

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland of Advice to a King*

Session 11: Pure Vision, Pure World

The following is inspired by “*Practical Ethics and Profound Emptiness: A Commentary on Nagarjuna’s Precious Garland*” by Khensur Jampa Tegchok, from the commentary of Gyaltsep 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, and texts used in this series are at the end of this study guide.*

Review of Session 9

1. In session nine we were talking about what the Tibetans call *shakpa*, or changing the direction of our life. We discussed this in the context of the Four Noble Truths—suffering, what causes suffering, the cessation of suffering, and what causes that cessation. The word the Buddha uses for suffering is *dukkah*, a Sanskrit term that refers to something being out of alignment. According to the Buddha, our experience of who we are ‘internally’ and the way in which we experience the world that appears to us ‘externally’ is out of alignment.

The dualistic view of consciousness

1. Basically, the Buddha is saying that a schism has occurred in our mind, or consciousness. In Buddhism, consciousness refers not only to our mental consciousness. According to Buddhism, we have six consciousnesses: seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling, and mental consciousness. These consciousnesses are something different than the sense organs, such as the ear sense organ, eye sense organ, tongue sense organ, and so on. Buddhism says these organs have a distinct aspect of consciousness that accompanies them. Generally speaking, when Buddhism refers to consciousness, it’s referring to the whole interrelated package of these six sense consciousnesses.

2. As our consciousness observes the objects of our consciousness, those objects appear to us as if they exist ‘out there’ externally, from their own side. An ‘external’ world appears to us as if it’s not connected to the internal ‘me’. For instance, Molly, the dog on the couch next to me, does not appear to be connected to my internal experience. Molly appears to be ‘out there’ with her own body, her own mind, her own external, independent being. This is the way our consciousness perceives things. It is said in the Buddhist wisdom teachings that our consciousness has generated our entire experience of cyclic existence, and it has generated it to have a deeply ingrained dualistic appearance.

3. Current findings and views in neuroscience and physics are helping us reassess our experience of a reality that seems to consist of separate internal subjective experiences and external objective appearances. According to these current scientific views, the way things

appear to our various consciousnesses is not actually occurring ‘out there’ but within our consciousness itself. In a way, one could say it is a non-dual conscious experience. This is precisely what the Buddhist wisdom teachings are suggesting. The qualities represented in the image and mantra of Manjushri, the Buddha of Wisdom, are pointing toward such an experience of non-duality.

4. Phenomena don’t exist in a separated subject-object relationship the way we normally think. What we have unwittingly done is generate a split or separation in our mind where we think the consciousness we identify and label as ‘I’ exists separately and independently from everything that appears outside of the ‘I’, which we identify and label as ‘objective reality’. Our paradigm is that of an objective reality existing ‘out there’ and an internal, privately existing ‘I’ inside of us that is separate from the reality ‘out there’.

Interdependence, emptiness, and the faulty “dynamics” of the ego

1. Everything is actually interdependent, but because the ego—the ‘I’—ignorantly assumes and feels as if it’s somehow separate from everything else, a sense of feeling bereft combined with a strong feeling of neediness arises. The ‘I’ thinks it *needs* what’s out there to make it feel complete. In other words, the ego does not feel complete by thinking everything exists as a non-dual, interconnected, interdependent experience. The ego doesn’t think that way. The ego feels that it is lacking, needy, and deprived, and must get what it needs and desires from something that’s outside of itself, somewhere ‘out there’. This is a mistaken view according to Buddhism.

2. Out of this neediness comes a grasping attachment to everything that the ‘I’ thinks will make it happy—whatever that may be. As soon as the ‘I’ can’t get what it thinks it needs; as soon as something gets in the way of the ‘I’ getting what it wants, the ego experiences aversion. It’s like two little kids who are playing together, and one takes a toy away from the other, and the other one shouts, “Mine!!” and starts kicking and screaming. There’s aversion that arises; an upset that occurs. This aversion manifests as emotions such as fear, anger, hatred, jealousy, or depression, and occurs for all of us to varying degrees. This is what the ego is about.

3. What we’re gradually trying to do through becoming familiar with the wisdom wing—the emptiness teachings of the Buddha—is to understand the faulty “dynamics” of ego self-grasping ignorance so we can clearly see the mistake we’re making. To do this, we must cultivate a thorough understanding of emptiness. This isn’t easy for us to do because of our pervasive and deeply fixed view of the ego—the view of self-grasping and self-centeredness. Very often when we try to study writings on emptiness by highly qualified masters, the information seems incomprehensible and the words of the texts appear to be written in some kind of code. This is because the view of emptiness is completely opposite to the view of ego self-grasping that we are so strongly habituated to. As a result, the self-grasping mind can’t make any sense of the words, and we quickly retreat to the behavior and thought patterns of the ego that are in our ‘comfort zone’. The Manjushri mantra practice is very, very helpful for this because it trains our mind to have the confidence, enthusiasm, and perseverance to delve into the layers of understanding that are required to cut through our ignorance and realize emptiness.

