duality.

These three roots are very clearly presented in the root verse itself:

If you and the world wish to attain unparalleled enlightenment, its roots are:

- (1) Altruistic aspiration to enlightenment, which is firm like the monarch of mountains
- (2) Compassion reaching to all quarters
- (3) Wisdom not relying on duality.

2. TRAINING IN THE CAUSES FOR ACHIEVING THE THIRTY-TWO SIGNS OF A BUDDHA

The next topic refers to the causes of the thirty-two major marks of a buddha, It describes each and then explains their causes. It would be good for you do some research so that when there is a reference to these marks you will be able to bring to mind that there are thirty-two major marks. There is some discrepancy between various texts in how these marks and their causes are presented. Nagarjuna's presentation seems to be more in accord with the *Uttara tantra* by Maitreya. However the main point is for us to actually get to know what the thirty-two major marks are; which you can prepare for yourself by referring to texts that explain them.

There is also a sutra requested by a girl called Rinchin Sangmo, which presents the thirty-two marks. If one has access to this particular sutra, it would be good for you to become acquainted with that, as it quite helpful for one's practice. Also you can understand that in fact there is no difference based on gender in the Buddha's teachings.

Amongst the Buddha's disciples there were some very intelligent women—their intelligence can be determined by the questions they asked the Buddha. His response to the queries of his disciples was presented as teachings that are called *sutras*. It is good to understand that.

It is important that we have a full understanding of the equality of both of male and female roles in the Buddha's teachings. The perfect circle of disciples of the Buddha consists of a fully ordained monk, a fully ordained nun a layman with vows and a laywoman with vows. Those who recite the *Vajra-cutter sutra*, will know that towards the end of the sutra there is a description of who was present when the Buddha gave that teaching. It clearly indicates that the disciples consist of fully ordained monks, fully ordained nuns, lay female practitioners with vows, and lay male practitioners with vows, gods and demi-gods and so forth. This describes the complete entourage of the Buddha's disciples.

In the *Heart Sutra*, which we regularly recite, Shariputra asks Avalokiteshvara, 'how does a son of good lineage practice in the profound?' and Avalokiteshvara responds, 'whatever son or daughter of good lineage who wishes to practice the profound should look at it this way' and then presents the method. This clearly indicates that there is no distinction between a male practitioner and a female practitioner. The earnest seeker may have male or female form, as both use exactly the same method to engage in that insight into wisdom. These are really important points that we need to understand, as they are helpful for the mind.

In the tantra, there are elaborately detailed explanations about the roles of male and female practitioners. According to tantra there is no difference in how a male or female body becomes enlightened—either body will do. That is specifically explained in the Guhyasamaja Tantra, which explains how the male enhances the wisdom of the female and the female enhances the wisdom of the male. Thus, by helping to enhance each other's wisdom, both male and female achieve the final realisation of enlightenment.

In summary, it would be good to acquaint yourselves with the marks of the Buddha, in particular the thirty-two major marks. The eighty minor marks are quite extensive, however if one has access to explanations, it is also good to be familiar with that as well. The main reason for familiarising oneself with the major and minor marks of the Buddha is that they are mentioned in the teachings, prayers and sadhanas. In the *Praise to Manjushri* prayer (which we do before every Tuesday evening teaching) the qualities of Manjushri are explained. At the very end of the prayer there is an indication that he is endowed with 112 marks; these are the 32 major and the 80 minor marks. So when these signs and marks are mentioned, even in passing, then at least one can remember what they refer to. To that extent, there is a personal benefit as it leaves a positive imprint on our mind.

The sadhana practice of any deity always mentions that the enlightened being is endowed with the major and minor marks. So again, every time the signs of the enlightened being are presented in sadhana practices, we will be able to relate to what they are, which is of great benefit.

Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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thus they are as kind as one's mother of this life. When one contemplates this kindness of all sentient beings again and again, the spontaneous wish to repay that kindness will develop in one's mind.

The stages of the seven-fold cause and effect method of developing bodhichitta are:

1. Recognising all beings as having been one's mother.
2. Contemplating their kindness, by using the example of the kindness of one's own mother in this life, who gave birth to us, nourished us and brought us up, then the kindness of each and every living being, who have been kind to us numerous times in our past lives, will dawn upon us.
3. Having contemplated their kindness; the wish to repay their kindness will naturally develop, which is the third cause.
4. After contemplating the kindness of all living beings and generating the wish to repay their kindness, they will begin to appear very appealing and a genuine love for them will develop. So, one develops an appealing love for all living beings (some call it 'heart-warming' love), which regards all living beings equally appealing.
5. Having developed that appealing love, one further contemplates on how best to repay their kindness. By recognising that beings are suffering, one generates a strong wish to alleviate all their suffering, which is called great compassion.
6. That very strong and unceasing wish to remove the suffering of all sentient beings wish further develops into a strong sense of personal responsibility, 'I need to free them from all suffering myself; it falls to me and it is my responsibility to free all sentient beings from all suffering'. This superior intention is developed based on the earlier contemplation that all beings have been kind to oneself just like one's mother. At this point one has completed the sixth stage, which is to take personal responsibility for freeing all sentient beings from all suffering and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness, which is called superior or special intention.
7. At this point one will naturally question whether one has the ability to free all beings from all forms of suffering now, whereupon one quickly realise that one does not have the capacity. After further investigation, one will come to realise that the only way to obtain the capacity to liberate all beings from all suffering is by achieving enlightenment oneself. Even a bodhisattva, who has reached high levels of attainment, doesn't have that capacity; only a buddha and no one else has that capacity. Therefore, 'I need to achieve that ultimate state of enlightenment myself, in order to fulfil my aspiration to free all sentient beings from all suffering'. By contemplating this reasoning, one develops the strong determination to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, which is also called uncontrived bodhichitta or awakening mind.

Chandrakirti presented this very systematic and logical presentation of the technique for developing bodhichitta. By initially using logic and then contemplation, one becomes more and more familiar with developing compassion, to the point of generating actual compassion.

So the sequence of how bodhichitta is generated is that it is dependent on the superior intention or responsibility that one takes for all sentient beings, which in turn is dependent on developing compassion, which is itself developed on the basis of a heart-warming or appealing love towards all

sentient beings. That is developed on the basis of wishing to repay their kindness, which is based on contemplating the kindness of all sentient beings, which in turn is based on recognising them as having been one's mother in the past.

