

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland of Advice to a King

Session 13.1: Creating Our Future Self

The following is based on “*Practical Ethics and Profound Emptiness: A Commentary on Nagarjuna’s Precious Garland*” by Khensur Jampa Tegchok, from the commentary of Gyaltsap Je, a principal disciple of Tsongkhapa; “*Nagarjuna’s Precious Garland, Buddhist Advice for Living and Liberation*”, analyzed, translated, and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins; and teachings by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Geshe Drakpa Gelek, Geshe Lobsang Nima, Gen Lamrimpa, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Geshe Lhakdor, Ven. Passang Gelek, Ven. Robina Courtin, Ven. Thubten Chodron, Bhikshu Steve Carlier, B. Alan Wallace, and Alexander Berzin, with the guidance of Geshe Lobsang Nima.

**Links to mantras, Buddha-figures, texts, and guided visualization practices used in this series are at the end of this study guide.*

Review of Session 12

1. If we wish to create a fortunate rebirth for ourself as a human being—which is considered ideal for spiritual practice and growth—we definitely should follow the Buddha’s enlightened instruction and refrain from engaging in the ten negative actions of body, speech, and mind and practice the ten positive ones that counteract them. Doing this in conjunction with the Vajrasattva practice as described in [Session 12](#) will help us remove the negative karmic imprints on our mindstream and replace them with positive karmic imprints. If we habituate ourselves to practicing in this way, our thoughts, speech, and actions will absolutely change for the better; we’ll experience more happiness and less disturbances in the day-to-day experience of our lives.

Three additional actions to avoid and three to practice

1. Nagarjuna now continues by describing three additional actions to avoid and three actions to practice:

*10. Not drinking intoxicants, a good livelihood,
Non-harming, respectful giving,
Honouring the honorable, and [cultivating] love—
Practice in brief is that.*

The ten nonvirtues aren’t the only negative actions to avoid. Taking intoxicants, engaging in wrong livelihood, and harming others are also activities we should stay clear of. Excessive, self-indulgent use of substances like alcohol, pot, tobacco, and psychedelics are not only dangerous to our physical health; they can impede our ability to think clearly and make wise decisions, causing us to lose control of our speech and actions and engage in destructive behavior.

2. Nagarjuna also advises us to earn our living in wholesome ways that don’t harm others. For instance in business we should avoid cheating or lying to customers, clients, employers, or employees, don’t manufacture merchandise that is used to harm or kill other beings or that damages the environment, and don’t be involved with killing other beings as a regular activity

performed in exchange for payment. Abuse of power or not paying fair wages is also considered wrong livelihood. All these unwholesome ways of behaving connected to one's livelihood arise due to the generally contaminated experience of samsara and as such can't be avoided, but as Buddhist practitioners and aspiring Bodhisattvas we are advised to avoid them.

3. In addition, Nagarjuna recommends three activities that we should engage in; practice respectful giving, honor the honorable, and cultivate love. *Respectful giving* is being generous with a respectful attitude and manner to those who are worthy, such as our spiritual teachers, as well as other sentient beings. In general, the Buddha spoke of four kinds of generosity: giving material possessions; giving fearlessness by protecting others from danger; giving love with the thought "May all beings be happy"; and giving the Dharma by giving teachings and sharing the Dharma with others.

4. *Honoring the honorable* means showing respect to those who are superior to us in good or virtuous qualities. This would include our trusted spiritual teachers as well as others who have greater knowledge or more excellent qualities than we do. *Cultivating love* means cultivating the four immeasurables: immeasurable love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Contemplating these frequently will make our mind peaceful and improve our relationships with others.

Engaging in flawed practices can harm oneself and others

1. Some non-Buddhists have their own practices for attaining higher rebirth, many of which are very different from those that Nagarjuna recommends.

11. *Practice is not done by just
Mortifying the body,
For one has not forsaken injuring others
And is not helping others.*

Some non-Buddhists engage in ascetic practices where they self-inflict pain or discomfort, such as fasting for long periods of time, bathing outdoors in filthy "sacred" waters, or sitting in a fire. Some, like Hindu Sadhus or Naga Babas, walk around naked or stand on one leg for months at a time. They believe these practices will purify negativities and lead to liberation from the suffering of cyclic existence. The practitioners of asceticism do not renounce injuring themselves or others—which is essential for ethical conduct—and their practices don't help others. For those reasons, ascetic practices are not causes for liberation or higher rebirth.

2. Although Buddhists also engage in fasting practices, they are not extreme, and they are done with the motivation of bodhichitta. These are combined with prostrations, making offerings, meditating on emptiness, and cultivating serenity. Buddhist fire pujas outwardly resemble non-Buddhist fire offerings, but the motivation, meditation during practice, and the conclusion of the practice are very different.