Emptiness and the object of conceptual designation

1. One of the main points to understand when studying emptiness is that everything depends for its existence upon conceptual designation. This initially sounds like craziness to us, because according to the ego's view, everything is independently self-existent, just the way it appears to us. But if we take the time to examine any object of consciousness we will begin to see the point that the view of emptiness is making. Take, for instance, a stainless steel thermos cup that holds hot drinks. When we hold it and look at it, we automatically take for granted that the cup exists from its own side with its own characteristics and functionality which have nothing to do with us. However, if we begin to analyze the cup, we'll realize that we're holding a cup and looking at a cup through the power of an idea. Someone came up with a concept of how to make the perfect thermos cup and what kind of material it would be made of. The thermos cup actually came into existence through conceptual thought.

2. In addition, our use of the thermos cup and our view of it arises through conceptual designation. We project or superimpose onto the cup all the concepts that it represents to us: this is a cup; it is a thermos cup made of stainless steel; one pours hot liquid into it and the liquid will stay hot; it has a secure top on it that will keep the contents from spilling; it has a pleasing color; a logo that looks trustworthy; I'm impressed with it; I'm attached to it. According to the view of emptiness, the object that we are calling a thermos cup is called "the object of designation". We project onto the object of designation all the meaning that it has for us. Conventionally, in our particular society, we all agree to designate this object as a "thermos cup". The thermos cup exists through conceptual designation *and* conventional agreement.

3. If we were to pull all of our conceptual designations away from this object—for instance, if we had no mental consciousness and couldn't think at all—we would have no idea that the shapes and colors of the cup that our eye consciousness was seeing meant anything to anybody. The object we conceptually designate as 'thermos cup' would have no meaning to us. In actuality it *has* no meaning in and of itself. The 'thermos cup' doesn't know it's a thermos cup, *it* doesn't know it has a function, *it* doesn't know it has a color or a logo. If we had no eye consciousness and no tactile consciousness, in addition to having no mental consciousness, and we could no longer see, touch, or conceive the cup...would the object even exist for us?

Getting a whiff of emptiness

1. It's only consciousness that is able to grasp and experience anything. As the neuroscientist Christof Koch puts it:

"Without consciousness there is nothing. The only way you experience your body and the world of mountains and people, trees and dogs, stars and music is through your subjective experiences, thoughts, and memories. You act and move, see and hear, love and hate, remember the past and imagine the future. But ultimately, you only encounter the world in all of its manifestations via consciousness. And when consciousness ceases, this world ceases as well."

Koch is saying something very similar to the Buddhist teachings on emptiness. It's our consciousness that is giving rise to everything. It's our consciousness that is conceptually designating and giving everything the meaning that it has for us.

2. If we can get even a whiff of this, it can open up our mind in a startling way. One night I was in bed reading a book called *Realizing Emptiness: Madhyamaka Insight Meditation* by Gen Lamrimpa. In the section I was reading, Gen Lamrimpa was explaining how everything depends for its existence upon conceptual designation. I put the book down and looked at the set of curtains at one of the bedroom windows. I realized that everything about the curtains—the fabric, the colors of the fabric, the type of designs printed on the fabric, my opinion of the quality of the fabric and designs, the function of the curtains, the positive emotional feeling that I have about the curtains—all of that was being conceptually designated by *me*. Suddenly I recognized that the curtains were nothing more than objects of designation that had no inherent meaning or existence of their own. For just a moment there was an extremely stark, unadorned, bare realization about the curtains that was completely new and almost shocking to me.

How attachment, aversion, and conflicting views arise

1. Our experience of everything arises into existence for us through our conceptual designation. Because of our ego self-grasping ignorance, we believe the object of designation truly exists out there the way it appears to us. We think that from its own side, the object is oozing forth and exuding all of the qualities that we have individually and collectively projected onto it. And because of our personally biased ego neediness and grasping attachment, some of these objects will appear attractive to us and others will not. We'll be drawn to certain objects and have aversion for others. We'll say things like, "I don't like that," or "This doesn't work for me." We'll say we hate a particular color, or we hate a particular flavor, or we don't like a particular person, or we hate a certain style of architecture. Whereas somebody else will say, "I love that person!" "I love that color!" "I love that flavor!" "I love that style of architecture!"

2. This is why we have all sorts of different and opposing views existing in the world. It's because we're all making our own personal decisions and judgements about everything based on our own personal biases rooted in our own personal feelings of attachment and aversion that have arisen from our own personal sense of lack and neediness due to a delusional schism that has collectively occurred in our minds. *None of that* is coming from any object that is 'out there' the way it appears to us. The object itself doesn't have any meaning other than what we each conceive it to have.

