



*Lama Tsong Khapa's
Lam Rim Chen Mo
How to Train in the Mahayana Path in General*

འཇུག་ཤིག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

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The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Set the correct motivation and begin your meditation.
[Tonglen meditation]

It's time to arise out of your meditation.

As ordinary sentient beings we cannot sit in deep meditative equipoise and at the time can listen to Dharma; we can't do both things simultaneously. Only fully enlightened beings can do that. That is why we have to come out of our meditation in order to listen to this profound teaching.

It is very important to cultivate the right motivation, the bodhicitta motivation. It is said that even if you cultivate the bodhicitta motivation of an awakening mind, for a split second, there is a tremendous benefit. It also has the benefit of purifying all negativities and at the same time accumulating enormous merit. Therefore, try to cultivate the awakening mind, the wish to achieve the full state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, from the depths of your heart. Make sure that the motivation has no stain of self-interest or self-cherishing.

From today we begin teaching the section on How to Train in the Mahayana in General from Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise on the Stages of Path to Enlightenment*¹.

III) EXPLANATION OF THE PROCESS OF LEARNING THE PRECEPTS

This has two subheadings:

1. How to train in the Mahayana in general
2. How to train specifically in the Vajrayana

Study the meaning of the term 'Mahayana' or Great Vehicle in your own time to find out the connotation of Great Vehicle.

A 'HOW TO TRAIN IN THE MAHAYANA IN GENERAL'

There are three subheadings under this heading:

1. Establishing the desire to learn the precepts of the spirit of enlightenment
2. Taking the vows of the conquerors' children after establishing the desire to learn the precepts
3. How to train after taking the vows

1. Establishing the desire to learn the precepts of the spirit of enlightenment

In the discipline of individual liberation and in tantra it is inappropriate to study the precepts before you have first taken the vows

Those of you who have been studying for a long time will know what 'individual liberation' means., Here the discipline of individual liberation refers to the vows of individual liberation (Skt: *pratimoksha* Tib: *so.thar*

sDom.pa) such as the vows of novice monks and nuns, fully ordained monks and nuns etc. There is also reference to the tantric vows. When the text says 'it is inappropriate to study the precepts' it is saying that without first taking the individual liberation and tantric vows, it is inappropriate to study the precepts or instructions relating to those vows.

The text next comments on the vows:

but these bodhisattva vows are different. First you understand the precepts well and then, after you are trained in them, if you have an enthusiasm for taking them, you are given the vows.

If you just read the commentary it is quite self-explanatory. As far as taking the bodhisattva vows goes, however, it is different in that it is saying here that first you should study and understand the precepts and train in them well, and 'if you have enthusiasm for taking them, you are given the vows.' Here the text refers to taking the bodhisattva vows which are, unlike vinaya or pratimoksha vows, allowed to study before taking them. In fact, the text says that before taking the bodhisattva vows it is very important that you study the precepts related to the vows very well. The reason is that if you have really studied and understood them well, feeling strongly motivated and enthusiastic about taking the vows, your practice will be very stable.

Essentially when it says 'in the discipline of individual liberation', it refers to the vinaya or vows of individual liberation, and the tantric vows – it is not appropriate to study these vows before taking them. On the other hand, it is strongly recommended that you study the bodhisattva's precepts and vows prior to taking them.

In Tibetan the terms 'enthusiastic' literally means joyful effort, 'if you have an enthusiasm for taking them', connotes heartfelt joy in the bodhisattva's vows and precepts. After studying and learning those vows and precepts, and if you feel joyful, positive and inspired, then it says you should go ahead to take them. Indirectly this means that if you don't feel that way, it is not recommended to take the vows.

Then the commentary continues:

In this regard the *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

For persons wanting to take the ethical discipline vows of a bodhisattva you should make known in advance the fundamental precepts and the sources of fault for bodhisattva as taught here in the "Summary of the Bodhisattva Fundamentals" for the bodhisattvas' scriptural collection of the discourses. If after sincere investigation and intelligent analysis these persons are inspired, and if it is not because of being made to do it by someone else and it is not to compete with others, then know that these are reliable bodhisattvas. These persons should be given the vows of ethical discipline and should receive them in accord with the ritual.

If you read the actual text it is quite clear however you should take the time to reflect on the meaning of each line and word. For instance, when it says, 'If after sincere investigation and intelligent analysis,' it means that after you have initially studied the scripture by reading or by listening to the teachings, the next stage is to use your own intelligence to understand the depth of the meaning, particularly applying those points or advice to yourself.

¹ Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path, Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee - Joshua W.C. Cutler, Editor-in Chief and Guy Newland, Editor.

You should see the benefits of applying this methodology of sincere investigation and intelligent analysis, and understand the shortcomings if you don't apply it. It is saying that if as a result of fully understanding them through using your own investigation and intelligence you feel motivated or inspired to take the vows and follow the precepts, then you should go ahead. That is the proper way of approaching the taking of these vows.

The passage saying 'and if it is not because of being made to do it by someone else' means that you are not taking on certain practices or precepts because you're being forced to or obliged by someone else. It should not be like that. It also says, 'it is also not to compete with others.' You must decide to do certain things on the basis of your own understanding, your intelligence and what your wisdom tells you, not because you see someone else doing them and do them too out of a sense of competitiveness. It is saying that it should not be like that. The text then says 'then know that these are reliable bodhisattvas. These persons should be given the vows of ethical discipline and should receive them in accord with the ritual.'

Then Lama Tsongkhapa continues:

This is a very good method because, if you understand the precepts, bring them to mind, establish a wish to train in them from the depths of your heart, and then take the vows, you will be extremely constant.

To explain the precepts both here and below would make for too great a burden of words, so I shall indicate them below.

2. Taking the vows of the conquerors' children after establishing the desire to learn the precepts

I have already established in detail in my Basic Path to Awakening commentary on the Bodhisattva Levels' chapter on ethical discipline

This commentary by Lama Tsongkhapa is available in English. In the past I have recommended that you read this text to learn more about the precepts and so forth; it is a good reference.

First how to take the bodhisattva vows, immediately after that how to guard against fundamental transgressions and transgressions which constitute minor infractions, and then how to repair vows if they degenerate. It is most definitely necessary that you read this before you take the vows, so understand them from there.

3. How to train after taking the vows

How to train after taking the vows has three parts:

- a) What the precepts are based upon
- b) How all the precepts are included in the six perfections
- c) The process of learning the perfections

When it says, 'what the precepts are based upon', they are based upon the six perfections. Then, 'how all the precepts are included in the six perfections' will be explained by the next subheading.

a) What the precepts are based upon

There are limitless clear categorizations, but if you arrange the bodhisattva precepts by type, you can include them all within the six perfections

The six perfections are thus the great condensation of all the key points of the bodhisattva path. The four ways to gather disciples [generosity, pleasant speech, working at

the aims, and consistency of behaviour] are also included within these six perfections as follows.

Please list the six perfections.

The perfections are generosity, morality, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom.

The four ways to gather disciples are included within the six perfections.

That generosity is included is obvious.

The four ways to gather disciples are:

Pleasant speech in giving instructions to disciples, taking the six perfections as the point of departure;

The second way of gathering disciples is included within the perfections.

working at the aims is establishing others in the aims of these instructions;

This third way to gather disciples is to teach or help the disciples to understand the teachings as well as inspire them to put their understanding into practice.

and consistency of behaviour is practicing just as the disciple does.

This fourth way to gather disciples is being 'consistent' in the sense that the teachers should also implement the same practices they advise others to adopt. The teachers need to be consistent with whatever advice they give to others to put into practice, that they also engage in the same practices.

The commentary continues:

Although it is true that the entire bodhisattva path is also subsumed under other condensations such as the two collections, the three trainings [ethical discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom], and so forth, these are not able to produce the understanding that the six perfections do, so the six perfections are the best inclusive set.

Name the two collections and the three trainings.

The two collections are the collections of merit and wisdom. The three trainings are morality concentration and wisdom

b) How all the precepts are included in the six perfections

Explanation on how all the precepts are included in the six perfections has two parts:

1. A discussion of the main topic, the fixed number of perfections
2. An ancillary discussion of the fixed order of the perfections

The Bhagavan formulated a bare outline of the six perfections, and the holy Regent [Maitreya] produced certain knowledge of these by explicating in accord with the Buddha's intended meaning the key points of the rationale for formulating the perfections in that fashion. These explanations show that there is a fixed number of perfections. When you are convinced of this and astonished by it, you will understand the practice of the six perfections as the supreme instruction, so obtain such conviction.

A discussion of the main topic, the fixed number of perfections, has six parts:

1. The fixed number of perfections based on high status
2. The fixed number of perfections based on fulfilling the two aims

3. The fixed number of perfections based on perfecting the complete fulfillment of others' aims
4. The fixed number of perfections based on their subsuming the entire Mahayana
5. The fixed number of perfections in terms of the completeness of paths or method
6. The fixed number of perfections based on the three trainings

(A) THE FIXED NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS BASED ON HIGH STATUS

To fully complete the greatly effective bodhisattva deeds you need an immeasurably long succession of lifetimes.

This clearly implies that we may not be able to achieve the perfection of giving, moral ethics etc. in one single lifetime; rather we need to depend on many more lifetimes. In order to ensure that we make progress with our practice, we continuously need to find a life that has the four excellences, the causes of which are the practice of the six perfections.

Moreover, to attain quick success on the path within these lifetimes you need a life excellent in every aspect. Our present life is not excellent in every aspect but rather has only some of the aspects of full excellence; we do not make progress with it though we practice the teachings. You need a life that has four kinds of excellence: (1) resources to use [the result of the perfection of generosity], (2) a body with which you act [the result of the perfection of ethical discipline], (3) companions together with whom you act [the result of the perfection of patience], and (4) work that you are able to accomplish once undertaken [the result of the perfection of joyous perseverance].

The first excellence is relating to the **resources** we need for our life. Are good resources important for our life or not? Do you all want good resources? Yes. Having all the resources alone is not enough. Importantly you also need an excellent life or a **body** that is fit to enjoy those resources.

You also need **companions** or others with whom you can enjoy those resources. That is also important. The fourth is to **finish the task you have started**. Thus, the four excellences are excellent resources, excellent body, excellent companions and the excellence of completing any task once started. You can imagine how different our life would be if we had all of these four excellences.

Each of these four excellences can be accomplished through each of the first four perfections: the perfection of giving, through which we can achieve excellent resources; the perfection of morality (or moral ethics) through which we achieve an excellent body; the perfection of patience through which we achieve excellent companions; and lastly the perfection of joyous effort through which we are able to complete whatever work we start.

The commentary continues:

Since in many cases these four kinds of excellence alone may themselves become conditions for afflictions, you must not fall under the control of the afflictions

This passage highlights the point that even though we may have met with all of the four excellences, they too can turn into the source of mental afflictions unless we have cultivated a meditative concentration. It is important to ensure that good conditions do not serve to

increase mental afflictions. Hence the commentary says, *you must not fall under the control of the afflictions*, which is achieved as a result of the perfection of meditative stabilisation.

