

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

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

Chapter I. Higher Rebirth and Highest Good
Session 6: Mantra Practice

Sunday, March 3, 2024

The following is based on on “*Practical Ethics and Profound Emptiness: A Commentary on Nagarjuna’s Precious Garland*” by Khensur Jampa Tegchok, from the commentary of Gyalsap 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 Lobsang Nima.

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

Working with mantras to enhance our spiritual practice

1. We continue our discussion of mantras and Buddha-figures as a vehicle we can use to enhance the practices Nagarjuna outlines in his text. There are many ways in which we can work with mantras, but they all fit into the context of training our body, speech and mind for beneficial purposes, integrating them in a very positive way that protects us from our habitual patterns of body, speech and mind that are destructive. The deepest level of mantra practice has to do with shaping the subtle energies that are very closely related to the breath. We shape the breath with the mantra, and that shapes the subtle energies in our body. Through familiarity and practice with this, we begin to experience the movement of these subtle energies, or ‘winds’, throughout our body.

2. When we recite a mantra it’s recommended that we move our mouth in the shape of the mantra with a little bit of vocalization. It doesn’t have to be loud. No one else has to hear it. Ultimately the only thing required is the continual shaping of the breath in and out. Even done in a whisper while continuously breathing in and out, a mantra can shape and move the subtle energies throughout our body. Of course, reciting a mantra mentally is beneficial as well. It can help reduce distractions and give a positive focus to our conceptual mind.

5. The Buddha-figures and the subtle energies generated through reciting their mantras represent the innate potential of our Buddha-nature—that is to say, the potential ability of all beings’ most subtle clear light continuum of consciousness to give rise to patterns of positive thought and behavior. This is true whether our innate positive potential of Buddha-nature is unrealized, partially realized, or fully realized. We can change and transform ourselves in dependence on causes and conditions and the ways in which we interact with those causes and conditions. This is because consciousness is empty of any kind of inherent, independently self-existent nature. Even the energies that underlie our most disturbing emotions such as hatred

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and self-centered desire can be transformed and put to constructive use precisely because those energies are empty of independent self-existence.

7. Buddhas emanate Buddha-figures as well as the subtle energies of mantras from their clear light continuums to benefit us, particularly by serving as embodied energies that represent the various factors of Buddha-nature, such as refuge in a safe direction of consciousness and the development of compassion and wisdom. In this way they help us as practitioners to actualize within our own clear light continuums the Buddha-nature factors that the Buddha-figures we're imagining and the mantras we're reciting represent. It is an interactive, dependently co-arising process between our consciousness and emanations of enlightened consciousness.

9. When visualizing the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who are associated with these particular mantras, we should mentally imagine them in the aspect of powerful and beneficial light energy, clean and clear, similar to the transparent light of a rainbow but brilliant in color and strength. Feel that their light energy is connecting and interacting with your own light energy—which consists of a system of channels and multiple energy centers through which the universal life force called *prana*, or energetic “winds” flow in, out, and throughout your entire body.

10. Alexander Berzin says these Buddha-figures are like enlightened energy infographics which help us in our training to embrace and embody the positive spiritual energies and qualities they represent. As we recite each mantra while imagining the corresponding Buddha-figures and the qualities of enlightened nature they reveal to us, the clearer our understanding of the path to full awakening will become. The meaning of the mantras will become more and more familiar and the beneficial energies they produce in us will become stronger and stronger. Gradually, as we continue to study and practice, our own mental continuum will become habitually imprinted with these qualities, enabling us to quickly progress on the path.

Shakyamuni Buddha-figure and mantra

1. The Shakyamuni Buddha-figure represents the enlightened qualities in which we take refuge—a safe direction in our life. When we say, “I go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha” we can imagine this figure of Shakyamuni Buddha in our mind. The first thing to notice is the expression of the Buddha’s face, which is loving, compassionate, wise, and spiritually powerful. His cranial protuberance, known as an *ushnisha*, represents the supreme Buddha Consciousness and is related to the pure consciousness located at the crown chakra. At the top of the ushnisha is what looks like an illuminated jewel or flame. This represents the development of one’s Buddha nature to its full potential of perfection with the opening of the crown chakra and complete, omniscient enlightenment. The color of the *ushnisha* and hair are both a deep black/indigo color, symbolizing the Buddha’s vast omniscient wisdom and spiritual insight.

