

**THE QUESTIONS OF  
THE NAGA KING  
SAGARA**

COMMENTED BY  
KHENPO SODARGYE

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THE NOBLE GREAT VEHICLE SUTRA

THE QUESTIONS OF  
THE NAGA KING SAGARA

(ROOT TEXT)

# The Noble Great Vehicle Sutra: The Questions of the Naga King Sagara 佛为娑伽罗龙王所说大乘经

如是我闻:

一时，佛在大海中娑伽罗龙王宫庄严道场，与大比丘众七千五百人俱，并诸得大智慧菩萨摩訶萨，自十方世界皆来集会；复有百千俱胝那由他梵王、帝释及护世等。天龙、夜叉、乾闥婆、阿修罗、哦嚩拿、紧那罗、摩睺罗伽等亦来集会。

Thus have I heard:

At one time, the Buddha was residing within the ocean in the realm of the naga king Sagara. It was in the palace of the naga king Sagara, in that magnificent bodhimanda, that 7,500 great bhikkhus and a great assembly of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas, all of whom had attained great wisdom, assembled from the worlds of the ten directions. Also present there were hundreds and thousands of nayutas of Sakra, Brahma, the guardians of the world, etc. Gods, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas and more also gathered at the assembly.

尔时，世尊见彼一切大众来集会已，告娑伽罗龙王言：龙王，观此世间，种种行业皆从妄起；种种心法，当感种种果报；若彼不了，当生种种之趣。

Then the Blessed One, seeing that the assembly in its entirety were present, spoke to the naga king Sagara, “Lord of nagas, the state of this world has been shaped by various kinds of karma, which are, in turn, conditioned by a variety of deluded thoughts. Various minds give rise to various karmic effects. Lacking this understanding, one takes rebirth in different courses of existence.

龙王，汝当观此大海之众，见作种种士夫色相。龙王，而彼一切色相，由于一切善恶身、口、意业，各各之心，种种变化。然此心法，虽云色相，由如幻化，无可取故。

“Lord of nagas, consider all the various forms of the beings that are present here in this ocean, all the diversity of beings that exist here. Lord of nagas, the forms of all of these beings are in such variety due to the diversity of their previous engagement in virtue and non-virtue, through the activities of their body, speech and mind. All kinds of karma arise from the variety of mental delusions. While the mind gives rise to forms and appearances, it is illusory and ungraspable.

龙王，此之色相，一切诸法，本无所生，亦无主宰。复无有我，亦无碍故，如是种种所作之业，诸法自性，皆幻化相，不可思议。

“Lord of nagas, all these forms, as well as all phenomena, are originally unborn and have no owner. They are without self and free from obscurations. Being a variety of production formed by whatever karma has been accumulated, they are merely illusory appearances and inconceivable.

龙主，若有菩萨知一切法，无生无灭，无色无相，如实知己，所作所修一切善业而无修作；所有色相及蕴处界，一切生法悉无所见。彼若如实得是见已，当复观察殊妙色相。

“Lord of nagas, should a bodhisattva know all phenomena are unborn, unceasing, having neither forms nor characteristics, thus he would know that although he engages in and practices all virtues, there is nothing to be practiced or engaged in; although all forms and characteristics, as well as all aggregates, elements, and sense sources arise, there is nothing to be perceived. Having gained such a truthful view, the bodhisattva should further observe the elegant and magnificent appearances.

龙主，殊妙色相，云何观察？当观如来身相。如来身者，皆从百千俱胝那由他福德之所生故。又如是之相，云何严持？云何恭信？当得如是之相，复得人间天上无老无死？复得十百千他化自在天身，乃至大梵天身？此由心不散乱，专注观想，瞻仰如来最妙之身。实知此身，一切色相殊妙庄严，皆从善业所集而得。

“Lord of nagas, how should one observe the elegant and magnificent appearances? One should observe the body of the tathagata. The body of the tathagata is born from hundreds of thousands of nayutas of

merit. How beautifully is such a form adorned? How can one develop reverence and faith in such a form? With the form of the tathagata, one surely has no wish for the immortality of devas and human beings; one surely has no wish for the assembly of tens of hundreds of thousands of Paranirmita Vasavartin Devas or Mahabrahma Devas. The conviction will be generated by attentively and reverently observing the most wondrous form of the tathagata without any distraction. One will know that the body of the tathagata, adorned with marks, perfectly complete and splendid, is the result of collective virtues.

龙主，如汝住宫，一切庄严，亦福所生。至于梵王、帝释及护世等，乃至天龙、夜叉、乾闥婆、阿修罗、迦楼罗、紧曩罗、摩睺罗伽、人非人等，所有一切庄严，皆福所生。

“Lord of nagas, your abiding palace with all of its marvelous adornments also arises from a great amount of merit. All the adornments of Sakra, Brahma, and the guardians of the world, and those of the gods, nagas, yaksas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, humans and nonhumans, likewise arise from merit.

龙主，又此大海之中，所有众生种种，或有广大、或复微细，多住丑陋，彼一切身，皆由种种心之所化。龙主，是故说言，随身、口、意业之所得。龙主，如是之报，以业为因，业为主宰。

“Lord of nagas, there are all sorts of beings within this great ocean. Some are large, some are small, and most of them are ugly. All of those bodies are illusorily manifested by the diversity of the mind.

Lord of nagas, because of this, it is said that everything is the fruition of physical, verbal, and mental karma. Lord of nagas, such fruitions are caused by karma and determined by karma.

汝当令诸众生，起智慧心，所作所修，随学善业；于诸邪见，不作不住；知彼邪见，非为究竟。如是知己，一切众生，当求为师，咸来供养，并得天上、人间归信供养。

“Lord of nagas, you should awaken the wisdom of your fellow beings, so that, their conduct and practices are in accordance with virtues, and they do not engage in, or dwell in, wrong views, and they will realize that wrong views are not the ultimate truth. Having such awareness, all beings will come to rely on you as a teacher and make offerings to you. Devas and human beings will also generate faith in you and make offerings to you.

龙主，而有一法，能令众生断于一切恶趣之业。云何一法？所谓观察善法。而彼善法，云何观察？当观自身，我于日夜，行住坐卧，所兴心意，无不是过。如是觉察，令四威仪中诸不善法，不得发生。如是断尽诸不善法，当令善法而得具足。复使一切同善众生，悉皆当得声闻、辟支佛及菩萨等，乃至无上正等正觉之位。

“Lord of nagas, there is one method that severs, for all beings, all the paths that lead to the lower realms. What is that one method? It is to contemplate virtuous qualities. How to contemplate virtuous qualities? It is to reflect on oneself, ‘Throughout the day and night, as I walk, abide, sit and sleep, all my thoughts and mental states

are full of faults.’ By repeatedly contemplating in this way, one’s four deportments will be prevented from all non-virtues. Having abandoned non-virtues and becoming endowed with virtues, such beings will accompany their fellows who engage in the same virtues, to attain not only the fruition of noble hearers, solitary buddhas, and bodhisattvas, but unexcelled and perfect enlightenment as well.

龙主，云何善法？我今说之。所谓十善之业，是为一切根本安住；是生天上、人间根本安住；世间、出世间殊胜善法根本安住；声闻、辟支佛、菩萨根本安住；无上正等正觉根本安住。

“Lord of nagas, what are those virtuous qualities? I hereby explain: They are the ten virtuous actions, which can be said to be the roots and foundations of all virtuous things. They are the roots and foundations of taking birth in the human and deva realms. They are the roots and foundations of all the mundane and supramundane virtues. They are the roots and foundations of the awakening of the noble hearers, solitary buddhas and bodhisattvas. They are the roots and foundations of the unexcelled and perfect awakening.

云何为彼根本安住？所谓十善业道。若能远离杀生、偷盗、邪淫、妄语、绮语、恶口、两舌，乃至贪、嗔、邪见等，若能如是远离，是为十善业道，乃是世间、出世间根本安住。

“What are these roots and foundations? Speaking of the paths of the ten virtues, if one is able to forsake the following: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, meaningless talk, harsh words, divisive talk, covetousness, malevolence, and wrong views, one’s abandonment of

these constitutes the path of the ten virtues. They are the roots and foundations for both mundane and supramundane excellence.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离杀生获得十种善法。云何十法？所谓得无畏施；他一切众生得住慈心；得正行，得不起一切众生过失之念；得少病；乐得寿命长；得种种非人而作拥护；于眠睡觉寤皆悉安隐；又得贤圣守护，心不厌舍，于睡梦中不见恶业苦恼之事；自得不怖一切恶趣；命终之后得生天上。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken killing will obtain ten noble qualities. What are these ten qualities? They will attain the generosity of fearlessness. They will regard all beings with love. They will uphold right conduct without generating any negative thoughts towards all beings. They will attain the comfort of having less disease. They will attain longevity. They will be guarded and protected by various non-humans. They will sleep happily and awaken happily. They will be safeguarded by noble beings without any weariness, and be free from frustrations and agony arising from negative karma even when asleep. They will have no fear of the lower realms. They will be born in the deva realm after having died.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，获得如是十种善法，行菩萨道，得善心住，善根成熟，当得无上正等菩提。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken killing will obtain those ten noble qualities. If they follow the path of the bodhisattva and abide in virtuous mind, their roots of virtue will mature into unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离偷盗，获得十依止法。云何为十？所谓得大富自在，得免王难得免水火贼盗冤家之难；得多眷属善顺和睦；得多人爱乐不相苦恼；凡所言说一切谛信；得无量财宝皆悉集聚；得此方他方一切称赞，于一切行处无怖无畏；得他称善名赞于智慧；又得色力寿命辞辩相应；于亲非亲心无分别不生恼害；命终之后得生天界。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken stealing will obtain ten qualities of adherence. What are these ten qualities? They will have great wealth and that wealth will not be taken by kings, fire, water, thieves, or enemies. They will attract a great retinue that is kind, obedient and complaisant. They will be well liked by others and not subjected to afflictions. Whatever they say will be credible and trustworthy. They will amass boundless treasures. They will be praised by people in every direction, and they will have no fear wherever they go. They will receive a good reputation and be praised for their wisdom. They will obtain beauty, power, longevity, eloquence and happiness. They will not discriminate against close or non-close ones, nor will they generate any harmful intents towards them. After death, they will be born in the deva realm.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离偷盗获，得如是十依止法。以彼善根，于诸佛法，自能证知，当得无上正等正觉。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken stealing will obtain those ten qualities of adherence. By such virtuous roots, they will be

able to realize all Buddhadharma and attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离邪淫，获得四智善法。云何为四？所谓降伏诸根；离于散乱；得世间一切称赞；复得无量营从。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken sexual misconduct will obtain four virtuous qualities of wisdom. What are these four qualities? They will have restraint of the senses. They will part from distractions. They will be praised by the whole world. They will be surrounded by an entourage of countless beings.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离邪淫，获得如是四智善法。以此善根，当得无上正等正觉，复证大丈夫阴藏隐密之相。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken sexual misconduct will obtain those four virtuous qualities of wisdom. By such virtuous roots, they will achieve the unexcelled and perfect enlightenment, and also their male organ will be withdrawn, which is a mark of a great being.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离妄语，获得天上人间八种善法。云何为八？所谓得口处清静常如青莲华香；又得世间一切正见；得天上人间一切爱乐；得身口意清静，化彼一切有情令住三业清静之行；得清静已咸皆欢喜；得真实语言必诚信；得过人辩所出言辞咸有方便；于天上人间离诸过失。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken lying will obtain eight noble qualities in the deva and human realms. What are these

eight qualities? They will have a clean and pure mouth with the scent of a blue lotus. They will acquire the right view of the world. They will be beloved by gods and humans. They will attain purification in body, speech, and mind, and also enable all beings whom they intend to influence, to abide in the purity of the body, speech and mind. Their purification will make everyone rejoice. Their speech will be truthful and credible. They will be endowed with remarkable eloquence, and all their words will possess expedient means. They will be free from all faults in the deva and human realms.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离妄语，获得如是天上人间八种善法。而彼善根，获得口业清静，诚实正行，当得无上正等正觉。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken lying will obtain those eight noble qualities in the deva and human realms. By such virtuous roots, their verbal karma will be purified, they will act with honesty and right conduct, and attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离绮语，当得三种一向之法。云何三种？所谓得知法者一向爱乐；得一向真实，复生智慧；得一向为人天师，天上人间一切信乐。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken meaningless talk will obtain three complete certainties. What are these three? They will certainly be appreciated by those who have a comprehensive understanding of all phenomena. They will certainly reach the truth

and attain wisdom. They will certainly become the teachers of gods and humans, and be trusted and appreciated by gods and humans.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离绮语，获得如是三种一向之法。以此善根，回向菩提，得一切如来授记，当证无上正等正觉。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken meaningless talk will obtain those three complete certainties. If they dedicate these roots of virtue toward bodhi, they will be prophesized by all tathagatas to attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离恶口，获得八种口过清净，而得八种善法。云何为八？所谓实语、爱语、依义语、软语、离取语、多人爱乐语、善语、有义利语。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken harsh words will obtain eight purities of speech. What are these eight? They are truthful speech, pleasant speech, reasonable speech, gentle speech, speech away from miscomprehension, speech that pleases many beings, kind speech, and meaningful and beneficial speech.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离恶口，获得如是八种清净口业。以此善根，回向菩提，当来证得无上正等正觉，复得最上清净梵音。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken harsh words will obtain those eight purities of speech. If they dedicate these roots of virtue toward bodhi, they will attain unexcelled and perfect

enlightenment, and will also be endowed with the utmost pure voices that resound like Brahma's speech.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离两舌，当得五种坚固。云何五种坚固？所谓得身坚固，当得远离一切怖畏之难故；得眷属坚固，不为他人之所贪故；得信坚固，获得信业果报故；得法坚固，获得果证坚牢故；得善友坚固，常得爱语摄受故。

*"Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken divisive talk will obtain five incorruptible qualities. What are these five incorruptible qualities? They will obtain indestructible bodies, because they have parted from the adversity of being horrified by others. They will obtain an unswerving retinue because their retinue will not become the subject of another's greed. They will obtain unwavering faith because they trust that karma bears fruit. Their Dharma practice will be undestroyed because they have accomplished the fruition of the practice. They will obtain unshakable friendship because they always receive loving speech from their spiritual friends.*

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离两舌，获得如是五种坚固。以彼善根，回向善提，当证无上正等正觉，使彼一切外道魔王等，咸不能破坏故。

*"Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken divisive talk will obtain those five incorruptible qualities. If they dedicate these roots of virtue toward bodhi, they will attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment, and no tirthikas or maras can cause any damage to them.*

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离贪毒，获得八种善法。云何为八？所谓得贪心消除；得杀心不生；得嫉妒心不生；得乐生圣族心为圣人尊重；得慈心；以善业利益一切众生；得身端正得多人尊重；得生于梵世。

*“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken malevolence will obtain eight noble qualities. What are these eight? Their minds will be free from covetousness. Their minds will be free from the intent of killing. Their minds will be free from jealousy. They will be inclined to be born in noble families and be respected by noble beings. Their minds will be fulfilled with lovingkindness. They will benefit all sentient beings through virtuous acts. They will obtain dignified and elegant physical attributes and be respected by many people. They will attain rebirth in the Brahma realm.*

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离贪毒，获得如是八种善法。以此善法，回向善提，心不退转，当证无上正等正觉。

*“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken malevolence will obtain those eight noble qualities. If they dedicate these roots of virtue toward bodhi without ever regressing on the path, they will attain the unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.*

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离嗔毒，当得五种胜愿圆满。云何为五？所谓修身口意不退诸根不乱；当得一切广大富贵圆满，得冤家降伏；得一切广大福德圆满；得受人天最上供养；得一切广大功德圆满。于最上受用，心所欲者，皆得圆满，如为富贵发百千最上胜愿，如愿圆满。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken covetousness will gain the fulfillment of five supreme wishes. What are these five? Their trainings of body, speech, and mind will not regress, and their sensory faculties will not be malformed. They will obtain vast and immense wealth and their enemies will be subdued. They will obtain vast and immense merit. They will receive the supreme offerings from devas and humans. They will obtain vast and immense qualities. For all kinds of supreme enjoyment, whatever they desire will be completely satisfied. If they wish for wealth and make hundreds of thousands of supreme wishes, all these wishes will be perfectly fulfilled.

龙王，士夫补特伽罗，远离嗔毒，获得如是五种圆满。以此善根，回向善提，证得无上正等正觉，而为三界之所尊敬。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken covetousness will gain the fulfillment of these five supreme wishes. If they dedicate these roots of virtue toward bodhi, they will attain the unexcelled and perfect enlightenment and be revered by the three worlds.

龙王，士夫补特伽罗，远离邪见，获得十种功德之法，云何为十？所谓得自心安善及同行善友深信因果；得不为身命作于罪业；不久获得贤圣之位；得不迷善法；修人天行，不堕傍生及焰魔界；行于圣道得最上福；得离一切邪法；得离身见；得见一切罪性皆空；得天上人间正行不阙。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken wrong views will obtain ten excellent qualities. What are these ten? Their minds will become virtuous and peaceful, and they will be accompanied by

virtuous friends who firmly believe in the karmic principle. They will not commit evil deeds even at the cost of their lives. They will soon reach the stage of noble sages. They will possess the wholesome quality of not being confused by anything. Their conducts will be concordant with those of devas and humans, and they will not fall into the realm of animals and the realm of the Lord of Death. They will follow the noble path and obtain the utmost merit. They will part from all evil views. They will part from the belief in the transitory collection. They will gain the insight that all evils are empty by nature. They will not lack any right conduct in the human and deva realms.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离邪见，获得如是十种功德。以此善根，回向菩提，速能证了一切佛法，当得无上正等正觉。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken wrong views will obtain those ten excellent qualities. If they dedicate these roots of virtue toward bodhi, they will realize all Buddhadharma swiftly and attain the unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

龙主，复次观于十不善法微细之行，多堕地狱、饿鬼、畜生之趣。

“Lord of nagas, once again if we contemplate the practice of the ten non-virtues, those who have engaged in them even to the slightest extent will most likely fall into the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, and animals.

龙主，观彼众生，若复杀生，当堕地狱、畜生、焰魔等界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者短命；二者苦恼。

“Lord of nagas, those sentient beings who have engaged in killing will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, their lives will be shortened; and secondly, they will be gravely afflicted.

若复偷盗，当堕地狱、畜生、焰魔等界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者自居贫贱；二者不得他人财宝。

“Those who engage in stealing will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, they will stay poor and lowly; and secondly, they will be unable to gain wealth from others.

若复邪染，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者愚痴；二者妻不贞正。

“Those who engage in sexual misconduct will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, they will become ignorant; and secondly, their wives will not be chaste and righteous.

若复妄语，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者言不诚实；二者人不信奉。

“Those who engage in lying will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, their speech will not be honest; and secondly, they will not be trusted by others.

若复绮语，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者言不真正；二者所言无定。

“Those who engage in meaningless talk will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, their speech will be unreal; and secondly, their speech will be unreliable.

若复恶口，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者言多斗争；二者人闻不重。

“Those who engage in harsh words will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, their words will provoke conflicts; and secondly, their words will not be valued by the listeners.

若复两舌，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者得下劣眷属；二者感亲属分离。

*“Those who engage in divisive talk will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, they will attract inferior retinues; and secondly, they will experience separation from their family members.*

若复多贪，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者不能利益他人；二者常被他人侵害。

*“Those who engage in malevolence will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, they will be unable to benefit others; and secondly, they will be often harmed by others.*

若复多嗔，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者心常不喜；二者多不称意。

*“Those who engage in covetousness will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, they will be often displeased; and secondly, they will be seldom satisfied.*

若复邪见，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者邪见；二者懈怠。

*“Those who uphold wrong views will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, they will be occupied by wrong views; and secondly, they will become indolent.*

龙主，若有行于如是十不善法，决定获得如是果报，复更别得无边诸大苦蕴。

*“Lord of nagas, if one performs these ten non-virtues, it is certain one will experience the aforementioned effects. An immeasurably great mass of suffering will be waiting for him.*

龙主，若复菩萨远离杀生，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富长寿及无量福，得离一切他侵之怖。

*“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken killing and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will have great wealth, longevity and boundless merit. They will be free from any fear of being harmed by others.*

龙主，若复菩萨，远离偷盗，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵及无量福，而于一切，心无吝惜，证得深智、诸佛所说无上法义。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken stealing and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; they will not be stingy with any of their possessions; and they will accomplish the profound wisdom and realize the supreme teaching expounded by all buddhas.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离邪染，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，感善眷属，父母妻男，悉无恶见。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken sexual misconduct and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; they will have virtuous followers; and their parents, spouses, and children will be free from hostile thoughts.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离妄语，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，当感所有语言，一切善软，凡起诚愿，坚固不退。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken lying and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; all their words will be kind and gentle; and all their sincere aspirations will be affirmed without degeneration.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离绮语，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，所言真实，闻者信受，凡有所说，断一切疑。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken meaningless talk and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they

will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; their words will be truthful and taken confidently by listeners; whatever they say will be able to cut through all doubts.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离恶口，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，所言可取，闻无背舍，于诸众中，无有其过。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken harsh words and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; their words will be well-accepted and not neglected by listeners; and whatever they say in public will be free from faults.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离两舌，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，于诸眷属，心住平等，爱之如一，无有离散。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken divisive talk and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; they will treat all their followers with an impartial mind and love them equally; there will be no separation among them and their followers.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离贪毒，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，得端正身，诸根具足，见者爱乐，心无厌舍。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken malevolence and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; they will obtain a beautiful and dignified appearance with all the sensory faculties

intact and functional; those who see them will be pleased without any feelings of boredom.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离嗔毒，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，得于仇仇，心无所起，闻佛法要，能生深信。

*“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken covetousness and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; when they are confronted by enemies, they will not give rise to hatred; when they listen to the Dharma, they will generate profound faith.*

龙主，若复菩萨，远离邪见，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，于三宝所，而具正见，常近于佛，得闻妙法，供养众僧，常无懈怠，教化众生，令发菩提之心。

*“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken wrong views and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; they will uphold the right views in the Three Jewels; without any laziness and degeneration, they will always stay close to the Buddha, listen to the wondrous Dharma, and make offerings to the Sangha; they will always teach and influence sentient beings and guide them to generate the mind of bodhicitta.*

龙主，若能修此十善之业，行菩萨道，初以布施而为庄严，果报圆满，得大富贵。若以持戒而为庄严，果报圆满，得一切佛法，愿满具足。若以忍辱而为庄严，果报圆满，得佛菩提，三十二相

八十种好，复得梵音具足。若以精进而为庄严，果报圆满，当能降伏天魔外道，以诸佛法而救度之。若以禅定而为庄严，果报圆满，当得正念清净，法行具足。若以智慧而为庄严，果报圆满，当得永断一切邪见。

*“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas practice the ten virtues and engage in bodhisattva activity, with the adornment of generosity, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome and they will obtain great wealth. With the adornment of discipline, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome; they will acquire the Dharma in its entirety; and all their wishes will be fulfilled. With the adornment of patience, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome; they will attain the bodhi of the Buddha with the thirty-two major marks and eighty minor signs, as well as the Brahma-like voice. With the adornment of diligence, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome; they will be able to subjugate maras and tirthikas, and liberate them with Buddhadharma. With the adornment of concentration, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome; their mindfulness will be purified and they will possess all the conducts of the Dharma. With the adornment of wisdom, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome; they will eradicate all wrong views.*

若以大慈而为庄严，果报圆满，能令一切众生降伏一切微细烦恼。若以大悲而为庄严，果报圆满，当得一切众生心不厌舍。若以大喜而为庄严，果报圆满，当得一心而无散乱。若以大舍而为庄严，果报圆满，当得微细烦恼皆悉除灭。

“With the adornment of loving-kindness, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome, and they will help sentient beings to overcome all subtle afflictions. With the adornment of compassion, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome, and they will not tire of or abandon any sentient being. With the adornment of joy, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome, and they will obtain the one-pointed concentration without distraction. With the adornment of equanimity, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome, and they will eliminate all subtle afflictions.

龙主，乃至以四摄法而为庄严，果报圆满，当得一切众生随顺化导。

“Lord of nagas, with the adornment of four ways of attraction, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome, and they will teach and guide sentient beings in accordance with their capacities and willingness.

若以四念处而为庄严，于身受心法悉能解了。若以四正断而为庄严，能使一切不善之法皆悉断灭，得一切善法圆满。若以四神足而为庄严，能得身心皆获轻利。若以五根而为庄严，当得信进不退，心无迷惑，了诸业因，永灭烦恼。若以五力而为庄严，当得不愚不痴，及得永断贫穷过失。若以七觉支而为庄严，当得觉悟一切如实之法。若以八正道而为庄严，当能证得正智。

“With the adornment of four applications of mindfulness, they will acquire a thorough understanding of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena. With the adornment of the four genuine restraints,

they will abandon all non-virtues and perfect all virtues. With the adornment of the four bases of miraculous powers, their body and mind will be light. With the adornment of the five powers, their faith will be irreversible, their mind will not be deluded, they will understand all the karmic causes and eliminate all their afflictions. With the adornment of the five strengths, they will be free from ignorance and stupidity, and never experience deprivation and related defects. With the adornment of the seven elements for enlightenment, they will realize the true reality of all phenomena. With the adornment of the noble eightfold path, true wisdom will be obtained.

若以奢摩他而为庄严，当得断于一切烦恼。若以尾钵舍曩庄严，当得了悟一切法之智慧。若以正道而为庄严，当于有为、无为一切方便悉能了知。

“With the adornment of shamatha, they will eradicate all afflictions. With the adornment of vipassana, they will realize the wisdom of comprehending all phenomena exactly as they are. With the adornment of the right path, they will comprehend all skillful means of the compounded and the un-compounded phenomena.