In order to prevent the excellences becoming a cause for increasing afflictions, we have to engage in the perfection of concentration which subdues all the mental afflictions. It is said that the benefit of meditation is decreasing mental afflictions.

As just the four kinds of excellence are not sufficient, you must also distinguish well, in regard to what to adopt and what to cast aside, precisely what things to do and to stop doing [the result of the perfection of wisdom].

This justifies the importance of integrating the perfection of wisdom into or practice. In relating the importance of developing the perfection of wisdom the commentary continues:

Otherwise, just as a bamboo or plantain tree dies after giving fruit, or a mule dies with pregnancy, you will be destroyed by the four excellences.

This reinforces the fact that without engaging in the practice of the perfection of wisdom, we will lose the advantage of having the four excellences, just like a bamboo or banana tree - if you peel off its skin you get nothing but skin and once it produces fruits it is of no use as it does not produce fruits again. It is important to relate this to our practice in order to understand why we need to practice all six perfections. Simply, if we want all four excellences, and we think of all the things we want in our lives, we will be motivated to engage in the six perfections. It is important to contemplate on each word and line found here and relate it to our practice. This is very effective.

The commentary continues with the perfection of wisdom:

The wise understand how these six - the four excellences, control of the afflictions, and knowledge of what to adopt and what to cast aside - are the results of earlier virtuous actions, and they strive again at steadily increasing their causes.

This says that if we cultivate the perfection of wisdom then we do not take for granted all the excellent conditions that we have found in this life. Whereas if we do not have the wisdom, we take it for granted and then as said here:

The unwise use the results of their earlier accumulations of virtue and exhaust them; as they do not increase them anew, they reach the brink of their future suffering.

Sooner or later all the excellences or good conditions will be exhausted and then we will fall into suffering. However, if we understand our situation through the eyes of wisdom, we will be encouraged to engage in practice even more because we will see that our excellent conditions are the result of our past virtuous actions, such as the perfection of giving. Since you appreciate the good conditions and know that they result from virtuous actions, you will be inspired to create more virtuous actions.

As we have discussed in the past, we should appreciate even small things like enjoying a cup of tea, and see it is as a result of our virtuous actions. As we enjoy that tea,

we will also be inspired to create more virtuous actions. In this way the good conditions that we have found now motivate us to create the causes for more good conditions in the future.

I have been saying over and over again that you should not exhaust all your good karmas by simply indulging in the pleasures and not accumulating any more good karma. But it appears that my words go in one ear and out the other. Even though you have heard about the eight worldly concerns you have not worked to overcome them in practice.

The worldly attitude towards pain and pleasure is that normally we view pleasure as something that we desire while we try to avoid pain. In fact, we should reverse that attitude, welcoming feelings of pain but not pleasure. We should see that feelings of pain are symptoms of exhausting the result of bad karma so in that sense it is good; it also as a reminder to not accumulate any more bad karma. Conversely, we should recognise that experiencing pleasures is an indication of exhausting our good karma, so our only alternative is to accumulate more good karma. If we think along these lines, we develop wisdom in our practice through which we are inspired to practice virtue and abandon non-virtue.

In this way, whenever we find pleasure we see it as a result of our virtuous actions which should inspire us to engage in more virtuous actions. Likewise, as suffering and pain is something we want to avoid, and if we see it as the result of our non-virtuous actions, confronting suffering should instil in our mind thoughts of abandoning non-virtuous actions. To practise virtue and avoid non-virtues, the first key is having a genuine thought and determination to practice virtue and avoid non-virtue.

When you again produce these six in future lives, their production will not be causeless, or from discordant causes, but rather from concordant causes that are the perfections, fixed as six in number. Therefore, in this lifetime you must repeatedly habituate yourself to constant reliance on the six perfections because the superiority of the effects is commensurate to the superiority of the causes. A life with the four excellences constitutes temporary high status, whereas the ultimate high status, which consists of ultimate excellence of body, etc exists at the buddha level.

Here the text indicates the temporary outcome of the six perfections and the ultimate outcome of the six perfections.

Thus the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras (Mahayana-sutralamkara)* says:

High status possessed of excellent resources and body,
Excellent companions and undertakings,
Not going under the power of the afflictions,
And never being mistaken in activities

This passage summarises how the four excellences are the result of the six perfections. Recall that the perfection of giving is the cause of excellent resources, the perfection of morality is the cause for a good body, the perfection of patience is the cause for excellent companions and joyous effort is the cause for the success of all undertakings. Meditative concentration prevents the excellences from being soiled by the power

of the afflictions, while never being mistaken in activities is the result of the perfection of wisdom.

(B) THE FIXED NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS BASED ON FULFILLING THE TWO AIMS

When someone in such a life of high status learns the bodhisattva deeds, these activities are comprehensively categorized as two: those which fulfil your own aim and those which fulfil the aims of others. Therefore, there is a fixed number of perfections based on fulfilling the two aims.

This paragraph indicates that having found the four excellences complemented by the last two perfections of concentration and wisdom, bodhisattvas do only two things: achieve the meaning of one's own purposes and the meaning or purposes of other beings. These are the only two aims.

This section of the text is showing how in terms of fulfilling the two aims - one's own aims and the aims of other beings - all the practices are included in the six perfections.

To fulfil the aims of others you must first help them with material goods. Since no benefit will come from generosity accompanied by harmfulness toward living beings,

This first talks of the perfection of giving, which primarily refers to your wholehearted intention to give. When you have cultivated that kind of thought in the depth of your heart, you will naturally give whatever resources you have to others, thereby fulfilling their needs.

The commentary then says:

To fulfil the aims of others you must first help them with material goods. Since no benefit will come from generosity accompanied by harmfulness toward living beings, you need ethical discipline, ...

This indicates the necessity of the practice of morality or moral ethics, essentially based on the principle of non-harmfulness. Without integrating the principle of non-harmfulness (or thought of not harming others) then you cannot do the practice of giving wholeheartedly. Therefore, in order to serve others, in order to benefit others, the practice of morality is mandatory.

...toward living beings, you need ethical discipline, which has a great purpose for others in that it is the state of desisting from harm to others and the causes of such harm.

This refers to refraining from the ten non-virtuous of the body, speech, and mind. In this Tibetan version, desisting from harmfulness refers to the non-virtuous actions of the body, and the base of harmfulness refers to the speech, four of the non-virtuous actions of speech and so forth.

To bring this to its full development you also need patience that disregards the harm done to you, for, if you are impatient with harm and retaliate a time or two, you will not attain pure ethical discipline.

As we discussed before, this relates to the practice of the six perfections in order to benefit others. It is saying that in order to benefit others we need to practise giving and morality (which is the thought of abandoning harm upon other beings). The text says that in order to benefit others we need to practise patience. For example, if we receive

harm from others and do not practise patience, i.e. do not tolerate any harm we receive from them and retaliate then instead of benefiting others we cause them harm. As such, the practice of patience is essential in order to prevent harmful actions and maintain our altruistic attitude towards others.

When you do not retaliate by practising patience, you prevent others from accumulating more negativities, because if you retaliate then they may retaliate back with more harmful actions. Whereas your act of non-retaliation may bring calmness in their mind and motivate them to create virtuous actions. Because of your practice of patience, it says here:

When you do not retaliate because of your patience, you prevent others from accumulating a great amount of sin and bring them to virtue by inspiring them with your patience.

Through this, when others observe your practice of patience, they may be inspired by it and through this, they may accumulate virtue. In this way, we can see here how our practice of patience helps others to achieve their great purposes. From this, we understand how the first three perfections of giving, morality and patience enable us to primarily benefit other beings. The text continues with the theme of how the six perfections are enough or essential to fulfilling one's own aims and other beings saying:

You attain your own aim, the bliss of liberation, through the power of wisdom.

Your own aim, which is state of liberation or nirvana, depends on the perfection of wisdom. Then it goes on:

Since you will not attain this with a distracted mind, ...

meaning you cannot achieve wisdom or insight if your mind is too distracted.

...you must set your mind in meditative equipoise by means of meditative stabilization,...

This shows that we have to rely on the perfection of concentration or meditative stabilisation to overcome all the distracted states of mind. And then:

obtaining a mental serviceability wherein you intentionally set your attention on any object of meditation ...

... refers to benefits of the perfection of concentration.

The commentary goes on:

since a lazy person does not produce this, you need joyous perseverance day and night that never slackens, so this is the basis of the other perfections.

Here a connection is made between the importance of generating joyous perseverance and achieving the state of concentration and wisdom. Without joyous effort, we can fall prey to laziness, and then we cannot achieve concentration and wisdom. So in this way, it summarises how the three perfections of joyous effort, concentration and wisdom are necessary to achieve one's own goals.

For accomplishing the two aims, then, the number of perfections is fixed as six.

In terms of fulfilling these two aims, one's own aim and of others, the number of the perfections is six. The text quotes *The Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* which says:

Those who strive for the aims of beings
Work at giving, non-harm, and patience;
And completely fulfil their own aims
With stabilization and liberation, together with their basis

In these six there is no complete fulfillment of others' aims. The mention of "stabilization and liberation" differentiates between the two as (1) the stabilization of the mind on the object of meditation, this being the imprint of meditative stabilization, and (2) the liberation from cyclic existence, this being the imprint of wisdom. Notice that this does not mistake meditative serenity for insight. As this is so, those who assert that the meditation of fixing one's attention in an absence of conceptual thought is meditation on the profound are speaking of a meditation that is a single portion of the meditative stabilization that is one of these six perfections. You must attain certain knowledge of the six perfections in their entirety.

I chose to teach you this text because I want you all to actually read it and contemplate on its meaning. That is my main hope. The six perfections are the core practice of the Mahayana. So, it is good to study the depth and breadth of the meaning as much as you can, e.g. knowing the difference between giving and the perfection of giving and so forth.

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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We have just recited the prayer for taking refuge, which indicates that we are Buddhists, and the prayer for generating bodhicitta, which indicates that we are Mahayana Buddhists. Accordingly, we should cultivate the bodhicitta motivation and begin our usual meditation of giving and taking.

[Tonglen meditation]

Review of key elements of last week's teaching

We covered some very important topics that should serve as guidelines for our future, such as the **type of future life that we should seek**. We learnt that we should seek a life in a higher rebirth which is endowed with the **four excellences**. We then learnt that we can, indeed, find such an excellent life by engaging in the practice of the six perfections.

At the moment we may not actually have practised any of the six perfections, such as the perfection of giving, because here the word 'perfection' specifically includes the three attributes of bodhicitta, the wisdom of emptiness and dedication. However, we do have the opportunity to engage in the practice of the six perfections. We can practise the perfection of giving which is to cultivate a thought of giving; the perfection of moral discipline which is to cultivate a thought of restraint from committing harmful actions; and the perfection of patience with facing hardship or receiving harm from others and so forth.

We are aware that sooner or later we have to leave this life and go to the next rebirth without any choice. If we ask, 'Do we have any choice about the next rebirth?', the answer is that we do not have any choice because rebirth is predetermined by the force of karma and mental afflictions. Therefore, it is important for us to recognise and be convinced that positive karmas will result in a happy rebirth and negative karmas will result in a bad rebirth.