People who go on the wrong path

12. *Those not esteeming the great path of excellent doctrine
Bright with giving, ethics, and patience,
Afflict their bodies, taking an aberrant path like a cow path
[deceiving oneself and those following].*

13. *Their bodies embraced by the vicious snakes of the afflictive emotions,
They enter for a long time the dreadful jungle of cyclic existence
Among the trees of endless beings*

1. All the practices that Nagarjuna has presented can be summarized into three: generosity, ethical conduct, and patience—which here refers to the strength of mind that allows one to endure adversity with courage and forbearance. We discussed the four types of generosity above. Ethical conduct involves abandoning the ten nonvirtues plus the three additional actions to avoid: taking intoxicants, wrong livelihood, and harming others. Forbearing patience is of three kinds: the patience of not retaliating, of enduring hardship and suffering, and of practicing the Dharma.

2. Those who have no respect for the Dharma—in other words, no respect for the three practices of generosity, ethical conduct, and generosity—and engage in practices opposite to these such as self-mortification, go on the wrong path. Some mistakenly believe they have attained liberation because they have good concentration or can endure pain, but this isn't enough.

3. In addition, they teach these wrong practices to others and lead them astray. Their followers spend their entire lives holding wrong views and following a wrong path, wasting their time, habituating their mindstreams to having wrong views, and creating destructive karma. It's like the example of a cow leading the herd off of an easy path to follow a trail that leads to the edge of a cliff or into a dangerous jungle. In a similar way, non-Buddhist teachers following a wrong path can bring ruin to others by leading them on that path as well, which causes all of them to suffer in the terrible jungle of cyclic existence.

4. Nagarjuna is saying that those of us who want to take the essence from this precious human life, who want to attain liberation and enlightenment, first need to seek out an unmistakable path. If we adopt a wrong path and practice incorrectly, no matter how much effort we put into it, no matter how courageous we may be, no matter how strong our practice may be, that path will not bring us a higher rebirth, liberation from cyclic existence, or enlightenment. For this reason, it's very important to meet a qualified spiritual teacher who can show us the unmistakable path to full enlightenment. Having found such a spiritual friend, we should make sure we follow them by studying, contemplating, and fully familiarizing ourselves with the Dharma.

The karmic results of complete actions that are nonvirtuous

1. When we follow a wrong path, or are inconsistent and lazy when we're following the correct path, we can create nonvirtuous, destructive karma and experience the results of it. For a complete action to occur—whether negative or positive—it must have the following three components: 1) the intention to take the action, 2) engagement in the action, and 3) completion of the action with no regrets. A complete action has three results: the ripening result, the result similar to the cause, and the environmental result. The *ripening result* refers to the rebirth we will take. *Results similar to the cause* are of two types: situations we experience that resemble those we caused others to experience, and the tendency to behave and act the same way again in the future. The *environmental result* influences where we are born and the type of environment

we live in. In the following three verses, Nagarjuna lists results similar to causes that one creates by engaging in the ten nonvirtuous actions, completed with all three components in place.

*14. A short life comes through killing.
Much suffering comes through harming.
Poor resources, through stealing.
Enemies, through adultery.*

First, if we intentionally or recklessly cause others to die it will result in our life being cut short in future lifetimes. Experiencing a short life in this lifetime is the result of killing done in past lives.

2. Harming and inflicting violence on others results in receiving much harm ourselves in future lives. If we experience being beaten or wounded by others, or great physical pain even though we haven't physically harmed others in this life, it is the result of inflicting harm and violence on others in past lives.

3. The result of stealing and taking what has not been freely given to us is being poor and having few possessions. Experiencing poverty or having trouble holding on to our possessions in this life is the result of stealing in previous lives.

4. Adultery causes relationship problems in future lives, so that your spouse or partner becomes like an enemy to you. Or in this life your partner may run off with somebody, and both your partner and the person they took up with become your enemies.

[continued in Session 13.2]

Compiled and edited by Tenzin Dhondup Sherab/Christopher Moroney

*Links to texts, mantras, Buddha-figures and practices used in this series:

[Precious Garland text translated by Jeffrey Hopkins](#)

[Working with Mantras](#)

[Chenrezig mantra](#)

[Manjushri mantra](#)

[Vajradhara-figure](#)

[Full Refuge Visualization](#)

[Full Refuge Visualization Text](#)

[Shakyamuni Buddha mantra](#)

[Chenrezig-figure](#)

[Manjushri-figure](#)

[Vajrasattva mantra](#)

[Manjushri Heart Lotus](#)

[Full Refuge Visualization Audio](#)

[Shakyamuni Buddha-figure](#)

[HH Dalai Lama-figure](#)

[Manjushri prayer & mantra](#)

[Vajrasattva-figure](#)

[Merit field image](#)

[Transforming Our Karma text](#)