

**H.E. Nubpa Rinpoche's commentary on
A Precious Garland of the Supreme Path by Gampopa**

Translated from Tibetan to English by Meghan Howard



Section 6 The Ten Things to be Known

These are the ten things that are very important for us to know and understand. We are all wandering in samsara and what is the cause of that? It is delusion. We misperceive phenomena as inherently existent and grasp at them. In other words, we do not see the natural state of phenomena, the way things actually are. That becomes a loop for us to cycle in samsara. What do we do about that? We try to attain liberation. In order to dispel the delusion of viewing and grasping phenomena as truly existing, these are the things that individuals who seek liberation need to know, understand, and pay attention to in order get out of samsara.

1. As external appearances are confusion, know them to be unreal.

Our ordinary body, an external appearance, is comprised of the five aggregates and six sense bases/organs. Based on that, we perceive various sensory objects (forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects and objects of the mind) which are called outer appearances. We ordinary beings in our ordinary body perceive ordinary sense stimulus or external objects. When we have these sense perceptions, we experience them as something real or having inherent reality. We perceive our body as real and sense objects as real. All these create a sense in our mind that all these are real. In that way, we grasp at reality, grasping at a self in phenomena. Regarding these outer objects, this verse says that these outer appearances lack any inherent existence. In fact, they are the manifestations of many causes and conditions. There are many buddhist teachings and scriptures written about this. Although things appear yet they lack inherent reality, that is the key point. Buddha used eight different metaphors—illusions, mirages, dreams, echoes, reflections, magic shows, foams, and bubbles to illustrate the lack of inherent existence of outer appearances. If you want to gain liberation, this verse says that you have to know the natural state of selflessness of all phenomena.

2. As the internal mind itself is without a self, know it to be empty.

This verse is about the selflessness of a person. Our inner mind perceives the outer objects with outer appearances. There is duality and we grasp at the duality between the subject (our mind) and the object (the objects outside). We have the sense that our mind lives inside our body and identify it as a self. If you examine your mind, it is empty awareness. It does not exist the way we perceive. It has no inherent existence just like the outer objects. We can examine from where it comes, where it abides, and to where it goes. First, we cannot find any place from where it arises. Similarly, if you look around for it, you can examine from the top of your head to the tip of your toe, you cannot find a place where your mind is abiding in your body. When consciousness is interrupted, it ceases and where does it go? You cannot find that place. From these three ways, you will see that there is no inherent reality of the mind itself. There is no place to identify where the mind abides, there is nothing you can point to or show since the mind has no shape or color. If you proceed in the analysis, you will see that the mind itself is empty. That is what this verse is all about. Emptiness means empty of an inherent existence.

Selflessness here means that mind lacks an inherent reality. What then is this thing that we call “I”? Basically, we are talking about the assemblage of the five aggregates. When these five aggregates come together, we grasp at those and the idea that there is a self or “I” there. But again, if we analyze it, you will find that there is no self there, the very foundation of the mind itself has no self. The mind itself is emptiness or empty awareness and that is the natural state. This verse says that you need to know this. Emptiness does not mean that there is absolutely nothing or nothingness? No, it is talking about being interdependent on the basis of various causes and conditions, for example interdependence of various causes and conditions that lead to our body. It is not that there is nothing, rather it functions through interdependence of causes and conditions.

3. As the thoughts in between arise conditionally, know them to be adventitious.

Here we are talking about thoughts or conceptual thoughts. When we encounter various external objects, we have the habit of thinking: that is this, and that is this. Those are mental events or conceptual thoughts. When there is an outer object and an inner mind that grasps at the object and there is sensory experience, for example, when you see the form of a flower, that is due to many conditions that come together to produce that moment of perception. The thought that that is a flower is adventitious that arises spontaneously on the basis of all these conditions. When you examine in this way, you see that the nature of all the conceptual thoughts is emptiness and they all collapse.

4. As this body and speech, composed of the elements, are composite, know them to be impermanent.

This is relatively straight-forward. This body composed of the five elements (earth, water, wind, fire, space) and the five aggregates is the working of the interdependences of these physical constituents. So, it is the dependent arising of causes and conditions. Thus, it is composite and the Buddha said that everything which is composite is impermanent.

Composite means that many different things are coming together into a big assemblage. But through the process we can see that because it is composed of many different elements and each of those can change moment by moment, it is subject to change and thus impermanent. Those who intend to gain liberation and omniscience should realize or develop the attitude that your body is impermanent. Thus, do not have attachment and clinging to the body and speech.