龙主，我今略说十善之法而有庄严，至于十力、四智及十八不共之法，乃至如来一切法分，皆得圆满。龙主，乃至广大解说此十善业道庄严之事，当令修学。

“Lord of nagas, I’ve briefly explained the ten virtues with the aforementioned adornments. In short, the ten powers, the four types of fearlessness, the eighteen unique qualities, up to all the qualities of

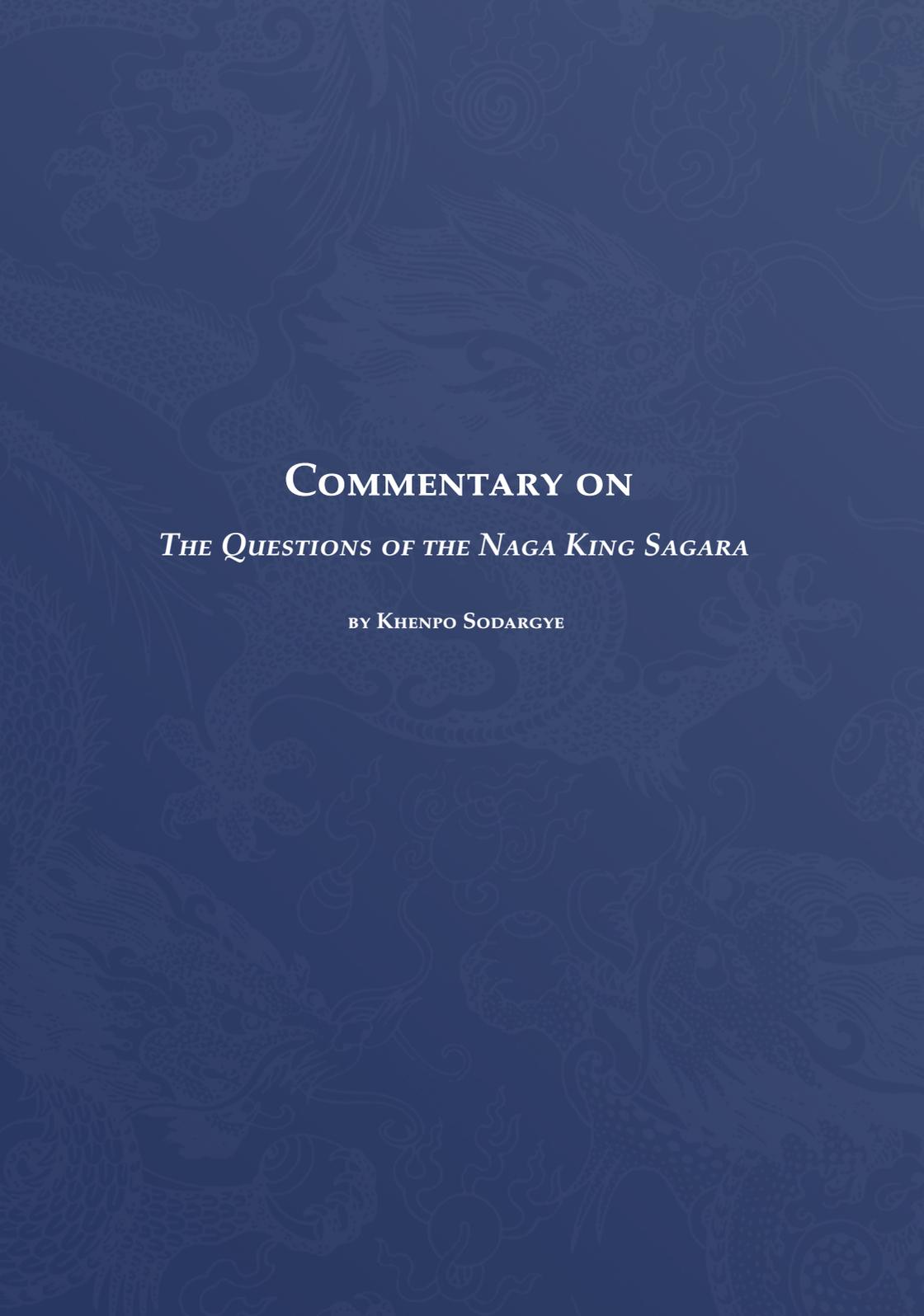
a buddha, will be perfected in their entirety. Lord of nagas, the vast and expansive explanations on the adornments of the paths of the ten virtues, you must strive to learn and practice.

龙主，譬如大地，能与人界一切国城、聚落，乃至林树及药草等，而为安住。又复诸业皆有种子，种子既由四大而成，由如种谷，初生芽茎，乃至成熟，皆依于地。龙主，此十善业道，能为天上人间一切有情胜妙安住，能令一切有为、无为得智果报，一切声闻及辟支佛，乃至菩萨、无上正等正觉而为安住，亦复为一切佛法根本安住。龙主，我此所说，汝等一切，当以正心而生信解。

“Lord of nagas, take the earth as an analogy: The earth is the foundation for all things established on the ground, such as the human habitats of countries, cities, towns, villages, as well as woods, herbs, grass, and so forth. All activities originate from seeds, and seeds are constituted by the four primary elements. Like sowing a seed of grain which sprouts and ripens, all activities rely on the earth. Lord of nagas, the paths of ten virtues are the basis for all the wondrous merits in the human and deva realms. They are the basis for the conditioned and the unconditioned fruition of wisdom. They are the basis for the awakening of shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas. They are the basis for the unexcelled and perfect enlightenment of buddhas. They are also the basis for all the qualities of buddhas. Lord of nagas, on what I’ve expounded, you should generate conviction with the right understanding.”

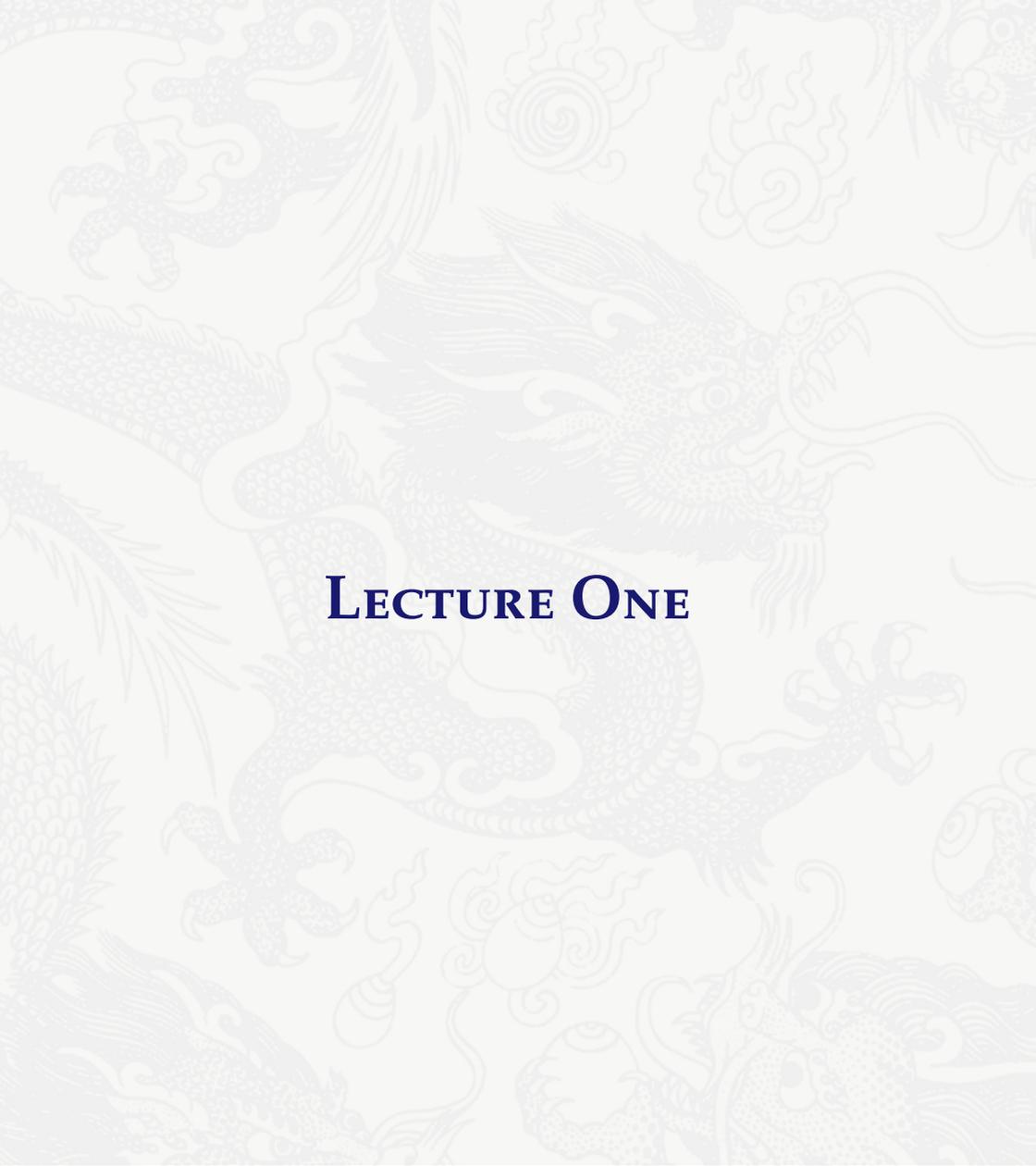
尔时，娑伽罗龙王，并在会诸菩萨摩诃萨，一切声闻及天、人、阿修罗、乾闥婆等一切大众，闻佛所说，欢喜奉行。

*At that time, the naga king Sagara, together with the whole assembly including all bodhisattvas and mahasattvas, all shravakas, devas, humans, asuras, gandharvas and so on, received the Buddha's teaching and put it into practice with great joy.*



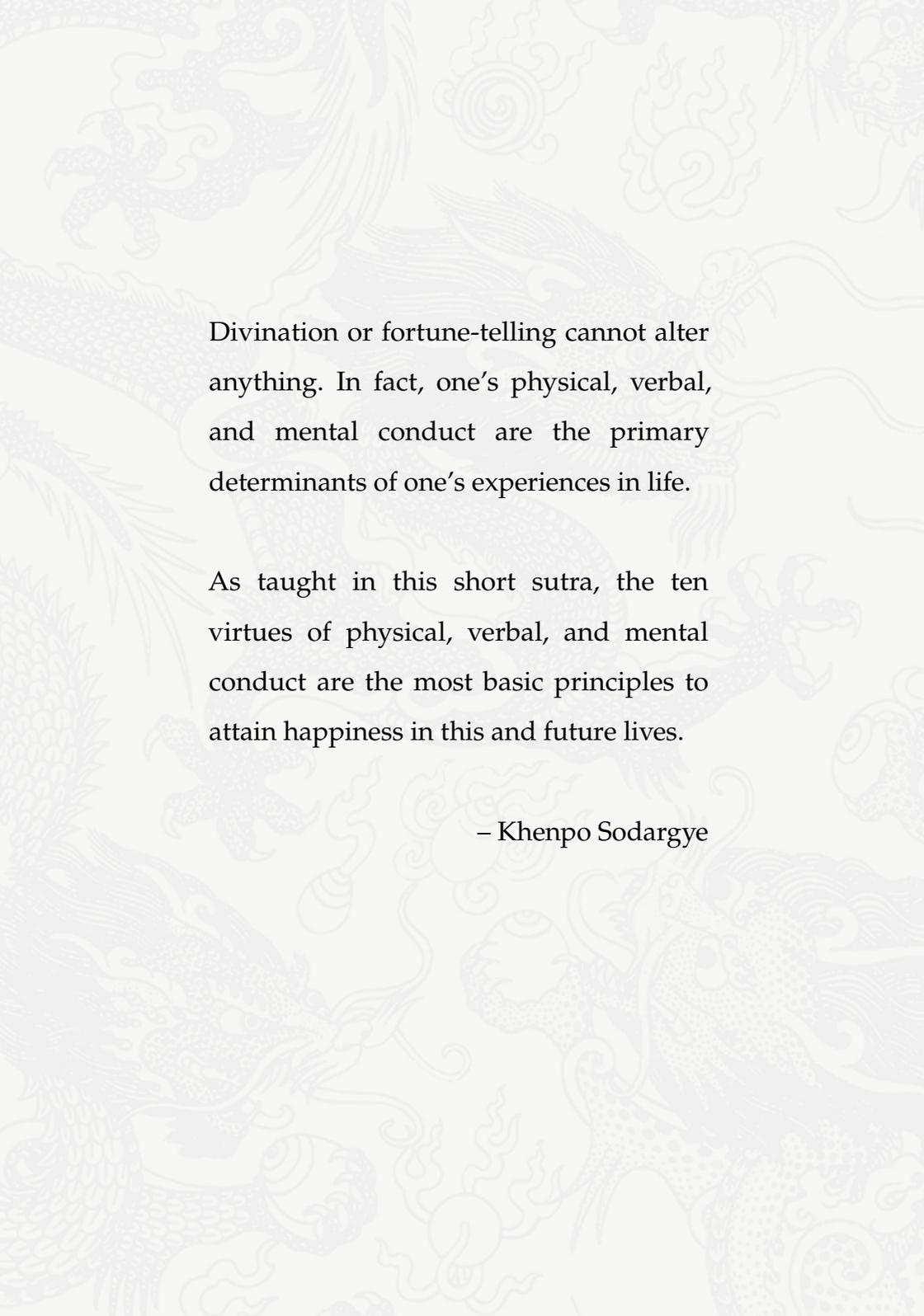
COMMENTARY ON  
*THE QUESTIONS OF THE NAGA KING SAGARA*

BY KHENPO SODARGYE



# LECTURE ONE

COMMENTARY ON  
*THE QUESTIONS OF THE NAGA KING SAGARA*



Divination or fortune-telling cannot alter anything. In fact, one's physical, verbal, and mental conduct are the primary determinants of one's experiences in life.

As taught in this short sutra, the ten virtues of physical, verbal, and mental conduct are the most basic principles to attain happiness in this and future lives.

– Khenpo Sodargye

# Lecture One

Today, we'll begin our study of *The Noble Great Vehicle Sutra: The Questions of the Naga King Sagara*. This sutra, though short, is very auspicious. I will give the oral transmission in Tibetan as I explain its meaning.

## Oral Transmission Is Important

Giving and receiving oral transmissions is an important tradition in Tibetan Buddhism. Whether in a shedra or a monastery, a teacher would not deliver the teaching of a given text if he or she hadn't received the oral transmission of that text. Practitioners place great importance on receiving a direct oral transmission. Regardless of whether it is a single sutra or shastra, the entire Tripitaka, or the works of a great master, it is always best to receive their pure transmission because their blessing is extraordinary and unique.

During his lifetime, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche greatly cherished the tradition of direct oral transmission. Once he invited Tulku Ditsha, the high lama from Dhomang Monastery, to give the sangha members at Larung Gar a full transmission of the entire Tripitaka. Unfortunately, I missed that opportunity because during that time, I was asked to accompany His Holiness on one of his Dharma trips. At the time I felt a great deal of regret, but I was later able to receive the transmissions of many scriptures from His Holiness, as well as from several other great masters. One of these is *The Questions of the Naga King Sagara*, and I have no doubt that the transmission I received is pure. During every lecture, before I begin my teaching, I will first give you the oral transmission of the part that we're going to study.

## **The Fundamental Study of the Buddhadharma Is Beneficial**

Since this sutra is kind of short and its teaching will not take too much time, I hope that after you have received its transmission and explanation, you will share it with others. I'm sure that by doing so, you can inspire them and help solve their confusions with the profound wisdom provided in this sutra.

Ordinary beings are lost and deluded due to their ignorance. Thus,

Dharma teachings are of the utmost benefit for their welfare. Monastics, in particular, should assume the duty of Dharma teaching if they are at all capable. Should there be no monastics present, lay practitioners, who are well learned and qualified, should also deliver Dharma teachings when the appropriate occasions arise. In the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*, it states, "All the devas, ghostly beings, and gods would come to receive the Dharma teaching given by laity, not to mention by monastics."

Unfortunately, in many places across mainland China, the outlook for the prevalence of Dharma teaching is not as optimistic as it should be. While the situation might be becoming better in some Dharma centers, generally speaking, not many people are interested in Dharma teachings given by qualified monastic teachers, let alone by lay teachers. I'm somewhat disheartened by this.

In the last few decades, here at Larung Gar, many Han monastics have been well trained and have become excellent Dharma teachers and practitioners. We have a strict system to evaluate their academic performance and the results of their spiritual training, including how many years they have been trained, how well they have learned each required treatise, as well as how well they meet certain criteria as regards their personality and so forth. Those who are deemed to be qualified by having met all of these requirements are granted the title of khenpo or khenmo. Unfortunately, although they are very capable of giving Dharma teaching, they often face many challenges when they return to the Han area.

Oddly enough, those who pull out all sorts of flashy tricks are admired and easily accepted by many people. It seems that the great majority of people are only curious about divination and fortune-telling. Recently I made a trip to several cities in the Han area and when I visited a prison, I was bombarded by inquiries from many of the staff. "Master, can you read my fortune?" "What do you think about my physiognomy? Will I have a good life?" "Will I be rich?" Well, all I could reply was, "I no longer do face reading. I used to know how but not anymore."

It is such a big pity that people do not know that so-called "fate" or "luck" lies in one's own hands. Divination or fortune-telling cannot alter anything. In fact, one's physical, verbal, and mental conduct are the primary determinants of one's experiences in life. As taught in this short sutra, the ten virtues of physical, verbal, and mental conduct are the most basic principles to attain happiness in this and future lives. For any person, regardless of whether they are Buddhist or atheist, meritorious effects can be expected if one commits to the ten virtues, whereas harmful consequences are foreseeable when one engages in the ten non-virtues.

So, I truly believe it is crucial for most people to understand the Buddhist teachings, and in particular, the karmic law that explains the causality of actions and effects. This principle is not exclusive to Buddhists only. In fact, the understanding of karmic law is beneficial for everyone, whether monastic, lay Buddhist or those who've never taken refuge in the Three Jewels.

I guess most of today's audience are Buddhists, but if there are some non-Buddhists present, I'd like to say "welcome" and thank you for joining us. As I mentioned yesterday, even if you listen to only one lecture of any Dharma teaching, for instance, *The Lotus Sutra*, it will be of great benefit for you. This is not an exaggeration or just my personal opinion, but can be found in the vajra words of many great masters, such as what have been recorded in the *Sensation Stories of the Lotus Sutra*. Also, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche gave similar teachings when he taught the *Sutra of a Hundred Actions* and the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*. Back then, he said, "If those local workers who come to build the shrine hall can attend one lecture, it'd be greatly beneficial to them." Therefore, it is great if you are able to receive the teaching and transmission in its entirety, but if you are really too much taken up by your work and all kinds of mundane trifles, it will still be meaningful for you to listen to even one lecture.

## Talks Between the Buddha and the Naga

### King Sagara

*The Noble Great Vehicle Sutra: The Questions of the Naga King Sagara*, is a noble Mahayana sutra in which the inquirer is the naga king Sagara. In Sanskrit, "sagara" means ocean. The naga king Sagara is one of the eight great naga kings and he frequently invited Buddha Shakyamuni to give Dharma teachings in his naga palace. Therefore,

this sutra is one in a series of sutras featuring the naga king Sagara. In the Tibetan canon there are three sutras entitled *Questions of the Naga King Sagara*. These can be distinguished by their length, one being quite long, one of medium-length, and one which is very short. All of these are available in the Chinese canon.

The sutra we're currently studying is the one that is medium-length. In 2011, I purposely posted the shortest one on my Chinese Weibo account, because it is a short but remarkable sutra that speaks about the four Dharma seals. Its Chinese version was translated by Yijing during the Tang Dynasty, and was entitled *The Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by the Buddha to the Naga King Sagara*. In this short text, the Buddha explains that recitation of the four Dharma seals is equivalent to the recitation of the entire 84,000 teachings of the Dharma and that they constitute the inexhaustible doctrine of bodhisattvas. Therefore, by reading this short text, one can generate immense merit and receive great blessings:

*Prostrations to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.*

*Thus, did I hear at one time. The Bhagavan was dwelling at the place of the naga king Sagara, together with a great assembly of 1,250 bhiksus as well as a multitude of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas. At that time, the Bhagavan said to the naga king Sagara:*

*"Lord of the nagas, if one utters these four aphorisms of the Dharma, in uttering them one is expressing all 84,000 articles of the Dharma. What are the four? They are as follows:*

*“To fully engage in understanding the inexhaustible doctrine of the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas that all compounded phenomena are impermanent; to fully engage in understanding the inexhaustible doctrine of the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas that all contaminated phenomena are suffering; to fully engage in understanding the inexhaustible doctrine of the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas that all phenomena are without self; to fully engage in understanding the inexhaustible doctrine of the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas that nirvana is peace.*

*“Lord of the nagas, if one utters these four aphorisms of the Dharma, in uttering them one is expressing all 84,000 articles of the Dharma.”*

*When the Bhagavan had spoken in this way, the bhiksus and bodhisattvas rejoiced and greatly praised the teachings of the Bhagavan.*

The medium-length version that we are going to study were previously translated twice from Sanskrit into Chinese. In the Tang Dynasty, the Khotanese monk, Siksanda, first translated this sutra with the title, *The Sutra on the Path of the Ten Virtuous Actions*. Later in the Northern Song Dynasty, the Indian monk Danapala re-translated this sutra, more closely aligning its title and content with the Tibetan version. During this teaching, we will mainly use Danapala’s Chinese version together with the Tibetan version to explain the general meaning of this sutra.

Danapala was a renowned translator, who translated more than a hundred Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Chinese. He was

born in Uddiyana, in Northern India, and later traveled to China accompanied by his half-brother, Devasantika. This was during the reign of Emperor Taizong of Song, who strongly supported the translation of the Buddhist canon into the Chinese language. So, armed “with an imperial order”, Danapala and Devasantika began in earnest to translate sutras from Sanskrit into Chinese. One of the more famous sutras translated by Danapala was the medium-length version of *The Questions of the Naga King Sagara* that we are now studying. The translation of this sutra was avidly studied throughout China and was highly regarded by all Buddhists.

Among Devasantika’s translations, one particularly well-known sutra is *The Mahayana Sublime Treasure King Sutra*, which, as translated from Tibetan into English, is known as *The Basket Display*. This sutra elucidates many of the inconceivable qualities of Avalokiteshvara. I cross-referenced the Chinese and the Tibetan versions and they are identical word-for-word translations in their respective languages. On the other hand, the Chinese and the Tibetan versions of *The Questions of the Naga King Sagara* are somewhat different.

## **An Overview of This Sutra**

Although this sutra is not difficult to understand, to make it easier for you to gain a better grasp of its meaning, I’ll first give a brief summary.

The sutra presents a discourse on the ten virtuous actions and the ten non-virtuous actions, as well as their corresponding effects as governed by the karmic law. The Buddha first tells us that all phenomena and all worlds are created by karma, while karma is created by the mind. So, karma and the mind are closely related. Ultimately speaking, the mind is empty by nature and this emptiness can be best recognized through the lens of ultimate truth; relatively speaking, the mind can give rise to all sorts of virtuous and non-virtuous karma, and their manifestations of myriads of phenomena can best be understood through the lens of relative truth. This being said, when approaching this sutra, we need to have a clear understanding of ultimate truth and relative truth, otherwise, one might become confused by the concepts of emptiness, mind, and karma.

By convention, the text begins with the five perfections: the perfect place, the perfect time, the perfect teacher, the perfect disciples, and the perfect teaching. These five perfections are also explained in Han Buddhism as the six accomplishments: the accomplishment of faith, the accomplishment of hearing, the accomplishment of time, the accomplishment of the teacher, the accomplishment of the location, and the accomplishment of the assembly.

The Buddha then explains to the naga king the cause of the variety of phenomena in the world. Take human beings as an example, some people are happy while others are suffering; some enjoy a luxurious life while others are deprived. What is the reason behind this? It is the various karma of each individual. How does karma come about?

It is created by one's mind. Then, what is the mind? When viewed through the perspective of ultimate truth, it is emptiness, while when seen through the lens of relative truth, dream-like, illusory karma and appearances are manifested by the mind.

Scientists and scholars are more than welcome to speculate on and study Buddhist doctrines. In the end, I believe that they will have to acknowledge the truth of the mind and the logical reasoning that has been presented. Buddhist teaching is supreme because it is impeccable in its ability to endure any type of investigation. A belief that has not been examined is nothing more than a superstition, and one should be certain not to carelessly take in any misleading ideas.

In this sutra, the Buddha first tells us that all kinds of phenomena that we perceive and experience in our life are caused by karma, and that karma is created by the mind. The relationship between karma and the mind can be only understood when viewed with an understanding of relative and ultimate truth. Ultimate truth recognizes the emptiness of everything, including karma and the mind, while relative truth accepts the illusory and dream-like appearance of everything which arises because of the empty nature of the karma and the mind.

How then does karma determine the various appearances of all things? Why do all things appear to be diverse? It is because karma itself is differentiated in various ways. Briefly speaking, virtuous karma manifests as pleasant things and non-virtuous karma manifests as unpleasant things. Both virtuous and non-virtuous karma can be

further classified into specific types, which are called the ten virtues and the ten non-virtues. The Buddha specifically explains each of these, as well as the merits of observing the ten virtues and the defects associated with engaging in the ten non-virtues. In the end, the Buddha elaborates the adornment of the ten virtues through engagement with such Mahayana practices as the six transcendent perfections and the four ways of attraction.

## Six Accomplishments of the Sutra

如是我闻：

一时，佛在大海中娑伽罗龙王宫庄严道场，与大比丘众七千五百人俱，并诸得大智慧菩萨摩訶萨，自十方世界皆来集会；复有百千俱胝那由他梵王、帝释及护世等。天龙、夜叉、乾闥婆、阿修罗、哦嚧拿、紧那罗、摩喉罗伽等亦来集会。

Thus have I heard:

At one time, the Buddha was residing within the ocean in the realm of the naga king Sagara. It was in the palace of the naga king Sagara, in that magnificent bodhimanda, that 7,500 great bhikkhus and a great assembly of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas, all of whom had attained great wisdom, assembled from the worlds of the ten directions. Also present there were hundreds

and thousands of nayutas of Sakra, Brahma, the guardians of the world, etc. Gods, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas and more also gathered at the assembly.

“Thus” refers to the accomplishment of faith. The contents of the sutra are the exact words that Ananda received from the Buddha. The teaching is original and has remained intact without any modification. Ananda presents the authentic words of the Buddha as they are, without adding any extra words or deleting any other words.

“Have I heard” refers to the accomplishment of hearing. Ananda was present to hear the teachings; he did not get it from other sources. When the Buddha was teaching, Ananda and his fellow arhats were present and retained the teachings with their unfailing memories. As precisely as they had obtained the teachings, they’ve demonstrated such accomplishment.

“At one time” refers to the accomplishment of time. Why can’t a date be specified? The concept of time is perceived differently in various realms under their own individual karmic influence. That’s why a specific date or “timing” can’t be provided.

When the Buddha was teaching, the audience could range from devas, humans, nagas, asuras and more. It is not possible for a consensus on the exact “time” when the teaching was given to be determined. The system of time is different in the human realm and in the deva realm. Likewise, it is also different in the deva realm and in the hell realm.

Even in the same dimension, there are time differences, such as time zones, etc. Hence, “one time” is the most inclusive term to cover all the “time zones” of the different realms.

“The palace of the naga king Sagara” marks the accomplishment of the location where the Buddha expounded the Dharma. The Buddha was residing within the ocean and giving the teaching in the naga palace, which was a well-adorned, magnificent bodhimanda for a Dharma gathering.

“The Buddha”, of course, embodies the accomplishment of the teacher.

The retinues that gathered represent the accomplishment of assembly. The sutra tells us that there were 7,500 bhikkhus and numerous great bodhisattvas who came from the worlds of the ten directions. As well, hundreds and thousands of nayutas of Brahma, Indra, such guardians of the world as the Four Great Kings and the Twelve Protective Gods, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas and more from all directions, joined in this teaching. No ordinary human beings were present because the location was in the naga king’s palace. Only participants who had attained miraculous power or sublime realization could reach the palace.

In the Chinese version, the number of bhikkhus is 7,500. Yet, in the Tibetan version it is 8,000. I guess this variation is understandable. Just like the population census here at Larung Gar, it is never 100%

accurate and the exact number is generally a little more or less than the number given.