Chandrakirti presented this very systematic presentation based of the logic of our own mother being our closest and kindest relation. When we have the same view of the appeal of all other beings as we have for our mother in this life, then all living beings will be equally appealing and we will have an unbiased view of them. Through familiarity with this practice, it is definitely possible to reach the point of spontaneously seeing all beings as equally appealing as one's own mother. When one reaches the stage of seeing all other beings as equally appealing and equally deserving of our help to be free from all suffering, then the following states of mind are developed naturally

This practice should not be seen as a mere intellectual exercise, but rather as a means to develop that real sense of a warm heartedness towards all living beings. Then the keen wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings and to free them from suffering will be developed, which is a most precious state of mind. Even though we may not have developed that uncontrived and spontaneous wish of the awakening mind right now, we will, through familiarity from meditating on these points, definitely develop a strong affinity with the awakening mind. This affinity will, at the very least, protect us from the lower realms in the next life.

It is said that those who have a strong affinity with bodhichitta cannot possibly be born in the lower realms. Thus, having an affinity with bodhichitta will protect and secure a rebirth with the right conditions to practice Dharma in our future life. The right conditions, which we have now, are meeting with the Mahayana teachings and the perfect Mahayana teachers, and obtaining these conditions again in the future will allow us to further develop ourselves. Even if we have not generated an awakening mind in this life, there is every possibility that we will develop it in the next life or beyond, which is how we progress towards enlightenment.

3. Wisdom

The third root cause of highest enlightenment is the wisdom realising emptiness. This is essential for achieving unparalleled enlightenment. Without the realisation of emptiness there is no possible way to achieve enlightenment – none at all!

Structure of the Mahayana path

All three roots to the achievement of unparalleled enlightenment are equally essential. So we must familiarise ourselves with these points and gain as profound an understanding of them as we can. As I have explained in previous teachings, it is good for us to really understand the complete structure of the Mahayana, which can be summarised into:

- ∞ The **basis**, which is the two truths.
- ∞ The **path**, which is method and wisdom.
- ∞ The **result**, which is the attainment of the two bodies of a buddha, i.e. form body and the wisdom truth body.

It is advantageous to have a good understanding of this structure and to know how they are interdependent.

The two truths are *conventional truth* and *ultimate truth*. Based on actualising the ultimate understanding of the two truths, one develops the path, within which both method and wisdom are essential. The awakening mind or the

altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment is the *method*, while *wisdom* is the wisdom realising emptiness. This relates also to the two accumulations: the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. The accumulation of merit refers to developing the awakening mind and the accumulation of wisdom is to acquire the ultimate wisdom realising emptiness. Therefore the method, which is the awakening mind or bodhichitta, is said to be the main cause to develop the *form body* of a buddha (an enlightened being's body) and the wisdom realising emptiness becomes the main cause for achieving the *wisdom truth body* (the qualities of a buddha's mind).

With respect to the two truths, the ultimate outcome of understanding conventional truth is the means to generate the awakening mind, while an understanding of ultimate truth is the basis for developing the wisdom realising emptiness. Thus the basis is the two truths, and the path is essentially bodhichitta and the wisdom realising emptiness, which is the means to achieve the result of the two bodies of a buddha (the form body and the wisdom truth body of an enlightened being). Thus the ultimate goal is to achieve the state of buddhahood.

Contemplating and meditating on this process is, in itself, a high form of meditation. Not only does it leave a very strong positive imprint on our mind, but we also gain a more profound understanding of these points. Even thinking about these points can bring about a very relaxed state of mind, as we are diverted from the negative states of mind. So during the practice of meditation we can definitely gain a calm state of mind as well as immediate release from the delusions. In that way it is a very powerful and meaningful meditation.

The main point to understand here is that the root causes for unparalleled enlightenment are (1) the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment or the awakening mind, (2) compassion, and (3) the wisdom realising emptiness. Although these three are presented as the primary or root causes, it is to be understood that there are other practices such as engaging in the practices of generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, concentration and so forth, which are auxiliary causes.

It is also good to incorporate this explanation into an understanding of what a Mahayana practitioner is. How does a Mahayana practitioner engage in practice? The answer is that, at the very least, they have a contrived state of an awakening mind, or bodhichitta, and that they engage in the practice of the six perfections. The practices of a Mahayana practitioner are referred to as the bodhisattva practices. What are the bodhisattva practices? They are engaging in the six perfections after having developed the awakening mind. Anyone who aspires to the Mahayana practices should understand that whatever practice one does, it should be based, at the very least, on a contrived bodhichitta, or an awakening state of mind.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je further explains:

Acharya Chandrakirti presents this point extensively in his *Madhyamakavatara* and further condenses the meaning in his commentary *Clear Words*. As presented in *Madhyamakavatara*, in order to generate bodhichitta, it has to be ornamented with the wisdom realising non-duality, preceded by great compassion and is the main cause for obtaining the primordial wisdom of the conquerors. In order to fully comprehend the intent of Arya Nagarjuna this treatise on compassion was composed. As Arya Nagarjuna elucidates, on the

paths of accumulation and preparation one fully embraces the three causes; finally on the first ground one will directly penetrate the meaning of emptiness, gaining the realisation of the perfection of wisdom. Thus, he presents the primary cause of unsurpassable enlightenment in a concise manner. If you wish to gain a comprehensive understanding of how bodhichitta is first developed and then practised once it has been developed, you need to refer to Je Rinpoche's [Lama Tsong Khapa] extensive treatise on the bodhisattvas' general deeds and the practices of last two perfections.

This is showing how the authentic sources explain the awakening mind, compassion, and the wisdom realising emptiness, as being the root causes of unsurpassable enlightenment. As mentioned here, on the first two paths—the *path of accumulation* and the *path of preparation*—the main emphasis is on further cultivating compassion, bodhichitta and gaining a conceptual understanding of emptiness. Then the direct realisation of emptiness is gained on the *path of seeing*, which is also where the first of the ten bodhisattva grounds is obtained.

The ten bodhisattva grounds are explained in the fifth chapter of *Precious Garland*. Chandrakirti extracted the essence from Nagarjuna's treatises and explained it in greater detail in the *Madhyamakavatara* and in *Clear Words*.

2. TRAINING IN THE CAUSES FOR ACHIEVING THE THIRTY-TWO SIGNS OF A BUDDHA

As the signs and marks of a buddha are being presented in this section, it is good to understand the literal meaning of the word *sign*. The definition of a sign or mark is that which indicates that the one who possesses it is a valid being.

This heading is divided into two sub-headings:

2.1. Exhortation to listen

2.2. Actual explanation of the thirty-two marks of a buddha

2.1. Exhortation to listen

The relevant verse reads:

176 *O great King, listen to how
Your body will be adorned
With the thirty-two signs
Of a great being.*

The sequence here is as was explained earlier. The ultimate goal of enlightenment can be summarised into achieving the two bodies of a buddha, the form body and the wisdom truth body. This section refers to the signs and marks of the form body of the Buddha. According to the definition of a sign, the possession of these marks is a clear sign that the person is a valid or enlightened being. These signs and marks that adorn the form body of enlightened beings do not just come about spontaneously without depending on any causes and conditions, but they are dependent on specific causes and conditions. What are the causes and conditions for achieving those marks and signs? So, here the text gives the presentation of what the marks are along with their causes.