As we learnt in last week's teaching, we should first try to understand why it is crucial for us to find a life with the four excellences, and then understand that we can indeed find such a life by engaging in the practice of the six perfections. It is said that the perfection of moral discipline serves as the primary cause for us to achieve a happy rebirth; the practice of giving is the main cause to ensure that we have good resources; the practice of patience is the main cause to ensure good friends and companions to share and enjoy those good resources, and joyous perseverance is the cause to be able to successfully complete whatever we start.

However, it's not good enough just to find a life with the four excellences, if we waste that opportunity and it ends up as a basis for even more mental afflictions. Hence, the need to practise the last two perfections - the perfection of meditative stabilisation, which is primarily to subdue or overcome the very gross or manifest form of mental afflictions; and the practice of the perfection of wisdom, which uproots these mental afflictions.

You have been doing the **meditation of giving and taking** for a long time. So it is important to check whether this meditation has increased your practice of giving at least on a

mental level. In this meditation, as the prayer that we chant tells us, we imagine giving our body, belongings, happiness and virtues to others. Along with that we are supposed to be reinforcing our sense of love and compassion for other beings.

It is important to focus on practices that are not only relevant, but which are within our capacity to actually integrate into our lives. In this way, whatever practice we do will become effective and beneficial. If we have conviction and faith in the working of the law of cause and effect, then we understand that our practices will yield results. As you have studied in the past, there is a type of result called a concordant result or a result similar to its cause, and it has two types: concordant with the causal experience and concordant with habitual patterns. Therefore, as a concordant result of your practice of giving in terms of habitual patterns, you will eventually be able to practise giving with ease, as thoughts of giving arise on a more instinctive level.

The meditation of giving and taking is primarily to train our mind to become accustomed to the thought of giving and taking. It is important not only because the actual act of giving depends on our thought of giving, but also so that the act of giving comes from the depths of our hearts. Therefore, it is important that we first train our mind thoroughly in order to be able to practise well. If our mind is not trained well with the cultivation of the thought of giving, then let alone giving our things to others, we would be too stingy to use them for ourselves. Sometimes we might give things to a person and then later on regret that giving, which could be because our act of giving did not come wholeheartedly from our heart.

On a day-to-day basis, we should remind ourselves about our spiritual practice. I frequently tell people who I meet casually or in my Dharma talks that each morning when you get up, you should try to cultivate the positive thought: **I will only do actions that benefit others and at any cost, I will not do any actions that will harm them.** You will find that cultivating such a positive state of mind is like the dawning of the sun dispelling the darkness of ignorance and confusion in your mind. It will make a huge difference to your experiences over the whole day. Whereas if you start the day with your mind filled with distractions and negative thoughts, then for the whole day you may experience a very confused and bewildered mind. Therefore, it is very beneficial to just to say to yourself every morning that 'benefitting other beings and not causing harm to them is my most important task.'

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that to remember the qualities of the Three Jewels, he recites this passage by Nagarjuna from *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* every morning, 'I prostrate to Gautama, who through compassion taught the true doctrine, which leads to the relinquishing of all views.' He follows this by saying, 'please grant me blessings.' It is essential to do this mind training practice on an everyday basis, in order to develop a positive habit and to habituate our minds to positive thoughts.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama also usually recites the same homage to the Lord Buddha before giving any Dharma teachings which His Holiness says is also a practice of one of his very important gurus, Khunu Lama Rinpoche. Likewise, I encourage you to think of benefitting other beings and not causing any harm to them every morning, as soon as you arise from your bed.

Last week, we talked about the six perfections. We should take note that there are **six opposites or six opposing forces relating to each of the six perfections**. The opposite of giving is obviously stinginess or miserliness.

We generally get the impression that Dharma teachings mainly focus on the future well-being of sentient beings, which may lead to people getting the wrong notion that maybe it is not relevant or beneficial to our present life. They may think that the Dharma is not meant to apply to bringing about happiness and overcoming various problems or hardships in this earthly life. But in fact, we will find that if we follow Dharma practice we will be able to achieve the higher goals of our existence and along the way, find that all our temporary or immediate goals are fulfilled automatically.

By following Dharma practice, we can directly experience immediate benefits from that practice, and we don't require any explanation to verify that fact. Because of this, the emphasis of Dharma teaching is on fulfilling higher and long-term aspirations of our existence, for which an attachment to, or too much worrying about our transient life can be an impediment. If we talk about the immediate benefits of engaging in the practice of giving, the benefits are very obvious, including removing poverty in the world and at a personal level gaining a good reputation and more personal friends.

The Lord Buddha said that initially you please and attract other sentient beings through your practice of giving. This advice is very true; it is a very effective way of benefiting other beings. Initially, through your practice of giving, you please them by alleviating their poverty or fulfilling their immediate needs. This will greatly please them, and they will become closer to you as if you have won their heart. Giving makes our resources or possessions a good cause for benefiting other beings, and in this way giving us a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment.

The opposite of giving is stinginess or miserliness, where let alone utilising our wealth and possession to benefit others, we even worry about utilising it for our own good. What point is there in being wealthy if we are stingy? The only good thing of having a stingy mind is accumulating material wealth *per se*.

The opposite of the practice of the perfection of moral discipline is immoral acts. More specifically the opposite of the moral act of refraining from killing is the act of killing; the opposite of refraining from stealing is stealing and so on. You can see how relevant it is for us to safeguard ourselves against all these immoral acts in order to secure our happiness and reduce suffering even in this present life.

The opposite of patience is hatred or anger, and we know how destructive and damaging that is to others and to our own lives.

The opposite of joyous perseverance or effort is laziness - let alone achieving our long-term goals we cannot even achieve short-term goals. The Lord Buddha said, 'If only you have effort you have all the Dharma, but if you have only laziness you do not have any Dharma.'

Similarly, the opposite of the meditative stabilisation or concentration is distraction. We know how it is important for us to have a calm and focussed mind if we are to be at peace and for our actions to be effective.

The opposite of wisdom is wrong or mistaken views which is a cause of a lot of confusion and ignorance, and as a result, brings a lot of suffering. We can talk about wrong

view in terms of the ultimate nature of things or in terms of knowledge of other truths such as impermanence. Therefore, the opposite of wisdom is really an ignorance with respect to the various types of knowledge.

In summary, last week we finished the discussion of how the practice of the six perfections includes all the practices related to achieving a higher rebirth or higher status. These six perfections subsume all of the practices related to fulfilling our own goals and the goals of other beings. I think we finished all of the detail related to fulfilling our own goals.

(C) THE FIXED NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS BASED ON PERFECTING THE COMPLETE FULFILLMENT OF OTHERS' AIMS

Actually, the heading indicates that to fulfil the aims of other beings you need to engage in the practice of the six perfections.

You first relieve others' poverty by giving away material goods. Then you do no harm to any living being and, in addition, are patient with harm done to you. Without becoming dispirited you joyously persevere at helping those who harm you. You depend on meditative stabilization and inspire them through displaying supernormal powers and so forth. When they become suitable vessels for the teachings, you rely on wisdom and give good explanations, cut through their doubts and thereby bring them to liberation. Because you do all this, the perfections are fixed as six in number.

In terms of the object of giving, the text only mentions *giving material goods*. But indirectly, it also implies other objects of giving such as giving Dharma and giving fearlessness.

I encourage everyone to read the text and reflect on its meaning as you read. It is very important to understand the finer points, and also to see how the contents are interwoven together, such as the linkage between the practice of giving being followed immediately by the practice of moral discipline. Then the text says:

Then you do no harm to any living being ...

We understand here that the practice of giving is done in conjunction with the practice of moral discipline, which makes a sense. Otherwise, our actions may be at odds with each other: on the one hand you give and on the other hand, you cause harm. This doesn't make sense, does it? Therefore, when you practise giving, you should work towards practising moral discipline.

This part of the text can be taken to refer to the necessity of the practice of **morality** in order to ensure that giving is wholeheartedly done to benefit others and that there is no self-interest and exploitation of other beings whatsoever. You don't want the giving to be like someone feeding a pig for its meat. Then the text continues:

... in addition, are patient with harm done to you.

In addition, we need to engage in the practice of **patience**, particularly patience with the *harm* we receive from others. Without the practice of patience, we retaliate when others harm us and such harmful actions are against our ethical practice and principle of refraining from harmful actions.

Then it continues:

Without becoming dispirited you joyously persevere at helping those who harm you. You depend on meditative stabilization and inspire them through displaying supernormal powers and so forth.

As it says here, in addition to the practice of the first three perfections, we need to rely on the practice of *joyous perseverance* in order to be able to benefit those who harm us, as well as being able to cultivate and develop the practice of the perfections of *meditative stabilisation* and *wisdom*. The text is saying that through developing meditative stabilisation such as the state of calm abiding, we can achieve actual concentration (Tib: *bSam.ten dNgos.shi*) and then the various clairvoyant powers (Tib: *mNgon.shes*). By utilising the clairvoyant powers of higher perception, we can then benefit other beings more effectively and to a greater extent. Then it says:

When they become suitable vessels for the teachings, ...

When other beings have cultivated an aspiration for and admiration and faith in the Dharma, or when they become suitable vessels for receiving Dharma, you teach them Dharma and lead them to the state of liberation. The text then says:

... you rely on wisdom and give good explanations, cut through their doubts and thereby bring them to liberation. Because you do all this, the perfections are fixed as six in number.

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

Through relieving others' poverty, not harming them,
Being patient with their harm, not being dispirited with
what they do,
Delighting them, and speaking well to them
You fulfil others' aims, which fulfils your own.

This verse, together with the one above, says that it is not possible to fulfil others' and your own aims without relying on the six perfections. Once you are certain about the way in which you fulfil your own and others' aims through these six perfections, you will have respect and deep admiration for the practice of them. Once you are certain about the way in which you fulfil your own and others' aims through these six perfections, you will have respect for the practice of them.

Here the text summarises how you will be inspired and feel motivated to engage in practising the six perfections because they have the potential to enable you to achieve all of your own aims and the aims of other beings.

(D) THE FIXED NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS BASED ON THEIR SUBSUMING THE ENTIRE MAHAYANA

Here we see a summary of the bodhisattvas' practice of the six perfections in general. The text says:

You are indifferent to resources because you are not attached to those you have and do not pursue those you lack. Since you then have the ability to safeguard precepts, you adopt and respect ethical discipline.

There is an indication here of how the practice of giving can serve as an underlying cause to engage in the practice of moral discipline. *Indifferent to resources* means without attachment to any wealth and possessions which you already possess, *and do not pursue those you lack* means not craving to have more or to possess those objects that you do not possess. So, the text is saying that because of such a lack of attachment you *then have the ability to safeguard the precepts* or, in other words, a conducive situation to practise moral discipline.

The text continues:

You are patient with the suffering that comes from living beings and inanimate things ...

If you practise patience then you will never be discouraged in the face of any suffering you receive from *living beings* or from *inanimate* causes.