2. Between his peacefully arched eyebrows, he has a small, tightly wound spiral of white hair called an *urna*, symbolizing supreme vision which sees the truth of all things. His elongated ears serve as a reminder that Shakyamuni Buddha was once a prince who wore heavy earrings which stretched his earlobes. He gave up the wearing of any jewelry when he gave up his life of privilege and luxury to pursue the path to enlightenment. It refers to foregoing worldly pleasures and pursuits that distract us from pursuing the spiritual path.

3. He is seated with his legs and feet in the lotus position, with his right hand touching the ground. This posture is known as the earth-touching mudra, and represents the moment when the Buddha called upon the earth to witness his enlightenment and the complete eradication of all his afflictive and cognitive obscurations. The lotus position itself symbolizes the infinite purity of the Buddhist path with its perfect balance of wisdom and compassion. On the bottom of each of the Buddha's feet and the palms of his hands is the impression of an eight-spoked Dharma wheel. This represents the Dharma teachings and spiritual pathways of consciousness the Buddha has manifested to help sentient beings of varying capacities attain liberation and enlightenment. His body is golden in color and he wears saffron colored robes, colors which energetically symbolize the emergence of great spiritual awakening in a world that is spiritually bereft and obscured by distraction.

4. His left hand rests on his lap holding a begging bowl filled with white nectar. The begging bowl represents the Buddha's simplicity, humility, and dependence on others, not only for material sustenance but for his spiritual accomplishments as well. It is no mistake that the begging bowl filled with white nectar is front and center in this image. It is a reminder that the Buddha lived a simple life free from the distraction of acquiring material things through relying on the kindness of others, yet it was also because of other sentient beings that he was able to develop the great compassion and wisdom needed to achieve full enlightenment. Without reliance on one's relationship with other sentient beings one cannot possibly perfect the qualities of generosity, morality, patience, and courageous, enthusiastic effort that are necessary for the development of compassion. And it is for the sake of other beings that one also perfects meditative concentration, wisdom realizing emptiness, and all the remaining stages of the Bodhisattva path to enlightenment. The radiant white nectar in the bowl represents the purity and power of the Dharma realizations which remove all ignorance and delusion preventing us from achieving enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings. The black/indigo color of the bowl—like the vastness of space in the universe—symbolizes the profound vastness of the Dharma and the spiritual insights contained in its realizations.

5. The mantra is as follows:

TA YA THA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SVAHA

Tayatha (sometimes transliterated tayadtha) is a Sanskrit word that means "it is like this" or "thus it is". *Om* is composed of the three pure sounds 'ah', 'oo' and 'mm', which signify one's ordinary body, speech and mind that are transformed into a Buddha's omniscient body, speech and mind. *Muni* is a Sanskrit term for a sage or saint who, through their own realizations, knows the truth of existence. In Buddhism the term Muni is used as a title of Gautama Buddha, who being born among the tribe of the Shakyas, is called Shakyamuni Buddha. *Maha* is a Sanskrit word meaning "great", thus *maha muniye* means "great sage". *Svaha* (pronounced swoha by Tibetans) means "may a blessing be upon it".

Lama Zopa Rinpoche's interpretation of the Shakyamuni Buddha mantra

TA YA THA – it is like this

OM – The omniscience of the Buddha and the multidimensional nature of the *Trikaya*, which refers to the three bodies or aspects of a Buddha—the *Nirmanakaya* (emanation or material

form body), the *Sambhogakaya* (enjoyment or spiritual light body), and the *Dharmakaya* (truth body—the omniscience and emptiness of a Buddha’s clear light continuum of consciousness, which is beyond material and spiritual forms). The syllable OM also represents the Buddha’s complete knowledge of the two paths to enlightenment (method and wisdom), and of the two truths (ultimate and conventional, aka absolute and relative)—that contain all existence within them.