What a scene! A massive crowd with an impressive number of species gathered before the Buddha. They came from different worlds across the ten directions. This is similar to occasions in our human world where participants of different colors and different cultures gather in one place for a master's teachings or empowerments. Certainly, there are also occasions where a teacher may only attract an audience with a specific feature, such as that everyone comes from the same region or everyone is of the same gender. Assemblies of this type vary according to specific Dharma teachers, locations and other variables.

People may be very skeptical about the existence of so many "mystical" beings and may wonder if they are truly real. It is reasonable to have doubts. In fact, it is mentioned in many sutras that listening to the Dharma with skepticism is also beneficial. In many movies and other forms of art, the legendary aquatic world with mermaids, the naga king and his palace are illustrated. Different people open up the possibility to view the world in different ways. There are many unknown species out there in this world whose unimaginable physical structures and lifestyles are incomprehensible to our limited knowledge and thinking process. Therefore, it would be imprudent to deny anything just because it goes beyond our common sense.

Now that we have the complete scene of the Dharma gathering, we will next address the main teaching given by the Buddha.

## Phenomena, Karma, and the Mind

尔时，世尊见彼一切大众来集会已，告娑伽罗龙王言：龙主，观此世间，种种行业皆从妄起；种种心法，当感种种果报；若彼不了，当生种种之趣。

Then the Blessed One, seeing that the assembly in its entirety were present, spoke to the naga king Sagara, “Lord of nagas, the state of this world has been shaped by various kinds of karma, which are, in turn, conditioned by a variety of deluded thoughts. Various minds give rise to various karmic effects. Lacking this understanding, one takes rebirth in different courses of existence.

To begin with, the Buddha told the naga king that all appearances in the world are determined by karma. All phenomena arise from various kinds of karma, and karma is created by the deluded mind. Various delusions of the mind cause various kinds of karma, which in turn give rise to various appearances in the world. While our mental activity continues on uninterruptedly, the corresponding results will ripen at some point. Not recognizing this, sentient beings wander in the cyclic existence of the six realms. Consequently, they take birth as

devas, asuras, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings. As stated in the chapter, *Karma*, from the *Abhidharmakosa*, “Diversification of this world is caused by the karma of sentient beings.”

It is extremely important to be mindful of the karmic law. Unfortunately, some people are completely ignorant about this. They have their eyes fixed on making lots of money, achieving material success, becoming more beautiful, and so on. No matter how hard one tries, the results are often disappointing. For instance, desirous of meeting society’s standard of beauty, people undergo cosmetic surgery in South Korea, the U.S. or elsewhere. Nevertheless, there are far too many disastrous results. If the virtuous cause for looking good is absent, plastic surgery could go wrong and the damage might be irreversible. Well, I’m not against it, if people think that this is necessary. . .

龙王，汝当观此大海之众，见作种种士夫色相。龙王，而彼一切色相，由于一切善恶身、口、意业，各各之心，种种变化。然此心法，虽云色相，由如幻化，无可取故。

“Lord of nagas, consider all the various forms of the beings that are present here in this ocean, all the diversity of beings that exist here. Lord of nagas, the forms of all of these beings are in such variety due to the diversity of their previous engagement in virtue and non-virtue, through the activities of their body, speech and mind. All kinds of karma arise from the variety of mental

delusions. While the mind gives rise to forms and appearances, it is illusory and ungraspable.

Drawing a familiar reference for the naga king, the Buddha took the appearances of oceanic creatures as an example. Within the great ocean, there are various kinds of living beings with various forms and appearances. According to scientific research, there are more than 230,000 known species in ocean, although it is estimated that 91% of marine species are yet to be classified, and that more than eighty percent of our ocean is unmapped, unobserved, and unexplored. Some sea animals are very adorable, while some others look appalling. It can be said that, sometimes human beings are unbelievably awful towards these creatures. Whatever they find in the ocean, they want to consume it, despite the risk of food poisoning.

Given the diversity of oceanic creatures, the Buddha continued: The appearances of all these beings are caused by their past virtuous and non-virtuous karma in terms of body, speech, and mind, which in turn, are created by their kind and unkind mind. While the deluded mind gives rise to karma and then manifests various forms and appearances, it is actually devoid of inherent existence. The mind is illusory and ungraspable.

In Chandrakirti's *Introduction to the Middle Way*, it is said, "It is because of the mind that innumerable worlds, animate and inanimate, together with all migrating beings without exception, arise by virtue of the karmic process." Also, as is stated in *The Forest of Gems in the Garden*

*of the Dharma*, “The root of the three kinds of karma is the mind.” The mind is the cause of physical, verbal, and mental karma. Therefore, the mind plays a fundamental role.

Some people wonder, “If everything comes from the mind, why does my kind mind not bring me kind results?” In fact, your present kindness will contribute to your future success. Similarly, your failures today are the result of the unkindness of your previous mind and karma. We should contemplate the working of karma and the mind carefully. Without this knowledge, we will suffer gravely when we fail in our worldly pursuits.

Knowing the working of karmic principles, we must maintain the awareness that although the mind creates all sorts of phenomena, they are merely appearances, illusory and dream-like, and devoid of any intrinsic existence. In fact, none of these phenomena are attainable. The entity of the mind is colorless, shapeless, without a zenith or a nadir, and so forth and so on. It cannot be found within itself, nor anywhere outside of itself. The mind is empty by nature, as is the very nature of karma. Both the mind and its manifestations are ungraspable and unattainable.

As I’ve mentioned, in order to have a better understanding of this sutra, we should be prepared with the knowledge of relative truth and ultimate truth. On the relative level, everything appears from karma and the working of the mind, like dreams and illusions; on the ultimate level however, nothing is graspable. As these two levels of

truth do not contradict one another, we must come to understand the mind and karma from both of these two perspectives.

龙主，此之色相，一切诸法，本无所生，亦无主宰。复无有我，亦无碍故，如是种种所作之业，诸法自性，皆幻化相，不可思议。

“Lord of nagas, all these forms, as well as all phenomena, are originally unborn and have no owner. They are without self and free from obscurations. Being a variety of production formed by whatever karma has been accumulated, they are merely illusory appearances and inconceivable.

The Buddha further told the naga king, not only about all of the forms found in the great ocean, but also that all phenomena are without inherent existence; they arise from emptiness and are without absolute existence of their own as there is neither a “self” nor the possession of a “self”. They are completely free from obscurations. The nature of all things formed by karma, as well as the accumulated karma itself, is illusory and inconceivable. How amazing is this truth!

In the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the Buddha says,

*See all phenomena in the three realms*

*As dreams and magical illusions.*

*If one has generated such a view,  
He will attain liberation through spiritual practice.*

We should regard all aspects of samsaric existence as dreams, magical illusions, hallucinations or dewdrops as none of these has intrinsic existence. If we practitioners can adjust our outlook and cultivate this view, we will attain liberation from samsara. Just to repeat this: The whole samsara of the three realms is determined by karma, and although karma can give rise to a variety of illusory and dream-like appearances, it is unattainable and empty in nature. This is not only true of karma; all phenomena in the world are devoid of self and concomitance of self, and lacking in any inherent entity. Still, by the nature of emptiness, they can appear to sentient beings in an illusory and dream-like manner. This truth is truly inconceivable.

Some may wonder, “How can it happen in this way?” Say, one has engaged in virtuous conduct today and it will become the cause of happiness some years later, or one has committed a non-virtuous deed, which is guaranteed to be the cause of suffering in the future. Then how can these causes and effects be empty? Indeed, when we take a closer look into the relationship between cause and effect, we’re surprised to find it lacking any substantial essence. Yet, we cannot say it is nothing more than a void in which nothing happens, because things do appear and are perceived by the minds of ordinary beings. The whole world appears to be true and real, yet is lacking in

any inherent entity. So, the relationship of cause and effect is really amazing.

Nowadays, cellphones have become an indispensable part of our life. Within the telephone network there are numerous active numbers that cannot be mistaken for one another. The karmic matrix is somewhat like the mobile network. Sentient beings sow the seeds of virtuous and non-virtuous karma through the actions of their body, speech and mind. The karmic matrix never goes wrong. Sooner or later, these seeds will ripen into their respective corresponding results.

I'd encourage you to expand your understanding by studying such related teachings as *The Sutra of a Hundred Actions*. After some time spent in this kind of study, you will recognize that our present life is closely connected with the karma from our former lives. Although it is not 100% determined by one's previous karma, a good deal of the experiences in this life have imprints carried forward from past lives.

If one doesn't acknowledge the principle of cause and effect, many things in the world will seem unjustified and will therefore, not make any sense. For instance, some people remain healthy while others suffer long-time illnesses. Some people seem to be always successful with whatever they do, while others do not enjoy the same kind of luck, regardless of how much hard work they put in. We are surrounded by living evidence that we can't turn a blind eye to. The karmic principle is undeniable.

For Buddhists, this principle can be accepted easily. For atheists, it will usually take some time to digest it. Actually, it is unquestionable that an intangible force is taking effect on every being's life journey. Knowing this, some people apply it to achieve success and good fortune. Unfortunately, there are also individuals who go against it and eventually lose everything, and end up being beaten to the ground. If the Buddha had not revealed the principle behind this force, no one could explain it.

Once again, it is important to reflect on the teaching of karma, otherwise, we might easily become "blamers". Some people love to blame others for their problems. When a relationship goes wrong, they blame their friends or partners. When their career isn't working out, they blame society or their bosses and coworkers. When they are sick, they blame hospitals and doctors. Thus, they live in resentment every day and their mental states cannot be healthy and sensible. If they could reflect on the connection between their experiences and their personal karma, they'd surely be relieved from their negative emotions.

## The Most Elegant and Magnificent Appearance

龙主，若有菩萨知一切法，无生无灭，无色无相，如实知己，所作所修一切善业而无修作；所有色相及蕴处界，一切生法悉无所见。彼若如实得是见已，当复观察殊妙色相。

“Lord of nagas, should a bodhisattva know all phenomena are unborn, unceasing, having neither forms nor characteristics, thus he would know that although he engages in and practices all virtues, there is nothing to be practiced or engaged in; although all forms and characteristics, as well as all aggregates, elements, and sense sources arise, there is nothing to be perceived. Having gained such a truthful view, the bodhisattva should further observe the elegant and magnificent appearances.

If a bodhisattva realizes that, in ultimate truth, all phenomena are unborn and unceasing, having neither forms nor characteristics, he will realize that there are no virtuous deeds to conduct, and no forms, aggregates, elements or sense sources to be perceived in an ultimate sense. Meanwhile, he knows that in the relative sense, virtuous karma

can give rise to all kinds of wonderful and magnificent appearances, which are manifested in an illusory and dream-like manner.

This part is slightly different from the Tibetan and the Siksananda version, both of which do not mention the ultimate truth of emptiness as it is being discussed here. The Tibetan text offers a straightforward interpretation, simply saying that bodhisattvas understand that virtuous actions can give rise to elegant, beautiful aggregates, elements, and sense sources that are lovely to behold.

Surely, everyone wishes for beautiful and elegant appearances. As a matter of fact, most people are unwell due to the disturbing state of their aggregates, elements, and sense sources. Their physical bodies, as well as their feelings and perceptions, are always afflicted. For instance, one wakes up in the morning, feeling exhausted and sleepy. He wants to study but can't take anything from the book. His aching body and gloomy mood are terrible. Everything within his five aggregates seems imbalanced, but he is not sure about the reason, or maybe there is no such reason. Then, by noon, he is recovered and feeling energetic again, but still unsure of the cause. This fluctuation is like a cloudy day that turns shiny again.

The unsatisfying state of one's aggregates, elements and sense sources is indeed the result of non-virtuous karma from the past. Conversely, if one had engaged in virtuous acts, the resulting state would be far more agreeable. Not only would one have a pleasant appearance and

a happy feeling, but that individual would also be endowed with a pleasant state of perception and beneficial mental constructs.

In summary, bodhisattvas understand that by engaging in virtuous deeds, an individual's aggregates, elements and sense sources can become far more excellent and pleasing. This person will enjoy a stable and delightful mindset, a dignified appearance, a successful career, a harmonious family, and so on. Their environment will also be beautiful and elegant.

龙主，殊妙色相，云何观察？当观如来身相。如来身者，皆从百千俱胝那由他福德之所生故。又如是之相，云何严持？云何恭信？当得如是之相，复得人间天上无老无死？复得十百千他化自在天身，乃至大梵天身？此由心不散乱，专注观想，瞻仰如来最妙之身。实知此身，一切色相殊妙庄严，皆从善业所集而得。

“Lord of nagas, how should one observe the elegant and magnificent appearances? One should observe the body of the tathagata. The body of the tathagata is born from hundreds of thousands of nayutas of merit. How beautifully is such a form adorned? How can one develop reverence and faith in such a form? With the form of the tathagata, one surely has no wish for the immortality of devas and human beings; one surely has no wish for the assembly of tens of hundreds of thousands of Paranirmitta Vasavartin Devas or Mahabrahma Devas. The conviction will be generated

by attentively and reverently observing the most wondrous form of the tathagata without any distraction. One will know that the body of the tathagata, adorned with marks, perfectly complete and splendidous, is the result of collective virtues.

The Buddha asked the naga king Sagara, what would be the most excellent appearance in the world? For ordinary beings, the very likely answer would be celebrities. I've visited a few college dormitories where students put up posters of celebrities on their walls to admire their beauty. As a matter of fact, the most noble and magnificent appearance in this world is none other than the tathagata's body. Because of the meritorious qualities reflected on the tathagata's body, people feel immense comfort and joy by seeing a statue of the Buddha. How then does such an extraordinary appearance come about? It does not rely on one simple cause or condition but on hundreds of thousands of nayutas of merit. *The Ornament of the Middle Way* and many other scriptures explain the formation of the tathagata's body in great detail.

Then, how wondrously is such a body adorned, and how can we develop reverence and faith in such a form? We should behold the tathagata's body, visualize the perfectly complete and splendidous marks of the tathagata with great concentration. By doing so, we will come to know that it is the most supreme of all. Paranirmita Vasavartin Devas and Mahabrahma Devas possess "immortal" bodies with unearthly beauty and dazzling characteristics, but the marks of

the Buddha far surpass the physical attributes of all human beings and devas, and the constitution of such magnificence is the accumulation of countless virtues.

This part is slightly different from the Tibetan and Siksanda version. I'd encourage you to use these two versions as a cross-reference during the study. In some parts, the Tibetan version is pretty much the same as Siksanda's translation. Here, those two versions are much simpler and do not address the physical attributes of humans and devas. Instead, they emphasize the magnificence of the tathagata's body which radiates such brilliance that no one can gaze at it directly. In the Siksanda version, it says that the splendor of the Buddha's radiance covers the whole of the great assembly, and that even if there were immeasurable nayutas of Ishvara and Brahma devas, when measured against the radiance of the Buddha, none of them would even be noticed. Those who look with reverence at the Tathagata's body will find themselves dazzled.

The tathagata certainly possesses distinctive qualities. As stated in *The Compassionate Lotus Sutra*, if even for one instant, one were to generate faith in the form and marks of the tathagata, the resultant merit is inexhaustible and immense. However, because of the difficulty for ordinary beings to visualize the excellent form of the tathagata, one may not be able to generate faith easily. *The Mahasaty Nirgrantha Sutra* says,

*The extraordinary qualities of the tathagata are  
The result of meritorious accumulation through countless eons.  
Timid and less fortunate beings would be frightened  
Upon hearing of these inconceivable qualities.*

Truly, when hearing, for instance, how a single vellus hair of the Buddha's body is formed, many people would generate great doubt and wrong views, or even feel intimidated, as they would find it to be unbelievable. If you find it difficult to generate faith in the body of the tathagata, I'd suggest you read more sutras on such topics as emptiness or ethical principles. As we expand our study to include the ten virtues, your conviction in the Buddha will become gradually strengthened.

The ten virtues are the codes of conduct for human beings laid out by Buddha Shakyamuni more than 2,500 years ago. Regardless of how history and time have elapsed, they remain universally fresh and applicable. These ten virtues, including no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no false speech and so on, are not so different from modern legal codes.

I had visited schools in China that specialize in politics and law where, because most of the staff and students do not believe in Buddhism, I can only discuss issues of ethics and morality from an academic perspective. As we review human history, it is obvious that the legal system had been changed numerous times in the East and in the West. Even in various modern societies where constitutions and laws are

highly developed, most laws and regulations do not persist for long periods of time.

A while ago, a professor wrote a book on cosmology and law and, as a gift, gave me a copy. After reading it, I had the feeling that the ten virtuous conducts could be integrated with modern laws and ethics without any incongruity. We've seen rapid and continual changes in legal systems throughout different periods of human history, while the disciplines set in place by the Buddha have remained effective from their onset to the present, regardless of how dramatic the changes that society had been undertaking. Reflecting upon this, one can't help but be curious about the wondrous mystery hidden inside.

Therefore, if you are repelled or reluctant to have your faith inspired simply on the basis of the Buddha's body, I'd encourage you to read more sutras. Buddha Shakyamuni expressed opinions on a variety of subjects, such as ethics, art and literature. With a better understanding of his teaching, perhaps many of your current doubts can be solved. Certainly, there are many benefits regarding your future lives which you may not have noticed in your present life.

## Karma Determines Appearances and Experiences

龙主，如汝住宫，一切庄严，亦福所生。至于梵王、帝释及护世等，乃至天龙、夜叉、乾闥婆、阿修罗、迦楼罗、紧曩罗、摩喉罗伽、人非人等，所有一切庄严，皆福所生。

龙主，又此大海之中，所有众生种种，或有广大、或复微细，多住丑陋，彼一切身，皆由种种心之所化。龙主，是故说言，随身、口、意业之所得。龙主，如是之报，以业为因，业为主宰。

“Lord of nagas, your abiding palace with all of its marvelous adornments also arises from a great amount of merit. All the adornments of Sakra, Brahma, and the guardians of the world, and those of the gods, nagas, yaksas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, humans and nonhumans, likewise arise from merit.

“Lord of nagas, there are all sorts of beings within this great ocean. Some are large, some are small, and most of them are ugly. All of those bodies are illusorily manifested by the diversity of the mind. Lord of nagas, because of this, it is said that everything is

the fruition of physical, verbal, and mental karma. Lord of nagas, such fruitions are caused by karma and determined by karma.

Further, the Buddha took the naga palace as an example to illustrate that both residence and environment are also determined by karma. There are descriptions of Sagara's palace in such scriptures as the *Long Agama Sutra* and *The Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Dharma*. Some people are very envious of the luxurious residences of world leaders, but surely, they cannot be compared to the luxuries of the naga palace. Here at Larung Gar, some practitioners managed to find good and decent cabins while others were unable to do so. Again, this is the result of each individual's merit.

Likewise, as marvelous as deva beings like Brahma, Indra, the guardians of the world and so forth, all their adornments are the results of their merit. Although we can't imagine how wonderful the abode of the gandharvas or devas are, the same principle applies in the human world. Look around, the differences among individuals can be great. Some people seem to be able to acquire everything effortlessly. They enjoy a comfortable house, a happy family and a fruitful career. On the other hand, some people are so deprived that it seems that the only thing that they have is misery. What's the reason behind such differences? It is largely due to each individual's accumulated merit from the past. Very few rewards are the immediate return of the virtuous karma in this present life. Such a situation would be quite rare.

The same goes for all sorts of beings within this great ocean. In the two Chinese versions of this sutra, the Buddha only speaks about the ugliness of oceanic creatures, whereas in the Tibetan version, both beautiful and ugly appearances are addressed. So, the Tibetan version includes sea animals that are also quite mesmerizing.

Following this, the Buddha concludes that sentient beings receive karmic retribution according to their physical, verbal and mental acts. Karma is the cause and the determinant of the result. That being said, Sakra, Brahma and all other gods are not humanity's supreme ruler. It is karma that determines our attributes and experiences.

*The Sutra of the Boy in Golden Color* says, "There is no worldly enjoyment that one experiences that does not result from one's merit." Worldly enjoyments include good looks, abundant wealth and so forth, and all of them can only be caused by one's merit. What one experiences in this life is determined by one's own karma. This is the inconceivable principle of dependent arising. Failing to know it, some are confused that no matter how hard they work, they can hardly improve their financial situation. So, they go for divinations or just simply dream about good fortune befalling them. Indeed, it is of no benefit if one doesn't know how to adjust one's conduct in accordance with karmic law. Certainly, there's no point to blame your parents for not passing a rich inheritance on to you. Here is a story of King Pasenadi to illustrate the important role of merit:

One noontime, King Pasenadi was taking a nap while two servants

were fanning him. Seeing that the king had fallen asleep, they began chit-chatting with one another. One said, "I'm living a happy life by the grace of the king. I wouldn't have such a good life without the merit of the King." Another man replied, "Surely, I'm grateful for the king's kindness and I have received many rewards from him, however, my life is the result of none other than my own merit."

They argued so loudly that they startled the king, and woke him up. The first servant was a people-pleaser, and cried out, "Oh! My compassionate lord, I'm nothing without you!" The second servant was a direct man, "My king, I appreciate your kindness, but I still believe that what I have earned is the result of my own merit." Hearing their argument, the king was upset with the second servant and decided to teach him a lesson.

King Pasenadi went to the queen, "Prepare fine clothing and jewelry. I will send a servant to deliver some grape juice for you. Reward him with these." He returned to his room and sent the first servant to the queen. As the man was preparing the juice, his nose began to bleed, so he called the second servant to ask him to deliver the grape juice instead. In the end, the second servant was the one to receive the king's reward. He was very happy and eagerly put on his new garments. The king was surprised by the result. He reflected on what had taken place and thereby came to understand the law of cause and effect.

Many people are unaware of this principle of karma. Some practitioners believe that everything is provided by the guru. Ordinary people think that good opportunities are given to them by their boss. Certainly, some conditions are made available by the guru or one's boss, but for the most part, they are the effects of the individual's past karma. Without the corresponding merit, no matter how hard others try to offer you certain fortune, you will still fail to enjoy it. By the same logic, our future is so closely connected with our current conduct. It is crucial to bear this in mind.

汝当令诸众生，起智慧心，所作所修，随学善业；于诸邪见，不作不住；知彼邪见，非为究竟。如是知己，一切众生，当求为师，咸来供养，并得天上、人间归信供养。

“Lord of nagas, you should awaken the wisdom of your fellow beings, so that, their conduct and practices are in accordance with virtues, and they do not engage in, or dwell in, wrong views, and they will realize that wrong views are not the ultimate truth. Having such awareness, all beings will come to rely on you as a teacher and make offerings to you. Devas and human beings will also generate faith in you and make offerings to you.

The Buddha encouraged the naga king Sagara to teach his fellow beings in the great ocean, and to guide them to understand the karmic law of cause and effect and generate the genuine wisdom. Consequently, they will become focused on cultivating virtuous

qualities and refraining from the wrong views of eternalism and nihilism. This is because, through understanding karmic law, they will realize that all their retributions come from their own karma, and that all those wrong views are not the ultimate truth. By doing so, the naga king would be venerated as their teacher by all beings in the great ocean. Humans and devas would also develop faith in him and make offerings to him.

In this context, the fields of merit are only referred to as the naga king Sagara himself, as he had received the teaching from the Buddha, and he possessed the quality to teach his fellow beings. In the Siksananda version, it's slightly different, as the Buddha told the naga king, "As to the fields of merit, you rejoice in them, respect them and support them, and because of this you will also be respected and supported by men and devas."

## One Method to Uproot All Non-Virtuous

### Karma

龙主，而有一法，能令众生断于一切恶趣之业。云何一法？所谓观察善法。而彼善法，云何观察？当观自身，我于日夜，行住坐卧，所兴心意，无不是过。如是觉察，令四威仪中诸不善法，不得发生。如是断尽诸不善法，当令善法而得具足。复使

一切同善众生，悉皆当得声闻、辟支佛及菩萨等，乃至无上正等正觉之位。

“Lord of nagas, there is one method that severs, for all beings, all the paths that lead to the lower realms. What is that one method? It is to contemplate virtuous qualities. How to contemplate virtuous qualities? It is to reflect on oneself, ‘Throughout the day and night, as I walk, abide, sit and sleep, all my thoughts and mental states are full of faults.’ By repeatedly contemplating in this way, one’s four deportments will be prevented from all non-virtues. Having abandoned non-virtues and becoming endowed with virtues, such beings will accompany their fellows who engage in the same virtues, to attain not only the fruition of noble hearers, solitary buddhas, and bodhisattvas, but unexcelled and perfect enlightenment as well.

The Buddha further told the naga king there is “one method” for all beings to eliminate the karma of taking rebirth in the three lower realms. It is to contemplate virtuous qualities. How to contemplate? To examine our body and mind in all daily activities throughout the day and night, and to be vigilant with every arising thought and mental state.

In the beginning, we will find our thoughts and behaviors to be full of faults. Some people get very disappointed in themselves after seeing that they possess so many faults. They blame themselves and cry out, “I’m a terrible practitioner! I’m gravely bounded by negative karma!

I'm too ashamed to see my guru. . . " They seem so desperate and without any hope. I must say that our mind can be really amazing. Sometimes it will gather all negativities and use them to beat us to the ground, even when that is not necessary at all. As our self-confidence is crushed, there's no way for us to continue with any practice.

Actually, ordinary beings are bound to generate non-virtuous thoughts and create destructive karma. Nevertheless, one can always purify negativities through Dharma practice. In *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, there's a story on self-awareness. A brahmin called Ravi wished to train his mind. Whenever a bad thought arose, he'd put aside a black pebble, and whenever a good thought arose, he'd put aside a white pebble. At first, all the pebbles he put aside were black. However, through vigorous practice and mind taming, he progressed to having even amounts of both black and white pebbles, and in the end, he was only putting aside white pebbles.

It is kind of a pity that some individuals experience their progress in reverse. They start out with great faith, feeling that all things are the pure manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas. After a few years however, their faith wanes and their behaviors are not as decent as they were before. So as ordinary people, we should avoid the feeling of being too self-satisfied or too self-debased. Remember that the training of the mind can never be something to be rushed into. Gradually, as we persevere in examining our thoughts and behaviors and applying antidotes to the negative ones, we can prevent non-virtue from arising in our daily activities.