We know from our own experience that when we lack the practice of patience, we can easily become discouraged and give up on our practice by saying that it is too difficult or 'I am not getting anywhere with it.' When faced with pressure or hardship, we feel despair (Tib: *sKyo.ba*) and hopelessness, and then we just give up. It is the same with our practice. However, patience brings resilience to our practice, and so it is a very important element of our practice of benefiting other beings and not harming them. Then the text concludes with:

... and you are enthusiastic about whatever virtue you set out to cultivate, so you do not get dispirited by either of these. You cultivate a non-discursive yoga of meditative serenity and a non-discursive yoga of insight. These six comprise all the Mahayana practices through which you advance by the six perfections, for you accomplish these practices in stages by means of the six perfections and you do not need any more than these six perfections. The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

The entire Mahayana is summed up in
Not delighting in resources,
Reverence, not being dispirited in two ways,
And the yogas free of discursiveness.

Given this, it is a contradiction to want to enter the Mahayana and yet to reject the practice of the six perfections.

We will recite the *King of Prayers* for Wendy White's father who recently passed away peacefully. Before passing away he thanked people for saying prayers. Wendy White, as many of you know, has been closely related to Tara Institute for many, many years. So, we dedicate this prayer for the good rebirth of her father, and as an acknowledgement of the deep sense of loss and sorrow Wendy and her family may be going through.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

30 October 2018

We have just recited the refuge prayer through which we take refuge in the Three Jewels, distinguishing the path that we follow from a wrong path; and through which we generate the bodhicitta mind, distinguishing the path that we follow from an inferior or lower path.

When we recite the prayer, we should also reflect on its meaning. We should take refuge from the depths of our heart, recognising that the path we are following is the perfect one; and sincerely generate bodhicitta, recognising that the path we are following is the highest one.

We call bodhicitta motivation the heart of the Mahayana or Great Vehicle. Why is it called the Great Vehicle? We can explain the use of the word 'great' here from the perspective of whose purpose it relates to, and what goal we, as Mahayana practitioners, aspire to achieve. The bodhicitta motivation of Great Vehicle practitioners aspires to benefit all sentient beings and to achieve the unsurpassed state of buddhahood, a perfect state free of all faults and endowed with all excellent qualities.

Once again, reinforce your bodhicitta motivation of wishing to achieve the state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Then, think that, in order to achieve enlightenment, I will listen to this profound teaching and put it into practice. Here, you are making a resolution or promise to practise, so it is important that you actually practise it. It is crucially important that when you attempt to cultivate bodhicitta while reciting the prayer, you are sincere about taking that vow and holding it, from the depths of your heart.

We will now continue with the teaching.

(E) THE FIXED NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS IN TERMS OF THE COMPLETENESS OF PATHS OR METHOD

This teaching helps us understand the significance or necessity of integrating all six perfections into practice – generosity, morality, patience, joyous perseverance, meditative stabilisation and wisdom.

Here, the text says:

The path – i.e. method – for not being attached to the resources that are your possessions is generosity, because you become free from attachment to your things by becoming habituated to giving them away.

So, the **practice of generosity or giving** is explained as a way to overcome attachment to the things we possess. When we speak of the practice of generosity or giving, the focus of the practice is to initially cultivate the thought or intention of giving. It is this thought of giving that counteracts or opposes our attachment to possessions.

As you read the text, contemplate its meaning carefully. You'll find that what it says is not simply a theory that

doesn't relate to you; rather it's something that will resonate with your life experience.

For example, when the text says that generosity is the remedy to overcome attachment *to the resources that are your possessions*, we can ask: why do we need to overcome attachment to our possessions? If we think about our life, we'll find that attachment has made us slaves to our wealth and possessions. We'll recall how sometimes we've undergone tremendous suffering and hardship because we were worried about possessions. Sometimes people have even suffered a heart attack from such worry. Whereas I've come across other people who have less wealth than they'd had in the past who say they are happier now.

Then the text says *becoming habituated to giving them away*. So if we habituate or get our mind used to the thought of giving, as that thought develops, it would become possible for us to readily give away our things to other beings. Essentially, the text is saying that the practice of giving is a way to overcome attachment to our possessions. We must overcome attachment by recognising it as a major source of suffering and contemplate this in relation to our life experience: how we suffer, go through hardship, and even sometimes become paranoid because of our wealth and possessions. We might then become motivated to take up the practice of giving, which, as we said before, mainly refers to cultivating and developing an intention to give, which will then lead to the actual giving.

Then the text says:

The method for restraining yourself from the distraction of trying to possess what you do not possess is ethical discipline, for when you maintain a monk's vows, you do not have all the distractions of making a living.

This refers to craving, or attachment to things we do not possess, and the distracting thoughts we generate in order to obtain those things. It says here that the **practice of moral discipline** is an effective way to overcome external distractions associated with satisfying our craving for the things we do not possess.

Obviously, one of the reasons we crave things we do not possess is that we are not content with the things we do possess. This leads us to go after various objects of distraction, which bring stress, tension, anxiety and so on.

Therefore, the text says, to overcome these outer distractions caused by our lack of inner contentment, we need to apply the remedy of ethical discipline, the perfection of morality. As it says, *for when you maintain a monk's vows, you do not have all the distractions of making a living*. This example shows how, if we follow or live the life of a celibate, there's less room for distraction because we have fewer needs. Why are there fewer needs? Because of the moral vows – monks are supposed to live a simple life by contenting themselves with just enough things to sustain them. So we can understand here the benefit of practising moral discipline in diminishing, in particular, the cause of all external distractions.

If we think about the meaning of *the method for restraining yourself from the distraction of trying to possess what you do*

not possess, we can see the importance of cultivating a sense of contentment and less desire, because, without it, we would be continually trying to possess more. In order to possess more and fulfil our desirous craving mind, we would have to continually worry about how we might gain those things. In other words, our mind would be filled with distractions. For as long as we do not try to overcome that desirous mind, it will remain distracted: as soon as we acquire one object, craving for the next object will arise.

If we look at our own experience, whenever we are unhappy, our mind wanders off to the outside world, as if it is going on a long trip. It will go everywhere, occupying itself with various thoughts and objects. If we think about how we feel when the mind finishes its trip and comes back to us, we will not feel good. We will feel exhausted, agitated and disturbed, as if the mind has brought back a lot of problems with it. Understanding our situation in this way helps us practise contentment and less desire and to live an ethical life.

We can draw inspiration from other people who live a noble life, such as some rich people who suddenly decide to stop making more money and instead focus on giving away their wealth to those in need. It seems like the sudden decision to do this is the activation of an imprint of a noble act of giving in the past. To observe such deeds is very inspiring; we should think of emulating them with whatever things we possess.

The text continues:

The method for not abandoning living beings is patience, because you do not despair at the suffering caused by the harm others inflict.

Here, the text implies that the **practice of patience** is the means by which we don't give up on benefitting other beings. As it says, one of the common conditions for us giving up on others is that of receiving harm from others, on either a mental or physical level. However, if we engage in the practice of patience – such as the patience of non-retaliation or remaining indifferent to harm from others – then when we receive harm from others, we will not alter our determination to benefit them. Therefore, the practice of patience is a way of not abandoning or giving up on others.

When the text says *not abandoning living beings*, what does *abandoning living beings* mean? It means losing love and a compassionate attitude towards them. When you lose your love and compassion for other beings, it is like you are abandoning them. As a bodhisattva or a practitioner who follows the bodhisattva's practices, you have taken an affirmation to benefit all sentient beings. So, to safeguard your vow to benefit other beings, it's very important to engage in the practice of patience.

Next it says:

The method to increase virtues is joyous perseverance, because you increase them when you joyously persevere at what you undertake.

So **joyous perseverance** here means taking joy in your virtuous practice. Of course, if you enjoy what you are doing, you will keep wanting to do the same thing because it delights you. Therefore, if we feel joy about our virtuous practices, we will naturally keep doing them

and hence increase our virtue. The opposite of joyous perseverance is laziness, which is the main obstruction to practising virtue.

The text continues:

The methods for clearing away obscurations are the final two perfections, because meditative stabilization clears away the afflictions and wisdom clears away the cognitive obscurations.

It says *the methods for clearing away obscurations are the final two perfections*. We may ask the question, isn't the perfection of wisdom enough to clear away or abandon all obscurations? If not, then what sort of obscuration does the perfection of meditative stabilisation clear away?

Here, when the text refers to the perfection of meditative stabilisation as clearing away or abandoning obscurations, the meaning is more in the sense of **suppressing** the mental afflictions. Whereas the perfection of wisdom is said to clear away obscurations by **uprooting** afflictions together with their latencies, imprints or seeds.

Under the topic of traversing the various levels of concentration, the text uses the term 'abandoning the mental afflictions of the desire realm' when talking of the abandonment of the meditator who reaches the first level of concentration. However, the meaning of abandoning the mental afflictions of the desire realm in this context is more in the sense of suppressing the afflictions, which means having prevented them from manifesting.

Thus the perfections are fixed as six in number. The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

Non-attachment to objects is a path;
Another is restraint from the distraction of obtaining them;
Not abandoning beings, increasing virtues,
And clearing away the obscurations are others.

This summarises what we have already discussed. We will continue to read the text, as the meaning is self-explanatory if we contemplate it with good concentration.

The following explanation produces strong conviction about the six perfections. In order to avoid being dominated by the distraction of sensual objects, you need generosity that is free from attachment. To prevent sensory experiences that have not occurred, you need ethical discipline that restrains distraction by things that are pointless [deeds that are wrong by prohibition] or counterproductive [deeds that are wrong by nature]. Given that there are a great number of living beings whose behavior is bad and who you are constantly in danger of meeting, you need a powerful conditioning to patience as a remedy for giving up on their welfare.

As a way to emphasise that **the practice of patience is indispensable**, the text points out here that you are expected to face continuous obstacles – there are living beings whose behaviour is bad and ill-natured, and the number of such beings is great. So *you need a powerful conditioning to patience as a remedy for giving up on their welfare*. Therefore:

In order to increase virtue in terms of the great number of actions and its practice over long periods of time, you need joyous perseverance that has the intense and long-term

enthusiasm that comes from reflecting on the benefits of virtuous actions, etc.

Again, the text emphasises **the practice of joyous perseverance**. It points out here how we need to cultivate and amass great amounts of virtue over a long period of time. So the practice of joyous perseverance is crucial. We should reflect on the benefits of accumulating virtuous actions to instil joyous perseverance within us.

The text continues:

In order to suppress afflictions you need meditative stabilization, and to destroy their seeds and the cognitive obscurations you need wisdom.

In fact the text actually uses the term *suppress afflictions* when talking about the **perfection of meditative stabilisation** – *in order to suppress afflictions you need meditative stabilization* – which we discussed before. But, *in order to destroy their seeds* – that is, the seed of the mental afflictions or afflictive obscurations, together with cognitive obscurations or obstructions to omniscient mind – you need the **perfection of wisdom**.

In short, this topic explains the bodhisattvas' practice, in terms of their motivation, and the deeds they engage in with that motivation. The bodhisattvas' motivation is bodhicitta, an altruistic mind of enlightenment, and their deeds are included within the six perfections.

(F) THE FIXED NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS BASED ON THE THREE TRAININGS

This section, *the fixed number of perfections based on the three trainings*, shows how, from the point of view of the threefold training of morality, concentration and wisdom, the number of perfections is fixed or definitive – in other words, the six perfections encompass the threefold trainings.