This systematic presentation can also be used as a meditation topic where one thinks about the marks, their causes and how the causes and effects are inter-related. There are different forms of meditation, and this one falls into the category of analytic meditation, which is a very high form of meditation. It is good to use whatever understanding one gains from these teachings as a part of our personal practice.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse:

Addressing the king Nagarjuna advises him thus: *O great King, listen to the causes and effects of the signs and the relationship between the two—in order to understand how your body will be adorned with the thirty-two signs, just like that of a great being.*

Indicating that the king will be adorned with the signs in the future is a way of inspiring the king, because it indicates that the king will obtain those signs when he becomes enlightened. So Nagarjuna exhorts the king to listen to what the signs are (which are the effects) and to the causes of those signs, and the relationship between the two. By acquiring the causes now, you will obtain the marks of a superior or enlightened being in the future.

2.2. Actual explanation of the thirty-two marks of a Buddha

177 *Through proper honouring of stupas, Honourable beings, superiors, and the elderly You will become a Universal Monarch, Your glorious hands and feet marked with [a design of] wheels.*

This verse relates to the first mark, which is that the *hands and feet are marked with wheels*. Did you look them up as I asked? It would be good to have a copy of the list so that you can refer to it, or even memorise them. It is good to know what the thirty-two major marks are, then, when an explanation is given, we can gain a deeper understanding of them. As I have mentioned earlier that would be very useful for one's own practice.

If we recite the list then that will leave an imprint to gain an understanding all the different marks that adorn the Buddha as an enlightened being. So it is good to become familiar with them. In the *Ornament of Clear Realisation* the marks are listed in verse form, which would be easier to recite together.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Because it is the essence of all reliquaries, blessed by the buddhas and a holy object for accumulating virtue and purifying negative karma, the Conqueror—Buddha Shakyamuni himself—is referred to as stupa [or receptacle of offerings].

The first part of the commentary relates to the *proper honouring of stupas*, where the ultimate stupa literally means *a receptacle of offerings*, which is the Buddha himself.

The commentary continues:

Thus, *through proper honouring of actual stupas which are buddhas; as well as honourable beings such as one's parents, abbots and teachers, the sick, the superior-arya sangha and the elderly, you will become a universal monarch*. And thus, you will not be suppressed by other's glory but rather *your own glorious hands and feet will be marked with [a design of] wheels*.

This presentation clearly shows the cause, which is to honour the ultimate receptacle of offerings, the stupa, or the Buddha himself. Furthermore, one's own parents having shown extreme kindness can be categorised as *honourable beings*, as well as *abbots, teachers and the sick*. The Buddha mentioned that caring for the sick and the elderly is one of the kindest ways to benefit others. So I regularly encourage people who work in nursing homes or homes for the aged that, with a proper motivation such work is a really good deed, and very good work in which to engage. By engaging in that and also honouring *the superior arya sangha and the*

elderly, you will become a universal monarch, which in this case, refers to being an enlightened being.

Thus *you will not be suppressed by others' glory, but rather your own glory, where your feet will be adorned with wheels*. Here *wheel* literally refers to a Dharma wheel, and it is not just any diagram of a wheel. Rather the wheel has specific features, for example, having a thousand spokes, having a hub and so forth, There is a very clear and luminous imprint of this wheel manifesting on a buddha's hands and feet.

Again, it is not as if the signs and marks of an enlightened being arise spontaneously or miraculously, and that we need to worship and pay respect to the Buddha because of his majesty. The glorious and majestic marks of an enlightened being are dependent on particular causes and conditions. This indicates that at one time the Conqueror, the Buddha, was an ordinary being just like us. It was during the time as an ordinary being that the Buddha engaged in the service of benefitting others, as indicated here, honouring the stupas as well as honourable beings such as one's parents, abbots and teachers, the sick, the arya sangha and the elderly.

Engaging in such virtuous deeds over many life times became the cause for the Buddha to obtain marks such as the Dharma wheel. It is good to really understand how, due to the specific causes and conditions; one will obtain these majestic signs and marks as an indication of being a superior or enlightened being. It is important that we contemplate this process as a way to inspire ourselves to engage in virtuous deeds now, as way to create the appropriate causes.

In essence, the presentation here, along with our study and understanding, serves as a means to inspire us to also engage in virtue and by doing so, to create the causes to obtain those marks and signs ourselves in the future. The way to create the causes now is, as explained here, to honour stupas and so forth. As we are capable of doing so, it is not out of reach.

Conventional stupas are either images of the Buddha, or a representation of the Buddha's mind. There are images, paintings and drawings, statues and relics and so forth that we need to regard as the actual manifestation of Buddha. Due to our obscurations we don't have the ability to actually see the Buddha with our own eyes now, so the next best thing for us is to relate to the images or representations of enlightened beings in the form of statues, stupas and so forth. Honouring them with the thought 'this is the real Buddha not just a representation', and then making offerings, singing praises and doing prostrations and so forth is highly meritorious practices. Making offerings in this way is highly meritorious. Furthermore, as explained here, whenever possible help and respect one's parents, abbots, teachers, the sick, the elderly, the Sangha and so forth, which is the cause to accumulate virtue, and so obtain those results oneself.

If we leave the study of this as just mere intellectual knowledge, thinking 'OK, I understand what the signs are, and that these are the causes', will not really be of personal benefit. But if we take this as a personal instruction it serves as a means to inspire us to accumulate virtue, and then it serves a great purpose and is of great benefit. If we can do that then we can derive the essence of the teachings, which serves as a great benefit for ourselves.

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Very white teeth, even teeth, well set,
Forty complete in number,
Azure eyes, eyelashes like a magnificent cow's:
These thirty-two are the signs.¹

The **first** of the signs, *hands and feet having the signs of wheels*, was introduced in our last session. The relevant verse from *Precious Garland* is:

177 *Through proper honouring of stupas,
Honourable beings, superiors, and the elderly
You will become a Universal Monarch,
Your glorious hands and feet marked with [a
design of] wheels.*

The verse presents the cause of this first sign. It is incredibly inspiring for us to see how, through the practices mentioned here, of *proper honouring of stupas, honourable beings* (which includes one's parents), *superiors and the elderly, you will become a Universal Monarch*, and *your glorious hands and feet marked with a design of wheels*. As the verse indicates, through specific practices one naturally obtains that sign on enlightenment. It is inspiring to relate the result of a specific sign to the practices that are the cause of that result.

The **second** sign as presented in *Ornament of Clear Realisation* is *tortoise feet*, which is a specific feature of the Buddha's feet. Unlike our own feet, the Buddha's feet are flat like the feet of a tortoise, which are rounded and very smooth. So, the Buddha's feet are said to be rounded and very soft, and not curved.