MUNI – Control over the suffering of the three lower samsaric realms and over the mistaken conception of the self-existent I.

MUNI – Control over the suffering of all realms of samsara and over self-cherishing thoughts.

MAHA MUNIYE – Great control over the suffering of subtle illusions and over the dualistic conceptions of the mind.

SVAHA – “May my mind receive, absorb and keep the blessings of the mantra, and may they take root.”

A visual meditation that may be used with the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra

1. Imagine Buddha Shakyamuni in the space before you. He represents refuge—a safe direction for your life—and is the embodiment of all Buddhas, Spiritual Masters, Bodhisattvas, and Dharma realizations. From your heart, generate the request to the Buddha that you be inspired to follow the path to full enlightenment; make this request on behalf of all living beings who are trapped in samsara. Rays of light stream from the figure of the Buddha before you. This light enters your body and quickly removes all negativities, obscurations and hindrances, freeing you to progress quickly on the path. Imagine that this light flows not only to you, but to all living beings situated in space around you. Imagine that they all receive such inspiration and blessings as you recite the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha as many times as possible.

TA YA THA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SVAHA

Chenrezig Buddha-figure and mantra

1. The Chenrezig Buddha-figure (also known as Avalokiteshvara in Indian Buddhism) embodies the qualities of enlightenment that are representative of the compassion aspect or wing of the Mahayana path. Chenrezig’s body is made of radiant white light reflecting total purity. Two of his four arms are joined in the prayer position at his heart, holding the sky-blue Mani Jewel of Buddha-nature between his hands. In his other left hand he holds a lotus flower and in his other right hand, a crystal mala (rosary), which he is using to count repetitions of his mantra *om mani padme hum* to liberate all beings from suffering. He smiles with deep understanding, love, and compassion as his eyes look upon all beings.

2. His four arms and hands denote the four immeasurables: immeasurable love, immeasurable compassion, immeasurable joy, and immeasurable equanimity. Chenrezig is the very embodiment of the four immeasurables. The four immeasurables are the vehicles through which Chenrezig benefits beings. The first two hands of the inner arms have palms joined at the heart holding the Mani Jewel of Buddha-nature, signifying that Chenrezig holds all living beings to his heart with immeasurable love and compassion, recognizing their primordial Buddha-nature which enables them to achieve liberation from all suffering and the full awakening of complete happiness.

3. In the outer right hand, Chenrezig is holding crystal beads and moving them the way we use a mala to count mantras. This shows that there is not one moment when Chenrezig is not imparting immeasurable joy to benefit all beings. Similar to the way that crystal functions as a continuous transmitter of light and energy, with the steady movement of counting the beads, Chenrezig continuously benefits all beings through enlightened activity, that they may experience the immeasurable joy of happiness that is completely free from suffering.

4. In the outer left hand, Chenrezig holds a lotus flower, symbolizing immeasurable equanimity. Chenrezig appears in whatever forms are necessary in accordance with the mental capacities, circumstances, and propensities of sentient beings, whether they exist as hell beings, gods, animals, humans, ghosts, beings with forms, or those that are formless. Chenrezig knows that all beings have Buddha-nature existing as potential within the continuum of their clear light consciousness. Just as a lotus is able to emerge from the swampy mud and water unstained as a beautiful flower, so all sentient beings are capable of arising from the mud and muck of afflictive emotions and self-grasping ignorance to achieve the full flowering of Buddhahood, no matter who they are.

5. As we focus on the qualities of loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity and the various features of Chenrezig while we visualize the image and recite the mantra, we can gradually awaken our own awareness of those same qualities in ourselves.