5. As all the pleasure and suffering of sentient beings arise from karma, know the results of actions to be unailing.

We are born into this body through the working of karma. Our various experiences of happiness and suffering throughout our lifetime arise through the accumulation of karma (actions). Our experiences are like the ripening of a fruit. When we perform virtuous deeds, we will reap a fruit of happiness and when we perform non-virtuous deeds, we will reap a fruit of suffering. Understand that the working of karma cause and result is infallible. Karma cause and result function through emptiness – the dependent arising of causes and conditions. Without emptiness, there is no possibility for dependent arising of causes which leads to the ripening of result. “In the teaching of the Buddha, it is said that not committing any non-virtues and cultivating the wealth of virtues by thoroughly taming your mind is the true essence of the Buddha’s teaching” So, if you do not want suffering, you need to abandon the causes of suffering which are the ten non-virtues and if you want happiness, you need to accomplish the causes of happiness which are the ten virtues. So you need to make effort with your body, speech, and mind in this way. It starts with our motivation in our own mind. We need to turn our mind so that we can do this. This leads to the root of abandoning samsara. That is why it is so important to understand karma cause and effect.

6. As suffering is a cause of renunciation, know it to be a teacher.

Gampopa gave advice or methods or tools to practitioners as to what they should do when different experiences such as happiness and sufferings arise. This verse means that for someone who is practicing, if you experience suffering, you should not let it overwhelm you, crush your motivation or morale. Do not feel sad or dejected thinking: *Oh, I am a disaster. I have such bad luck.* Nothing like that, instead you should realize that by experiencing this suffering, you are purifying many lifetime's sinful deeds and negative karma. Also, suffering can help us to trigger compassion towards others including our enemies when we see them suffer. It also helps us to develop renunciation of samsara. Sometimes, when you have some success in your Dharma practice, you become proud of yourself and feel that you are a great practitioner. Then suffering comes along and knocks out your pride and arrogance. It helps us to face our own mistakes. So suffering in so many ways are helpful to us. In this way, suffering is doing the same thing as if we are receiving teaching from our spiritual teacher. It resembles a spiritual teacher supporting us in virtue. This verse is about how to bring suffering onto the path. Moreover, it promotes the development of love and compassion for others; specifically, with the attitude: *May I be the only one that have to go through the suffering that I am experiencing, may no other sentient being have to go through, them.* Then the adverse conditions actually foster the practice of Dharma.

7. As pleasure and comfort are the root of samsara, know craving and attachment to be mara.

This is about worldly pleasures and comfort such as food, wealth, possessions, clothing, and so on, that is, wanting the best of everything in full measure. It is also about idle conversations or just hanging out and having a good time. When we grasp at and attach to them, they block the path to liberation. The *37 Bodhisattva Practices* says: *Sense pleasures are like salt water, the more one indulges, the more thirst and craving increase. Therefore abandon these objects as soon as they arise is the bodhisattvas' practice.* So the more you indulge in sense pleasure, the more attachment grows. It is a negative feedback loop. Therefore practitioners should let go of the attachment and clinging towards these pleasurable objects and know that craving and attachment to be mara, namely, the mara of the sons of the gods.

8. As distractions are conditions uncondusive to the accumulation of merit, know them to be obstacles.

For example, when you start having some success in your Dharma practice, you immediately think: *I am a real practitioner. I am a lama. I am a siddha.* Especially when other people are using these words for you as well. Suddenly more people are showing up around you and you have so many disciples. While you are focusing on all these, your own practice is totally lost. This is an obstacle to your Dharma practice and your accumulation of merit. This verse points out that we should not get caught up in any distraction.

9. As obstacles are exhortations for the virtuous practitioners, know enemies and obstructers to be your gurus.

When we strongly engage in Dharma practices, various obstacles and negative conditions can arise. Obstacles can take many forms such as sicknesses that threaten our health, physical harms, mental disturbances caused by spirits and so on. This verse says that we should view them as exhortations for us to develop further virtues. So they are our gurus. Here enemies refer to human enemies while obstructers refer to spirits, devas, demons, and so forth. For practitioners all these lead to siddhis or accomplishments.

10. As, in absolute truth, all things are without a nature, know everything to be the same.

Previous verses are expressed in the perspective of the relative truth, here this verse is about the absolute truth. When the nature of reality is realized, there is no duality, everything is in the same nature of emptiness. On that level, there is no difference in quality, good or bad, there is no virtue to practice or non-virtue to abandon. It is all equality, sameness or oneness.

These are the ten things to be known.