The verse in the root text which corresponds with this sign is:

178 *O King, always maintain firmly
What you have vowed about the practices,
You will then become a bodhisattva
With feet that are very level.*

In his commentary Gyalsab Je explains:

O King, always maintain firmly what you have vowed and made commitments about the practices. Thus, you will then become a bodhisattva with feet that are very level, and are equally touching the ground.

Here, Nagarjuna is exhorting the king to engage in the practices that the Buddha engaged in. Practising in accordance with vows and commitments made in the past, is the specific cause, even for a bodhisattva, to obtain *feet that are very level and equally touching the ground*.

The **third** sign is *digits of the hands and feet joined with webs*. The corresponding verse from the root text reads:

179 *Through giving, speaking pleasantly,
Purposeful behaviour, and concordant
behaviour
You will have hands with glorious
Fingers joined by webs [of light].*

Gyalsab Je's commentary states:

Through giving, speaking pleasantly, purposeful behaviour and concordant behaviour, which are the four means of gathering, you will have hands with glorious fingers, like the king of geese, joined by webs [of light].

The *four means of gathering* refers to the four ways to benefit others by giving them the Dharma. The first of the four is *giving*, which is being generous with material needs and thus relieving others of a difficulty, which will endear us to others. *Speaking pleasantly* or using pleasant words makes others feel at ease. For example, if someone comes to visit

from far away, the first words you utter are, 'Have you had a pleasant trip? Do you feel like resting? Are you feeling OK?' Even in a worldly sense, we all appreciate such pleasant words as 'welcome' and 'very nice to see you' or 'how are you doing?'. They make us feel at ease and welcome, and are, in a conventional sense, regarded as being courteous. So the first two means of gathering disciples epitomise good conduct and the kind of behaviour that makes others feel at ease.

Once people are at ease, one then engages in *purposeful behaviour* which relates to encouraging others to engage in purposeful behaviour. The fourth means of gathering, *concordant behaviour*, relates to one's own behaviour. It is unacceptable if one encourages others to engage in good and purposeful conduct without personally practising such conduct oneself. Just as one encourages others to engage in good behaviour, one must also practise in the same way. In other words, one's own behaviour must be concordant with the advice one gives. Then, having gained the trust of others, one can impart the teachings of the Dharma. That is how great beings impart the Dharma to others.

Through these practices, one becomes enlightened and has *hands with glorious fingers, like the king of geese*. Now although we may not have come across the king of geese, we can see that the feet of geese are webbed. So, possessing such hands is a sign of having engaged in the four practices of giving Dharma.

Now we come to the **fourth** and **fifth** signs: *Hands along with feet smooth and tender and seven regions of the body elevated*. The corresponding verse from the root text is:

180 *Through abundant giving
Of the best food and drink
Your glorious hands and feet will be soft;
Your hands, feet, shoulder blades,
And the nape of your neck will broaden,
So your body will be large and those seven
areas broad.*

The explanation in Gyalsab Je's commentary is:

Through your abundant giving, of the best food and drink to others...

Not just any kind of giving will suffice, it needs to be *abundant giving*, or continuously giving *the best food and drink* to others. Having engaged in such great acts of generosity in the past, the result will be that:

...your glorious hands and feet will be soft and youthful;...

As explained here, the hands and feet will be very soft, having an appearance of being young and tender.

The **fifth** sign according to *Ornament of Clear Realisation*, is the *seven regions of the body elevated*, which is also presented in this verse.

With regard to this Gyalsab Je's commentary on Nagarjuna's text states:

... your hands, feet, shoulder blades, and the nape of your neck will broaden, so your body will be large and those seven areas broad.

As explained in the commentary, the seven points are the back of the hands, the two feet, two shoulder blades (or shoulders) and the back of the neck. Unlike our rather flat features, these seven features of the fifth sign are elevated and more rounded. Rather than being shallow like ours, the shoulders are further broadened as is the back of the neck.

Can you list the five signs we have covered thus far?

¹ From *Ornament for Clear Realisation* by the Protector Venerable Maitreya, reproduced with permission from FPMT.

Students: *Inaudible.*

You don't have to be embarrassed when answering questions! This is the wrong time to be shy and embarrassed. When we are engaged in virtue, there is no need to be shy and embarrassed at all! You can confidently engage in virtue. It's when you are engaging in negativity that you should be shy and embarrassed. In some ways it is quite disgraceful to be very competent when engaging in negativity, and very shy about engaging in virtue. So can you now list the five signs we have covered so far?

Students:

Hands and feet having the signs of wheels, tortoise feet;
Digits of the hands and feet joined with webs;
Hands along with feet smooth and tender;
Seven regions of the body elevated.

The next signs listed in *Ornament of Clear Realisation* are *having long digits, broad heels, a large and upright body.*

The following verse of the root text presents the **sixth**, **seventh** and **eighth** signs:

181 *Through never doing harm and freeing the condemned
Your body will be beautiful, straight, and large,
Very tall with long fingers
And broad backs of the heels.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Through never doing harm to others and freeing those who are condemned to death, your body will be beautiful to look at, straight without bends, and large, very tall with long fingers and broad backs of the heels.

The **sixth** sign is that *your body will be beautiful to look at, straight without bends and large and very tall.* The **seventh** and **eighth** signs are, respectively, *long fingers* and *broad backs of the heels.* Here, the three signs are attributed to one main cause, which is *never doing harm to others and freeing those who are condemned to death.*

There is a minor difference between the presentation of *Precious Garland* and that of *Ornament for Clear Realisation.* The latter presents a specific cause for each of the three signs, whereas the former gives one main cause for all three signs. Otherwise, the general layout is the same and the presentation of the signs and marks is the same. Other texts also differ in their presentation of the explanation of the causes for these particular signs.

So *with the body being beautiful, straight without bends and large and very tall, long fingers and broad backs of the heels,* eight signs have now been covered.

The **ninth** and **tenth** signs are presented in the following verse:

182 *Through spreading the vowed practices
You will have glory, a good colour,
Your ankles will not be prominent,
Your body hairs will stand upwards.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Through spreading the words and meaning of the vowed practices,...

This refers to the cause of the signs, which is *spreading the words and meaning of the vowed practices.* Observing and explaining whatever vows one has taken will encourage others to keep those commitments and vows. Then, as a result of that practice:

... you will have glory, a good colour. Your ankles will not be prominent; your body hairs will individually stand upwards, turning clockwise.

The **ninth** sign is to *have glory, a good colour and your ankles will not be prominent.* The Buddha's ankles are not prominent and don't protrude, and are very smooth and rounded. The **tenth** sign is *your body hairs will individually stand upwards, turning clockwise.* Here the 'hairs' are body hairs, which spiral upwards and turn clockwise.

So how many signs have we covered?

Students: *Ten.*

And if you were to recite them?