If we read the text carefully, we can understand this.

The nature of the training in ethical discipline [the first of the three trainings] is the practice of ethical discipline.

This indicates that the perfection of ethical discipline belongs primarily to the training in ethical discipline or morality.

The precondition of the training in ethical discipline is generosity, because once you have generosity that is indifferent to resources, you can properly adopt an ethical discipline.

The text is implying here that the perfection of giving is also included in the training of morality by saying that giving is a prerequisite, or leading cause of, the practice of ethical discipline.

The aid to the training in ethical discipline is patience, because the patience of not retaliating when scolded, etc. safeguards your properly adopted ethical discipline.

The next, the perfection of patience, is said to be an aid to the training in ethical discipline, so it can also be included in the training of morality *because the patience of not retaliating when scolded, etc. safeguards your properly adopted ethical discipline*.

Then:

Meditative stabilization is the training of mind [the second training, the training of meditative concentration] ...

So, the perfection of meditative stabilisation belongs to the training of mind or concentration:

... and wisdom is the training in wisdom [the third training].

And:

As for joyous perseverance, it is included in all three trainings, so the perfections are fixed at six in number.

So, the perfection of joyous perseverance is included in all three trainings.

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

The Conqueror rightly presented six perfections
In terms of the three trainings: three are the first,
Two of the six are connected with the final two,
One is included in all three.

By a certain kind of excellent life you bring to completion either others' or your own aims; you practice certain kinds of trainings by possessing a diversity of methods, depending on which vehicle you are in. Understand in this way that the six perfections comprise and bring to completion the above perspectives on their fixed number – life, aims, the Mahayana, the methods, and the trainings. Reflect until you get a deep conviction about how the six perfections are the summation of all the key points of bodhisattva practice.

Furthermore, there are two causes of not initially transcending or rising above cyclic existence – attachment to resources and attachment to a home. The remedies for these are generosity and ethical discipline, respectively.

So, in terms of remedies for overcoming various hindrances to one's practice, they are all included in the six perfections. For example, it says here that the remedies for attachment to resources and attachment to a home are, respectively, the practices of generosity and of ethical discipline.

You may rise above these attachments once, but still turn back without reaching the end. There are two causes of this – suffering from the wrongdoing of living beings and becoming dispirited at the length of time you have pursued virtue. The remedies for these are patience and joyous perseverance, respectively. Once you understand how to sustain a disregard for all suffering and harm, as well as an enthusiasm which views even an eternity as though it were one day, you must practice them in various ways. If you do this, you will produce the patience and joyous perseverance that are capable of functioning as remedies to what causes you to turn back.

Thus, they are extremely crucial. Never mind the matter of the bodhisattva deeds, even with regard to present-day cultivation of virtue, there are many who start out but few who do not turn back after a while because (1) their forbearance for the slightest hardship is tiny, and (2) their enthusiasm for the path they cultivate is tepid. This is the result of their not putting into practice the personal instructions associated with patience and joyous perseverance.

There are two causes for letting your virtue go to waste even if you do not turn back after a while – distraction, wherein your attention does not stabilize on a virtuous object of meditation, and faulty wisdom. The remedies for these are meditative stabilization and wisdom, respectively. Meditative stabilization is a remedy because it is said that even virtuous practices such as repetition of mantra and daily recitations are senseless if your attention wanders elsewhere. Wisdom is a remedy because if you fail to develop the wisdom that fully delineates the topics in the collections of Buddhist knowledge, you will be mistaken about what to adopt and what to cast aside, even the obvious, and will then conduct yourself wrongly. This fixes

the number of perfections at six in terms of their being remedies that eliminate the class of phenomena that are incompatible with virtue.

The number of perfections is fixed at six based on the fact that they are the foundation for achieving every quality of a buddha.

Then it goes to the next topic.

This is because the first four perfections are preconditions for meditative stabilization, so through these four you accomplish meditative stabilization—the perfection of non-distractedness. Furthermore, when you cultivate insight based on this, you will know reality.

Fixing the number of perfections at six in terms of their being concordant with helping living beings to mature is similar in meaning to the third one [perfecting the complete fulfillment of others' aims] mentioned earlier.

I have explained here the noble Asanga's assertions as presented by the master Haribhadra [in his *Long Explanation of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines (Abhisamayalamkaraloka)*]. It is extremely crucial to gain conviction about the six perfections.

Where the text says *wisdom that fully delineates the topics in the collections of Buddhist knowledge* – in this context, *Buddhist knowledge* mainly refers to the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness, which is the philosophical view uniquely presented in Buddhism.

We'll stop here tonight and continue next week from the next section on 'An ancillary discussion of the fixed order of the perfections', which is not that much. After that, the text goes into detail on each of the six perfections.

The topics we are studying here are not just for stimulating our intellect but are for practice. Studying and reflecting on these topics will benefit us because we can do our everyday practice more effectively. We can take small regular acts, such as feeding our pets, as the practice of the perfection of giving.

I am glad to hear that Maria is recovering well. So, instead of saying the six-syllable Chenrezig mantra, which I was thinking of doing, we will recite the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* for her.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
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The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

6 November 2018

We will do our usual meditation first.

[*Tonglen meditation*]

Please cultivate a proper motivation for listening to the teaching. The reason for listening to it is to fulfil our altruistic aspiration to achieve the state of buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings.

With respect to the meditation which you have just performed, it is said that if you are doing the giving and taking meditation in conjunction with the breathing meditation, then you should exhale and inhale more forcefully with a bit of effort. You can imagine the outgoing breath of giving in the form of white light and the incoming breath of taking in the form of dark light. Normally when you do a breathing meditation, it is said that you need to breathe in and out gently and slowly, just as you normally breathe. You should not be able to hear yourself breathing in and out. There are of course a number of breathing meditation techniques, such as mentally counting the cycles of breathing, or simply focussing on the mindfulness of breathing in and out.

We will now continue with the lam-rim teaching on the following section:

2" An ancillary discussion of the fixed order of the perfections

This discussion has three parts:

1. The order of arising
2. The order in terms of inferior and superior
3. The order in terms of coarse and subtle

(a) The order of arising

When you have a generosity that is disinterested in and unattached to resources, you take up ethical discipline.

This section explains why the six perfections are listed in order of giving, followed by moral discipline, patience and so on. Giving is mentioned first because, as it says, *when you have a generosity that is disinterested in and unattached to resources, you take up ethical discipline*. Basically, this is saying that if you do well in the practice of giving, you will do well in the practice of moral discipline. It is not saying that the practice of giving is a prerequisite for practising moral ethics, nor is it saying that you have to practise giving in order to practise morality. It is saying that the practice of giving establishes a very sound base for the practice of morality. Giving is a sign of having less desire and reduced attachment which facilitates the practice of moral discipline. Conversely, attachment to and obsession with possessions leads to the various distractions that impede the practice of moral discipline. Then follows:

When you have an ethical discipline which restrains you from wrongdoing, you become patient with those who harm you.

Again, this is saying that if you do well in the practice of moral discipline, then you will also do well in the practice of patience. A firm sense of morality and restraint from wrongdoing, and harmful deeds in particular, will boost your ability to tolerate external suffering and hardship.

Then the text says:

When you have the patience wherein you do not become dispirited with hardships, the conditions for rejecting virtue are few, so you are able to persevere joyously.

This explains how the practice of patience leads to the practice of joyous perseverance. With patience, we are talking about not losing our spirit and determination in the face of any difficulty, such as receiving harm from others or hardships or the challenges we confront in our Dharma practice. If we practise the patience of non-retaliation or accepting hardship, then we don't lose our strength of mind or give up our practice easily. In this way, if we think about the benefit of patience in terms of maintaining our hope, our spirit and our motivation, we can see that patience is essential if we are to maintain our enthusiasm in what we are doing and develop joyous perseverance. Not only do we require patience and joyous perseverance to complete our Dharma practice, but they are also essential to achieve our mundane pursuits as well. Whatever our goal may be, it is very important to maintain our spirit and determination and persistent effort in order to achieve that goal. In other words, we need to be patient with hardship and suffering, and that patience makes it easy to persevere and maintain our effort. So, if we do well in patience then we will do well in developing joyous perseverance too. Then the text continues:

Once you joyously persevere day and night, you will produce the meditative concentration that facilitates the application of your attention to virtuous objects of meditation.

Obviously, this is saying that if we are able to maintain our effort in meditation practice then we can achieve results such as calm abiding. Here, *meditative concentration* refers to calm abiding, which *facilitates the application of your attention to virtuous objects of meditation*. This, in turn, makes your mind very serviceable so that if you direct it onto a virtuous object, it can just sit there single-pointedly, effortlessly and spontaneously for as long as you wish. So, we can understand how achieving such meditative concentration is dependent upon developing joyous perseverance day and night.

When your mind is in meditative equipoise, you will know reality exactly.

If our mind is in *meditative equipoise*, meaning in the state of calm abiding through the practice of meditative stabilisation, then *you will know reality exactly* which means gaining special insight through the practice of wisdom. So, it is saying here that the meditative state of calm abiding which one develops through the practice of meditative stabilisation facilitates knowledge of *reality* which refers to penetrative wisdom, specifically the special insight realisation of reality.

(b) The order in terms of inferior and superior

Each preceding perfection is inferior to the superior one that follows it.

This is quite clear. When you think of the list of the six perfections, *each preceding perfection is inferior* means that, for example, the perfection of giving precedes the perfection of moral discipline, so giving is inferior to morality or compared to giving, morality is superior. Likewise, morality is inferior compared to patience which means patience is superior to morality, and so on.

(c) The order in terms of coarse and subtle

Each preceding perfection is easier than the subsequent one to engage in and perform, so it is coarser than the subsequent one. Each subsequent perfection is more difficult than the preceding one to engage in and perform, so it is more subtle than the preceding one.

Similarly, the perfection of giving is coarse compared to morality because giving is easier to practise; morality is more subtle than giving because it is harder to practise than giving; morality is coarse compared to patience because morality is easier to practise than patience. So, patience is subtle compared to morality because it is harder to practise than morality. The same distinction between coarse and subtle applies to the rest of the perfections.

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* says:

Because the subsequent perfections arise contingent on the preceding ones,
Because they are ranked as inferior and superior,
And because of their coarseness and subtlety,
The perfections are taught in order.

It is quite amazing to see how Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise* expounds its subject matter in conjunction with a great many classical Buddhist scriptures. You rarely find any other lam-rim texts that refer to the great Buddhist classics in a similar fashion.

c" The process of learning the perfections

The process of learning the perfections has two parts:

1. How to train in the bodhisattva deeds in general
2. In particular how to train in the last two perfections

1" How to train in the bodhisattva deeds in general

How to train in the bodhisattva deeds in general has two subheadings:

1. Training in the perfections that mature the qualities you will have when you become a buddha
2. Training in the four ways to gather disciples that help others to mature

In terms of practice, the text has two very important themes or categories. The first is how to mature one's own continuum, which is presented under the topic of the six perfections. The second is how to mature the continuum of other beings which is presented under the topic of the four ways to gather disciples.