*Dhammapada* says,

*Should virtues increase,*

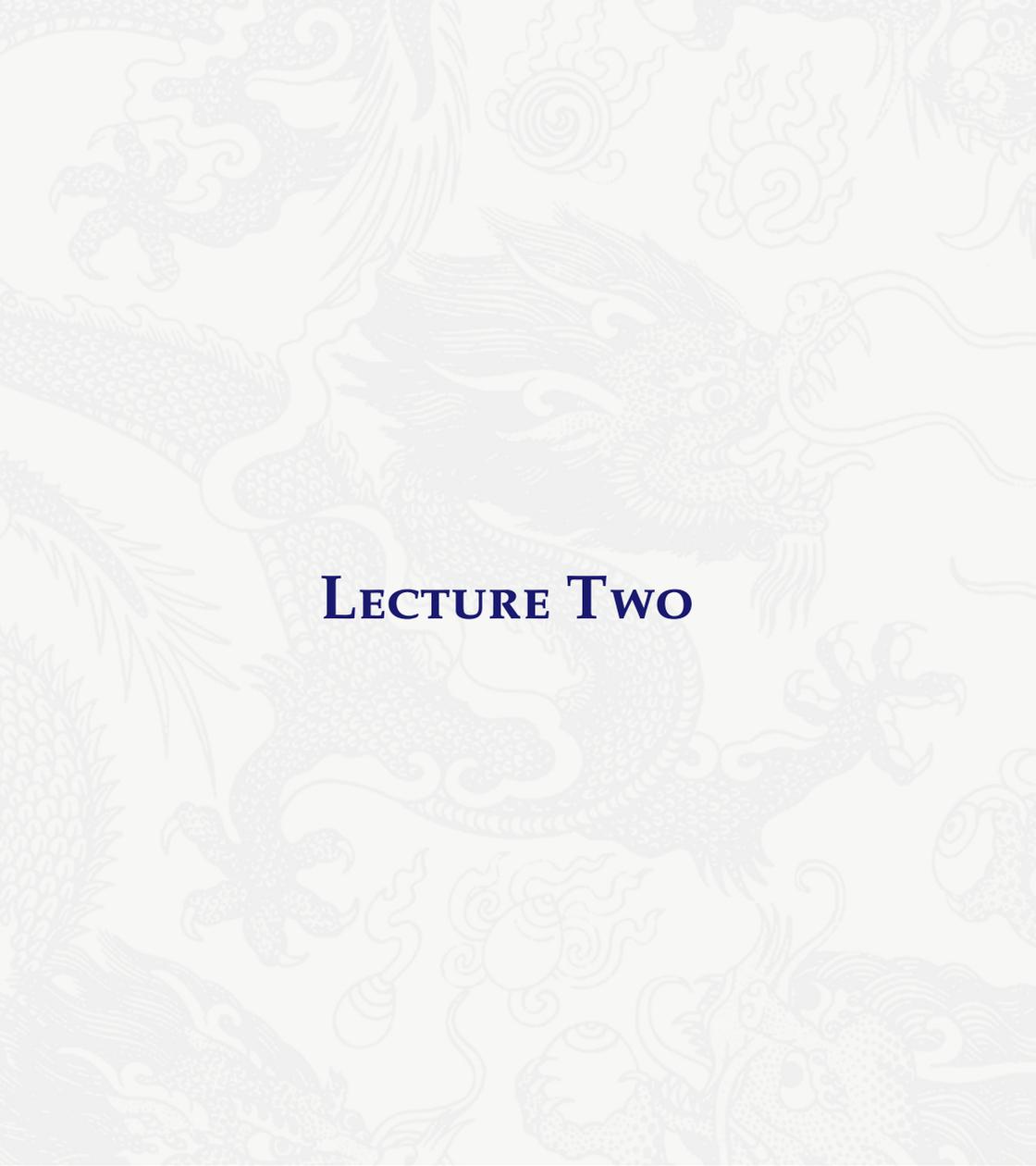
*Maras finds no opportunity to harm.*

*When one eliminates afflictions and realizes peace,*

*One will attain authentic fruition.*

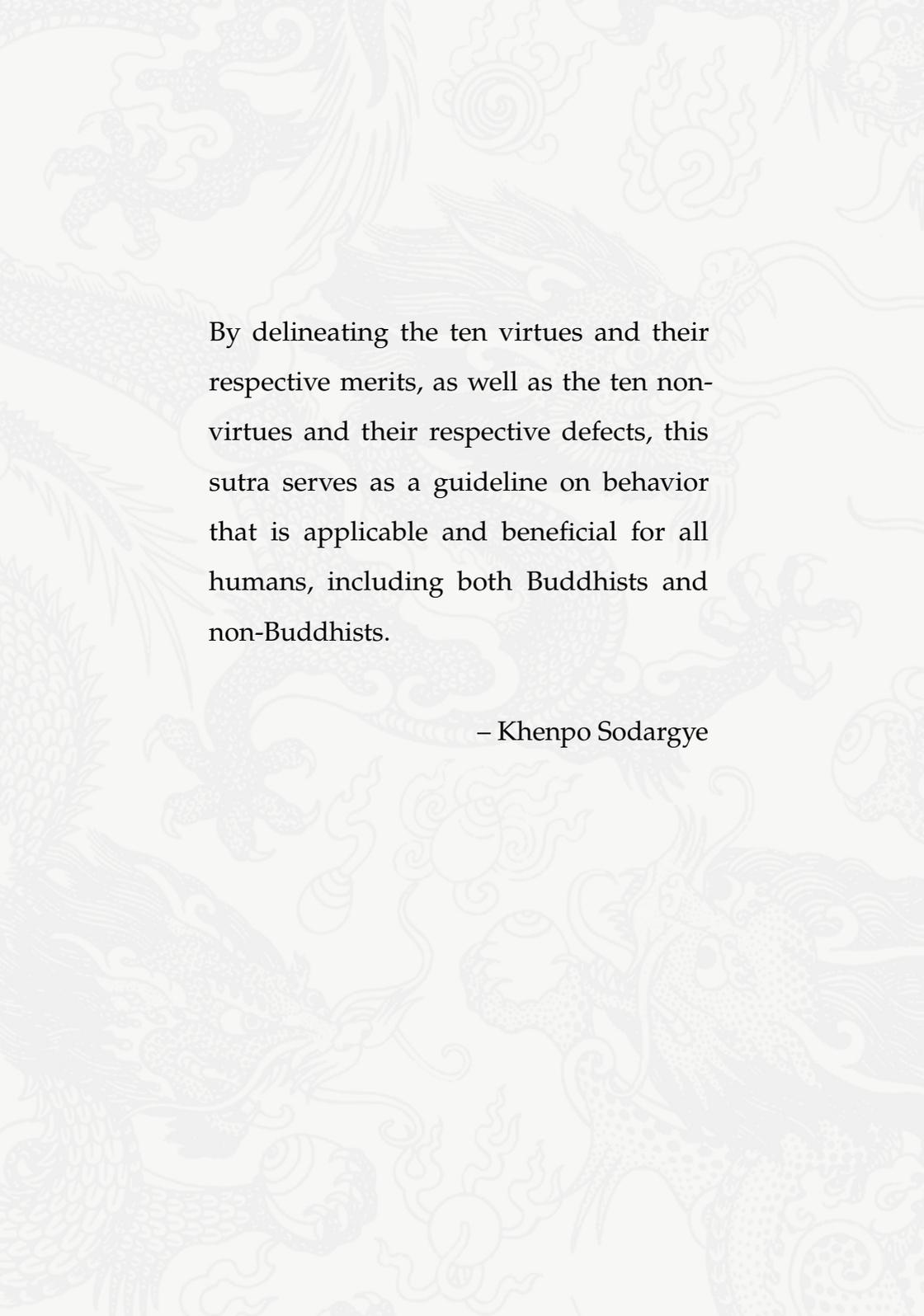
Along with the increase of virtues, the host of mara will not find any chance to trouble us. If we contemplate virtuous qualities and continuously remain introspective, we will be able to engage in more and more virtuous deeds. Then as a consequence, Dharma protectors will remain nearby to protect and support us, and all maras will be unable to come close to us and make trouble. On the contrary, if we are not committed to virtues, even our surroundings will turn hostile and seek to harm us.

So, the Buddha said, you should apply this method to remain apart from all non-virtues and to acquire all virtues. Sentient beings endowed with such a practice will attain the realization of shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and even the perfect Buddha. Therefore, we should be mindful to carry out virtuous deeds at all times!



# LECTURE TWO

COMMENTARY ON  
*THE QUESTIONS OF THE NAGA KING SAGARA*

The background of the page features a traditional East Asian artistic motif. It consists of a large, stylized dragon with intricate scales and flowing, flame-like clouds. The dragon is depicted in a dynamic, coiled posture, facing towards the right. The entire scene is rendered in a light, monochromatic green or grey tone against a plain white background, creating a subtle and elegant decorative effect.

By delineating the ten virtues and their respective merits, as well as the ten non-virtues and their respective defects, this sutra serves as a guideline on behavior that is applicable and beneficial for all humans, including both Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

– Khenpo Sodargye

## Lecture Two

*The Questions of the Naga King Sagara* is an exceptional sutra that encompasses the basic and inclusive codes of conduct for human beings. By delineating the ten virtues and their respective merits, as well as the ten non-virtues and their respective defects, this sutra serves as a guideline on behavior that is applicable and beneficial for all humans, including both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. If a man cannot uphold the ten virtues, he lacks basic human decency and will find it difficult to survive in this world as misfortune and difficulties in this and future lifetimes are certain to be expected. Therefore, I would say that this is a classic text that deserves everyone's attention.

Most Buddhists are familiar with the terms "ten virtues" and "ten non-virtues", yet, not many are clear, as regards the detailed teaching on them. Long-term practitioners, even monastics, might not have a full understanding of the corresponding retributions of the ten virtues and the ten non-virtues. Actually, in order to have a solid foundation for any kind of Dharma practice, an in-depth and comprehensive understanding, along with the development of a strong conviction in the karmic principle is indispensable. It is vital to establish the

right view on karma, if one wishes to attain enlightenment and benefit beings. Without a strong conviction in this essential principal, realization of the remarkable qualities of enlightenment is surely unattainable.

I hope that through this course of study, all of you, monastics and lay practitioners alike, can receive a pure transmission and explanation of this text that will deepen your understanding of the ten virtues. With a good understanding and a pure transmission, you will be able to actively propagate the ten virtues whenever the occasion may arise in your communities, places of work, schools, and more.

The knowledge of the Three Jewels, the five precepts, and the ten virtues is truly impactful. This feeling has touched me deeply when I first visited prisons, drug rehabilitation centers and similar places in recent years. Inside of these types of institutions, people suffer deep remorse and the bitter consequences of previous behavior. It is not hard to imagine the miserable karmic retribution that lies in wait for them in their future lives. Sadly, their misconduct was largely due to their ignorance of fundamental Buddhist teachings, and in particular, the basic code of conduct guided by the discipline of the ten virtues.

So, it is of great importance that everyone study Buddhist philosophy and understand its essential meaning. If you are serious about Dharma practice, it is best to approach your study of the Dharma progressively and thoroughly. On its most fundamental level, Buddhism provides an

education in cultivating the noble qualities that can lead one to a life of decency and elegance. It teaches us to gradually perfect our characters and improve our personalities, and meanwhile it also guides us to uncover our innate potential to cultivate the transcendental qualities which go beyond the state of ordinary beings. These practices, which provide us with the ability to transform ourselves into enlightened beings, end the suffering brought on by such common adversities as birth, aging, illness, and death. That being said, let's continue with our study of this sutra.

## The Roots and Foundations of All Virtues

龙王，云何善法？我今说之。所谓十善之业，是为一切根本安住；是生天上、人间根本安住；世间、出世间殊胜善法根本安住；声闻、辟支佛、菩萨根本安住；无上正等正觉根本安住。

“Lord of nagas, what are those virtuous qualities? I hereby explain: They are the ten virtuous actions, which can be said to be the roots and foundations of all virtuous things. They are the roots and foundations of taking birth in the human and deva realms. They are the roots and foundations of all the mundane and supramundane virtues. They are the roots and foundations of the awakening of the noble hearers, solitary buddhas and bodhisattvas.

They are the roots and foundations of the unexcelled and perfect awakening.

The virtuous qualities that one needs to contemplate are the ten virtues, which serve as the roots and foundations of all virtuous actions. Unsurprisingly, they are the fundamentals of all Dharma practices, and indispensable for all Dharma practitioners as well. We must keep this in mind. Too often, “senior” practitioners feel indifferent towards foundational learning. Despite the fact that they, very often, have been following the practice of Zen or Vajrayana for many years, they still engage in killing, stealing, and other non-virtues. While claiming to be Buddhists of high realization, they underrate the importance of the root practice. It is indeed shameful that there is such a lack of essential training in these basic teachings.

The *Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha Sutra* states that, “The path of the ten virtuous actions is the fundamental basis of the Great Vehicle, and the cause for *bodhi*.” The basis of Mahayana practice, the fundamental cause of bodhicitta, is the ten virtues. If one does not uphold the ten virtues, it is not possible to engender bodhicitta. Without bodhicitta, the higher states of the Zen or Vajrayana practice are certainly unattainable and one’s training in these practices cannot bring any success. It is as if one were attempting to build a castle in the air.

Specifically, the ten virtues are the roots and foundations of taking rebirth in the human and deva realms. They are, as well, the roots and foundations of all worldly and transcendental virtues, including

the realizations of shravakas, pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattvas, and even the perfect enlightenment of the tathagata. Put simply, the ten virtues are the basis of the excellent qualities of humans, devas, shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and tathagatas.

The *Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha Sutra* also says,

*To cease the various sufferings of becoming  
And to realize the supreme bodhi,  
One shall practice the ten meritorious wheels  
Strenuously without indolence.*

Should we wish to uproot all suffering in samsara and to attain supreme enlightenment, we must exert ourselves in the practice of the ten virtues without any procrastination or distraction. Unfortunately, there are many Buddhists who do not carefully observe the ten virtues. Even worse, they discourage others by giving such advice as, “No ethical disciplines are needed.” Certain gurus might also say, “Don’t worry, all things are nothing more than the projection of the mind.” These statements seem very “free and open”, as if hedonism were being encouraged, but this is like telling children that they needn’t do anything more than to play all day and that they do not need to do their homework or learn anything. Though these words might make them happy in the short term, the terrible consequences are foreseeable.

Ju Mipham Rinpoche states in his *Beacon of Certainty*,

*Because all beings are quite relaxed in their ordinary state,  
Always wandering in the three worlds of samsara,  
There is no reason to encourage or remind them!*

This means that because sentient beings are too relaxed in their ordinary state, they have been trapped in samsara and have not been able to attain freedom since beginningless time, and there is absolutely no need to remind or encourage them to indulge in comfort and pleasure. Without such a reminder, they would be still drawn to their natural indulgence and would still continue to actively engage in non-virtuous deeds. In fact, what they really need is a code of discipline for their behaviors and thoughts, and to strictly observe that code of discipline as a basic guideline for their lives.

Nagarjuna's *Discourse on the Ten Stages* states, "All unwholesome paths arise from the ten non-virtues, whereas all wholesome paths arise from the ten virtues." We should know that rebirth in the three lower realms is the result of the ten non-virtues, while rebirth in the three upper realms is the result of having behaved in accordance with the ten virtues. All of us here today have obtained this human life due to our past observance of the ten virtues. Beings suffering in the animal, hungry ghost and hell realms are reaping the karmic results of having engaged in the ten non-virtuous acts.

Not only does our virtuous and non-virtuous karma drive us to wander in the six realms of samsara, but it also exerts its force on our perception of all phenomena and the way that we experience all of the

events in our life. For instance, some people experience deprivation, or are stricken by illness, due to the non-virtues conducted in the past. Those who are fortunate in wealth, status, talent and intelligence are deserving of the fruition of their virtuous acts. Being unaware of this karmic principle, people become confused or even angry with their unfortunate experiences. In fact, we have to acknowledge that karma is a mysterious force that affects everything in our lives, even though we cannot perceive it with our naked eye.

云何为彼根本安住？所谓十善业道。若能远离杀生、偷盗、邪淫、妄语、绮语、恶口、两舌，乃至贪、嗔、邪见等，若能如是远离，是为十善业道，乃是世间、出世间根本安住。

“What are these roots and foundations? Speaking of the paths of the ten virtues, if one is able to forsake the following: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, meaningless talk, harsh words, divisive talk, covetousness, malevolence, and wrong views, one’s abandonment of these constitutes the path of the ten virtues. They are the roots and foundations for both mundane and supramundane excellence.

The Buddha listed the ten virtues as the roots and foundations for all noble worldly and transcendental qualities. They can be categorized in terms of body, speech, and mind. To follow the path of the ten virtues, one should refrain from: the three physical non-virtues of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, the four verbal non-virtues

of lying, meaningless talk, harsh words and divisive talk, and the three mental non-virtues of covetousness, malevolence and wrong views.

The ten virtues are the foundations of all practices that can be categorized together as the pursuit of liberation from samsara. This ranges from the attainment of Shravakayana or Pratyekabuddhahood, rebirth in Dewachen, and more. For those who wish to be free from cyclic existence, it is important, and necessary, to cultivate the ten virtues.

From a worldly perspective, the ten virtues are imperative for all of mankind. Whether one is a member of the laity or a monastic, an Easterner or a Westerner, privileged or underprivileged, the ten virtues apply to everyone, regardless of any differences. Other than certain uncivilized tribes that still adhere to “unethical” practices, most cultures throughout the world would agree that these codes constitute the fundamental principles of ethical behavior.

## The Virtue of No Killing

龙王，士夫补特伽罗，远离杀生获得十种善法。云何十法？所谓得无畏施；他一切众生得住慈心；得正行，得不起一切众生过失之念；得少病；乐得寿命长；得种种非人而作拥护；于眠

睡觉寤皆悉安隐；又得贤圣守护，心不厌舍，于睡梦中不见恶业苦恼之事；自得不怖一切恶趣；命终之后得生天上。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken killing will obtain ten noble qualities. What are these ten qualities? They will attain the generosity of fearlessness. They will regard all beings with love. They will uphold right conduct without generating any negative thoughts towards all beings. They will attain the comfort of having less disease. They will attain longevity. They will be guarded and protected by various non-humans. They will sleep happily and awaken happily. They will be safeguarded by noble beings without any weariness, and be free from frustrations and agony arising from negative karma even when asleep. They will have no fear of the lower realms. They will be born in the deva realm after having died.

The Buddha told the naga king Sagara, the first virtue, abstaining from killing, will bring one ten noble qualities. Here, Pudgala simply means a person, or the entity that reincarnates as an individual or a person.

“No killing” is subject not only to human beings, but to animals and beings of all kinds. In general, people only consider “murdering people” as a crime, whereas killing animals or other beings is not seen as something terrible. Such an idea can be observed in those who don’t believe in karmic law or in the existence of rebirth. There are

also cases of this attitude amongst those that are influenced by certain philosophies or have never heard about the precept of no killing.

The act of killing is horrifying regardless of the victims involved. Human beings cherish their own lives and regard them as a priority. Animals and other beings share the same instinct. From this perspective, their lives are as equally significant as ours. Oddly, people consider their own lives to be superior and disregard the value of the lives of others. For most people, cutting vegetables and chopping the fish are not seen as being in any way different from one another. When a chef is killing a fish, he appears to be numb towards the suffering of the fish. We should reflect on such a discriminating manner towards the lives of other beings.

Here are the ten noble qualities of forsaking killing:

1) One will attain the generosity of fearlessness. There are two interpretations of this quality. First, one who has refrained from killing in their past lives is capable of offering fearlessness to other beings in this life. For example, some people are very active in life liberation and will rescue as many captive animals as they can.

The second interpretation is that because one has forsaken killing in past lives, they are fearless toward other beings in this life. A lot of us have an unreasonable fear of others. Some people are frightened of going out at night or are worried about running into enemies. Additionally, they may be scared of being harmed by ghosts or non-human beings, etc. They don't realize that it is because of their past

actions that they are constantly filled with fear. Yet, those who have forsaken killing in their past lives do not suffer this kind of fear.

2) One will regard all beings with love. Those who have ceased killing in their past lives have innate love and compassion towards all beings, and all beings will also have an affinity towards them. Thus, they do not have any enemies.

3) One will uphold right conduct without generating any negative thoughts towards any other beings. Because one has forsaken killing in their past lives, they do not harbor harmful intentions or such emotions as anger, nor do they hold grudges towards sentient beings in this life. Having refrained from killing, one is kind to everyone without seeking to manipulate or cause harm to others. Such negative thoughts, as well as any habitual intentions or tendencies, are all eradicated from one's mind. Unfortunately, some people are the complete opposite of this and frequently reside in a state of anger and hatred. Such an unbalanced state of mind does not happen to those who have abstained from killing in their past lives.

4) One will attain the comfort of having less disease. Having refrained from killing in past lives, one is less troubled by illness in this life. Some people are very healthy and hardly ever suffer from illness, whereas others are forced to rely on lots of medications and long-term treatment. As a Tibetan expression goes, they consume more medicinal powders than tsampa. In the Tibetan region, tsampa is a staple food that is consumed for breakfast, lunch, and supper.

Unfortunately, some people take more medicine each day than their staple food.

The causes of health issues could be an imbalance of the four primary elements (earth, water, fire, air), or the karmic result of having killed in previous lives. Yet, some people seem to come to other conclusions. At Larung Gar, some monastics attributed their health issues to the high plateau climate, so after having become ill, they returned to their home cities. In spite of this, the condition of their health continued to deteriorate, and even worse, some of them were unfortunate enough to have passed away soon after. Although I'm not concluding that, in every case, there was a connection between killing and their illness, it is important not to underestimate the karmic effects caused by our non-virtuous actions in past lives.

Good health is one of the karmic rewards of no killing. Everyone wishes to have good health and to be free from ailments in all lifetimes. The most efficient method to achieve this is to stop killing. If you have previously committed killings, be sure to free more captive lives and also to confess your negative actions frequently. Otherwise, you will remain indebted to the lives you had taken away and one day, the karmic debt will catch up to you and cause grave agony to your body.

5) One will attain longevity in this life. If one has refrained from killing in past lives, one actually has planted the seed for extending life. There are many people who have lived very long lives, some to

well over 100 years. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the oldest person who has ever lived made it to 122 years old. Well, for me, I guess that eighty years of age is probably enough. When I am no longer capable of caring for myself, I'd rather pass away. In any case, a long lifespan is the maturation of virtues resulting from non-killing, while a short life is often the result of taking the lives of others in the past.

6) One will be guarded and protected by non-humans. Should one have refrained from killing in one's past lives, one is safeguarded and supported in this life by many Dharmapalas and other non-human beings. Whether staying at home or travelling, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, in any daily activities and at all times, one is under the protection of non-humans. For instance, when one goes out, many Dharmapalas will take action to encircle and protect him. By contrast, if a man has committed lots of killing in the past, instead of being protected, many hostile non-human beings will follow to drain his energy and vitality. This is especially terrifying.

7) One will sleep happily and awaken happily. Should one have abandoned killing in their past lives, one will enjoy a good quality of sleep in this life, never being perturbed by any nightmare. Some people suffer from poor quality sleep and either have a hard time falling asleep or are only able to have intermittent rest. They might rely on sleeping pills to fall asleep, but then have to endure drowsiness the next day. This can be attributed to either poor health conditions

or their past non-virtuous deeds. In the latter case, the best antidote is confession.

The other day, a lama told me, "I used to suffer from having trouble sleeping, but now I'm very happy if I don't fall asleep because I can use the time to meditate or recite mantras." This is a good method of transforming negativity into positive use.

8) One will be safeguarded by many noble beings, such as venerables, gurus and Dharmapalas, and will also be free from the frustrations and agony that arises from negative karma even when asleep. Because this person had abstained from killing in their past lives, noble beings will protect them continuously in this life. As a result, such individuals will not experience any agony or fear, even in their dreams.

People who had engaged in killing in the past are rejected by others naturally. These people's bosses, teachers and so forth, will not appreciate them and will become easily frustrated with them. Conversely, those who have turned away from killing in the past, are always welcomed and adored by others. Even when asleep, they will have no dreams that concern disputes with their gurus, parents, superiors, and such. Those who live a rather complicated or manipulated life are often troubled by unpleasant dreams. Actually, the state of dreaming closely depends on an individual's mental state and karmic effects. The karmic reward of no killing ensures us a peaceful mind.

9) One will not experience the fear of the animal, hungry ghost and

hell realms. In other words, one will not fall into the three lower realms.

10) One will take rebirth in the celestial realms after their earthly death.

龙王，士夫补特伽罗，获得如是十种善法，行菩萨道，得善心住，善根成熟，当得无上正等菩提。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken killing will obtain those ten noble qualities. If they follow the path of the bodhisattva and abide in virtuous mind, their roots of virtue will mature into unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

Above are the ten noble qualities resulting from no killing. Furthermore, as is explained in the *Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha Sutra*:

*He who abstains from killing,  
Is admired and remembered by humans and devas,  
Will enjoy longevity in all lifetimes,  
And not be threatened by harms when practicing virtues.*

So, for those who have observed the virtue of no killing, all beings in the human and deva realms will respect, appreciate, and safeguard them. They will not suffer from a premature death or a short life span. Meanwhile, no obstructions or harm will threaten his engagement in virtuous deeds.

In the course of cultivating virtues, some people are confronted by any of a number of unfavorable conditions. Whether it is dissent within one's family, limited resources, and so on, most of these obstacles are likely due to the karmic effect of killing. Many people come to Larung Gar to pursue the Dharma, yet they're challenged by all sorts of difficulties: career crisis, disagreement from their gurus, criticism from colleagues, objections from their families, and so forth. As such, we can never underestimate the connection between these types of adversities and one's past karma.

The Buddha further concluded that, once a person has attained the ten noble qualities of no killing, if he can follow the bodhisattva path, guiding and dedicating all his practices with the motivation of bodhicitta, his virtuous roots will mature into unexcelled and perfect enlightenment. Consequently, as is said in the Tibetan and Siksananda version of this sutra, he who has renounced killing will attain the "mastery of lifespan", enjoying the freedom to determine the length of their own life.

As a Buddhist, one must refrain from killing by all means. Occasionally, people will express doubts about this: "How can we stop killing? We have to eat meat." "You must consume meat to stay healthy!" "If there is no killing and everyone assumes monasticism, what will be left to eat?" Actually, if people truly care for their own well-being, they'd better recognize the inevitable torment that habitual killing will bring to them. It would be silly to underestimate the magnitude

of this karmic effect. Killing not only makes this life miserable, but will also bring unbearable suffering in future lifetimes.

Therefore, I'd urge Buddhists not to partake in any form of killing. If you are unable to practice vegetarianism, do your best not to eat anything whose death has been ordered for you. It would also be great if you were to participate in life liberation. The merit in rescuing captive lives is immense. If you don't come across these opportunities, do your best not to engage in the killing of other beings.

Vegetarianism is such an exceptional feature of Han Buddhism. With all the proper conditions in place, there should be no excuses for not practicing a plant-based diet. Strictly speaking, there are no occasions where consuming the lives of other beings is permissible. However, there could be rare exceptions where one's life is in danger and meat must be taken for medicinal purposes. Even so, one should only take "three-pure meat" and regard it as a kind of medicine.

For vegetarians, never forsake this virtuous practice due to the acts of certain gurus or the influence of others. There have been cases of long-term vegetarians who changed their minds under the influence of others. For ordinary beings, non-virtuous habitual tendencies are deeply rooted, whereas the awareness that leads one to be virtuous is weak. Consequently, because we regress easily from the path of virtuous practice, it is crucial to keep right mindfulness and remain persistent in our virtuous deeds.