This is the best known and most recited mantra in Tibetan Buddhism, chanted by laypersons and monastics alike:

OM MANI PADME HUM

OM – The sound *om* (or *aum*) is in itself an important mantra in various Indian religions. In Hinduism it is believed to be the beginningless sound expressing the pure essence of eternal reality. Its three pure sounds *aaah-ooo-mmm* are often slowly chanted, causing the heart chakra to resonate to the sound “ah”, moving up to the throat chakra as it resonates to the sound “oo”, and finally up to the crown chakra which resonates to the sound “mm”. As the first sound in the mantra sequence *om mani padme hum*, the *om* signifies the fundamental, beginningless essence underlying our own being that is capable of transforming into the perfection of an enlightened being.

MANI – *Mani* means “jewel” and refers to Buddha-nature, the potential for all sentient beings to become fully enlightened. The *Lankavatara Sutra*, the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment, and the *Surangama Sutra* all use the Mani Jewel as a metaphor for Buddha-nature. The Sanskrit word for Buddha-nature is *tathāgata-garbha*. *Garbha* means “womb”, “seed”, or “embryo” and *tathāgata* means “thus gone” and “thus come”, and refers to one who has achieved Buddhahood, who has thus gone from samsara into nirvana, and thus has come back from nirvana into samsara as a Buddha to work for the benefit of all sentient beings. The *Tathāgata-garbha Sūtra* states that we all have luminous, pure Buddha-nature within us that exists as unrealized potential. Because it is covered over by external afflictions arising from ignorance, it remains in a non-emergent state and we don’t recognize it. When our ignorance and afflictions are completely removed and purified, our Buddha-nature naturally appears and is finally

recognized. An analogy is that of water which is muddy, obscured, and contaminated due to pollution. Because the pollution is adventitious—meaning it is not an inherent part of the water—the pollution can be removed and the water revealed in its clear, pure state.

PADME – *Padme* is the Sanskrit word for “lotus”. It is a sacred flower in both Hinduism and Buddhism, representing the path to spiritual awakening and enlightenment. Just as a lotus has the ability to emerge out of muddy, swampy water unstained as a magnificent flower in full bloom, similarly our Buddha-nature, through the continuum of our clear light consciousness, is able to emerge purified of all afflictive and cognitive obscurations, transformed into the magnificent flowering of complete Buddhahood.

HUM – *Hum* or *Hung* is the syllable expressing the clarity and awareness of our pure consciousness that is able to achieve the wholeness of compassion and wisdom, the two aspects or wings of the Mahayana path to enlightenment.

A visual meditation that may be used with the Chenrezig mantra

1. Imagine Chenrezig in the space before you. From your heart, generate the request that you be inspired to cultivate the four immeasurable qualities of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity within your being; make this request on behalf of all living beings situated in space around you who want to be happy but are trapped in the pervasive suffering of cyclic existence. Chenrezig’s body with four arms and hands is made of radiant white light and his face looks upon you and the countless beings around you with great loving kindness, compassion, and understanding. Chenrezig holds your Buddha-nature at his heart in the form of a sky-blue jewel between his two inner hands of love and compassion. He simultaneously holds all beings’ Buddha-nature at his heart as well. With his outer right hand he is steadily moving the beads of his crystal mala, transmitting immeasurable joy to you and all sentient beings with the prayer that you be inseparable from the happiness that is completely free from suffering. In his outer left hand he holds a blue lotus flower by its stem in a gesture of immeasurable equanimity for you and all sentient beings. Just as the lotus emerges from the dark, swampy water as an unstained beautiful flower, Chenrezig knows that all beings equally have the potential, through their Buddha-nature and clear light continuums of consciousness, to arise from the darkness of ignorance and the karmic stains of their afflictions and obscurations and emerge as fully enlightened beings. Imagine that you and all sentient beings receive, absorb, and keep these blessings as you recite Chenrezig’s mantra many times.