(a) Training in the perfection that mature the qualities you will have when you become a buddha

Earlier we studied all of the six perfections in a general sense. Now the text goes into detail about each one of the six, specifically relating to integrating them into our practice. This section has six parts:

1. How to train in the perfection of generosity
2. How to train in the perfection of ethical discipline
3. How to train in the perfection of patience
4. How to train in the perfection of joyous perseverance
5. How to train in the perfection of meditative stabilisation
6. How to train in the perfection of wisdom

(i) How to train in the perfection of generosity

This has four sections

1. What generosity is
2. How to begin the development of generosity
3. The divisions of generosity
4. A summary

If you think about it, the organisation of the outlines of the text is quite amazing. The structure covers everything you need to know in relation to a particular topic and does so in a logical way. Let us take a look into these four subheadings. The first is: What is generosity? We might have heard that word 'generosity' many times over. Do we know its meaning precisely? We need to know its meaning so as to be able to practise it. Without knowing what it is then we will find ourselves in confusion when it comes to practising it. Immediately after that the text then shows us the method to cultivate and develop the practice of generosity. Then it goes on to explain the different types of generosity, and finally it provides a summary of what has gone before.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has commented that in his dialogue with a lot of renowned scientists and other scholars he always finds room for questioning; he also finds that the kind of methodology they use for their presentations doesn't fully cover their topics or follow a sequential logical order. His Holiness remarked that he finds his formal training in the monastic educational system very effective in investigating and looking into things from various angles. You can find the same method, rationale and logic in this lam-rim too, which is a unique way of learning.

(a') What generosity is

Here there is this quote from the *Bodhisattva's Level*:

What is the nature of generosity? It is the intention accompanying bodhisattvas' disinterested non-attachment to all their possessions and their body and motivated by this, the physical and verbal actions of giving the things to be given.

Essentially, the practice of giving refers to a genuine thought or intention to give without having any attachment to or craving for the objects of giving. *Motivated by this ... giving* refers to the initial intention or motivation of giving. It also refers to *the physical and verbal actions of giving the things to be given*. Here *physical and verbal actions* refer to the mental intention which is a mental factor that is concomitant with the mind at the time of the occurrence of physical and verbal acts of giving, due to the force of the initial motivation of giving. Therefore, giving refers to the mental intention of the thought of giving which is an intending action, as well as the mental factor of intention at the time of the physical and verbal acts of giving, which is the intended action.

Lama Tsongkhapa explains the meaning of the above quotation as follows:

It is the virtue of a generous attitude and the physical and verbal actions which are motivated by this.

What is the nature of the practice of giving? *It is the virtue of a generous attitude*, indicating that giving refers to the thought or intention to give. As discussed earlier, *physical and verbal actions* refers to the mental intention, which is called intended action, at the time of the actual act of giving, such as any physical or verbal actions. The nature of giving, therefore, refers to the initial thought of giving or intention to give, as well as the intended physical or verbal actions of giving at the time of the actual giving action taking place. It should be noted that the intended physical or verbal actions refer to the mental factor of intention concomitant with the mind.

Bringing the perfection of generosity to completion is not contingent on removing beings' poverty by giving gifts to others.

The text continues by saying that the development or completion of the practice of the perfection of giving is not contingent upon eliminating all the poverty in the world. If that was to be the case then, then as it argues here:

Otherwise, since there still remain many destitute living beings, all the earlier conquerors [referring to all past buddhas] would not have attained perfect generosity. Therefore, the physical and verbal aspects of generosity are not the main thing; the main thing is the mental aspect. This is because you perfect generosity after you destroy your stingy clinging to all that you own – your body, resources and roots of virtue and you completely condition your mind to giving them away to living beings from the depths of your heart and, not only that, but also to giving to others the effects of this giving as well.

This is saying that the primary focus of the practice of giving is to cultivate, develop and perfect the thought or intention of giving. Therefore, the primary focus is on the mental level, overcoming stinginess and developing an intention to give from the depth of one's heart. The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says,

If generosity were perfected
By removing beings' poverty
Since beings are still destitute
How could past saviors have perfected it?
Generosity is perfected, it is said
Through the attitude of giving away to all beings
All your possessions, along with the effects of this
Therefore generosity is a state of mind.

Thus, the practice of the perfection of generosity entails generating in various ways the intention to give and steadily increasing this generosity, ...

This last sentence clearly shows us the meaning of the practice of giving or generosity. It clearly implies that the nature of the practice of giving is to steadily increase the thought or intention to give.

... even though you may not be actually giving away something to others.

It is not necessary that you have to own possessions in order to practise giving. As emphasised here, the most important element of the practice of giving is to cultivate

and develop a thought or intention to give to others wholeheartedly.

We have been doing the giving and taking meditation for quite a while now. This meditation is also a practice of giving, so we need to check whether this meditation is helping us to develop our practice of giving in terms of increasing our thought of giving. Has it increased your thought of giving? I doubt it. Again, we see here that the practice of giving means to increase our thought or intention to give to others. If the thought of giving or intention to give is developed, and it arises forcefully and strongly, then we will automatically give whatever possessions we have to others.

(b') How to begin the development of generosity

The text states:

Simply destroying all stinginess in regard to your body and resources is not the perfection of generosity, for stinginess is included within attachment and so even the two kinds of Hinayana arhats have totally eliminated it along with its seeds.

It says here that achieving the perfection of giving is more than simply overcoming the mind of stinginess or miserliness. It does this by pointing out here that *even the two kinds of Hinayana arhats*, the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas of the Lesser Vehicle, *have totally eliminated it along with its seeds*.

Stinginess or miserliness is regarded as part of desire or attachment, which the two arhats of the Lesser Vehicle have abandoned along with its seeds. In other words, they have uprooted it. Here, seed refers to a causal capacity to produce a concordant result or produce a result which resembles the type of the cause. We speak of the imprint or the latency of mental afflictions which is different from the seed of mental afflictions. The former is a cognitive obscuration and the latter is an afflictive obscuration.

What is required, then, is that you not only clear away stinginess's tightfistedness, which prevents giving things away, but also that you develop from the depths of your heart the intention to give away to others all your possessions.

Hence, the key to the practice of the perfection of giving is mentally developing and perfecting an intention to give, rather than simply overcoming stinginess. This section of the text also indicates the objects of giving, which is all of your possessions.

An intention to give, which is the nature of giving, is produced by overcoming any form of attachment or craving for the objects to be given. The objects of giving should encompass all your possessions and also that you develop the intention to fully benefit all beings *from the depth of your heart*. This explains the various components or the qualities of the practice of giving.

If we relate this to our own practice of giving, what is indicated here is that we need to make an effort to cultivate and develop a thought of giving. We need to ensure that our mental intention of giving is wholehearted and that the reason for giving is to fully and completely benefit all other beings. Our objects of giving should include all our possessions, not just some objects

but the objects we do not want to give away. Then the text continues:

For this you have to meditate on the faults of holding on to things and the benefits of giving them away. I shall, therefore, discuss these.

This shows how to cultivate the thought or intention of giving. Next, the text states:

The *Moon Lamp Sutra* (Candra-pradipa-sutra) says:

These childish people are attached
To this rotting body and to this
Rushing life-force, both of which lack independence
And are like a dream or a magician's illusion.
So these unintelligent beings do terrible things,
Fall under the control of sin,
And, carried away by the chariot of Death's Lord,
Proceed to unbearable hells.

Then Lama Tsongkhapa explains the meaning of this sutra by saying:

This says that you should stop attachment by viewing the body as unclean, life as rushing like a mountain cascade, both body and life as devoid of an independent self because they are under the control of karma, and both as false like a dream or a magician's illusion.

We need to overcome attachment in order to develop the practice of giving. Here the text explains a way to overcome attachment, such as an attachment to the body and an attachment to life itself. As mentioned here, we can overcome attachment to the body by reflecting upon the uncleanliness or filthiness of the body in terms of the content of the body. Likewise, reflecting on the transient nature of life, and the way it fluctuates and changes moment by moment, just like a waterfall flowing down a steep mountain, overcomes an attachment to life.

We also need to meditate on how both our body and life are simply a by-product of karma and delusions. They only exist in dependence on other phenomena and lack an independent existence in their own right, i.e. they lack an objective existence. The analogy *like a dream or a magician's illusion* is also very effective in overcoming attachment to the body and life and other seemingly attractive objects. Although we grasp at these things as true, in reality, they are false or deceptive. [The appearance of false things such as a horse in the dream is due to the effect of sleep; at a magician's show the appearance is due to the magician's mantra spell. Similarly, things objectively appear to have a substantial existence due to the effect of ignorance.]¹

False or deceptive implies that things don't exist the way they appear to the perception of our mind. Whereas if there is no gap between the appearance to the perception of our mind and reality, that is the way things actually exist, which reflects the true mode of existence of things. Even though things appear to our mind to have a substantial existence, reflecting upon the fact that our body and life lack an existence from their own side, and therefore lack an independent and substantial existence, and that it exists only by depending on other

phenomena, is very effective in overcoming attachment to our body and life.

The most important thing is that we have to learn the nature and meaning of giving in terms of our own practice and be very clear about what it means to develop our practice of giving.

We can transform the food and drink that we take every day by offering them to holy objects and saying dedication prayers into a practice of giving, and as a cause for the Dharma to flourish and benefit other sentient beings. [Practice is very important. If you don't practise, you will never develop. You can't just forget about practice, because you need to walk the walk by taking the initiative to practice. If you practise regularly such as making an offering before eating or drinking, then it will become habitual. The practice will come to you automatically whenever you eat or drink something. It will be that easy to create merit!]

You are aware there are countless numbers of other beings in the form of bacteria living inside our bodies. Their survival is dependent on our survival. This is a fact. Therefore, whenever we eat or drink something, we should first cultivate a motivation that we eat or drink in order to benefit other beings such as the bacteria in our body, [and also to sustain our precious human life to practise Dharma to achieve buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings]. Then, as the foods or drinks go down, imagine that these bacteria experience uncontaminated bliss. You then pray that at the moment you are benefitting these beings through an act of giving and that in future you will be able to please them by giving pure Dharma.

[Part of our motivation in partaking of food and drink also includes being able to sustain this precious human life. This is also very important. The only way to reach the state of buddhahood, if we truly seek it, is by relying upon a series of life forms, and the most suitable life form is the precious human rebirth. Therefore, it is important to think that we eat and drink to sustain and prolong our life in good health so that we can practise Dharma to achieve Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.] Likewise, as I have mentioned to you in the past, we can integrate all our everyday activities, such as sleeping, walking etc. into our Dharma practice. [In this way, we can understand that Dharma practice becomes a part of our everyday life and we can practise it along with our everyday activities.]

We will recite the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* for Pat Geary's husband who is about to undergo surgery.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering
Edit 2 by Adair Bunnnett
Edited Version*

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¹ The material within these square brackets, and in subsequent instances were part of the teaching in Tibetan, but on Geshe Doga's advice were not translated on the night.

The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

13 November 2018

We will begin with our usual giving and taking meditation.

Try to cultivate the proper motivation by thinking, 'I will listen to this profound teaching to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and I will put it into practice.'