Students:

Hands and feet having the signs of wheels, tortoise feet;
Digits of the hands and feet joined with webs;
Hands along with feet smooth and tender;
Seven regions of the body elevated;
Long digits, broad heels, a large and upright body;
Knees not protruding, hairs pointing upward.

The next verse presents the **eleventh** sign:

183 *Through your zest for knowledge, the arts,
And so forth, and through imparting them
You will have the calves of an antelope,
A sharp mind, and great wisdom.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse:

Through your zest for knowledge, the arts, and so forth, having learned them respectfully, and through respectfully imparting them to others, you will have the calves of an antelope, a sharp mind because of good memory, and great discriminative wisdom.

As explained here, a zest for knowledge particularly pertains to the arts. Within the arts there are the minor arts and the major arts. The minor arts incorporate general knowledge about the sciences, medicine, astrology and poetry and so forth. After having learnt them oneself, respectfully, one then imparts or teaches them to others. Having engaged in these deeds in the past, the result is the enlightened sign of *the calves of an antelope.* Unlike our own calves which are uneven in size and shape, the calves of an antelope reduce very evenly down to the hoof.

Here extra features are presented that are not part of the thirty-two signs. However they are part of the qualities of an enlightened mind: *a sharp mind because of good memory, and great discriminative wisdom.* These natural qualities are attained after having engaged in the arts with diligence, and then conveying the knowledge to others.

Now we come to the **twelfth** sign. Is that correct?

Students: *Yes.*

The root verse is:

184 *If others seek your wealth and possessions,
Through the discipline of immediate giving
You will have broad arms and a pleasant appearance
And will become a leader of the world.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

If others seek your wealth and possessions, through the vowed discipline of immediate giving,...

This refers to the cause. Having previously engaged in the practice of *immediate generosity,* means that when others seek one's wealth or possessions, they are immediately given without any hesitation. Through such a virtuous action in the past:

...you will have broad and long arms and a pleasant appearance with nice complexion.

Here, the resultant sign or enlightened feature is to *have long arms*. Unlike our arms, the arms of enlightened beings are very long and if they were completely relaxed, their hands would almost touch the ground. They wouldn't ever have to bend down to pick up anything! *[soft laughter]*. This isn't just an external feature, because a buddha is miraculously able to pick up anything they desire.

Other specific features arising from this cause are a *pleasant appearance with a nice complexion*. Many of the signs or features of the Buddha's body specifically relate to having engaged in great acts of generosity in the past, helping the needy and the poor many times over. Thus the practice of generosity is one of the primary and predominant practices in Buddhism, which is good to know, lest one thinks that Buddhism doesn't emphasise the need to be generous.

Now we go to the **thirteenth** sign, which is presented in the following verse:

185 *Through reconciling well
Friends who have become divided
You will become the best of those
Whose glorious secret organ retracts inside*

As Gyalsab Je explains in his commentary, the cause is:

Through reconciling well, friends who have become divided;...

The actual sign that is the result is:

...like the great elephant and the precious horse, you will become the best of those whose secret organ retracts inside.

We need to understand that each of the causes are practices that we can engage in now, which inspires us to engage in them. This is a very practical presentation indicating the importance of helping others to maintain good relationships, and helping to bring them together.

The specific cause here is to assist in reconciling friends or relatives who are divided or parted. Thus helping to restore relationships or friendships is a very good deed. This inspires us to not engage in acts of divisiveness or slander and so forth in our everyday life. By engaging in the positive deed of helping others to maintain their good relationships, and to dispel conflict or disharmony when it arises (by using pleasant words and so forth), one creates the causes for those enlightened signs or marks to be obtained in the future.

When we study these causes of the thirty-two signs of a buddha, we are being presented with specific practices. For each cause, the practice incorporates two parts: things to adopt and things to avoid and discard, i.e. adopting virtue as a practice and discarding non-virtue, which is its opposite.

Using the thirteenth sign as an example, we need to abandon causing division between friends and relations. The point of the practice to be adopted is to engage in ways and means to reconcile those who may be divided, or who may be experiencing relationship difficulties. This is how we need to incorporate these practices into our own daily life.

When we think about it, there is really great deal of meaning and purpose in all of these presentations. By contemplating these points, and the points of the teachings in general, one will become more aware of one's own faults and ill-deeds, and understand that we need to overcome them. Furthermore one will also come to recognise the positive qualities that need to be strengthened and further developed. This is how we engage in our practice.

As I have previously mentioned, when one listens to the Dharma, one should regard the teachings as being like a

mirror. The purpose of looking into a mirror is to beautify ourselves; the mirror is a medium to detect any dirt on our face, which can then be cleaned off. Similarly, the Dharma is like a mirror, in that it shows us our faults, particularly those in our own mind. Using the Dharma as a mirror to see the faults of our own mind also shows us how to overcome those faults.

As the teachings present, our practice can be summarised into two main points:

1. Practices that are to be adopted;
2. Practices that are to be abandoned.

So how many signs have we covered so far?

Students: Thirteen.

As a way to distinguish them properly, it might be good to develop a list of them so that you can recognise the individual signs clearly. Gaining some understanding of the signs is a way to strengthen our refuge practice as well. As presented in the advice on taking refuge, we need to relate to the qualities of the Buddha in order to develop strong faith in him. Then taking refuge in the Buddha becomes more powerful.

The qualities of the Buddha can be divided into three: his qualities of body, speech and mind. The thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of the Buddha basically summarise the qualities of the Buddha's *body*. Then there is the Buddha's eloquent *speech* and so forth. The qualities of the Buddha's *mind* are his omniscience along with great love and compassion, which gives him the great ability to benefit others.

It is by understanding the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech and mind, and his great deeds, that one's faith and sense of refuge in the Buddha becomes much stronger and firmer. These are ways to practise in daily life.

The great significance of contemplating the qualities of the Buddha is that it inspires us to become like the Buddha ourselves. When we are inspired, then, as one of the main causes for achieving enlightenment is bodhichitta, our inclination to develop bodhichitta will also develop naturally. To take a conventional example, when, in our worldly, everyday life, we see a prominent or influential person with many good qualities we wish to emulate that person. When we really admire them, we have the spontaneous thought, 'Wouldn't it be nice if I could be like them and have those same qualities myself'. So along with admiration, there is a natural tendency to want to emulate the qualities one notices. Then one will naturally examine the causes of those qualities, how they trained and how they have gained those qualities and then strive to achieve the same result.

The same applies to admiring the Buddha. Having faith in him and taking refuge in the Buddha is a means for us to aspire to become like the Buddha, and thus to engage in the practices of love and compassion and bodhichitta, which are the main cause to achieve the state of enlightenment. That is the significance of this teaching.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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Generating a positive motivation, we will now engage in the meditation practice. (*meditation*)

The motivation for receiving the teachings can be along these lines: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the Dharma. I will not just pay it lip service, but I will actually put the Dharma into practice'.