OM MANI PADME HUM

1. Alternately, imagine that a duplicate Chenrezig emerges from the heart of Chenrezig before you and comes to the crown of your head. The duplicate Chenrezig superimposes his body of light onto your body. Think of yourself as an aspiring Bodhisattva and Chenrezig is your coach, training you in the way to embody the four immeasurables for the benefit of all beings. Imagine that you look at the countless sentient beings in the space around you with great loving kindness, compassion, and understanding. Hold their Buddha-nature at your heart in the form of a sky-blue jewel made of light between your two inner hands of love and compassion. In your outer right hand imagine you are continually moving the beads on a crystal mala, transmitting immeasurable joy to all beings with the prayer that they be inseparable from the happiness that is completely free from suffering. In your outer left hand you hold a radiant blue lotus by its stem in a gesture of immeasurable equanimity for the countless beings around you. Know that

all beings equally have the potential, through their Buddha-nature and clear light continuums of consciousness, to arise from the darkness of ignorance and the karmic stains of their afflictions and obscurations and emerge as fully enlightened beings. Imagine that all sentient beings receive, absorb, and keep these blessing as you again recite Chenrezig's mantra many times.

OM MANI PADME HUM

Manjushri Buddha-figure and mantra

1. The Manjushri Buddha-figure embodies the qualities of enlightenment that are representative of the wisdom aspect or wing of the Mahayana path. The name "Manjushri" is a combination of the Sanskrit word "mango" and an honorific "shri", and can be translated as "Beautiful One with Glory". Manjushri is depicted as a youth of about sixteen years, whose body is a brilliant saffron color as if it was reflecting the sun. He is wielding a flaming sword in his right hand, representing the realization of transcendent wisdom which cuts down ignorance and duality. The scripture supported in his left hand is the *Prajnaparamita sutra*, representing his attainment of ultimate realization from the blossoming of wisdom. Manjushri is often depicted as riding on a lion or sitting on the skin of a lion. This represents the use of wisdom to tame the mind, which is compared to riding or subduing a ferocious lion.

2. The mantra commonly associated with Manjushri is the following:

OM AH-RA-PA-TSA-NA DHEE

OM signifies the fundamental, beginningless essence underlying our own being that is capable of transforming into the perfection of an enlightened being. The Arapachana (pronounced in Tibetan as *ah-ra-pa-tsa-na*) is a set of written syllables in the Indo-Aryan Prakrit language dating to the 3rd century BCE. These syllables represent the first letters of five different words which serve as a mnemonic device for remembering important Mahayana concepts related to emptiness. Due to its association with Manjushri, *Arapatsana* can even serve as an alternate name for him. The *Sutra on Perfect Wisdom* defines the significance of each syllable in this way:

1. AH (*adya-anutpannatvad*): the empty nature of self and phenomena is uncreated and without beginning.
2. RA (*rajas*): the empty nature of self and phenomena is without corruption or stain.
3. PA (*paramartha*): the empty nature of self and phenomena is the ultimate truth.
4. TSA (*tsavana*): the empty nature of self and phenomena does not die, nor is it reborn.
5. NA (*nama*): the names of self and phenomena are merely labels; the essential empty nature of them behind their names and labels cannot be gained or lost.

DHEE is the seed syllable of the mantra which focuses on the beginningless, endless essence of one's clear light continuum of consciousness and Buddha-nature. It is chanted with greater emphasis and also repeated a number of times at the end of the last repetition of the mantra. In the Tibetan tradition, this mantra is believed to enhance wisdom and improve one's skills in debating, memory, writing, and other literary abilities.