As Mahayana practitioners, not only must we refrain from killing, we should also be willing to sacrifice our lives for others. Here's a story found in the *Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*:

In a butcher's household, the parents wished for their son to adhere to the family business. The child had a very kind and gentle nature and had never harmed a single being and so he refused to become a butcher. The parents were very forceful and one day they locked him up with a sheep and a knife and demanded that he kill the sheep before they would let him out. The child felt very sad and thought to himself, "If I kill the sheep, we will both suffer a lot. Having been killed, the sheep will have undergone great pain and horror, but being the killer, I will be karmically indebted to be killed in lifetimes to come. So, the best solution will be for me to kill myself, so that the sheep is saved and I will only need to be killed this once, instead of being killed over and over again in lifetime after lifetime.

The parents waited for a long time outside the door, assuming that the son was inside killing the sheep. Sadly, when they eventually opened the door, they found that only their child was dead. They regretted their actions terribly but there was nothing that they could do to bring their son back. Although it was a heart-breaking ending for the parents, the child's strict observance of no killing resulted in his immediate rebirth in the deva realm.

The Buddhist concept of protecting lives is unique because it takes all sentient beings into consideration, including humans, animals, and

also ghosts and non-humans that are invisible to ordinary people. There are few traditions or religions that share this same idea with Buddhism. I came across some Jains when I visited a university in the United States. Jainism is an ancient religion that was rooted in India over 4,000 years ago. Their tradition of valuing all life does share a few commonalities with Buddhist philosophy. In Ju Mipham Rinpoche's commentary on *Ornament of the Middle Way*, he introduced Digambara, one of the two Jainist principal sects who maintain the practice of neither possessing nor wearing any clothes. He mentioned that the Digambara followers would tie bells around their ankles to alert insects to move away, so that they would not accidentally step on them. When I discussed this topic with the Jains I met, it was really interesting to find out about the things that Jainism and Buddhism have in common.

## The Virtue of No Stealing

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离偷盗，获得十依止法。云何为十？所谓得大富自在，得免王难得免水火贼盗冤家之难；得多眷属善顺和睦；得多人爱乐不相苦恼；凡所言说一切谛信；得无量财宝皆悉集聚；得此方他方一切称赞，于一切行处无怖无畏；得他称善名赞于智慧；又得色力寿命辞辩相应；于亲非亲心无分别不生恼害；命终之后得生天界。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken stealing will obtain ten qualities of adherence. What are these ten qualities? They will have great wealth and that wealth will not be taken by kings, fire, water, thieves, or enemies. They will attract a great retinue that is kind, obedient and complaisant. They will be well liked by others and not subjected to afflictions. Whatever they say will be credible and trustworthy. They will amass boundless treasures. They will be praised by people in every direction, and they will have no fear wherever they go. They will receive a good reputation and be praised for their wisdom. They will obtain beauty, power, longevity, eloquence and happiness. They will not discriminate against close or non-close ones, nor will they generate any harmful intents towards them. After death, they will be born in the deva realm.

The Buddha talked about the ten qualities derived from the second virtue, the observation of no stealing. In the Siksānanda version, “the ten qualities of adherence” are said to be the qualities that can protect one’s confidence. In the Tibetan version, they are referred to as the “ten qualities of affirmations”. Despite these slight differences, the various versions all refer to the ten qualities acquired after one has committed to refraining from stealing.

Although the ten qualities mentioned in the three versions are not exactly the same, this should cause no problems. Some of the scholars who study Buddhist scriptures become quite skeptical when faced

with varied versions of the same sutra. Because of certain differences, they make judgments on which version should be considered to be the official one, while stating that the others are incorrect. These kinds of judgments are not necessarily valid.

When the Buddha was delivering teachings, there were lots of arhats present. They recorded the teachings with their unfailing memories. For this reason, many versions of the same sutra were available. This is fairly common among Sanskrit scriptures, including the *Diamond Sutra*, *Verse Summary of Prajnaparamita*, *The Heart Sutra* and so forth. It is unreasonable to determine that any one version is the sole authoritative version, while stating that the others are erroneous.

It is like a teacher giving a lecture to a group of students. Say, four students were taking notes. Surely, their notes would not be the same. One reason is that each of them has their own way of interpreting the information that they are receiving. The second reason is that their styles of recording are different. Also, for certain profound teachings, their comprehension and insight is likely to be different. This is even more likely to happen in the case of the Buddha's teaching, as just by saying one sentence, the Buddha can provide different antidotes to different beings' mental afflictions in accordance with their different habitual tendencies. Therefore, it is understandable that there would be several versions of the same discourse.

Now we move on to the ten qualities of adherence obtained from no stealing:

1) He will enjoy great wealth in this life and his wealth will remain stable without being looted by the five households of king, fire, water, thieves and enemies. It means that his properties will not be confiscated by the government, lost in disasters or taken away by thieves, relatives or enemies. If, on the other hand, someone were to undergo these kinds of adversity, it might be the result of one's stealing in the past and would not have happened if one had never created the karma of stealing in the past.

2) He will have a large retinue and close companions in this life, all of whom will be very kind and complaisant, getting along with each other harmoniously without any conflicts or disputes.

3) He will be well liked and trusted by others and not subjected to afflictions in this life. He will not often feel disturbed but rather, will be joyful every day.

4) He will be a credible man and his words will be deemed to be reliable and trustworthy. The Tibetan version offers a more inclusive aspect of this, as it does not limit itself to the quality of speech. It also states that all his behaviors will be pleasing to all beings.

5) He will amass boundless treasures in this life, as substantial wealth will naturally be drawn to him. In the Tibetan version, it says that he will be trusted by those who have wealth, or said differently, his financial companions will all be reliable.

On the contrary, if one has engaged in lots of stealing in the past, he will mistrust others and his wealth will end up in the wrong hands. Some people are always scheming ways to scam others' money through business. A while back, the stock market collapsed and lots of people lost their money overnight. Some of them had entrusted their money to others to invest on their behalf. Sadly, the investors and the money just disappeared. There are way too many cases like this. However, someone who has not stolen in the past will not experience these kinds of financial losses in this life. Instead, he will gather wealth easily, and if others entrust their money to him, they won't ever have to worry or doubt him.

6) He will be praised by people from everywhere and he will have no fear wherever he goes. In the Siksanda version, it is said that "one is without fear in public". For instance, he is not intimidated when it comes to delivering presentations in public. Some Dharma friends are so scared to do an oral presentation that when faced with it, they begin trembling nervously. So, we do need such a quality of being fearless in whatever we do.

7) He will receive a good reputation and in particular, his wisdom will become renowned and admired by many people.

8) He will obtain excellent and respectable physical attributes in this life. He will be endowed with great energy, strength, longevity, eloquence and peace, and he will be happy all the time.

9) He will be impartial towards close ones and non-close ones. Neither harmful intent nor discriminative thought will ever arise in his mind. Some people tend to generate malicious thoughts toward others. Not only do they not get along with others, but they also can't keep harmonious familial relations. Conflicts are always happening around them. I've heard about a couple who fought a lot. They both wanted a divorce, yet it was never finalized. How agonizing it must be! On the other hand, some people never get involved in conflicts with others and are able to work well and get along with their families and colleagues. Maintaining a positive ambiance with others is also the karmic fruition of past deeds.

Recently, we held an appraisal for monastic Dharma teachers. Certain individuals received great overall comments from others while others did not. Surely, different people may hold different opinions towards one person, but certain people always seem to win the heart of the majority. Undoubtedly, one's credibility and reputation are influenced by one's karma.

10) He will be reborn in the celestial realms after an earthly death.

龙王，士夫补特伽罗，远离偷盗获，得如是十依止法。以彼善根，于诸佛法，自能证知，当得无上正等正觉。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken stealing will obtain those ten qualities of adherence. By such virtuous roots, they

will be able to realize all Buddhadharma and attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

A person who has refrained from stealing will acquire the abovementioned ten qualities of adherence. If they can dedicate these virtuous roots with bodhicitta, by wishing all beings to attain Buddhahood, they will gradually eliminate all afflictions and acquire pure wisdom by following the course of Dharma study and practice and in the end, will attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

In *The Questions of Pratibhanamati*, the Buddha says, “Forsaking stealing leads to great wealth, thus money, property and treasure will naturally appear.” If one has not engaged in stealing, and furthermore, always helped others to protect their savings, good fortune will be rolling his way naturally. Some people seem to make money easily while others only seem to spend it quickly. Actually, the karma of stealing can cause one’s money to dissipate imperceptibly, just as if it had been stolen by a thief. Without noticing how it happened, one’s money has already gone. This is the karmic retribution of stealing. Without such karma, one will accumulate wealth quickly and easily.

## The Virtue of No Sexual Misconduct

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离邪淫，获得四智善法。云何为四？所谓降伏诸根；离于散乱；得世间一切称赞；复得无量营从。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken sexual misconduct will obtain four virtuous qualities of wisdom. What are these four qualities? They will have restraint of the senses. They will part from distractions. They will be praised by the whole world. They will be surrounded by an entourage of countless beings.

One will attain four virtuous qualities of wisdom if one has abstained from sexual misconduct in past lives.

1) He will gain restraint of his sensory faculties, thus his seeing, hearing, taste, smell and touch will be amenable and pure. On the contrary, one who has indulged in unchaste conduct will experience susceptible and untamed sensory faculties and he will be constantly disturbed by greed, aversion, and ignorance. He will be somewhat aware of his uncontrollable mind and others will be intimidated by his strong emotion.

Some well-trained practitioners demonstrate tamed and tender sensory faculties. For instance, the departments of Arhat Ashvajit and Maudgalyayana were exceptionally peaceful, because they had eradicated greed and aversion for many lifetimes and would never generate any harmful intent to others. Nowadays, we can also see some lay practitioners who demonstrate consistent and peaceful behavior that delivers a positive impression to others.

2) He will avoid complicated lifestyles and his body, speech, and

mind will be free from distracting causes and conditions. As a result, his physical and mental states will be at peace and ease.

3) He will be extolled in many aspects by others.

4) He will have a large retinue of numerous beings. This quality is described somewhat differently in the translations of the other two versions. In the Siksānanda version, it is “his wife will not be encroached upon by others”, and in the Tibetan version, it also mentions that his relationship with his spouse will be harmonious.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离邪淫，获得如是四智善法。以此善根，当得无上正等正觉，复证大丈夫阴藏隐密之相。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken sexual misconduct will obtain those four virtuous qualities of wisdom. By such virtuous roots, they will achieve the unexcelled and perfect enlightenment, and also their male organ will be withdrawn, which is a mark of a great being.

As a person has refrained from sexual misconduct, he will acquire the abovementioned four virtuous qualities of wisdom. If he can dedicate these virtuous roots with the motivation of bodhicitta, wishing all beings to attain Buddhahood, he will achieve unexcelled and perfect enlightenment, and will also obtain the sign of a well-withdrawn male organ, one of the thirty-two marks of the Buddha.

As we have concluded the merits produced from all the three physical virtues, we will next describe the four verbal virtues: no lying, no meaningless talk, no harsh words and no divisive talk.

## The Virtue of No Lying

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离妄语，获得天上人间八种善法。云何为八？所谓得口处清净常如青莲华香；又得世间一切正见；得天上人间一切爱乐；得身口意清净，化彼一切有情令住三业清净之行；得清净已咸皆欢喜；得真实语言必诚信；得过人辩所出言辞咸有方便；于天上人间离诸过失。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken lying will obtain eight noble qualities in the deva and human realms. What are these eight qualities? They will have a clean and pure mouth with the scent of a blue lotus. They will acquire the right view of the world. They will be beloved by gods and humans. They will attain purification in body, speech, and mind, and also enable all beings whom they intend to influence, to abide in the purity of the body, speech and mind. Their purification will make everyone rejoice. Their speech will be truthful and credible. They will be endowed with remarkable eloquence, and all their words will possess expedient means. They will be free from all faults in the deva and human realms.

If a person refrained from lying in past lives, he will obtain eight noble qualities in the deva and human realms:

1) His breath will be naturally fragrant, like the scent of a blue lotus. On the other hand, if one often told lies in the past, his breath will have an unpleasant odor. Some people's breath has an unpleasant odor due to poor oral hygiene while others seem to be born with it. The latter could be karmically related.

2) He will acquire the right view of the world, and consequently, his words will be considered authoritative and trustworthy.

3) He will be well respected, beloved and trusted by gods and humans, and constantly receive protection from them.

4) His body, speech, and mind will be purified. Because of this purification, those beings whom he intends to teach and convert, will also be able to purify their physical, verbal, and mental karma.

5) His purification of body, speech, and mind will bring about appreciation and rejoicing from others.

6) His speech will be truthful and credible and he will be trusted by everyone.

7) He will excel in eloquence and whatever he says will possess skillful means.

8) He will part from all defects in the human and deva realms, and his wisdom can overcome anything.

龙王，士夫补特伽罗，远离妄语，获得如是天上人间八种善法。而彼善根，获得口业清净，诚实正行，当得无上正等正觉。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken lying will obtain those eight noble qualities in the deva and human realms. By such virtuous roots, their verbal karma will be purified, they will act with honesty and right conduct, and attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

A person who has refrained from lying, will acquire the abovementioned eight noble qualities in the human and deva realms. These virtuous roots will lead that person to gradually purify his verbal karma and uphold right conduct. If he dedicates his virtuous roots with the motivation of bodhicitta, he will attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment. Here “honesty and right conduct” in the Tibetan version refers to truthful words, meaning that he will obtain one of the Buddha’s qualities that all his words are in accord with the truth.

In this version, the next verbal virtue is “forsaking meaningless talk”. In the Tibetan and Siksānanda version, the second one is “forsaking divisive talk”. This slight variation in the sequence might be due to

some difference in the Sanskrit versions and shouldn't be considered to be a big deal.

## The Virtue of No Meaningless Talk

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离绮语，当得三种一向之法。云何三种？所谓得知法者一向爱乐；得一向真实，复生智慧；得一向为人天师，天上人间一切信乐。

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离绮语，获得如是三种一向之法。以此善根，回向菩提，得一切如来授记，当证无上正等正觉。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken meaningless talk will obtain three complete certainties. What are these three? They will certainly be appreciated by those who have a comprehensive understanding of all phenomena. They will certainly reach the truth and attain wisdom. They will certainly become the teachers of gods and humans, and be trusted and appreciated by gods and humans.

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken meaningless talk will obtain those three complete certainties. If they dedicate these roots of virtue toward bodhi, they will be prophesized by all tathagatas to attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

A person who has refrained from meaningless talk in their past lives will acquire three complete certainties:

1) He will certainly be granted recognition by those wise ones who have mastered the principle of all phenomena. These wise ones will appreciate his views and opinions because they will all be in accordance with the truth.

2) He will certainly attain the wisdom of the truth and cut through all doubts; therefore, his answer to any question will be reasonable.

3) He will certainly become a teacher of gods and humans, and will receive supreme reverence from them because his speech is devoid of flattery, deception or distortion. Beings in the deva and human realms will trust and respect him, and take delight in seeing him.

These are three complete certainties that one can obtain if one has refrained from meaningless talk. If one further dedicates these roots of virtue with the motivation of bodhicitta, he will be prophesized by all tathagatas to attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

## The Virtue of No Harsh Words

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离恶口，获得八种口过清淨，而得八种善法。云何为八？所谓实语、爱语、依义语、软语、离取语、多人爱乐语、善语、有义利语。

龙王，士夫补特伽罗，远离恶口，获得如是八种清净口业。以此善根，回向善提，当来证得无上正等正觉，复得最上清净梵音。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken harsh words will obtain eight purities of speech. What are these eight? They are truthful speech, pleasant speech, reasonable speech, gentle speech, speech away from miscomprehension, speech that pleases many beings, kind speech, and meaningful and beneficial speech.

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken harsh words will obtain those eight purities of speech. If they dedicate these roots of virtue toward bodhi, they will attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment, and will also be endowed with the utmost pure voices that resound like Brahma’s speech.

If a person has refrained from harsh words in their past lives, they will obtain eight purities of speech:

- 1) Their speech will be truthful and free of any fault.
- 2) Their speech will be pleasant and beneficial to sentient beings.
- 3) Their speech will be reasonable and in accordance with the truth.
- 4) Their speech will be gentle and make others feel comfortable and agreeable.

- 5) Their speech will be acceptable and comprehensible and won't lead a listener to generating any misunderstanding.
- 6) Their speech will please many people and make listeners willing to accept it.
- 7) Their speech will be kind and free from ridicule and denigration.
- 8) Their speech will have a profound meaning and bring sentient beings both temporary and ultimate benefits.

It is very important to refrain from harmful words that slander or denigrate others. Unfortunately, the Internet has now become the biggest platform to accumulate such seriously negative karma. Unfounded or slanderous language can be seen everywhere. If one forwards this kind of harsh language, then regardless of whether its content is real or not, if it speaks about others' faults, it certainly brings no good to the forwarder. In fact, the forwarder will also be contaminated by the negative karma of lying or denigration.

Some people might consider themselves to be fighters for justice and thus, post about other's wrongdoings. Yet, a message like this can be shared so many times that it creates a negative impact that is far-ranging, both in distance and effect. As a result, the initiator of the post will end up accumulating enormous non-virtuous karma. In contrast, if we share stories that encourage kindness and virtue, we can accumulate a great deal of merit. By inspiring others to learn more about positivity, we also will benefit from this virtuous act and will

accumulate virtuous karma. So, when we come across postings that aggravate negative ideas or perturbed views, we should delete them instead of sharing them, because they are harmful to both ourselves and to others.

I'd like to stress this again: we must be very careful with our actions in this modern age. The wave-like effect of a non-virtuous activity can be multiplied exponentially in a very short time. The other day I saw an article about modern trawling, which is a kind of fishing. In the past, fishermen could only catch limited numbers of fish with their tiny boats and equipment. Nowadays, trawling has become one of the most advanced but contentious technologies, as it can lead to overfishing and environmental destruction. Similarly, in the past, a person's slanderous speech would only take place within a small group of people, and only for a short period of time, whereas nowadays it can be spread quickly to the entire world and its harmful influence can remain active for days, months or even years. In this degenerated age, people are equipped with various techniques to engage in either meritorious or unmeritorious deeds. Therefore, we must be extra mindful of our physical, verbal, and mental conduct and stay away from non-virtuous involvements.

Back to the text. By avoiding the usage of harsh words, a person will acquire the eight purities of speech. If he dedicates these roots of virtue with the motivation of bodhicitta, he will attain unexcelled

and perfect enlightenment, and will also be endowed with an utmost pure voice that resounds like the voice of Brahma.

## The Virtue of No Divisive Talk

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离两舌，当得五种坚固。云何五种坚固？所谓得身坚固，当得远离一切怖畏之难故；得眷属坚固，不为他人之所贪故；得信坚固，获得信业果报故；得法坚固，获得果证坚牢故；得善友坚固，常得爱语摄受故。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken divisive talk will obtain five incorruptible qualities. What are these five incorruptible qualities? They will obtain indestructible bodies, because they have parted from the adversity of being horrified by others. They will obtain an unswerving retinue because their retinue will not become the subject of another’s greed. They will obtain unwavering faith because they trust that karma bears fruit. Their Dharma practice will be undestroyed because they have accomplished the fruition of the practice. They will obtain unshakable friendship because they always receive loving speech from their spiritual friends.

If a person has refrained from divisive talk in past lives, he will obtain five incorruptible qualities:

1) His physical state will be indestructible and free from the terror caused by human or non-human beings. Not only is his physical strength stable, but his mind is also stable and always possesses a sense of security.

2) His retinue remains unswerving and persistent, and won't leave him behind because of their self-interested pursuits.

We can see examples of this in some Dharma groups. Some disciples remain with their guru for decades without their earnestness ever wavering. On the other hand, certain guru-student relationships are quite volatile. Also, in our daily life we can easily notice that some people have shaky relationships with their family members or their business partners. Undoubtedly, these unstable relationships are the result of their past negative karma. As it is essential to develop a stable and reliable personality, I'd encourage you to work on this. If you have inspired a strong faith in Buddhism, be sure that you're even more affirmed in your faith when you're about to pass away in old age. When you have regarded a teacher as your guide, be sure to attend him or her for the rest of your life and if you've developed a conviction in a specific text, be sure to review it repeatedly.

3) He will have an unshakable faith in the karmic law of cause and effect. This certainty will be immovable.

4) His Dharma practice will be firmly grounded and undestroyed, because he has accomplished the fruition of his practice. He will remain persistent and unshakable throughout his Dharma practice,

until he attains the full qualification of that practice. For instance, if such a practitioner focuses on cultivating bodhicitta, he will pour all his effort into this practice. If such a practitioner focuses on renunciation, again, he will practice it persistently until he generates the unshakable mind of renunciation. Regrettably, some practitioners will pursue one type of practice today, and then change to another one tomorrow. In that case, they can hardly accomplish the fruition of their practice.

A man told me once, "I'm no longer practicing." I wondered, "You mean, you've given up on Buddhism entirely? Or you've given up on the teaching of a specific guru?"

"The latter." He replied.

"What is your plan going forward?"

"I'm going to change the guru and the ritual texts. That way, I'll only need to reboot the whole program. . . ." (*audience laughs*)

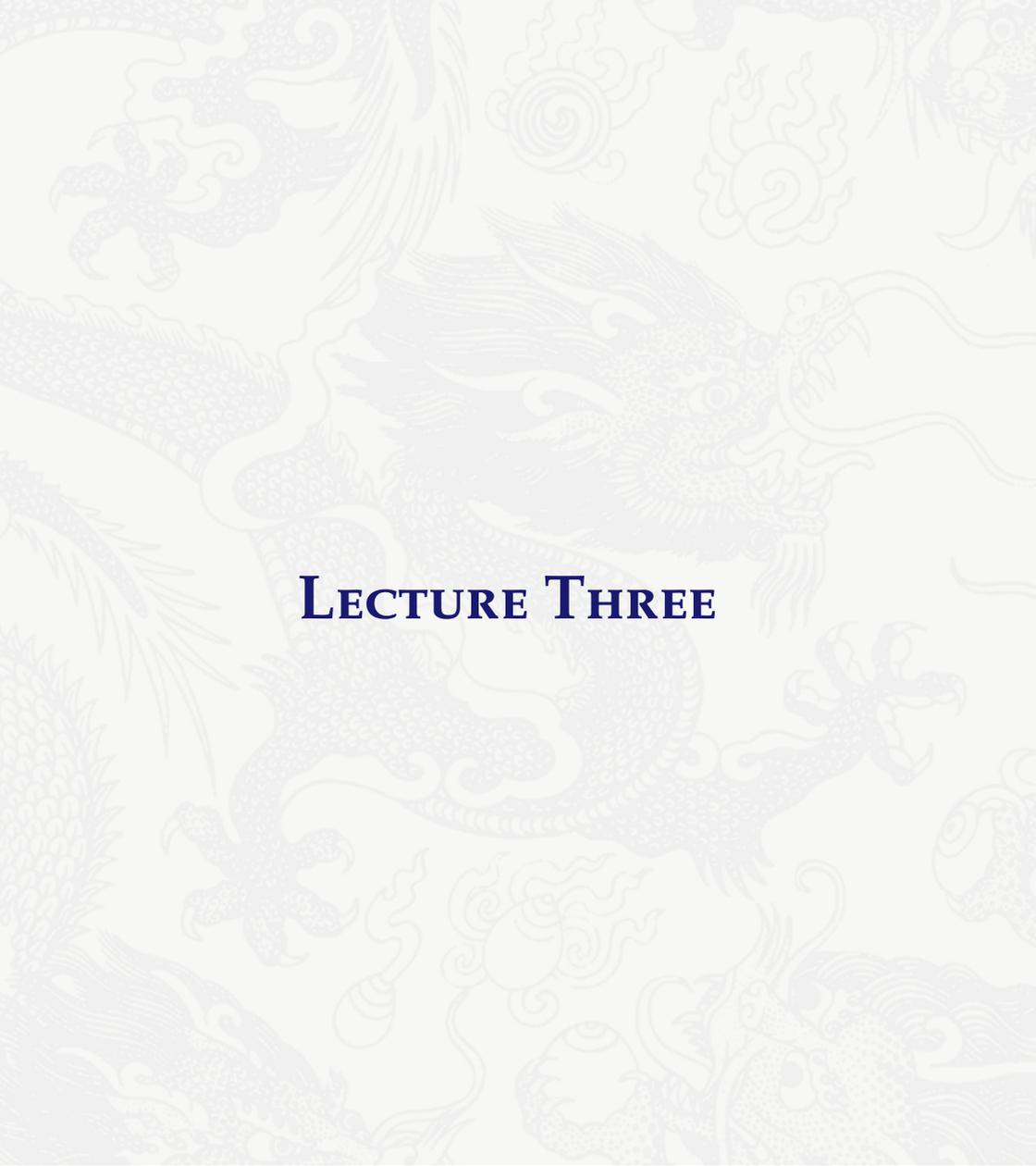
5) His connection with his spiritual teachers and companions will be unbreakable and he will always receive loving speech from them.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离两舌，获得如是五种坚固。以彼善根，回向菩提，当证无上正等正觉，使彼一切外道魔王等，咸不能破坏故。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken divisive talk will obtain those five incorruptible qualities. If they dedicate these roots of virtue toward bodhi, they will attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment, and no tirthikas or maras can cause any damage to them.

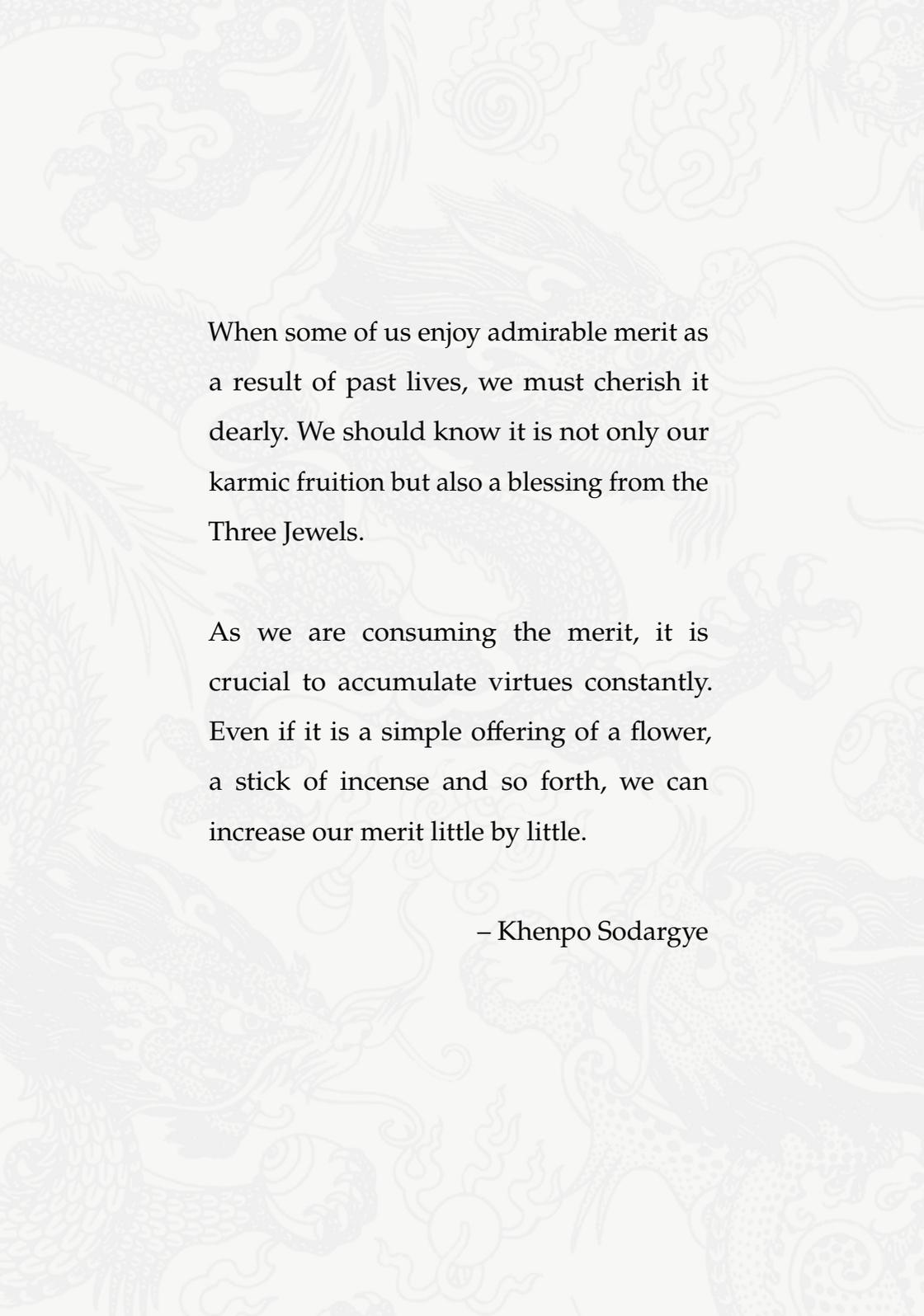
If one has abstained from divisive talk, he will acquire these five incorruptible qualities. If he dedicates these roots of virtue with the motivation of bodhicitta, he will attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment, and as a result, no maras, hostile forces, or tirthikas can cause him even the slightest harm.