2.2. Actual explanation of the thirty-two marks of a Buddha

We covered a few of the marks and signs in our last session, so we can begin by reciting the verses from *Ornament of Clear Realisation*.

Hands and feet having the signs of wheels, tortoise feet,
Digits of the hands and feet joined with webs,
Hands along with feet smooth and tender,
Seven [regions] of the body elevated,

Long digits, broad heels, a large and upright body,
Knees not protruding, hairs pointing upward,
Calves like the antelope's, long and beautiful arms,
Secret organ well retracted in a sheath.

Golden-hued skin, soft skin,
Hairs growing singly and excellently clockwise,
Face adorned with a treasure hair, torso like the lion's,
Tops of the shoulders rounded, broadness between the
shoulders,

With respect to this, the appearance of even tastes that
are not delicious as the best of tastes,
Body is symmetrical like a nyagrodha tree,
Possessing a protrusion on the crown, tongue beautiful
and long,
The melodious voice of Brahma, cheeks like a lion's,

Very white teeth, even teeth, well set,
Forty complete in number,
Azure eyes, eyelashes like a magnificent cow's:
These thirty-two are the signs.¹

In our last session we left off at the **thirteenth** sign, the *sexual organ* is modestly *retracted* and remains concealed.

185 *Through reconciling well
Friends who have become divided
You will become the best of those
Whose glorious secret organ retracts inside*

The main point is that through the cause of *reconciling* friends who have become *divided* or separated, *you will become the best of those, with the glorious secret organ retracted inside*. The cause of this sign is that in the past, when the Buddha was practising on the path, he repeatedly engaged in actively reconciling shattered relationships amongst friends and so forth.

On a personal level, what we need to learn from this is that we must make every effort to reconcile others. If we are not careful, we may find that, rather than practising the virtue of reconciling others, we are spending time in gossip and slander, which actually creates divisions between people. That non-virtuous deed harms others, so we need to be mindful and practise the opposite of this, which is to adopt the virtuous practice of reconciling.

The purpose of studying the Dharma is not just to gain superficial knowledge, and then put it aside while continuing with our habitual ill-behaviour. If there is a discrepancy between the Dharma that we have learnt, and the behaviour that we adopt, then our knowledge and conduct are not concordant. We need to put into practise whatever knowledge or understanding we gain from the Dharma, otherwise it will not serve its purpose.

There is a saying in Tibetan: with Dharma practice, we should not become like the hide in which butter is stored. That is because no matter how long the butter is kept in the hide, the hide just becomes harder and tougher rather than being softened by the butter. This example is used to illustrate the misuse of Dharma to make our self-cherishing and ego even stronger. If our mind hasn't softened with the understanding of Dharma then the point of learning the Dharma has not been served.

Given the choice, we all want to become an enlightened being. Thus, it is essential that we engage in acquiring all the causes for obtaining the qualities of a buddha. The external characteristic of an enlightened being is that all the signs and marks are intact. So in order to become enlightened, we need to create all of the causes for each of those signs. If we neglect to create the cause for even one of those thirty-two signs, then because one of the causes for enlightenment is missing, we would not become enlightened. That is why it is important to understand how it is necessary to create each one of the causes.

We should avoid becoming the sort of person who gains a significant level of understanding of the Dharma, and who, when he or she hears certain points thinks, 'oh yes, I understand that', but then fail to actually put it into practice. It is important that our initial enthusiastic, and sometimes zealous, acquisition of Dharma knowledge does not deteriorate into a complacent acceptance, without any attempt to check whether the Dharma is actually being applied in our practice and daily life.

If we behave in that manner then it would be like the line from the *Guru Puja*, which says that although countless numbers of buddhas have descended, we have not yet been subdued.² We will fall into the category of not having acted to put the teachings into practice even though the teachers have come, and thus we will remain in samsara.

The **fourteenth** and **fifteenth** signs, *golden-hued skin*, and *soft skin* in *Ornament Of Clear Realisation*, are described in the following verse:

² We make our requests to you, O compassionate refuge protectors:
With precision you impart the good way of Those Gone to bliss
To the unruly beings of this degenerate age;
Who are difficult to curb, and were not tamed
By the countless Buddhas of the past. (Verse 46)

¹ From *Ornament of Clear Realisation* by the Protector Venerable Maitreya, reproduced with permission from FPMT.

186 *Through giving good houses
And nice comfortable carpets
Your colour will be very soft
Like refined stainless gold.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Through giving good houses and nice comfortable carpets, your colour will be very soft, like purified and refined stainless gold.

Through repeatedly engaging in the virtue of *giving material necessities, such as good houses and nice comfortable carpets* and so forth, while training on the path, the result is that on achieving an enlightened body, the colour of the skin will be golden *like purified and refined stainless gold*. Refined and stainless gold refers to gold in its purest form, which is very *soft*. Having a skin like that is the result of practising generosity while on the path.

Actually the literal meaning of the Tibetan word *sapa*, as used in *Ornament of Clear Realisation*, should be translated as *thin*, but in *Precious Garland* the word *soft* is used.

Now we come to the **sixteenth** and **seventeenth** signs, *hairs growing singly and excellently clockwise, and face adorned with a treasure hair*, which are covered in the following verse:

187 *Through giving the highest powers
And following a teacher properly
You will be adorned by each and every hair
And by a spiralling hair between the eyebrows.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Through giving the highest monarch powers and following a teacher's advice properly, you will be adorned by each and every hair that grows from individual pores, and by a spiralling hair between the eyebrows.

The **sixteenth** sign is the body hair that curls clockwise and points upwards. The **seventeenth** sign is the spiral of hair on the Buddha's forehead, which also spirals clockwise as well as pointing upwards. It is said that when uncurled this hair stretches out a great distance and when let go, it springs back its place as a spiral on Buddha's forehead. In images and statues of the Buddha this spiral is depicted as a dot on his forehead; sometimes a jewel is placed there to represent this spiral of hair that is one of the major signs of the Buddha.

Like his body hair, each strand of hair on the Buddha's head curls clockwise. Far from being strands of individual hairs like the Buddha's hair, our own hair is intertwined, and if we don't comb our hair regularly it becomes tangled and matted. The unique feature of the Buddha's hair is that each strand of hair spirals clockwise. Statues of the Buddha depict this sign as bumps in his hair.

Now we come to the **eighteenth** and **nineteenth** signs, *torso like a lion's*, and *tops of the shoulders rounded*. The relevant verse is:

188 *Through speech that is pleasant and pleasing
And by acting upon the good speech [of others]
You will have curving shoulders
And a lion-like upper body.*

With respect to this verse, Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Through speech that is pleasant when heard and pleasing when recalled, and by acting upon the good speech [of others]; you will have curving shoulders and a lion-like expansive upper body.