A visual meditation that may be used with the Manjushri mantra

1. Imagine Manjushri seated in the cross-legged lotus position at the center of a lotus throne in the space before you. From your heart, generate the request to Manjushri that you be inspired to have the motivation, enthusiasm, and perseverance to develop your understanding of the profound view of emptiness. Make this request on behalf of all living beings who, due to ignorance of the true nature of self and phenomena, perpetually generate karmic actions of body, speech, and mind that bind them to the dissatisfaction and suffering of cyclic existence. Manjushri's body is made of brilliant saffron light that radiates out like the sun in all directions to dispel ignorance and mistaken views. His fresh and youthful face looks upon you and all beings situated in space around you with love and wisdom. In his right hand he holds a deep blue double-edged sword with a gold vajra handle above the right side of his head. The double-edged sword is wrapped in a blaze of fire towards the tip of the blade, where the two edges come together and meet. This sword of wisdom cuts through and destroys afflictions and obscurations resulting from ego self-grasping ignorance that leads to nihilism, and the dualistic, two-sided views of self and other, conventional reality and ultimate reality, and subject and object. In his left hand he holds the stem of a lotus at his heart. The stem curves its way up towards his left side to just below his left ear where it blossoms into a lotus flower, the center of which holds the *Prajnaparamita* (Perfection of Wisdom) sutra. This signifies that by listening to wisdom teachings, studying them, absorbing them, and allowing them to take root in us at our heart, we develop the methods to cut through and destroy our ignorance and ego-based views. Imagine that you and all sentient beings receive, absorb, and keep these blessings so that they take root in your hearts as you recite Manjushri's mantra *om ah-ra-pa-tsa-na dhee* many times. At the end of the last round, repeat the final syllable *dhee* many times, focusing its energy at the center of your heart chakra, where the indestructible drop of energy which contains your clear light continuum of consciousness and Buddha-nature resides.

OM AH-RA-PA-TSA-NA DHEE [repeat many times]

DHEE-DHEE, DHEE-DHEE, DHEE-DHEE [repeat many times at the end of the last round]

2. Alternately, imagine that a duplicate Manjushri emerges from the heart of Manjushri before you and comes to the crown of your head. The duplicate Manjushri superimposes his body of light onto your body. Think of yourself as an aspiring Bodhisattva and Manjushri is your coach, training you in the way to understand the empty nature of self and phenomena in order to attain liberation and enlightenment for the sake of all beings. As Manjushri, your body is made of brilliant saffron light that radiates out like the sun in all directions to dispel ignorance and mistaken views. In your right hand you hold a deep-blue double-edged sword with a golden vajra handle above the right side of your head. The double-edged sword is wrapped in a blaze of fire towards the tip of the blade, where the two edges come together and meet. This sword of wisdom cuts through and destroys afflictions and obscurations resulting from ego self-grasping ignorance that leads to nihilism, and the dualistic, two-sided views of self and other, conventional reality and ultimate reality, and subject and object. In your left hand you hold the stem of a lotus at your heart. The stem curves its way up towards your left side to just below your left ear where it blossoms into a lotus flower of light, the center of which holds the *Prajnaparamita* (Perfection of Wisdom) sutra. This signifies that by listening to wisdom teachings, studying them, absorbing them, and allowing them to take root at your heart, you will

develop the methods to cut through and destroy your ignorance and ego-based views. Imagine that you receive, absorb, and keep these blessings so that they take root in your heart as you recite Manjushri's mantra om ah-ra-pa-tsa-na dhee many times. At the end of the last round, repeat the final syllable dhee many times, focusing its energy at the center of your heart chakra, where the indestructible drop of energy which contains your clear light continuum of consciousness and Buddha-nature resides.

OM AH-RA-PA-TSA-NA DHEE [repeat many times]

DHEE-DHEE, DHEE-DHEE, DHEE-DHEE [repeat many times at the end of the last round]

3. There are a number of mantras and their corresponding Buddha-figures that we will be using as part of our study and practice in relation to Nagarjuna's text. They are: the Shakyamuni Buddha mantra and the Shakyamuni Buddha-figure; the Chenrezig mantra and the Chenrezig-figure; the Manjushri mantra and the Manjushri-figure; and the Vajrasattva mantra and the Vajrasattva-figure. These images and mantras can be easily downloaded to your mobile device or computer for quick access and reference.

Compiled and edited by Tenzin Dhondup Sherab/Christopher Moroney

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

Chenrezig mantra

Chenrezig-figure

Manjushri mantra

Manjushri-figure

Manjushri prayer & mantra

Manjushri Heart Lotus

Shakyamuni Buddha mantra

Shakyamuni Buddha-figure

Vajrasattva mantra

Vajrasattva-figure

Precious Garland text translated by Jeffrey Hopkins