Above are the merits generated from all of the four verbal virtues. Speaking of all the virtues we’ve touched on today, I hope that you will all safeguard your body, speech, and mind to vigorously observe them.



# LECTURE THREE

COMMENTARY ON  
*THE QUESTIONS OF THE NAGA KING SAGARA*



When some of us enjoy admirable merit as a result of past lives, we must cherish it dearly. We should know it is not only our karmic fruition but also a blessing from the Three Jewels.

As we are consuming the merit, it is crucial to accumulate virtues constantly. Even if it is a simple offering of a flower, a stick of incense and so forth, we can increase our merit little by little.

– Khenpo Sodargye

# Lecture Three

In the last lecture, we explained the merits of the three physical virtues and the four verbal virtues. Today, we'll learn about the merits of observing the three mental virtues.

The concept of the ten virtues has been deeply rooted in every Tibetan's mind. However, I've seen a negative change in some individuals recently. Certain Tibetans with prejudice do not believe in the karmic law of cause and effect, so they make this kind of comment on the Internet: "Since you monastics have set the rule of the ten virtues for laymen, we're also setting ten new rules for you ordained ones, such as not allowing you to go into towns for receiving offering. . ." This kind of person has little idea that the ten virtues are not exclusive to lay practitioners but applicable to everyone. They are the fundamental codes of conduct that should be obeyed by everyone. Otherwise, we will engage in actions that are negative by nature and can bring us detrimental results in this and future lifetimes.

Nowadays, it seems there are increasing cases of people criticizing monastics and monasteries. From another perspective, this may not be

entirely negative. We can't label people as evil just because they hold different opinions. For many years, over and over again, Devadatta plotted to resist and harm the Buddha. Yet, he was also prophesized to attain Buddhahood. Therefore, it is natural to encounter different opinions and people whom we don't get along with. Their existence is necessary for our development.

## The Virtue of No Malevolence

龙王，士夫补特伽罗，远离贪毒，获得八种善法。云何为八？所谓得贪心消除；得杀心不生；得嫉妒心不生；得乐生圣族心为圣人尊重；得慈心；以善业利益一切众生；得身端正得多人尊重；得生于梵世。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken malevolence will obtain eight noble qualities. What are these eight? Their minds will be free from covetousness. Their minds will be free from the intent of killing. Their minds will be free from jealousy. They will be inclined to be born in noble families and be respected by noble beings. Their minds will be fulfilled with lovingkindness. They will benefit all sentient beings through virtuous acts. They will obtain dignified and elegant physical attributes and be respected by many people. They will attain rebirth in the Brahma realm.

In the Chinese version, it is said forsaking “covetousness” will lead to these eight noble qualities. However, comparing this with the Tibetan version and Siksanda’s version, it appears that “covetousness” is likely a misprinting. It should be “malevolence” instead, which makes more sense because it corresponds to the eight noble qualities to be explained.

If a person has refrained from malevolence, he will obtain these eight noble qualities:

1) His covetousness will be pacified. In the other two versions, this first quality is stated as “being free from the desire to injure or annoy others.”

2) He will not generate the intent to kill or harm other beings.

3) He will not give rise to jealousy in any situation. In the other two versions, it is explained as “his mind will be free from the desire to dispute and to argue,” meaning that there will be no competitions, disputes, or conflicts involving him.

4) He will take rebirth in a noble class of family and be respected by noble beings. Noble family and noble beings are explained in the *Abhidharmakosa* as those beings who possess four qualities. They are: 1) being content with clothes, 2) being content with food and drink, 3) being content with bedding, and 4) enjoying the practice of abandoning non-virtues and cultivating virtues. If one has not inflicted harm on others in past lives, he is much more likely to take

rebirth in a noble family with these qualities and to be well respected by others.

5) His mind will be fulfilled with lovingkindness, and he will develop genuine compassion towards all living beings with no exception.

6) He will benefit all living beings greatly through all kinds of virtuous acts in terms of his body, speech and mind.

7) His physical attributes will be dignified and elegant, and his personality, deportment, wisdom and compassion will also become remarkable. Due to these qualities, people will respect him sincerely.

The differences between people can be very great. Some people are well-recognized with praises while others experience quite the opposite. There are those who are both praised and criticized. All of these various experiences are none other than the influence of past karma. On some occasions, people's self-evaluation also plays a negative role. Some individuals believe that they are superior when that is not actually the case. Yet, there are also people with very low self-esteem who are actually doing pretty well. In either case, feeling arrogant or worthless is unnecessary.

8) He will take rebirth in the Brahma realm after having died.

龙王，士夫补特伽罗，远离贪毒，获得如是八种善法。以此善法，回向菩提，心不退转，当证无上正等正觉。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken malevolence will obtain those eight noble qualities. If they dedicate these roots of virtue toward bodhi without ever regressing on the path, they will attain the unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

If a person has refrained from malevolence, he will obtain the above-mentioned eight noble qualities. If he dedicates these roots of virtue with the motivation of bodhicitta and never retrogress on the path, he will attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment. In the other two versions, it is also mentioned that he will attain the mind of the Buddha that is free from obstructions and that he will be the one whom others never tire of seeing.

Here malevolence can include negative emotions like jealousy, competitiveness, aggression, harmful intention and so forth. As a Dharma practitioner, one must be free from all these destructive emotions. If you're hot-tempered and easily irritated, you'd better tame your mind through the practice of patience. As you develop patience, you'll acquire happiness naturally. As *The Way of the Bodhisattva* states,

*Those who seize and crush their anger down  
Will find their joy in this and future lives.*

If one strives to destroy anger, their enemy, one will enjoy happiness in this and future lifetimes. Once a practitioner told me that he had never generated a single afflictive thought in the past five or six years.

I didn't believe this at first, so I asked the people around him. Truly, he was constantly at ease and hardly troubled by anything.

On the contrary, if one is consumed by aggression or anger, one's life will be devoid of joy and peace. *The Way of the Bodhisattva* says,

*Those tormented by the pain of anger,  
Never know tranquility of mind—  
Strangers they will be to every pleasure;  
They will neither sleep nor feel secure.*

Aggressive people are so constantly agitated that they get into disputes with others easily and suffer from poor sleep quality. Even worse, they are occupied by plans to compete and battle against others. How sad! I'd encourage these people to calm their minds through the practice of patience or to try to recognize the empty essence of aggression. These are the efficient antidotes to crush destructive emotions.

## The Virtue of No Covetousness

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离嗔毒，当得五种胜愿圆满。云何为五？所谓修身口意不退诸根不乱；当得一切广大富贵圆满，得冤家降伏；得一切广大福德圆满；得受人天最上供养；得一切广大功德圆满。于最上受用，心所欲者，皆得圆满，如为富贵发百千最上胜愿，如愿圆满。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken covetousness will gain the fulfillment of five supreme wishes. What are these five? Their trainings of body, speech, and mind will not regress, and their sensory faculties will not be malformed. They will obtain vast and immense wealth and their enemies will be subdued. They will obtain vast and immense merit. They will receive the supreme offerings from devas and humans. They will obtain vast and immense qualities. For all kinds of supreme enjoyment, whatever they desire will be completely satisfied. If they wish for wealth and make hundreds of thousands of supreme wishes, all these wishes will be perfectly fulfilled.

If a person has refrained from covetousness, he will gain the fulfillment of five supreme wishes:

1) His trainings of body, speech and mind will not regress, and he will gain the freedom over his three doors. Whatever the occasion, his body will be completely under his control, and so will be his speech and his mind. Both his body and his mind are at ease. Also, his sensory faculties of eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body are well formed without any defect.

2) He will acquire vast and immense wealth and his wealth won't be looted by his enemies. As mentioned in the previous lecture, according to the Buddha's teaching, one's wealth is not private but generally shared by the five householders, i.e., king, fire, water, thieves and enemies. Nowadays, money can vanish in the blink of an eye. People

may lose their assets all of the sudden due to their failed investments or the collapse of share prices. Or their wealth may be taken away by their relatives or someone else. Yet, those who have parted from covetousness in past lives will never experience such losses.

3) He will obtain vast and immense merit. He will have great and stable fortune and never experience poverty or deprivations in this life. Also, all the other kinds of merit will be perfectly fulfilled, too.

4) He will receive the supreme reverence, praise, and offerings from humans and devas. Dharmapalas will also frequently safeguard him.

5) He will obtain vast and immense qualities, and whatever he desires will be completely satisfied. If he wishes for wealth and makes hundreds or thousands of supreme wishes, all these wishes will be perfectly fulfilled. In the other two versions, it is mentioned that the wealth he can obtain will be a hundred or a thousand times greater than what he has wished for, because in his past lives he was never mean or jealous.

When some of us enjoy admirable merit as a result of past lives, we must cherish it dearly. We should know it is not only our karmic fruition but also a blessing from the Three Jewels. As we are consuming the merit, it is crucial to accumulate virtues constantly. Even if it is a simple offering of a flower, a stick of incense and so forth, we can increase our merit little by little. Otherwise, if we exhaust all the

meritorious resources without any accumulation, our next life will be miserable.

As mentioned in the sutra, “If curious about the past, reflect on your current experiences. If curious about the future, reflect on your current doings.” What we did in past lives can be reflected in our physical appearances, financial conditions and many other aspects in this present life. If we are well off in all aspects in this life, it means we accumulated virtuous karma in previous lives. Likewise, what we engage in in this life will take effect in future lives. There’s no need to rely on divination or fortune-telling. Everything is determined by our own acts.

Tibetans are very concerned about their afterlife and worried they may end up in hell. Yet, in places with little Buddhist influence, people are unconcerned about their next lives. They have their eyes set on this life alone. So, often I’m asked, “Master, can you read my fortune?” “Will I make a lot of money?” “I heard that a dark vein on this part of my hand is bad for my fortune. Should I find a way to cover it?” It makes me wonder whether if I were a fortune-teller I might be more popular than I am as a Buddhist teacher.

Before getting ordained, as I was studying at the teacher’s college, I was quite good at face reading. My notebooks were filled with this kind of knowledge, and I still keep it somewhere. I made myself quite a name among schoolmates, so much so that they’d come to me for readings of their future. Even now, some old pals still ask me to read

their fortune from their hands. Well, I tell them that since becoming a monk I've forgotten how. But sometimes as I'm travelling outside, my monastic attire somehow makes it more convincing to others to take me as a fortune-teller. Some people have never seen monastic robes before, and I was once approached and asked, "Why are you wearing an Indian dress?" He had confused my robe with a saree. . .

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离嗔毒，获得如是五种圆满。以此善根，回向善提，证得无上正等正觉，而为三界之所尊故。

"Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken covetousness will gain the fulfillment of these five supreme wishes. If they dedicate these roots of virtue toward bodhi, they will attain the unexcelled and perfect enlightenment and be revered by the three worlds.

If a person has refrained from covetousness, he will gain the fulfillment of five supreme wishes. If he dedicates these roots of virtue with the motivation of bodhicitta, he will attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment and also become the respectable teacher in the three realms.

## The Virtue of No Wrong Views

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离邪见，获得十种功德之法，云何为十？所谓得自心安善及同行善友深信因果；得不为身命作于罪业；不久获得贤圣之位；得不迷善法；修人天行，不堕傍生及焰魔界；行于圣道得最上福；得离一切邪法；得离身见；得见一切罪性皆空；得天上人间正行不阙。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken wrong views will obtain ten excellent qualities. What are these ten? Their minds will become virtuous and peaceful, and they will be accompanied by virtuous friends who firmly believe in the karmic principle. They will not commit evil deeds even at the cost of their lives. They will soon reach the stage of noble sages. They will possess the wholesome quality of not being confused by anything. Their conducts will be concordant with those of devas and humans, and they will not fall into the realm of animals and the realm of the Lord of Death. They will follow the noble path and obtain the utmost merit. They will part from all evil views. They will part from the belief in the transitory collection. They will gain the insight that all evils are empty by nature. They will not lack any right conduct in the human and deva realms.

If a person has refrained from wrong views, he will obtain ten excellent qualities:

1) He will become a kindhearted and serene man, imperturbable by any discriminative thoughts. He will hold right views and bond with spiritual friends who have a strong faith in the karmic principle.

It seems that some people seldom give rise to wrong views or biased conceptions after studying Buddhism. Yet, there are also cases of some becoming more troubled than ever. Someone came to me yesterday and said, "Please grant me your blessing so I don't have any wrong ideas about you and another guru! This is too scary!" Surely, all sorts of odd and complicated ideas may come into mind uncontrollably at times. Why is that? It is very much related to our past lives.

By staying away from wrong views, one will be very kindhearted and endowed with right views. He will also be surrounded by virtuous friends who firmly believe in the law of causality. On the contrary, one is always skeptical of others under the influence of wrong views. And the sort of people that such a person is attracted to are those who denigrate the karmic law of cause and effect and can only bring him harmful influence.

2) He will not commit evil deeds even at the cost of his life, because he firmly believes in karma. More specifically, here "evil deeds" refers to grave non-virtues. Ordinary beings are unlikely to be free from all negativities. When we've made a minor mistake, we don't need to be overly guilty and ashamed. If we are, we may lose the courage

to purify it and engage in virtuous acts. In that case we'd lose many opportunities to practice the Dharma.

3) He will soon reach the stage of noble sages. Having the right views as the basis, it is not difficult for him to realize the ultimate truth and attain the fruitions of shravaka, pratyekabuddha, or bodhisattva. In the other two versions, it is said that he will take refuge in the Buddha only and not in devas or others.

4) He will be untangled from the web of confusion and follow the sublime path because he upholds the right view.

5) His conducts and practices will be concordant with those of devas and humans, and he will not take rebirth in the animal and the hungry ghost realms. In the text, the realm of the Lord of Death is part of the hungry ghost realm.

6) He will travel the noble path with the mind of renunciation and bodhicitta and obtain the utmost merit.

7) He will part from all wrong views that are against the karmic law, the Three Jewels, the Four Noble Truths, and so on. We can see from many examples that some practitioners easily adhere to the right view as though it were an innate quality. Their devotion, renunciation, and bodhicitta seem to be in place already, and they can engage in virtuous acts effortlessly. However, some people wish to exert themselves in Dharma practice but feel obstructed by a certain

force. Such a difference is due to the difference in merit resulting from past deeds.

8) He will abandon the belief in the transitory collection, which mistakenly identifies any of the five aggregates as a permanent entity of self.

9) He will recognize that even faults and crimes are empty by nature. He can either realize the empty nature by himself, or at least gain a perfect understanding of this ultimate truth.

10) He will advance on the right path of devas and human beings. No adversities will emerge nor will he associate with any non-virtuous deed.

龙主，士夫补特伽罗，远离邪见，获得如是十种功德。以此善根，回向菩提，速能证了一切佛法，当得无上正等正觉。

“Lord of nagas, those pudgalas who have forsaken wrong views will obtain those ten excellent qualities. If they dedicate these roots of virtue toward bodhi, they will realize all Buddhadharma swiftly and attain the unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

If a person has refrained from wrong views, he will obtain those ten excellent qualities. If he dedicates these roots of virtue with the motivation of bodhicitta, he will realize all Buddhadharma swiftly and attain unexcelled and perfect enlightenment. In the other two

versions, it is also mentioned that he will obtain the swiftest and most superior miraculous power.

Once again, I'd encourage you to use both the Tibetan and Siksánanda version as a cross-reference for your study. While these three versions are similar in general, there are minor differences, and in certain places, Siksánanda's translation is easier to understand and more consistent with the Tibetan version. The following part talks about the faults or karmic retributions of the ten non-virtues, which are available in the Tibetan version but absent from the Siksánanda version. Originally, I thought about using the Siksánanda version to give this teaching, but later I felt that it'd be quite important to equally understand the positive effects of the ten virtues and the negative effects of the ten non-virtues. So I decided to use Danapala's translation instead.

## The Karmic Retributions of the Ten Non-Virtues

龙主，复次观于十不善法微细之行，多堕地狱、饿鬼、畜生之趣。

"Lord of nagas, once again if we contemplate the practice of the ten non-virtues, those who have engaged in them even to the

slightest extent will most likely fall into the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, and animals.

As opposed to the merits of the practice of the ten virtues, we need to know the negative karmic retributions of the practice of the ten non-virtues. If we examine them closely, we will find that they mostly lead to rebirth in the three lower realms. For each of the ten non-virtues, the consequences are approached from two aspects: the fully ripened effect and the effect similar to the cause.

Believe it or not, the karmic law of causes and effects truly exists in the phenomenal world, and the karmic retribution of a minor negative act can be terrifying. Everyone should hold the karmic law in awe and take it as a guideline to discipline one's behavior. Here the Buddha told us that from the aspect of the fully ripened effect, each of the ten non-virtues will lead to rebirth in any of the three lower realms. Engaging in the ten non-virtues to a great extent is the cause for birth in the hell realms, to a middling extent is the cause for birth in the hungry ghost realm, and to a lesser extent is the cause for birth in the animal realm. We must be mindful to refrain from these non-virtues.

In the early days, Tibetans observed the ten virtues closely in general. Nowadays, most elders are still watchful of their view and conduct, but many young Tibetans cannot even list the ten virtues. Interestingly, a great number of Han Chinese Buddhists are starting to pay greater attention to karmic effect. Their overall awareness is encouraging. As

we have the opportunity to study the karmic principle, we'd better take it seriously and apply it in our life. If one believes in cause and effect, understanding and observing the ten virtues is the very basic training. Otherwise, one will easily offend them and thus have to bear inevitable suffering in future lives.

Without using the karmic principle to discern right from wrong, one will commit horrible deeds heedlessly. I'm sometimes surprised by certain Buddhists who feel indifferent to killing pests like roaches or rats. Once, a man who had been Buddhist for over ten years clapped his hands and killed the mosquito at once. I questioned him, "Are you a Buddhist or not?" He said, "Oh, no worries, just recite 'om mani padme hum' for it." Really!? If only it were that simple! A true Buddhist would never do something horrible like this.

There's another story I remember clearly. It happened in 1993 or 1994. The director of a life liberating association invited Tulku Tenzin Gyatso and me to a restaurant. The waiter placed a huge pot with live shrimps jumping inside in front of us. Before we realized what was about to happen, without any warning, he poured boiling oil over the shrimps. Tulku Tenzin and I were shocked and heartbroken by the horror of it. We left immediately. These people claimed to be Buddhists, nonetheless, they didn't take the appropriate actions as they should. I still believe they were kind inside, and perhaps it was the lack of education on the karmic principle that led to their

ignorance. Therefore, this sutra should be carefully studied by every Buddhist.

龙主，观彼众生，若复杀生，当堕地狱、畜生、焰魔等界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者短命；二者苦恼。

“Lord of nagas, those sentient beings who have engaged in killing will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, their lives will be shortened; and secondly, they will be gravely afflicted.

In the same order that we’ve proceeded through the merits of the ten virtues, we’ll begin with the karmic effects of killing. Speaking of the fully ripened effect, having engaged in killing will lead one to be born in the hell, animal, and the hungry ghost realms. In the text, the realm of the Lord of Death can be referred to as the hungry ghost realm. Even when one finally gets out of the lower realms and obtains a human form, one will still suffer the two effects similar to the cause: he will have a short life and experience strong afflictions. In the Tibetan version it reads, “Their lives will be shortened, and they will be sickly.” Afflictions and sickness should be agreeable in this context.

The fault of killing is horrible. *Longshu’s Articles on Pure Land* says,

“Killing is the most severe crime among the five precepts, among the ten precepts, and also among the 250 bhikkhu precepts. No killing is the foremost virtue, whereas killing is the worst evil deed.” Therefore, no matter who you are, and no matter what kind of reason or motivation you have, in no situation should killing be permitted. Some believe killing animals is necessary because meat is indispensable for many people. They seem to be very concerned about others’ wellbeing. However, if one really understands the dreadful karmic retribution of killing, I’m sure nobody would dare to kill any living being.

If one has engaged in a lot of killing and never confessed this wrongdoing, very possibly he will pass away at a young age. Also, he will be troubled by all sorts of physical and mental afflictions. Nagarjuna said in his *Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*, “Those who commit killing will experience all types of pain and suffering both physically and mentally in this and future lives.” Nowadays many people suffer from depression or other mental disorders. These may well be related to their killing in this life or past lives.

When a certain illness is incurable or idiopathic, we should recognize it as our karmic debt. Unless it is paid off, we’ll continue to suffer. Whenever I’m sick, I’d have a strong feeling of indebtedness to sentient beings. Hence, I’d sincerely confess all killings that I might have done in my past lives. I reflect as follows: “Surely, I must have been in the three lower realms for long-time torture. Even if I have obtained a human form, I’m expected to undergo sickness and even a short life

due to my killing in the past. The karmic law of causes and effects is truly infallible.”

When we discourage people from killing, some get offended. They say, “You monastics could go meat-free, but we laymen must survive this way.” Well, the effect of killing works for everyone. Whether you’re a monastic or a layperson, the action of killing brings only harm to oneself and others in both the present and future life. Life is the most precious thing to every being. As explained in the *Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*, “Life is foremost in preciousness among all treasures. People strive to acquire money for sustaining life, not the other way around.” The preciousness of life is the same for all sentient beings. *Longshu’s Articles on Pure Land* also says, “All forms of life are not different.” The life of any kind of animal is as precious as a human life. Both human beings and animals have the same pursuit of surviving in this world and enjoying happiness. So, through teaching this sutra, I sincerely urge you all to abstain from killing.

若复偷盗，当堕地狱、畜生、焰魔等界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者自居贫贱；二者不得他人财宝。

“Those who engage in stealing will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, they will

stay poor and lowly; and secondly, they will be unable to gain wealth from others.

Having engaged in stealing will lead one to be born in the hell, animal, and hungry ghost realms. This is the fully ripened effect of stealing. Even when one finally gets out of the lower realms and obtains a human form, one will still suffer the two effects similar to the cause: he will be very poor and lowly, and also unable to gain others' wealth. Poverty and deprivation are the effects of stealing. Due to its karmic effects, even if one has obtained some money, one cannot keep it for long but has to endure a destitute life. As well, one cannot receive any fortune from others.

No one would want to live a poor life. If we have engaged in stealing in the past, we have to endure poverty in this life, and sometimes may not even secure the basic living standard. The beggars or homeless people we see on the street might have been thieves or robbers in past lives. Taking them as a reminder, we should not commit stealing, or else we'll also experience destitution in future lives.

On a larger scale like the global economic crisis, there are many cases in which a company goes bankrupt or an investor loses everything due to a failed investigation. Many businessmen are upset about unexpected changes and losses. Indeed, these are none other than the results of their past karma. Speaking of finances, we do need financial resources for livelihood, but we cannot breed our greediness. From the Buddhist perspective, it is necessary to secure living necessities.

Nonetheless, excessive pursuit of pleasure will only bring about more pain instead of happiness.

若复邪染，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者愚痴；二者妻不贞正。

“Those who engage in sexual misconduct will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, they will become ignorant; and secondly, their wives will not be chaste and righteous.

Having engaged in sexual misconduct will lead one to be born in the hell, animal, and hungry ghost realms. This is its fully ripened effect. Even when one finally gets out of the lower realms and obtains a human form, one will still suffer the two effects similar to the cause: he will become stupid and his wife will be adulterous.

The effect of sexual misconduct is stupidity or ignorance. In the Tibetan version it is said that one's retainues or companions will have little trust in him. In other words, there will be a trust issue among families and relatives. Also, his wife will have extramarital affairs. We can see that many families are going through the struggle of

cheating and that the divorce rate continues to climb significantly. This is certainly related to sexual misconduct in the past.

若复妄语，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者言不诚实；二者人不信奉。

“Those who engage in lying will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, their speech will not be honest; and secondly, they will not be trusted by others.

Having engaged in lying will lead one to be born in the hell, animal, and hungry ghost realms. This is the fully ripened effect of lying. Even when one finally gets out of the lower realms and obtains a human form, one will still suffer the two effects similar to the cause: his speech will not be honest and trustworthy. In the Tibetan version, it is said that he will be greatly criticized, slandered and deceived by others.

One who used to lie will carry forward the same habit in this life. His words are untruthful and fabricated. Even under circumstances where lying is unnecessary, he will still speak dishonestly. Consequently, others will find this person untrustworthy and unreliable. We may

hear comments about certain individuals that their words cannot be trusted. Eventually, nobody will find this kind of person credible.

若复绮语，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者言不真正；二者所言无定。

“Those who engage in meaningless talk will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, their speech will be unreal; and secondly, their speech will be unreliable.

Same with all the other non-virtues, having engaged in meaningless talk will lead one to be born in the hell, animal, and hungry ghost realms. Even when one finally gets out of the lower realms and obtains a human form, one will still suffer the two effects similar to the cause: his speech will be unreal and unreliable. Most of his talks are unconstructive and meaningless, and not in accordance with the truth of things. So what he says is doubtful and unreliable. There are some people who often promise a lot but are liable to change their mind at any moment. Inconsistency can always be spotted in their stories. Meanwhile, there are others who are so credible that they can be always counted on. The differences between these two types of individual can be the result of their previous karma.

We can examine ourselves to see whether we have committed much

lying, meaningless talk, harsh speech, or divisive talk in past lives. Often, we may get an idea of why others do not trust us and so on. It is not without reason.