To clarify the commentary, pleasant speech refers to speech that others find pleasing when heard, and which later brings great pleasure when recalled. The Buddha, while training on the path, engaged in this virtuous deed repeatedly, and so when he became enlightened, he obtained the two signs mentioned here—the **eighteenth** sign of curving shoulders and the **nineteenth** sign of a lion-like upper expansive upper body.

Now we come to the **twentieth** and **twenty-first** signs, *broadness between the shoulders*, and *the best of tastes*, which are covered in the next verse, which reads:

189 *Through nursing and curing the sick,
The area between your shoulders will be broad,
You will live in a natural state,
And all tastes will be the best.*

Gyaltsab Je further expands on this in his commentary:

Through nursing and curing the sick with care, the area between your shoulders will be broad, you will live in a natural state without immediate distractions, and through having given medicine to the sick all tastes will be the best.

This is another essential point for us to consider. The Buddha was not a spontaneous or miraculous manifestation. Rather he achieved his enlightened state by virtue of having actually engaged in benefitting others while he was on the path. As a trainee on the path he helped other beings in such practical ways as helping them to bathe, cooking for them, and nursing the sick. It was as a result of these virtuous deeds while he was on in the path, that the seed was planted for the **twentieth** sign—the area between the shoulders is broad, and it is also the cause for one to be able to live in a natural state without any distractions. The **twenty-first** sign, is that all food is appealing and tasty as a result of the virtue of providing medicine for the sick and the needy.

The practice of the caring for the sick is held in high esteem. While training on the path, the Buddha did not dwell in his own world of prayers and so forth; rather, he actively engaged in caring for, and nursing the sick many times over. It is mentioned in many teachings that care of the sick is of great importance. In a monastic environment, therefore, care for the sick is held in high regard as a most important good deed. So when I meet those who train or work as a nurse, I applaud them for their work. I say, 'It is a really good deed to be a nurse, helping the sick'. Of course to derive the full benefit of that practice one also needs to have a good motivation. But even without a high level of motivation, any nurse going about their duties in a proper way, will, by the very nature of that work, definitely benefit. That's why I encourage them.

I have heard that in some nursing homes there are times when some of the residents miss out on meals, because someone doesn't do their duty properly. Apparently everyone is allocated responsibility for a certain area, but some staff will bring in the breakfast for a resident and leave it on the tray, without making an attempt to help the resident eat. Then later they come around to take away the

dishes – even if the resident haven't had their breakfast, they just take it away. That means the resident is left without a meal, which often occurs. The person who told me this said that they are really unhappy when they see this happen, but sometimes it is difficult to intervene. I heard that some staff even eat the untouched food, which is appalling.

On a positive note there others who really make a point of trying to coax the residents into eating a bit, and feed them until they start to eat for themselves. It just goes to show that even though people have the same duties, when work is done out of a sense of genuine concern and care for the other, then that is really benefitting others.

The **twenty-second** and **twenty-third** signs, *body symmetrical like a nyagrodha tree*, and *possessing a protrusion on the crown*, are explained in the next verse:

190 *Through initiating activities concordant
With the practices, your crown protrusion
Will stand out well as a primary feather and
your crotch and other body parts will be
Symmetrical like a banana tree.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads

*Through initiating activities concordant with the
Dharma practices, your crown protrusion will stand
out well as the primary feature and your crotch and
other body parts will be symmetrical like a banana tree.*

Although this translation refers to a banana tree, that is not the term originally used. The text actually refers to a tree that is very symmetrical with respect to its bark, branches and leaves. The cause of these two signs is that one's activities are concordant with the Dharma.

The **twenty-second** sign, the *crown stands well*, refers to the protrusion on the Buddha's crown which has a height of four finger-widths. The **twenty-third** sign is that, unlike us, the crotch and other body parts are symmetrical. Sometimes our limbs, and other parts of the body are out of proportion and not symmetrical, but the Buddha's enlightened body has very symmetrical and even parts. I saw a picture of a very tall person, from England I think, who was very skinny too, and he just didn't look quite right. In Tibet we also have quite tall people, but they are often quite broad and well built, so their height suits their body shape.

The **twenty-fourth** and **twenty-fifth** signs, *tongue beautiful and long*, and *voice of Brahma* are related to the following verse.

191 *Through speaking true and soft words
Over a long time, O lord of humanity,
Your tongue will be long
And your voice that of Brahma*

In his commentary then Gyaltsab Je further expands on the meaning of the verse:

*Through speaking true and soft words to others over a
long time, O lord of humanity, your tongue will be long
and your voice pleasant like that of Brahma.*

With respect to the cause, we know that, even on a conventional level, speaking the truth is regarded as a virtue. Here, however, speaking true words is not enough—they have to be spoken softly and in an appealing manner. It was the combination of speaking the truth softly over long period of time while he was

training on the path that the Buddha has these two enlightened signs.

The **twenty-fourth** enlightened sign is that the tongue is beautiful and long. Other commentaries go into more detail, saying that the Buddha's tongue is so long it can touch his forehead and even his ears. The analogy is that his tongue is like a dog's tongue, which is also quite long. The Buddha's tongue is very red in colour and, like a lotus petal, is very pleasant to look at.

The **twenty-fifth** sign is that the voice is very pleasant, like that of the celestial god, Brahma, which has five specific features. In fact the Buddha's voice is said to have sixty different qualities. The primary quality is that it reaches out to all at a level appropriate to their understanding, and even in their own language.

Another quality of the Buddha's speech is that even when many are asking questions at the same time, the Buddha is able to answer all those questions simultaneously, with just one answer. This is said to be the most amazing and incredible feature of the Buddha's speech. Although these features seem to be quite beyond our comprehension, they were obtained by the Buddha because, while he was training on the path, he made very strong prayers to be able to benefit sentient beings in whatever language that is necessary to converse with them. It is said that in any one teaching the Buddha simultaneously gives the teaching to gods, humans and many other beings. This feature of the Buddha's speech is said to be its primary quality, because that is how he is able to benefit all sentient beings at their respective levels.

The **twenty-sixth** sign, *cheeks like a lion*, is introduced in the following verse:

192 *Through speaking true words
Always and continuously
You will have cheeks like a lion,
Be glorious, and hard to overcome.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Through knowing what is true speech, speaking
true words always and continuously, you will have
cheeks like a lion, be glorious and hard to overcome by
others.*

As indicated here the cause of the **twenty-sixth** sign is, having fully comprehended the truth, engaging in the virtue of always speaking true words continuously to others. As a result of engaging in that virtue, the enlightened sign will be cheeks like a lion. Unlike our cheeks, which can sometimes be quite sunken, the enlightened sign is naturally rounded cheeks, like those of a lion, which are very pleasant to look at. Furthermore an enlightened being has great stamina, and is not easily influenced by others.