The meditation we have just performed is called *tong-len* in Tibetan or 'giving and taking'. With the 'giving' we focus on sentient beings as an observed object of love and wish them to have happiness. With the 'taking', we focus on sentient beings as an observed object of compassion and wish them to be free from suffering. This meditation is very profound and reflects the essence of Dharma practice which is to benefit all sentient beings by giving them happiness and eliminating their suffering. There is no practice more effective and powerful than cultivating love and compassion to benefit other sentient beings. The more love and compassion that we cultivate towards other sentient beings, the more benefits we will receive as well.

Therefore, it is crucial that our meditation on love and compassion, such as the giving and taking meditation that we have been doing for a long time now, actually gives rise to love and compassion within our continuum. Does it? As a result of it, we should feel more love and care for those we live with and interact with in our daily lives. Love and compassion brings mutual benefit in the form of joy, happiness and care and support. On the other hand, if love and compassion are lacking, then there is more distrust, conflict and harmful actions in the human-to-human relationship.

Therefore, we should clearly understand the advantages of cultivating love and compassion, and the disadvantages of not cultivating it; not only in relation to other sentient beings but also with ourselves. This is a very important step in motivating ourselves to cultivate love and compassion. We have to understand that benefiting other beings is benefiting ourselves, likewise harming other beings is harming ourselves. Here we start to talk about our mental attitudes. Without love and compassion, our mental attitude becomes very much self-centred, and hypocritical with no care or consideration for other beings. If we see actions in terms of satisfying our needs, so we have no hesitation in taking any course of action, even it brings harm or loss to others. Unfortunately, the end results of such inconsiderate and selfish actions not only brings harm to other beings but also brings suffering and misery to ourselves. From the perspective of Dharma, as these actions cause harm to other beings, they are negative or non-virtuous actions, the result of which is definitely suffering.

Once again, we should bear in mind that the practice of cultivating love and compassion within ourselves is very beneficial, not only for others but also for our own lives.

In practice, if we develop love and compassion it has an immediate effect of bringing more joy and happiness into our lives. It is also important to know how to effectively put it into practice. What does cultivating love and compassion for other beings mean? Normally it doesn't occur to us that it means to bring love and compassion into our everyday relationships and interactions. Rather, when we think of cultivating love and compassion for other beings, we think of other beings in a broad sense, without having any connection with any real beings. This is wrong. We have learnt that in practical terms we need to first include those who are close to us, such as our close family or friends, as objects of meditation for cultivating love and compassion. After that, we can then include strangers, and finally even enemies. In this way, it becomes possible to cultivate love and compassion for all sentient beings

The value and benefit that love and compassion adds to our lives is just amazing. If we speak of a relationship between even just two people, if it is grounded on true feeling of love, care and concern for each other, it would be very harmonious, and both will benefit from it tremendously. As a benefit of the love that exists in their relationship, they will find enough happiness and satisfaction with whatever they have got. They will be very contented and not look for anything more. They will share whatever they have got and take good care of each other. They can live happily even if they don't have millions of dollars in their bank accounts. It's not the material wealth, but the richness of love and compassion within us that brings happiness and satisfaction to ourselves and other beings. Alternatively, if instead of love and compassion we have even one person who holds a malicious thought, then that's one too many because he or she can cause great harm to a lot of people.

We have been doing the meditation of giving and taking for quite a while. We have to check whether as a result of engaging in the meditation it is helping us cultivate and increase love and compassion, especially towards those who are closest to us. I have been leading this meditation so I have to say, I admire those of you who think your love and compassion has increased following this meditation; but I have to say to others, I am sad if this meditation has not had the effect of increasing love and compassion in your mind, or if you are not following the meditation instruction properly.

(b') How to begin the development of generosity (cont.)

The text states:

Simply destroying all stinginess in regard to your body and resources is not the perfection of generosity, for stinginess is included within attachment and so even the two kinds of Hinayāna arhats have totally eliminated it along with its seeds.

In last week's teaching we covered the nature of the practice of the perfection of giving, which is to do with cultivating and developing the intention of giving. As

part of developing that, one needs to reflect upon the benefits of the practice of giving, and the shortcomings of attachment or stinginess.

The text continues:

What is required then, is that you not only clear away stinginess and tight-fistedness, which prevents giving things away, but also that you develop from the depths of your heart the intention to give away to others all your possessions. For this you have to meditate on the faults of holding onto things and the benefits of giving them away. I shall, therefore, discuss these.

The Moon Lamp Sūtra (Candra-pradīpa-sūtra) says:

These childish people are attached
To this rotting body and to this
Rushing life-force, both of which lack independence
And are like a dream or a magician's illusion.
So these unintelligent beings do terrible things,
Fall under the control of sin,
And, carried away by the chariot of Death's Lord,
Proceed to unbearable hells.

This says that you should stop attachment to the body by viewing it as unclean, life as rushing like a mountain cascade, both body and life as devoid of an independent self because they are under the control of karma, and both as false like a dream or a magician's illusion.

We finished at this point last week. There's an emphasis here about the faults or shortcomings of attachment to body and life. I want you to read the text slowly and think over its meaning. Think about the analogies of a dream and the magician's illusion, how it is used to understand the meaning of emptiness and to counter attachment. You will find it very effective.

Where it says, *devoid of an independent self because they are under the control of karma*, this implies the meaning of dependent origination in terms of the law of cause and effect.

And then, *and both as false like a dream or a magician's illusion*, implies the meaning of dependent origination in terms of emptiness, a very subtle concept of dependent origination.

The text continues:

Furthermore, if you do not stop attachment, you will become dominated by it, build up great wrongdoing, and proceed to miserable realms.

Consider also the *Formula That Accomplishes Limitless Methods (Ananta-mukha-nirhāra-dhāraṇī)*:

As to living beings who dispute with others,
It is tight-fistedness that is the root cause.
So, renounce that which you crave.
After you give up craving, the formula will work.

The *Compendium of Trainings* says:

My body and mind
Move on moment by moment.
If with this impermanent body, dripping with filth,
I attain enlightenment,
Which is permanent and pure,
Will I not have attained what is priceless?

The *Compendium of Trainings* reminds us about the transient nature of our body and mind which changes from moment to moment. For example, the body and mind we have now are already different from what we had before we entered into this hall. However, if we

utilise this transient impure body to achieve the everlasting state of enlightenment, then it's saying that we have attained something priceless.

Next:

The *Garland of Birth Stories (Jātaka-mālā)* states:

This body devoid of self, perishing, without substance,
Suffering, ungrateful, and continually impure
Is of benefit to others; not to delight in this
Is not to be intelligent.

Here it is describing the nature of this body as *perishing, without substance, suffering, ungrateful, and continually impure*. And also, no matter how much we serve this body, in return it does not do us any favours, so it is said to be *ungrateful*. Despite this fact, if we use it to benefit others by overcoming attachment, then as it says, *not to delight in this is not to be intelligent*.

It continues:

Though you make much effort to care for your body, which has no substance, you have to discard it. By sincerely giving it away to others you fulfil many of your own and others' aims. After you think, "I would be a fool not to train my mind to do this," do whatever you can to produce the thought of giving away your body and the like to others.

In a very condensed way, the text explains here the nature of this body, how it lacks substance and consists of impurities and filth, and how we inevitably discard it at the end. Yet we get so attached to it and make a great deal of effort and endure hardship in maintaining it. The point here is that rather than being attached to the body, *by sincerely giving it away to others you fulfil many of your own and others' aims*. After you think, "I would be a fool not to train my mind to do this." So, as you read this, it's important to reflect on the meaning for a little while and in that way, it has some effect on your mind.

Then the text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

By giving everything away, I pass from sorrow,
So my mind reaches nirvāṇa.
As I have to give up everything [at death],
It is best to give it to living beings.

And the *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

If you see the impermanence of resources
And naturally have great compassion
You will know with good reason that the gifts
You have kept in your house belong to others.
There is never fear from what has been given away;
What is kept at home gives rise to fears
That it is insufficient, ordinary, or needing constant
protection.
If you give it away, these faults never harm you.

By giving you achieve happiness in future lives;
Not giving brings suffering even in this life.
Human wealth is like a shooting star –
What is not given away will cease to exist.

Wealth not given is transitory and will be gone;
By giving it away it remains a treasury.
Wealth of no value comes to have value
When you strive to help living beings.

The wise praise giving wealth away,
Childish persons like to hoard it;
No wealth is kept by holding on to it;
From giving it away excellence always arises.

By giving things away, you no longer grasp the afflictions;

Being miserly breeds afflictions on an ignoble path.

Noble beings say generosity is the best path,

While its opposite is a bad path.

I'll give a brief explanation of the literal meaning of this quotation from the *Compendium of the Perfections*. Essentially, it's self-explanatory if you read slowly and think over the meaning. You will find it very effective for your meditation to overcome attachment to wealth and increase the thought of giving, thereby making your wealth a worthy cause for many benefits.

If you see the impermanence of resources and naturally have great compassion, this shows that reflecting on the impermanence of the things can induce compassion for other beings.

Whereas when it says, *you will know with good reason that the gifts you have kept in your house belong to others*, it means it's like entrusting all your possessions to other beings temporarily, so they really don't belong to you but belong to them. If you think in this way, it says, *there is never fear from what has been given away*. Conversely, *what is kept at home gives rise to fears, that it is insufficient, ordinary*, which elucidates the shortcomings of attachment, obsession and craving towards wealth and possessions. A great deal of stress arises from accumulating and protecting wealth, there is fear of losing it, worrying if you have enough or if it is good enough. Whereas if you give it away, *these faults never harm you*, so that's what it is saying here.

It continues:

If you dedicate from the depths of your heart all roots of virtue, however great or small they may be, for the sake of accomplishing both temporarily and ultimately extensive benefit and happiness for all living beings, and then give something, you obtain merit related to each living being.

Here, the text shows the benefits of giving away your virtues by dedicating them to benefit all sentient beings. As we discussed the other day, dedicating merit or virtues towards others is also a form of the practice of giving. Therefore, it is saying here that it doesn't matter how small or big our act of virtue, if it is dedicated to all beings, then you accumulate the amount of merit equal to the number of sentient beings. When you dedicate your virtues by thinking, *for the sake of accomplishing both temporarily and ultimately extensive benefit and happiness for all living beings*, it is important to imagine all the sentient beings and their needs in your mind. Their needs include temporary needs in terms of finding them a good rebirth of human or godly being, and their long-term or ultimate need is to be placed in the state of vast everlasting benefit and happiness.

To emphasise the enormity of the merit you accumulate through dedicating your virtue in this way, the text quotes *Precious Garland*, which says:

Were the merit of saying this

To have physical form

It would not fit into universes as numerous

As the grains of the Ganges' sand.

The Bhagavan said this

And there is a logic to it –

The expanse of living beings is immeasurable;

The merit of the wish to help them is the same.

Furthermore, do not hold on to companions and belongings that have prevented you from increasing your ability to give things away, that have intensified your stinginess, that have stopped the development of previously absent inclinations to give, or that have weakened your inclinations to give. Do not take on these kinds of companions or accept these kinds of material gifts even if others offer them.