若复恶口，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者言多斗诤；二者人闻不重。

“Those who engage in harsh words will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, their words will provoke conflicts; and secondly, their words will not be valued by the listeners.

Having engaged in harsh words will lead one to be born in the hell, animal, and hungry ghost realms as the fully ripened effect. Even when one finally gets out of the lower realms and obtains a human form, one will still suffer the two effects similar to the cause: his words will cause contentions and conflicts, and others will not value his words.

Some people seem to naturally invite criticism or negative comments. As soon as they express themselves, they are attacked by others. These people could get so intimidated that they become afraid to say anything anymore. We can see this kind of situation on social media apps where someone is attacked by the public just because

of a simple comment which, if made by another, wouldn't cause any condemnation at all. The difference lies in the past karma of different individuals. Despite having the same attitude and speech and doing the same thing, different people nevertheless receive different responses. This is exactly the display of their own karma.

Also, one who has been harsh in their speech is easily neglected by others. Even if one repeats his words a hundred times, people simply don't take him seriously. There are times when people would ask us, "Could you great masters say something about this? A word from you is far more effective than my repeating the same thing a hundred times." Whether this person is serious or simply complimenting us, we are certain that the influence of speech varies among individuals. Some people could exhaust themselves trying to deliver a message, yet, to no avail. While a word from a noble being, a genuine practitioner, or a mahasiddha who accomplishes the truth of speech, can make a huge impact on the world. This is none other than the karmic effects dependently arising from certain causes.

Even in our Dharma discussions, we can see that some people are very concise with their words, and they are respected and welcomed by others. But there are also some people who talk endlessly and are not well received by others. Even worse, they'd become the center of refutation or denigration. The karmic effects of harsh words can be terrifying. We do need to pay careful attention to our speech in all situations. There's a story on harsh words in the *Vinaya Sutra* :

Long time ago, there was a bhikkhu who was always meditating on loving-kindness and compassion. Then in his sangha assembly all the other bhikkhus got used to calling him "Compassionate Meditator." The bhikkhu was upset and tried to stop them from using this nickname. He tried several times, but nobody listened to him. Then he got so angry that he cursed, "I'm the compassionate meditator while you guys are the venomous snake among humans!" As a result of insulting the sangha members with such harsh words, he was born as a venomous snake in the next five hundred lives.

*The Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Dharma* has another similar story : During the time of Buddha Kashyapa, a Tripitaka master went to other countries along with his five hundred students to give a Dharma teaching. Once, someone in the audience raised some questions that he couldn't answer right away. This made the master so angry that he said to the audience harshly, "You guys know nothing about the Dharma but purposely bring up such rude questions just like a buffalo making trouble for others!" With this harsh complaint, the master reincarnated as an aggressive buffalo in the next five hundred lives.

Once, I attended a conference with some well-respected individuals from some non-Buddhist organizations. They teased others' appearances with animal names. Although they felt they were joking with each other, this kind of talk was sufficiently offensive that I felt nervous for them. I wanted to give them a gentle reminder, but I didn't have the courage. All I could do was to recite "om benza sattva hum," the Vajrasattva mantra for purifying faults, in my head.

At Larung Gar, after H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche delivered *The Sutra of a Hundred Actions*, everyone was very mindful of his or her language. No one would call another such nicknames as snake, whore, butcher, etc. Nor would anyone make fun of another for their shortcomings by saying things like cripple, blind, shortie, fatty, and so forth. Related teaching can also be found in Lala Sonam Chodrup Rinpoche's commentary on Karma Chakme Rinpoche's *Aspiration Prayer of Sukhavati*.

Dharma practitioners at Larung Gar were very careful with their language. You could see someone almost blurt out regrettable words, "You're such a . . . , never mind!" It was good to see them biting their tongue back by applying right mindfulness before it was too late. However, as time passes, young Buddhists and monastics seem to forget about this. The other day I went to a monastery nearby, and as I was walking behind two monks, I heard them calling each other nicknames. I felt quite regretful for them. And we never know, speaking harsh words could even attract non-human beings to us.

若复两舌，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者得下劣眷属；二者感亲属分离。

"Those who engage in divisive talk will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, they

will attract inferior retinues; and secondly, they will experience separation from their family members.

Having engaged in divisive talk will lead one to be born in the hell, animal, and hungry ghost realms as the fully ripened effect. Even when one finally gets out of the lower realms and obtains a human form, one will still suffer the two effects similar to the cause: he will attract inferior retinues and his family members will be separate from him. His closed companions will be of inferior character and he will hardly find any person who is righteous and reliable. For instance, some entrepreneurs are having trouble finding helpful employees; some masters or abbots do not receive good disciples. Examples like these are the karmic effect of divisive talk. Also, those for whom he cares most, including his family members, relatives, friends, and so on, will very possibly leave him isolated. This is none other than the consequence of divisive language.

若复多贪，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者不能利益他人；二者常被他人侵害。

“Those who engage in malevolence will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, they

will be unable to benefit others; and secondly, they will be often harmed by others.

Having engaged in malevolence will lead one to be born in the hell, animal, and hungry ghost realms as the fully ripened effect. Even when one finally gets out of the lower realms and obtains a human form, one will still suffer the two effects similar to the cause: he will be unable to benefit others and meanwhile he will be often harmed by others. A malevolent person tends to inflict harm on others. Therefore, with this habitual tendency, one can hardly benefit others. And as a direct backfiring of aggression, one is constantly disturbed and harmed by others.

若复多嗔，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者心常不喜；二者多不称意。

“Those who engage in covetousness will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, they will be often displeased; and secondly, they will be seldom satisfied.

Having engaged in covetousness will lead one to be born in the hell, animal, and hungry ghost realms as the fully ripened effect. Even when one finally gets out of the lower realms and obtains a human form, one will still suffer the two effects similar to the cause:

he will be unhappy and seldom feel satisfied. Such a person will be frequently displeased and will be unable to find any joy in most things. In *Mindfulness of the True Dharma* it is said, "One with greediness cannot obtain happiness day or night." Greediness prevents one from finding happiness because one always desires more. Not only is he discontent with many things but people do not recognize him with praises or trust. This kind of individual is constantly in distress and never acquiring real happiness.

若复邪见，当堕地狱、畜生及焰魔界。后生人间，以余业故，得二种报：一者邪见；二者懈怠。

"Those who uphold wrong views will be led to the hell realm, to the animal realm, or to the realm of the Lord of Death. Later when they are born in the human realm, due to the remaining karmic effect, they will experience two consequences: firstly, they will be occupied by wrong views; and secondly, they will become indolent.

Upholding wrong views will lead one to be born in the hell, animal, and hungry ghost realms as the fully ripened effect. Even when one finally gets out of the lower realms and obtains a human form, one will still suffer the two effects similar to the cause: he will be occupied by wrong views and also become indolent. The effect of wrong views from past lives will continue to exist in this life. Some people are very attracted to non-virtuous ideas and activities while they repel

virtuous acts and right views. They may cheer and agree with the denigration of the Three Jewels or the encouragement to engage in negative deeds. I feel very sorry for these people.

As for the possible causes of wrong views, one is the karmic effect of holding wrong views in past lives. Another that has to be taken into consideration is the influence of heterodox philosophies in this life. If we notice that our mind is mostly occupied by wrong views, we must purify them through confessing our negativities and through studying the related treatises. For example, if one is able to deeply study the Buddhist Logic or the Middle Way, I'm sure that many of his wrong views will be eliminated. With persistent listening, contemplation, and application of the Dharma, the impeccable logical reasoning found in these treaties will persuade us and enable us to transform our mind. Eventually, pure wisdom will defeat wrong beliefs.

For most people, a proper environment is needed to make such a transformation. If one is surrounded by those with wrong views, it is difficult for him to resolve the improper thoughts and conceptions. Whereas if one is in a shedra or a Buddhist organization where everyone observes the right views, one will be influenced gradually by the surrounding people, environment, as well as the indescribable blessing of that place. Eventually, one will be endowed with proper views.

Another karmic effect of wrong views is indolence or negligence. In

the Tibetan version, the word used is “deceitfulness,” which may be understood to mean the way an indolent person can use their cleverness to avoid responsibility. We can reflect on ourselves. If we are very indolent, perhaps we are heavily influenced by wrong views from the past.

For me I don't think I'm negligent. I'm pretty serious and dedicated to everything I do. Well, there are times when I get so worked-up and it is not helpful to the situation. But some people are easily annoyed by the mandatory volunteering and the other duties and say, “Man, this is exhausting. . . I don't feel like doing it. . .” Actually, as long as the activity is virtuous, we must engage fully without any laziness or reluctance.

龙主，若有行于如是十不善法，决定获得如是果报，复更别得无边诸大苦蕴。

“Lord of nagas, if one performs these ten non-virtues, it is certain one will experience the aforementioned effects. An immeasurably great mass of suffering will be waiting for him.

The Buddha concluded to the naga king that the ten non-virtues will lead one to undergo the corresponding karmic effect and infinite unbearable suffering. Next, we'll learn about the merit of approaching the ten virtues through the Six Perfections.

# The Adornment of the Ten Virtues with Generosity

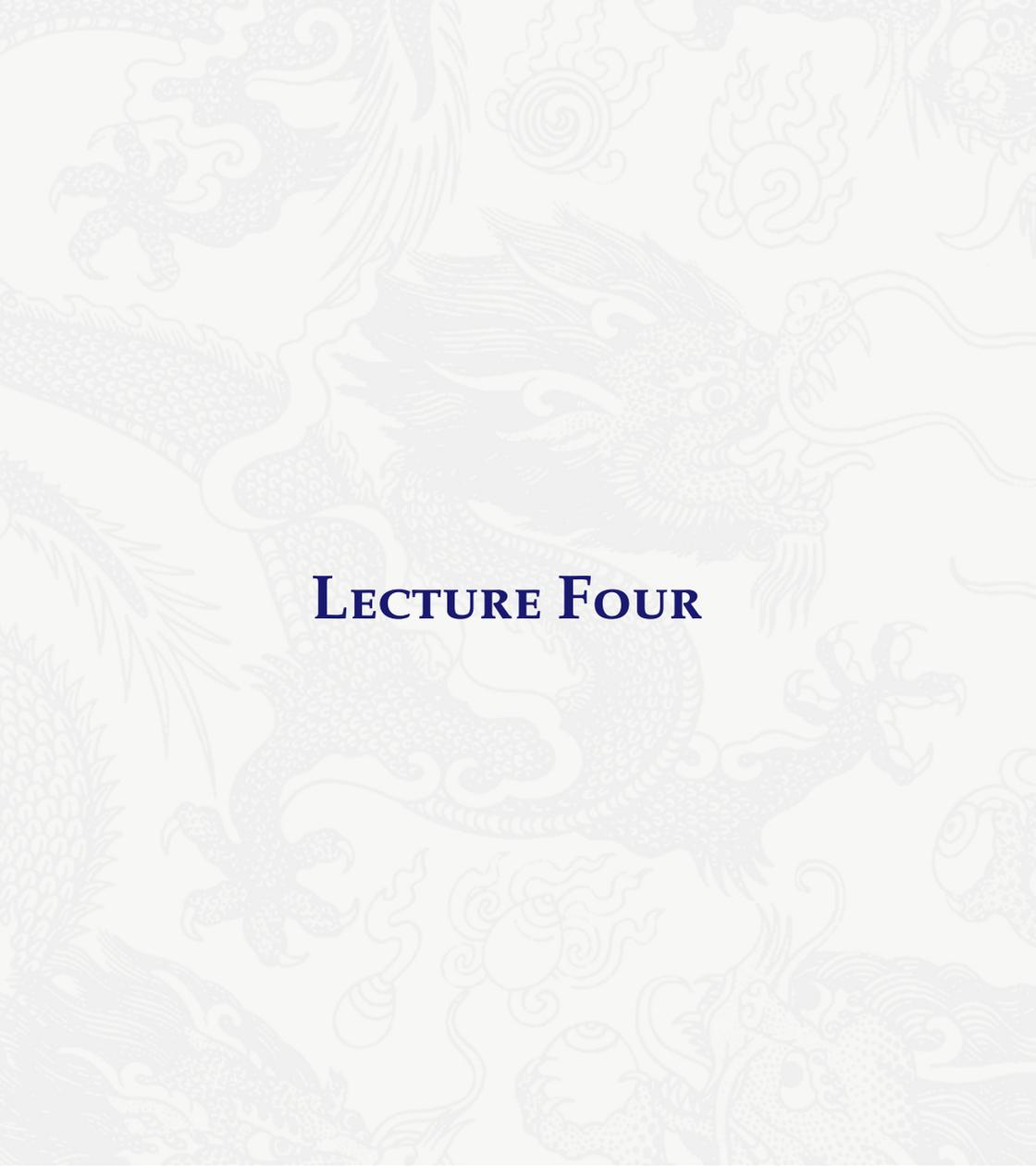
龙主，若复菩萨远离杀生，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富长寿及无量福，得离一切他侵之怖。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken killing and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will have great wealth, longevity and boundless merit. They will be free from any fear of being harmed by others.

Should bodhisattvas refrain from killing and engage in generosity, they will acquire abundant wealth, longevity, and immeasurable merit. As well, they will not be annoyed by any fear of being harmed by others. Take a current issue as an example, one will not be impacted by terrorism.

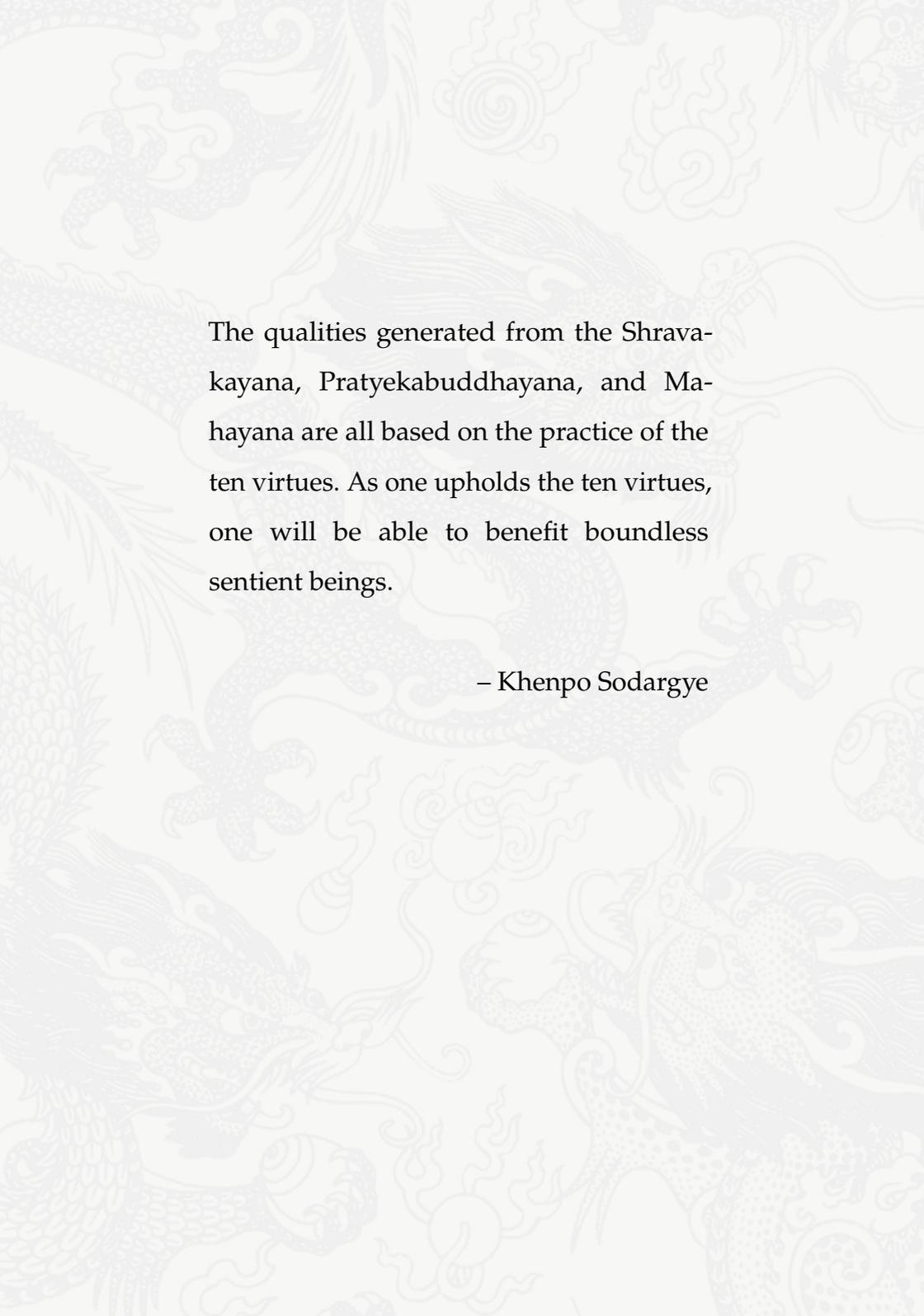
I wasn't going to get into the ten virtues from the perspective of the Six Perfections today. However, I reckoned that rather than “an immeasurably great mass of suffering,” “free from any fear” in this paragraph should be an auspicious place for us to stop. I sincerely wish for you all to stay away from any fear or harm and to live free lives where your physical and mental states are at ease. So, I just touched on the first virtue of no killing associated with generosity. Stopping here could be an auspicious sign for us to be free from fear and to live happily in this world.

I believe we can conclude this sutra in the next lecture. I am very happy to see that most of you have made it to the end with us. Without any audience to listen, I would have no opportunity to teach this sutra. I really appreciate your listening and wish you success in cultivating and deepening your view on the law of causality.



# LECTURE FOUR

COMMENTARY ON  
*THE QUESTIONS OF THE NAGA KING SAGARA*



The qualities generated from the Shravakayana, Pratyekabuddhayana, and Mahayana are all based on the practice of the ten virtues. As one upholds the ten virtues, one will be able to benefit boundless sentient beings.

– Khenpo Sodargye

# Lecture Four

Of the two Chinese versions of this sutra, the Danapala version that we're currently studying, features an elaboration on the faults of engaging in the ten non-virtues. This is absent in the Siksanda version though it is available in the Tibetan version. As a Buddhist, a Dharma practitioner, it is of fundamental importance to have a thorough understanding of the ten virtues and the ten non-virtues. This requires attentive listening, contemplating and practicing of the Dharma teaching.

## The Ten Virtues and the Practice for Rebirth in a Pure Land

Without a graded path of learning to build a solid foundation, it can be dangerous to jump right into Vajrayana practice. Without observation of the ten virtues as the basis, it can be also difficult to take rebirth in Sukhavati. I translated the *Sutra on the Contemplation*

*of Buddha Amitayus* from Chinese into Tibetan a while ago. It lists the threefold goodness of pure deeds as the requirement for taking rebirth in Sukhavati. These are: 1) One should act filially towards their parents and support them, serve and respect their teachers and elders, with compassion abstain from killing, and cultivate the ten virtuous actions. 2) One should take and observe the vow of seeking refuge from the Three jewels, fulfill all moral precepts, and refrain from breaking the rules of conduct. 3) One should generate bodhicitta, deeply believe in the principle of cause and effect, study and recite the Mahayana doctrines, and support and encourage others in following the same practice. Therefore, the practice of the ten virtues is the very basic foundation for rebirth in a pure land.

Among the audience, some of you may follow the Pure Land School as your primary practice. I rejoice in your active attendance at my teachings. In earlier days, some Pure Land practitioners in Han regions held certain views that were not completely agreeable with Tibetan Buddhism. Now, through communication and discussion between followers of Han Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism, many people have found a mutual understanding of the different Buddhist philosophies. They have understood that there is no contradiction between the Tantrayana teaching and the Sutrayana teaching. Thus, many seemingly apparent arguments have been resolved. What a progressive development among the followers of different schools of Buddhism!

In the last year, I have visited several honorable masters of the

Pure Land School. We had wonderful opportunities for meaningful and in-depth exchange. Followers of the Buddha's teaching should not become sectarian due to geographical differences or other such designations. So called "differences", "barriers", "contradicting views" and so forth, are merely the products of personal bias or emotional attachments to specific schools or traditions.

We must recognize that all Buddhists operate under the same tenets of Buddha Shakyamuni's teaching. Different schools or traditions within Buddhism developed over time due to various factors such as location, culture, teachers, etc. But this does not mean that Buddhists of different schools should be estranged from each other, nor should they hold hostility to traditions that they are unfamiliar with. This is not a good situation and instead, all Buddhists should come together harmoniously.

Unfortunately, there seems to be more troubles and scandals within Buddhist organizations than in some non-religious groups. As Buddhists, we must look into the problems. I made an analysis before on two general categories of Buddhists. In the first category are those who genuinely generate faith in Buddhism and take the Three Jewels as a refuge. In the second are those who run into lots of challenges in life or those who could not get along with others. They turn to religious groups or choose to become monastics because they could not work well in a secular setting. Some movies portray monasticism as a pessimistic escape in the absence of other better choices. In such

cases, without a truly inspired faith, these individuals often become troublemakers once they have joined a Dharma group.

As Buddhists, we must not turn a blind eye to these problems. Whenever people criticize Buddhism, we might feel offended, “Don’t you insult Buddhists. I’m sure your religion has many problems too!” “Non-believers do terrible things too!” But when we take a moment to reflect, it becomes clear that some Buddhists are ever-more afflicted than non-Buddhists. There is more gossip and issues occurring within Buddhist organizations. This is a very disheartening phenomenon. We must re-evaluate the meaning of being Buddhist and the purpose of joining Dharma groups.

I’d love to see improvement with problem-solving and many other helpful skills through long-term Dharma study and practice. If Buddhists are more troubled than non-Buddhists when encountering adversities, it just indicates that they fail to apply the advantages that the Dharma offers. Not only is the Dharma teaching useless to them, but even monasticism would be pointless for them.

Now we go back to the text. In the previous lecture, we began to explore the merit of refraining from the ten non-virtues and engaging in the Six Perfections. With the adornment of generosity on each of the ten virtues, one will acquire great wealth, boundless merit, and the additional advantages corresponding to each respective virtue. In the Tibetan version, instead of boundless merit, it is said that one’s

wealth will not be stolen or damaged by others. In that case it is assured that one's wealth will only increase exponentially.

## The Adornment of the Ten Virtues with Generosity

龙主，若复菩萨，远离偷盗，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵及无量福，而于一切，心无吝惜，证得深智、诸佛所说无上法义。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken stealing and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; they will not be stingy with any of their possessions; and they will accomplish the profound wisdom and realize the supreme teaching expounded by all buddhas.

Should bodhisattvas refrain from stealing and engage in generosity, they will acquire abundant wealth and immeasurable merit. Their wealth will not be damaged by others, and they will not be stingy with any of their possessions in their practice of generosity. In any situation, they will be more than happy to give away their assets. They will attain the profound wisdom and unobstructedly realize the

supreme teaching expounded by all buddhas, which is the ultimate and unsurpassable truth of the union of appearance and emptiness.

Therefore, engaging in generous giving combined with abandoning theft is important. I have heard of a case that some government officials once hurried to donate lots of money to monasteries before midnight, because their bank accounts were to be investigated. It is said that the corrupt officials could be identified by looking into the donor list. In fact, it is somehow futile to practice generosity based on stealing or killing. Say, a man offers ¥500 to sanghas out of ¥2000 he made from killing a yak. One is unlikely to receive the abovementioned merits if making donations with improper sources of money, let alone sources associated with non-virtues such as killing and stealing.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离邪染，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，感善眷属，父母妻男，悉无恶见。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken sexual misconduct and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; they will have virtuous followers; and their parents, spouses, and children will be free from hostile thoughts.

Should bodhisattvas refrain from sexual misconduct and engage in generosity, they will acquire abundant wealth and immeasurable

merit. Their wealth will not be damaged by others, and they will attract kind-hearted followers. Their parents, spouses, and children will all be free from evil thoughts and aggression. In the Tibetan version, it is said that they will not view their parents, spouses, and children with hostility. Both interpretations are acceptable.

Due to karmic effects, some people cannot get along with their parents at all, behaving as if they are enemies. I heard about a son who went home to see his parents after a long trip. They got into an argument the first night and he left before sunrise. Many people are also experiencing an unhappy marriage. In recent years, the divorce rates in many countries keep getting higher and higher. Too often, people initially impress others with a good image which then changes after a while. In a public talk, a presenter made a graph to illustrate the feeling between couples: the happiest day is the first day of marriage, and then, the level of happiness drops day after day. It appears to be true in most cases.

Situations in which children are unfilial to parents, parents are unkind to children, spouses disrespect each other, or various interpersonal issues of hostility and aggression arise, are the result of non-virtuous deeds from the past. Karmic effects are none other than the consequence resulting from one's own actions. Take dreaming as an example. If you are dreaming of an evil person, then this person is none other than an emergence from your own dream. Likewise, whatever ugliness you might see in this world, is nothing but the results of your own actions from the past. One's actions in terms

of body, speech and mind will influence one's future experiences under the principle of karma. Such karmic effects can be classified into the proliferating effect, the fully ripened effect, the dominant effect, the effect similar to the cause, the personal effect, and the effect of removal. All of these are just the displays of one's own karma and are similar to the arising of appearances in one's dreams.

Up to this point, we should be aware that our virtuous acts of generosity are no longer pure if they are based on non-virtues. The resultant merits wouldn't be as wholesome as they might otherwise be. Hence, we must strive to avoid the ten non-virtues.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离妄语，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，当感所有语言，一切善软，凡起诚愿，坚固不退。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken lying and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; all their words will be kind and gentle; and all their sincere aspirations will be affirmed without degeneration.

Should bodhisattvas refrain from lying and engage in generosity, they will acquire abundant wealth and immeasurable merit. Their wealth will not be damaged by others, and their words will be kind and gentle. One's gentle and soft speech is a skillful means to influence

and guide others. There can be a huge difference between the speech of different individuals.. One person's words may touch everyone's heart whereas another's words only makes people feel indifferent. This is related to their past karma.

Moreover, all the wishes that they sincerely make will be affirmed and fulfilled. As they are engaging in bodhisattva activity, their aspirations will be stable and accomplished without any degeneration. Whatever they wish will be fulfilled naturally. By expressing honest speech, one's mind abides in stability and happiness. As *Mindfulness of the True Dharma* says,

*Truthful words lead to happiness.*

*Truthful words lead to nirvana.*

*Whereas lies bring about pain and suffering*

*That one has to endure in a hell realm.*

One can attain the ultimate peace by observing the virtue of not lying, while lying will generate great suffering in this life and future lives.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离绮语，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，所言真实，闻者信受，凡有所说，断一切疑。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken meaningless talk and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; their words

will be truthful and taken confidently by listeners; whatever they say will be able to cut through all doubts.

Should bodhisattvas refrain from meaningless talk and engage in generosity, they will acquire abundant wealth and immeasurable merit. Their wealth will not be damaged by others. Their words will be truthful, without any flattery or deception, and thus can be confidently accepted by listeners without any doubt arising. Also, their words can eliminate the hesitation or doubts that listeners may already have.