The next verse relates to the **twenty-seventh** and **twenty-eighth** marks, *very white teeth*, and *even teeth*.

193 *Through showing great respect,
Serving others, and doing what is fitting,
Your teeth will be very white,
Shining, and even.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je says:

*Through showing great respect towards other living
beings, serving others, and doing what is fitting in*

accordance to their needs, *your teeth will be very white, shining and even.*

So the cause of great respect to others results in two signs: the teeth are white and shining, and even. Here *even* refers to teeth being larger or taller than the others.

The **twenty-ninth** and **thirtieth** signs, *well set*, and *forty in number*, are explained in next verse:

194 *Through using true and non-divisive
Speech over a long time
You will have forty glorious teeth
That are set evenly and are wondrous.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

Through using true and non-divisive speech over a long period of time, you will have forty glorious teeth—twenty upper and twenty lower—that are set evenly and are wondrous.

So as explained here, the causes of these signs are the virtuous deeds of using true and non-divisive speech over long period of time. The result is the enlightened sign of having *forty* intact *teeth*, with twenty lower and twenty upper teeth, which are *evenly set*, and very *wondrous* and pleasant to look at.

The **final two** signs, *azure eyes*, and *eyelashes like a magnificent cow* are covered in the next verse:

195 *Through viewing beings with love
And without desire, hatred, or delusion
Your eyes will be bright and blue
With eyelashes like a bull.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation is:

Through viewing beings with love that wishes them to be happy, and without desire, hatred or delusion, your eyes will be bright and blue, with eyelashes distinct, black and flowing downwards, just like that of a bull.

The specific cause of the **thirty-first** and **thirty-second** signs is that during his time as a trainee on the path to enlightenment in previous lifetimes, the Buddha cultivated and then developed a strong wish for others to be constantly happy. That wish, called love, is an unbiased wish without desire or attachment, hatred, or ignorance. It is free from the bias of only loving some people, such as relations and close ones because of attachment, and does not exclude others out of hatred, or indifference towards some out of ignorance. This unbiased love that is free from discrimination is the love that the Buddha practised. Mahayana practice esteems this type of love, which forms the core of the bodhisattva practices in Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

Having engaged in this kind of practice, the result is the **thirty-first** mark, which is eyes that are bright and blue. Here the eyes are very clear, the pupils, the iris and the white being sharply delineated from each other. Sometimes the eyes are cloudy with cataracts or a bit bloodshot, but the thirty-first mark is that the eyes are free from all these types of defects. In other words the eyes are very pleasant to look at and very bright.

The **thirty-second** mark is that the eyelashes are very distinct, in that each eyelash is individually separate from all the others, and curls downwards. This is quite unlike the measure that some people have to take to separate the

eyelashes with mascara. The Buddha doesn't have to worry about that at all, as his lashes are naturally distinct.

That covers all of the signs and now there is a brief **summary**:

196 *Thus in brief know well
These thirty-two signs
Of a great lion of beings
Together with their causes.*

Gyaltsab Je's summary is:

Thus in brief know well these thirty-two signs of a great lion of beings, together with their causes.

That being explanation of the verse, the commentary continues:

You must show respect for the accomplishment of the causes of the signs. Also while in the process of accomplishing the causes, you must understand the interconnected relationship between the causes and effects, and establish the link by making stainless prayers to obtain the distinctive features of the signs.

Here Gyaltsab Je is elaborating on how one needs to utilise an understanding of cause-and-effect in one's own practice. By relating the causes of each of the signs to the virtue and practice that was involved in obtaining these signs, one can develop a strong admiration and respect for the signs themselves.

We also need to gain the further understanding that having a mere understanding of the interrelationship between the cause (virtuous deeds) and the effect (the signs) is not sufficient. While we engage in accomplishing the causes, we must seal the link by making stainless prayers to obtain the distinctive features of the signs.

This means that having engaged in any of these positive practices of virtue, one must ensure that they do actually become causes by dedicating one's practices. Without such a dedication then the practice could be stained with worldly concerns. When we do a good deed in our ordinary practice, we might be attached to an immediate result, such as a good reputation or being appreciated by others and so forth. If that was our concern then even that good deed is stained with worldly concern. So what is being emphasised here is that in order for the good deeds (which can be practiced by anyone) to become a cause, you need to understand the effect, i.e. the signs, and be focused on that. So you need to engage in practice as a means to obtain the effect, and make a proper dedication towards that end, so that the practice becomes the cause for the end result of achieving the sign of an enlightened being, rather than being stained with worldly concern.

As those who attend study group regularly are aware, the next session will be the discussion session, which is followed by the exam in the following week. As usual I encourage to conduct the discussion in a good spirit of sharing and so forth, and to take the initiative in the exam to write the answers well.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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Discussion (26.04.2011)

Week: 1 (29.03.11)

1. Why did Geshe la say, "Nagarjuna intended this to be personal advice. However we should not implement the practice of avoiding killing just because Nagarjuna said so!"? [3]
2. What are the three types of effects of karma? [3]
3. As the commentary explains there are specific karmic results if one engages in the act of killing, for example hunting. What are these specific karmic results? [3]
4. 'If the advice of all the teachings were to be summarised it really comes down to the two points in this summary by Nagarjuna, which is the same as the advice His Holiness the Dalai Lama presents as a daily practice.' Give Geshe Doga's advice for a daily practice that contemplates on these two points. [4]
5. What are the three roots of unparalleled enlightenment? [3]

Week: 2 (5.04.11)

1. 'An uncontrived bodhicitta, or the awakening mind, is generated by having first developed the causes of that awakening mind.' Give the seven fold instruction for developing bodhicitta. [7]
2. The complete structure of the Mahayana can be summarised into three points. Give these three points with an explanation of each. [6]
3. Give the definition of a sign. [1]
4. 'Thus you will not be suppressed by other's glory, but rather [possess] your own glory, where your feet will be adorned with wheels.' Show the cause for this to occur. [4]

Week: 3(12.04.11) and Week 4 (19.04.11)

1. List the thirty two signs of a Buddha. First thirteen signs (week 3) and remaining nineteen signs (week 4), and briefly show the cause of each. **Exam:** List the first six signs and show the cause of each. [12]

Exam (03.05.2011)

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2. What are the three types of effects of karma? [3]

3. As the commentary explains there are specific karmic results if one engages in the act of killing, for example hunting. What are these specific karmic results? [3]

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8. Give the definition of a sign. [1]

10. 'Thus you will not be suppressed by other's glory, but rather [possess] your own glory, where your feet will be adorned with wheels.' Show the cause for this to occur. [4]

11. List the thirty two signs of a Buddha. First thirteen signs (week 3) and remaining nineteen signs (week 4), and briefly show the cause of each. **Exam:** List the first six signs and show the cause of each. [12]

1.

2.

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