Realizing Emptiness: the teaching of Gen Lamrimpa

1. At the very end of his book, *Realizing Emptiness*, Gen Lamrimpa hints at non-duality, and the reason why it is essential for our happiness to purify and align our actions of body, speech, and mind with mature, well-balanced, habitual ways of expressing interdependence that are harmonious and constructive; rather than crude, out-of-balance, habitual ways of expressing interdependence that cause discord and destruction. As we purify our actions of body, speech, and mind, we will purify our view of things. As a result, we will change the way we conceptually designate phenomena, which will change the way the world appears to us. Here is what Gen Lamrimpa says about it :

“To make one final comment, when I speak of the dependence of physical objects upon sensory awareness, I am not suggesting that a flower is dependent upon any particular individual's awareness. It is dependent upon sensory awareness in general.

But it can still be said that the flower that appears to your awareness is dependent on your awareness.

If you examine this issue very closely, you are led to the conclusion that the world that appears to you actually does not appear to anyone else. This implies that the world that each of us lives in is in fact produced by our own sensory awareness. This has a direct bearing on the issue of pure vision in Buddhism. By the very process of purifying one's own mind, the appearance of the world is also purified. And as you experience a pure vision of the world, the whole world in which you dwell becomes transformed. In this regard we say that the whole world arises as the result of maturation of the habitual propensities. In this way the world is like a dream."

Purification: the foundation of the path

1. This is why the practice of purifying our actions of body, speech, and mind that Nagarjuna first mentions in *Precious Garland of Advice to a King*, is the foundation of the entire path to enlightenment. We have to clean up our mind, clean up our actions based on our mind, and clean up our speech based on our mind. We need to adopt a mature, well-balanced, *constructive* view of interdependence and bring that view into everything we think, say, and do. In this way, the world that we experience will transform for us.

2. This is how we do it. This is exactly how we will accumulate what is called *sonam*, or positive potential, and the wisdom required to continually proceed through the stages of the path of a Bodhisattva—all the levels, all the bhumis—all the way to the purified state of Vajrasattva just prior to attaining the Path of No More Learning. The Path of No More Learning is the omniscient state of Buddhahood, where we realize the pure, uncontaminated, non-dual, completely interconnected nature of all that is, and joyfully work for the benefit and happiness of all sentient beings.

3. But first we have to start with our own view of things. Gen Lamrimpa says that in this regard the whole world arises as the result of the maturation of our habitual propensities. What we want to do is mature and ripen those habitual propensities so they support interdependence in a very healthy way, rather than the psychotic way of destruction and suffering that ego self-grasping produces. When we look at the history of our world, we can't avoid coming to the conclusion that the cycles of suffering and destruction never change. *We're* the ones who have to change, and it has to start with our own view, because the world that appears to us is our own view. It's a very profound statement that Gen Lamrimpa makes. He closes by saying:

"In this way the world is like a dream."

The world is like a dream

1. This idea has been expressed over and over again in a variety of ways throughout many of the world's great wisdom teachings. Perhaps one of the finest examples of esoteric wisdom in modern history to use the analogy of a dream came from a very unexpected source at the onset of the massive destruction and suffering of World War II in 1939. The film version of "The Wizard of Oz" uses the metaphor of being caught up in a dream and being guided by a gentle, wise hand to follow the path that leads to awakening from the dream. The reason the main character needs to wake up is because the dream has caused her to enter into a separated state

of consciousness from those whom she loves and is connected to. It's an inspired piece of filmmaking that in true esoteric fashion has multiple levels of profound meaning that are revealed upon closer examination.

20. Shantideva also uses the metaphor of a dream in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. He says the world is like a dream—a nightmare really. Samsara is like a nightmare that has some wonderful and beautiful aspects to it, but keeps cycling back to death and destruction. Enlightened beings can step into our dream and appear in whatever form will best work for us, and they find ways to gently wake us up. That's what is occurring to us now. We are gently being awakened to our actual nature and the way things actually exist. As we develop our pure vision, we will awaken from the dream and see a pure world.

Gen Lamrimpa closes his book with the following:

“Let us dedicate the merit of this teaching so that all sentient beings may realize emptiness and attain perfect spiritual awakening. May the teachings of the Buddha flourish, may our spiritual teachers live long, and may all sentient beings experience both temporal as well as ultimate happiness.”

Compiled and edited by Tenzin Dhondup Sherab/Christopher Moroney

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

<u>Mantra Meanings</u>	<u>Shakyamuni Buddha mantra</u>	<u>Shakyamuni Buddha-figure</u>
<u>Chenrezig mantra</u>	<u>Chenrezig-figure</u>	<u>His Holiness the Dalai Lama</u>
<u>Manjushri mantra</u>	<u>Manjushri-figure</u>	<u>Manjushri prayer & mantra</u>
<u>Vajradhara-figure</u>	<u>Vajrasattva mantra</u>	<u>Vajrasattva-figure</u>
<u>Full Refuge Visualization</u>	<u>Manjushri Heart Lotus</u>	
<u>Precious Garland text translated by Jeffrey Hopkins</u>		