While refraining from meaningless talk and engaging in the practice of generosity, bodhisattvas can also cultivate great wisdom. As a result, their words can dispel many people's doubts and confusion. By relying on their reliable and truthful words, many people are able to find meaningful direction. Yet, there are also some people whose words cannot be trusted easily. Listeners find many flaws and contradictions in their speech. This is also due to their negative karma from the past.

Some great masters practiced abandoning meaningless talk and engaging in bodhisattva activity in numerous past lives. As a result, all the treatises they composed and the teachings they gave are far more powerful in uprooting doubts and ignorance for those living beings who have made connections to them. Also in history, certain shastras were so impactful that they dispelled numerous people's

suffering and confusion. The reason behind this is related to the composers' virtues of speech accumulated in their past lives.

Nonetheless, I'm hearing from some Dharma teachers who feel disappointed in themselves, "Why is there nobody to listen to me? I teach so well!" When situations like this happen, it can be connected to their verbal non-virtues from past lives.

As Buddhists, we should recognize that any experience in our life cannot be caused by a single and obvious reason. All experiences in this present life are the consequences of past deeds either in the earlier period of this life or in past lives. Although we cannot perceive the intangible matrix of causes, we must be certain of its working. Some people try to maintain good health by all means, yet their condition only deteriorates. They are confident that no deeds in this life could contribute to their illness. Yet, they could not be more confused as to the cause of sickness. This is when we must realize that the cause of suffering lies within the past.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离恶口，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，所言可取，闻无背舍，于诸众中，无有其过。

"Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken harsh words and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; their words

will be well-accepted and not neglected by listeners; and whatever they say in public will be free from faults.

Should bodhisattvas forsake harsh words and engage in generosity, they will acquire abundant wealth and immeasurable merit. Their wealth will not be damaged by others. Whatever they say will be heeded and respected, because their words are pleasant, meaningful and beneficial to others.

Some Dharma teachers have demonstrated convincing eloquence. Nonetheless, some others are articulate lecturers, but do not do so well in their personal practices. In that case their listeners may examine them like detectives. They are listening while observing the lecturer's conduct closely. "This master is an excellent teacher, but he doesn't seem to walk the talk..." Hence, a Dharma teacher needs to act accordingly with what he or she preaches. Pretty rhetoric alone cannot convince others.

Another merit of abandoning harsh words is that whatever one says in general, will be free from faults. In the Tibetan version, it is said that their words will not offend the audience, and everyone will be delighted with their speech. On the contrary, someone can offend many people as soon as they open their mouth. This is probably due to their negative karma from harsh speech in past lives.

Once again, we should be very careful to avoid harsh words. In the writings of some Pure Land School masters, there are many stories to

elaborate the terrible effects of cruel speech. In one instance, a man cursed another as a starving dog while tossing food at him. The man who had done this was reborn as a famished dog afterward. So do not make jokes and call names lightly. We must be very mindful of this.

A relevant example today, that could easily turn into a basis for abuse, is the Internet. Unlike in earlier times, when someone made a negative comment, it stayed among those who were known to them. Nowadays, some people take pride in cyberbullying. Offensive comments can spread infinitely in an instant. Even worse, I have seen books compiled solely of criticisms and attacks. The public seems to be so fond of such materials that they become bestselling books. As a result, blind imitation has become prevalent among readers. Such an influence is detrimental and severe. The karmic effect will be multiplied exponentially due to it being so widely spread. As we have learned about the karmic principle, we must now stay away from spreading harsh speech. Do not hurt people or advertise their faults, even if you are joking.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离两舌，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，于诸眷属，心住平等，爱之如一，无有离散。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken divisive talk and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; they will treat

all their followers with an impartial mind and love them equally; there will be no separation among them and their followers.

Should bodhisattvas forsake divisive talk and engage in generosity, they will acquire abundant wealth and immeasurable merit. Their wealth will not be damaged by others. They will regard their followers impartially and love them equally. Their followers will also stay peaceful and stable, thus there will be no separation or disconnection among them and their followers.

If one caused division and conflict among others by gossiping in past lives, one will experience the suffering of separation in this life. Even if he engages in generosity, the consequence will not be wholesome due to the factor of divisive talk. Conversely, if one avoided divisive talk and performs generosity in this life, many virtuous results can be expected. For instance, their followers will not hold any opinion against them, but remain stable and fully respectful.

We can observe that many people in charge of enterprises or monasteries are criticized by their members. Complaints include unfair treatment, poor management, and so on. Although a public complaint is inappropriate, it reflects the shortcomings of the superior. They could simply be doing a poor job, or, they might have donated wealth acquired through divisive talk in past lives. The karmic result of their generosity which matured in this life, is contaminated by their verbal non-virtue.

No separation or disconnection will result from the practice of generosity while refraining from divisive talk. One will treat their followers equally with love and care. Their followers will in turn support and safeguard them. Both parties care for one another respectfully. Thus no division will take place among them, nor will the followers make any protests or objections.

I've been teaching at Larung Gar for almost 30 years. Originally there were only twenty or thirty Han students. Later on, this became a larger sangha of hundreds of thousands of monks and nuns. There have not been any cases of people coming together to criticize me. It is said in the sutra that if a Dharma teacher performed generous giving of resources acquired through divisive speech, his disciples will feel dissatisfied and try to go against him. We are seeing more demonstrations around the globe nowadays where the general public stands against the state. This has to do with non-virtuous karma in terms of speech.

Next, we're going to talk about the practice of generosity while refraining from the three mental non-virtues. Again, it seems that in the Chinese version, there is a misprinting error, and "malevolence" and "covetousness" in the following two paragraphs need to be switched, so as to be consistent with the Tibetan and Siksánanda version, and also the meaning becomes clearer.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离贪毒，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，得端正身，诸根具足，见者爱乐，心无厌舍。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken malevolence and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; they will obtain a beautiful and dignified appearance with all the sensory faculties intact and functional; those who see them will be pleased without any feelings of boredom.

Should bodhisattvas forsake malevolence and engage in generosity, they will acquire abundant wealth and immeasurable merit. Their wealth will not be damaged by others. Their appearance will be beautiful and elegant, with all their sensory faculties intact and functional. Everyone who sees them will adore them and not want to part from them.

As one has refrained from malevolence and aggression, their appearance will be kind and pleasing, with all their senses operating without any defects. Usually, when we are upset or overwhelmed by anger, we will glare at others angrily, speak harshly, and all our senses become engaged in a negative state. Consequently, the karmic effects of these negativities will cause our sensory faculties to be defective and unfunctional in future lives. For instance, if one gets used to rolling their eyes or glowering at others, then very possibly their eyes will be similarly defective in future lives.

On the contrary, if one is endowed with full faculties, a dignified appearance, and appropriate conduct, everyone is pleased with them and feels reluctant to part from them. Actually, one's appearance, personality, qualities, educational background, and other attributes are all important aspects for others to take into consideration. Although we hold no prejudice, there are still grades of individuality among people. We should reflect on ourselves and strive to cultivate better and noble qualities through Dharma practice. Such a deliberate effort will surely take effect.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离嗔毒，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，得于仇仇，心无所起，闻佛法要，能生深信。

*“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken covetousness and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; when they are confronted by enemies, they will not give rise to hatred; when they listen to the Dharma, they will generate profound faith.*

Should bodhisattvas forsake covetousness and engage in generosity, they will acquire abundant wealth and immeasurable merit. Their wealth will not be damaged by others. They will not hold any grudge or hatred towards any being, even if they are confronted by their enemies. When they receive Dharma teachings, they will generate a firm and profound conviction in the Dharma. In the Siksānanda

version, it is said that their devotion and conviction will be solid and unshakable, and they will be endowed with great strength. The Tibetan version says that “they will aspire to the vast and they will be renowned as mighty”.

龙主，若复菩萨，远离邪见，修菩萨道，行于布施，得大富贵，获无量福，于三宝所，而具正见，常近于佛，得闻妙法，供养众僧，常无懈怠，教化众生，令发菩提之心。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas have forsaken wrong views and engaged in bodhisattva activity, due to the practice of generosity, they will obtain great wealth and boundless merit; they will uphold the right views in the Three Jewels; without any laziness and degeneration, they will always stay close to the Buddha, listen to the wondrous Dharma, and make offerings to the Sangha; they will always teach and influence sentient beings and guide them to generate the mind of bodhicitta.

Should bodhisattvas forsake wrong views and engage in generosity, they will acquire abundant wealth and immeasurable merit. Their wealth will not be damaged by others. They will uphold right views toward the Three Jewels, always have opportunities to get close to the Buddha and spiritual teachers, to receive the auspicious Dharma teachings and to make offering to the sangha. They will not be negligent nor recede on the bodhisattva path. Furthermore, they will

teach and influence sentient beings to guide them in arousing the unsurpassable mind of bodhicitta. In the other two versions, it is said that they will never forget or fail to generate bodhicitta.

It is crucial to have the liberty to engage in virtues. Some people enjoy the convenience and effortlessness to perform virtuous acts in this life because they accumulated virtuous causes in their previous lives.

## **The Adornment of the Ten Virtues with the Six Perfections**

龙主，若能修此十善之业，行菩萨道，初以布施而为庄严，果报圆满，得大富贵。

“Lord of nagas, if bodhisattvas practice the ten virtues and engage in bodhisattva activity, with the adornment of generosity, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome and they will obtain great wealth.

The abovementioned explains the karmic results of generosity on the basis of the observation of the ten virtues. Mainly one will obtain great wealth and boundless merit. In the following part, the Buddha further elaborates the practice of the remaining five perfections by following the path of the ten virtues.

若以持戒而为庄严，果报圆满，得一切佛法，愿满具足。

With the adornment of discipline, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome; they will acquire the Dharma in its entirety; and all their wishes will be fulfilled.

With the adornment of discipline, the resultant effects of observing each of the ten virtues will be perfect and wholesome. In particular, bodhisattvas will acquire the Dharma in its entirety and all their virtuous wishes will be fulfilled.

The perfection of discipline can be achieved when bodhisattvas reach the second bhumi. As the *Introduction to the Middle Way* says,

*The qualities of perfect discipline are theirs, and thus*

*They spurn disordered conduct even in their dreams.*

*The actions of their body, speech, and mind are pure;*

*They practice tenfold virtue on the sacred path.*

For bodhisattvas of the second bhumi, their observation of discipline is perfect. Not only can they uphold pure precepts while awake, they can also fully observe every discipline in their dreams. So the actions of their body, speech and mind are completely pure and their practice of the ten virtues can mature into perfect and wholesome rewards.

In general, ordinary beings inevitably violate precepts when awake or in dreams, due to their habitual tendencies and the seeds of afflictions.

Some people feel very upset and guilty by their violations, but this is understandable. Only when a bodhisattva attains the second bhumi, will the quality of observing discipline be perfected with purification. Not only is their conduct pure when awake, but their dreams are also free from defilements. So their body, speech, and mind are maintained in utmost purity, and the merits of the ten virtues can be fully accomplished.

That being said, the perfect observance of the ten virtues is not as easy as some people may wrongly think: “The ten virtues are only for the laity. We are monastics and Vajrayana practitioners, with no need to worry about the ten virtues.” No one should underestimate the significance of the ten virtues. They are the basis of all virtues like the foundation of the earth.

若以忍辱而为庄严，果报圆满，得佛菩提，三十二相八十种好，复得梵音具足。

With the adornment of patience, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome; they will attain the bodhi of the Buddha with the thirty-two major marks and eighty minor signs, as well as the Brahma-like voice.

With the adornment of patience, the resultant effects of observing each of the ten virtues will be perfect and wholesome. Bodhisattvas

will attain Buddhahood with the thirty-two major marks and eighty minor signs, as well as a voice with the sixty melodies of Brahma.

As the *Introduction to the Middle Way* states, “Patience makes you beautiful and dear to holy beings.” By practicing patience, one will acquire a pleasing and dignified appearance. I remember many years ago when I was teaching the *Introduction to the Middle Way* in the Samye Tower, the first teaching hall for the Han sangha at Larung Gar, a classmate exclaimed, “Ah! If I start practicing patience from now on, people will begin to like me. I never understood why people don’t like me. . . .” At that time there were only a few dozen Han students studying at Larung Gar, and I remember this story vividly.

若以精进而为庄严，果报圆满，当能降伏天魔外道，以诸佛法而救度之。

With the adornment of diligence, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome; they will be able to subjugate maras and tirthikas, and liberate them with Buddhadharma.

With the adornment of diligence, the resultant effects of observing each of the ten virtues will be perfect and wholesome. Bodhisattvas will be able to defeat maras and opponents, and further liberate them with the Dharma.

Should one be extremely diligent, no maras of illness and other afflictions can harm them. As we’ve learned from the *Verse Summary*

of *Prajnaparamita*, maras do not like diligent people. They think, “Hmm, this person is way too hardworking, I don’t think I could distract him.” Maras are also not bothered to annoy the lazy. Their primary targets are those who are somewhat diligent with a tendency to become lax, “We should bother these people so they will engage with us.” That is why some practitioners experience mental and physical discomfort when they try to be more diligent. If they are not strong enough, their practice will be slowed down and sometimes, they may even feel out of control or possessed.

Therefore, we must strive for diligence. Conscientious people are not possessed easily by hostile forces. No matter how hard the maras try, assiduous practitioners will never recede on their path of virtuous practice. It is mediocre individuals who are more likely to be influenced and regress.

若以禅定而为庄严，果报圆满，当得正念清静，法行具足。

With the adornment of concentration, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome; their mindfulness will be purified and they will possess all the conducts of the Dharma.

With the adornment of concentration, the resultant effects of observing each of the ten virtues will be perfect and wholesome. Bodhisattvas will obtain pure mindfulness and constant meditative stabilization. Here mindfulness means that one will never forget the Dharma

teaching. In the Siksanda version, it is also said that one will possess wisdom, regret, conscientiousness and calm, all of which are attributes of the Dharma.

At the current time, many people wish to attain right mindfulness, right intent, and right awareness through meditation. Some people like to experience the Theravada tradition of right mindfulness meditation. I believe it can be helpful to release stress. Whether Buddhist or not, the practice of meditation is actually quite relevant for modern individuals, such as businesspeople, professors, students, and so forth, as we all need to rest our minds in peace and happiness.

若以智慧而为庄严，果报圆满，当得永断一切邪见。

With the adornment of wisdom, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome; they will eradicate all wrong views.

With the adornment of wisdom, the resultant effects of observing each of the ten virtues will be perfect and wholesome. Bodhisattvas will uproot all wrong views from their minds. The primary cause of wrong view is ignorance. The more ignorance one has, the more one is blinded by wrong views. Wisdom is the exact antidote to dispel ignorance. In order to cultivate such wisdom, it is crucial to study Buddhist Logic and the Middle Way and integrate one's intelligence with the

wisdom of Buddhist philosophy. Gradually, improper conceptions will be eliminated, and right views established.

## The Adornment of the Ten Virtues with Other Mahayana Practices

若以大慈而为庄严，果报圆满，能令一切众生降伏一切微细烦恼。若以大悲而为庄严，果报圆满，当得一切众生心不厌舍。若以大喜而为庄严，果报圆满，当得一心而无散乱。若以大舍而为庄严，果报圆满，当得微细烦恼皆悉除灭。

“With the adornment of loving-kindness, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome, and they will help sentient beings to overcome all subtle afflictions. With the adornment of compassion, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome, and they will not tire of or abandon any sentient being. With the adornment of joy, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome, and they will obtain the one-pointed concentration without distraction. With the adornment of equanimity, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome, and they will eliminate all subtle afflictions.

Next is the karmic results of practicing the four immeasurables in the path of the ten virtues. With the adornment of each of them,

bodhisattvas' karmic results of engaging in the ten virtues will be perfect and wholesome. Specifically, with the adornment of loving-kindness, they will guide all sentient beings in overcoming all mental afflictions, to the very subtle level. In the other two versions, it is said that they will not generate any harmful intent or anger towards others.

With the adornment of compassion, bodhisattvas will never abandon or tire of any sentient being. Compassion is an all-inclusive mindset that forsakes no beings. In *Buddha Speaks of the Dharma Collection Sutra*, Avalokiteshvara said to the Buddha that if a bodhisattva fully knows one Dharma and upholds this one Dharma, he will grasp all Dharma, and this one Dharma is the practice of the great compassion, which encompasses the entire Buddhadharmā. Also, it is said in the *Mahāparinirvāna Sutra*, "He who generates compassion for all sentient beings belongs to the noble family and possesses immeasurable merit." For many of us, the generation of compassion should not be too challenging, as it is an aspiration to not cause any harm to any sentient being. If one can truly give rise to the mind of compassion, one is not in an ordinary state, but a sublime one. This statement is not from the perspective of an ordinary conception, but from the vajra speech of the Buddha.

With the adornment of joy, bodhisattvas will attain the one-pointed concentration without distraction. And with the adornment of equanimity, they will eliminate all subtle afflictions.

龙主，乃至以四摄法而为庄严，果报圆满，当得一切众生随顺化导。

*“Lord of nagas, with the adornment of four ways of attraction, their karmic results will be perfect and wholesome, and they will teach and guide sentient beings in accordance with their capacities and willingness.*

With the adornment of the four ways of attraction, that is, generosity, pleasant language, beneficial conduct and cooperation, the karmic results will be perfect and wholesome, and they will lead sentient beings toward maturation according to their various capacities and preferences.

若以四念处而为庄严，于身受心法悉能解了。若以四正断而为庄严，能使一切不善之法皆悉断灭，得一切善法圆满。若以四神足而为庄严，能得身心皆获轻利。若以五根而为庄严，当得信进不退，心无迷惑，了诸业因，永灭烦恼。若以五力而为庄严，当得不愚不痴，及得永断贫穷过失。若以七觉支而为庄严，当得觉悟一切如实之法。若以八正道而为庄严，当能证得正智。

*With the adornment of four applications of mindfulness, they will acquire a thorough understanding of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena. With the adornment of the four genuine restraints,*

they will abandon all non-virtues and perfect all virtues. With the adornment of the four bases of miraculous powers, their body and mind will be light. With the adornment of the five powers, their faith will be irreversible, their mind will not be deluded, they will understand all the karmic causes and eliminate all their afflictions. With the adornment of the five strengths, they will be free from ignorance and stupidity, and never experience deprivation and related defects. With the adornment of the seven elements for enlightenment, they will realize the true reality of all phenomena. With the adornment of the noble eightfold path, true wisdom will be obtained.

The following are the effects of applying the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment in the path of the ten virtues. They can be classified into seven sets of qualities: the four applications of mindfulness; the four genuine restraints; the four bases of miraculous powers; the five powers; the five strengths; the seven elements for enlightenment; and the noble eightfold path.

With the adornment of the four applications of mindfulness, bodhisattvas will acquire a thorough understanding of the impurity of the body, the feelings of suffering, the impermanence of the mind, and the selflessness of phenomena.

With the adornment of the four genuine restraints, bodhisattvas will prevent non-virtues that have not yet arisen from arising and eradicate

non-virtues that have arisen. Also, they will cause virtues that have not arisen to arise and those which have arisen to grow.

With the adornment of the four bases of miraculous powers, their physical and mental states will be at ease and comfort.

With the adornment of the five powers, they will never lose conviction and diligence. They will be free from delusions and clearly understand the principle of dependent arising. Afflictions are therefore pacified without ever arising again.

With the adornment of the five strengths, they will be free from ignorance and stupidity, severe deprivations, misfortunes and all sorts of worldly shortcomings.

With the adornment of the seven elements for enlightenment, they will realize the original nature of all phenomena.

With the adornment of the noble eightfold path, they will realize the utmost and unsurpassable wisdom of the enlightened being.

若以奢摩他而为庄严，当得断于一切烦恼。若以尾钵舍曩庄严，当得了悟一切法之智慧。若以正道而为庄严，当于有为、无为一切方便悉能了知。

With the adornment of shamatha, they will eradicate all afflictions. With the adornment of vipassana, they will realize the wisdom of comprehending all phenomena exactly as they are. With the

adornment of the right path, they will comprehend all skillful means of the compounded and the un-compounded phenomena.

With the adornment of shamatha, all mental afflictions will be vanquished. With the adornment of vipassana, the wisdom of comprehending all phenomena as they truly are will arise. With the adornment of the right path, they will possess all skillful means of compounded and un-compounded phenomena. The other two versions read that with the adornment of skillful means, they will acquire compounded and un-compounded happiness, which I feel is easier to understand, since there are numerous skillful means in Mahayana practice. As stated in *Safeguarding the Sovereign of a Country Dharani Sutra*, “Practice the path of purity, and immeasurable joy grows.” Engaging in a pure path by relying on various skillful means, one will attain happiness naturally in this life and future lifetimes. Such happiness is boundless.

龙王，我今略说十善之法而有庄严，至于十力、四智及十八不共之法，乃至如来一切法分，皆得圆满。龙王，乃至广大解说此十善业道庄严之事，当令修学。

“Lord of nagas, I’ve briefly explained the ten virtues with the aforementioned adornments. In short, the ten powers, the four types of fearlessness, the eighteen unique qualities, up to all the qualities of a buddha, will be perfected in their entirety. Lord of

nagas, the vast and expansive explanations on the adornments of the paths of the ten virtues, you must strive to learn and practice.

The Buddha told the naga king that he had just summarized the karmic effects of practicing the ten virtues with the abovementioned adornments. In the end, one will attain all qualities of a buddha, such as the ten powers, the four types of fearlessness, the eighteen unique qualities, the wisdom that knows completely, the wisdom that knows correctly, and so on. So the Buddha urged the naga king that he must study extensively all the related teachings on the ten virtues, and that all the adornments of the ten virtues must be vigorously practiced.

From the Buddha's words, we come to the understanding that the ten virtues are not as simple as many people think. They are more than abandoning acts of killing, stealing, lying and so on. The ten virtues are the foundation for all Dharma practice. Without them, a successful practice will be unattainable.

Both monastics and lay practitioners can realize the importance of the ten virtues by closely studying these teachings. Even the exclusive qualities of the tathagata are attainable on the basis of the ten virtues, let alone other merits and qualities. In Nagarjuna's *Treatise on the Ten Bodhisattva Grounds*, it says, "All the benefits of the Shravakayana, Pratyekabuddhayana, and Mahayana come from relying on the path of the ten virtues." The qualities generated from the Shravakayana, Pratyekabuddhayana, and Mahayana are all based on the practice of

the ten virtues. As one upholds the ten virtues, one will be able to benefit boundless sentient beings.

Even from the perspective of being a decent person, the ten virtues are the root. If one's physical, verbal, and mental conduct are in accordance with the ten virtues, one will be a perfect individual. On the contrary, one's conduct will degenerate if they perform the ten non-virtues. In terms of body, if one commits killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct, they cause harm to others and also defile themselves by these negativities. In terms of speech, if one commits lying, harsh words, divisive talk, and meaningless speech, they will be disliked as their words will be meaningless, untrustworthy, and also disturbing to others. These four verbal non-virtues entail all the faults of speech. By avoiding them, meritorious speech takes their place. In terms of mind, if one possesses strong covetousness, malevolence and wrong views, their mental state will be heavily afflicted and troubled. So for every person, the ten virtues are indispensable to cultivate the purity of body, speech and mind.

## **An Analogy for the Ten Virtues to Conclude the Sutra**

龙王，譬如大地，能与人界一切国城、聚落，乃至林树及药草等，而为安住。又复诸业皆有种子，种子既由四大而成，由如

种谷，初生芽茎，乃至成熟，皆依于地。龙王，此十善业道，能为天上人间一切有情胜妙安住，能令一切有为、无为得智果报，一切声闻及辟支佛，乃至菩萨、无上正等正觉而为安住，亦复为一切佛法根本安住。龙王，我此所说，汝等一切，当以正心而生信解。

“Lord of nagas, take the earth as an analogy: The earth is the foundation for all things established on the ground, such as the human habitats of countries, cities, towns, villages, as well as woods, herbs, grass, and so forth. All activities originate from seeds, and seeds are constituted by the four primary elements. Like sowing a seed of grain which sprouts and ripens, all activities rely on the earth. Lord of nagas, the paths of ten virtues are the basis for all the wondrous merits in the human and deva realms. They are the basis for the conditioned and the unconditioned fruition of wisdom. They are the basis for the awakening of shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas. They are the basis for the unexcelled and perfect enlightenment of buddhas. They are also the basis for all the qualities of buddhas. Lord of nagas, on what I’ve expounded, you should generate conviction with the right understanding.”

Human habitats ranging from villages and towns to cities and countries, are all founded on the earth. Forests, trees, herbs, flowers, and grasses all grow and thrive on the earth. Human activities such as agriculture, industry, and construction all take place on the earth.

Seeds of grain depend on the four primary elements to ripen. The process of their sprouting, growing, and ripening depends on the earth as well. So the earth is the basis of everything. If it is absent with only space existing, nothing could come into formation.

Likewise, the paths of the ten virtues are the basis of all the wondrous merits in the human and deva realms. The conditioned and unconditioned wisdom is rooted in the observation of the ten virtues. The cultivation of all the qualities of shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas and buddhas are based on the ten virtues. The exclusive qualities of the tathagata are only attainable through the path of the ten virtues. What the Buddha said to the naga king is surely without deception. So one should generate devotion in the ten virtues from the bottom of one's heart.

尔时，娑伽罗龙王，并在会诸菩萨摩訶萨，一切声闻及天、人、阿修罗、乾闥婆等一切大众，闻佛所说，欢喜奉行。

At that time, the naga king Sagara, together with the whole assembly including all bodhisattvas and mahasattvas, all shravakas, devas, humans, asuras, gandharvas and so on, received the Buddha's teaching and put it into practice with great joy.

At that time, the naga king Sagara and the whole assembly were full of joy and aspired to put the Buddha's teaching into practice. At this moment, we've completed the teaching on the sutra of *The Questions*

*of the Naga King Sagara.* The benefits of teaching and listening to this sutra are immense, and I hope that having received this teaching and the transmission, all of you can make a good effort to propagate it. It will be of great benefit to share with people some basic Dharma teachings such as the ten virtues, the karmic principle, the vows of taking refuge and the generation of bodhicitta. These teachings can bring great benefit to one's present life and all future lives.

It is the last day of 2016. What an auspicious coincidence that we conclude the study of this sutra tonight! I guess it indicates that starting with the new year, we all should be mindful of our thoughts and behavior by following the paths of the ten virtues. If you have transgressed certain codes, confess sincerely without being overly troubled. It is unlikely for ordinary people not to make any mistake. What is crucial for us, is to take every opportunity to cultivate virtuous qualities and to confess all our non-virtuous deeds. I wish that you may all observe the ten virtues heartily and happy new year!



ཡི་གེ་གི་ལུ་ཅར་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་འདི་དངོས་མཛད་པུ་བཞུགས་ན་པའི་ཆ་དེ་ཅི་འདྲར་  
བཞག་མཁམ་ཁྱེང་གིས་ལ་མི་འདྲུང་བར་འཇམས་དཔལས་ཙུ་རྒྱུད་ལམས་གསུངས་སོ།།

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