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Bodhisattvas give up all possessions

That intensify the fault of stinginess

Or that do not expand generosity,

The deceivers that become an obstacle.

Bodhisattvas should not accept

Jewels, wealth, or even a kingdom

If it would harm their generous attitude and

Obscure the path to perfect enlightenment.

These lines reflect the true practice of giving thoughts and deeds by bodhisattvas. They are determined to overcome all the hindrances to their practice of the thought of giving. They have not only given away all their possessions by seeing them as a cause of stinginess or attachment that will affect their wish to increase the intention to give, but also they will not accept or receive any goods including *Jewels, wealth, or even a kingdom if it would harm their generous attitude and obscure the path to perfect enlightenment*. So, those who follow the bodhisattva path find this kind of instruction very striking.

And the text then continues:

When you act in this way, stinginess may lead you to feel attached to your goods. If so, become unattached by thinking, "The Sage reached enlightenment after he gave away every possession. Previously, recalling my commitment to emulate him, I gave away my body, every resource, and all my virtue to all living beings. If I am still attached to resources, I am behaving just like an elephant, oppressed by the sun, who goes into the water and bathes and then, back on dry land, rolls in the dirt. Then again, after it sees that it is covered in dirt, it goes back into the water and does the same thing over again."

The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

Recalling the superior deeds of the sages,

Strive at them and reflect on your commitment;

Understand the following excellent thoughts

In order to clear away your attachment to things:

"I gave away my body to all beings;

Then I relinquished the virtue of this gift.

My being attached to external objects

Is senseless, like an elephant's bathing."

If you are able to generate intense delight as you contemplate the many benefits of giving things away and great fear as you reflect on the faults of tightfistedness, you will naturally produce a generous attitude.

If you have a copy of this text, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path*, it is very good to read it over and over again. As you read, supplicate to Tsongkhapa for his blessing and inspiration, then you'll find this extremely beneficial for your practice. You should read a few lines then sit in silence to reflect on the meaning of what you have read. This would be very beneficial.

[Geshe-la then spoke at some length in English]: You should read Dharma books and contemplate and meditate on their meaning. As the Dharma becomes your companion, you no longer have to depend on others to be happy and content with your life. Dharma shows us a way to access peace and happiness from within us. If you are happy and content from within, you don't have to do something externally to be happy or overcome restlessness, such as shopping, going somewhere or meeting people etc. True happiness and peace, a sense of the purpose of life, arises as you develop inner qualities such as contentment, loving kindness, bodhicitta and the wisdom of emptiness. If we expect happiness to come from outside such as from other people, then we will never get it. If we rely too much on the right external conditions for our happiness then the result is more suffering such as loneliness, frustration, conflicts etc. Therefore, the most effective and perhaps the easiest way to access happiness is making effort to bring about a positive change within ourselves through cultivating positive mental attitudes and diminishing negative states of mind.

To quote *A Song of Longing for Tara, the Infallible*, by the Buddhist monk Lobsang Tenpey Gyaltzen (1852)

I cannot rely on non-virtuous friends for even a day. They pretend to be close to me and all the while they have in mind the opposite. They are friends when they wish it and enemies when they don't. Since I cannot trust in this kind of friend, you are my best friend. Be close to me, Divine Mother, essence of love. Arouse the great power of your compassion and think of me.

I'm giving this advice because I consider all of you as very close and old friends of mine. So, please do not consider it as something to make myself an important person. It is in my nature not to easily become friends with others, but when they become my friends, I am firm in my friendship with them and cherish that friendship. You are all my friends. Once in a casual conversation, the late Kensur Legden admired me for my friendly nature by saying, 'Who doesn't get along with you?' I think having a friendly nature is another good source of finding joy and happiness in life.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
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The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

20 November 2018

We will start with the usual meditation.

[Meditation]

Please make sure that you cultivate the bodhicitta motivation.

If you can't generate uncontrived bodhicitta, you can generate a contrived or artificial bodhicitta, which will suffice. The primary difference between contrived and uncontrived bodhicitta is that the uncontrived bodhicitta of aspiring to achieve complete enlightenment in order to alleviate the sufferings of other beings, and wishing them to have happiness, arises naturally and spontaneously. It is rooted in the strong force of love and compassion for all sentient beings that also arises spontaneously and forcefully. Whereas contrived bodhicitta arises as an effect of our effort and progress in meditation, and mental training in using instructions on how to generate bodhicitta, such as the sevenfold cause and effect method. The bodhicitta that arises from that is contingent upon the individual's effort in meditation and training, and so it is called contrived bodhicitta.

The first of the sevenfold points of generating bodhicitta is (1) contemplating and (2) recognising all sentient beings as your mother and then remembering their kindness, which is then followed by (3) cultivating a sense of wanting to repay their kindness followed by (4) cultivating the loving kindness that is a deep sense of endearment, a feeling of intimacy and closeness towards all sentient beings. From this arises (5) compassion, which aspires to alleviate the suffering of other beings, as well as love, in the sense of wishing them to have happiness. As you further develop this love and compassion, your aspiration to benefit others moves from being merely wishful thinking to a more active intention. Propelled by love and compassion, (6) you begin to think 'I will single-handedly liberate all beings from suffering and lead them to the everlasting state of happiness.' Taking up the task of personally freeing other beings and wishing them to have happiness from the depths of your heart is called 'superior intention'. This superior intention marks a highly developed degree of love and compassion and aspiration to benefit other beings. With superior intention, your aspiration to benefit others becomes so strong that you want to free all other beings from suffering and bestow everlasting happiness on them. (7) Realising that you do not have such a capacity and that the only person who is capable of doing this is a buddha, you aspire to achieve the state of buddhahood for the sake of all beings. The stronger the force of your superior intention, the stronger your aspiration and urge to achieve buddhahood will be.

Bodhicitta is a wish or aspiration to achieve buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. In the initial stage of development, bodhicitta is contrived because it is contingent upon a deliberate effort on your part. However, it will arise with less and less effort as a result of your continuous effort in sustaining and developing bodhicitta in this way. Eventually, no effort will be needed, and it will arise

spontaneously and forcefully. This is called uncontrived bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta incorporates two aspirations – the aspiration to achieve one's own goal and the aspiration to achieve the goal of other beings.

In terms of the order of cultivating these two aspirations, the aspiration to achieve the goal of other beings is cultivated prior to the aspiration to achieve one's own goal. In the sevenfold cause and effect method, all the steps that are associated with generating love and compassion relate to cultivating an altruistic thought of benefiting others, so they reflect training in an aspiration to achieve the goal of others. After superior intention arises, you generate a wish to achieve buddhahood which reflects your own ultimate goal. Therefore, the aspiration to achieve your own goal arises simultaneously with the cultivation of bodhicitta. However, when we talk about actually fulfilling these two aspirations, then we notice that the aspiration to achieve one's own goal is accomplished prior to the aspiration to achieve the goal of others.

At the moment we may not have the capacity to generate uncontrived bodhicitta. We do, however, have an opportunity to develop a contrived bodhicitta mind. I think it is extremely important that we make an effort to generate bodhicitta. You have been studying bodhicitta over many years and have heard the word 'bodhicitta' from me so frequently. You have learnt about the great many benefits of generating bodhicitta, not only in terms of benefitting others but also the benefits for yourself.

In my view, there is no more effective and powerful means of subduing your own mind than bodhicitta. You can apply all kinds of other practices but none of them will work to calm your thoughts and deeds. So, if you want to subdue or calm your mind, you must sincerely cultivate bodhicitta within your continuum.

Of course, it would be a different story if you didn't know anything about the true means of subduing your mind. In that case, you would just have to apply whatever method that you know, such as a relaxation meditation technique of simply resting the mind on a given object. However, that doesn't apply to you, as you have invested a great deal of time and effort in learning about Dharma as an effective means of subduing the mind. So, it would be very unfortunate if you don't apply this profound knowledge and, I have to say, it would make me sad.

Loving-kindness is one of the causes in the sevenfold cause and effect method for generating bodhicitta. Loving-kindness is a very general English term and requires some further clarification here, where it is considered as a cause for generating compassion. Hence, it listed before compassion. Generally speaking, we understand love or loving kindness to be a mental attitude of wishing others to have happiness.

From this perspective, the relationship between loving kindness and compassion is not one of cause and effect. Hence, there is no definitive order in the way they arise or whether one necessarily precedes the other. However, in the context of the sevenfold cause and effect method, as I mentioned earlier, loving kindness specifically refers to a sense of endearment, intimacy, closeness, and affectionate love that you feel towards others, which, in this technique, is a necessary cause for cultivating compassion. We find out

about such contextual meanings and fine distinctions in the major scriptures of the early masters.

It doesn't matter if we don't gain any realisations straight away as a result of whatever effort we put into Dharma in this life. However, it will at least leave a good imprint in our continuum. As an effect of that, we can be sure that in our future lives we will definitely and continuously meet with a perfect Mahayana spiritual guru and under their guidance, we will progress to the perfect state of complete enlightenment. It is most unlikely and extremely difficult for us to achieve full enlightenment within this life. Although the secret mantra shows a quick path to enlightenment in a single lifetime, in practice it is extremely difficult. Therefore, our best chance to achieve complete enlightenment is by depending upon a gradual progression along the path through a series of many subsequent rebirths. That is why I am saying that it is very important that we focus our spiritual practice on what is within our reach, and directly related to our current situation. Then you will find studying Dharma and putting it into practice in whatever way you can will be more effective and beneficial now and in the long term.

We will now continue with the teaching.

(b') How to begin the development of generosity

We left off at this point last week, but we'll read it again:

Previously, recalling my commitment to emulate him, I gave away my body, every resource, and all my virtue to all living beings. If I am still attached to resources, I am behaving just like an elephant, oppressed by the sun, who goes into the water and bathes and then, back on dry land, rolls in the dirt. Then again, after it sees that it is covered in dirt, it goes back into the water and does the same thing over again." The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

Recalling the superior deeds of the sages,
Strive at them and reflect on your commitment;
Understand the following excellent thoughts
In order to clear away your attachment to things:
I gave away my body to all beings;
Then I relinquished the virtue of this gift.
My being attached to external objects
Is senseless, like an elephant's bathing.

The clarification to make here is that *I gave away my body* may literally sound OK. However, if we take, *I relinquished the virtue* literally it may sound like we are relinquishing virtue. Of course, this doesn't mean giving up on Dharma or virtues. Rather it means giving Dharma or virtues to others.

The text continues:

If you are able to generate intense delight as you contemplate the many benefits of giving things away and great fear as you reflect on the faults of tightfistedness, you will naturally produce a generous attitude.

We need to take this as Lama Tsongkhapa's spiritual experience. He is saying here that if you contemplate the benefit of the practice of giving, the thought of giving will arise spontaneously and forcefully – *it will naturally produce a generous attitude*.

Then:

Accordingly, generate the thought of giving away everything to others at the conclusion of cultivating love and compassion, or at the conclusion of reflecting on the life stories of the Conqueror, his children, and so forth.

This emphasises that the purpose of cultivating love and compassion for other beings is to increase the thought of

giving or, in other words, to be able to engage in the practice of giving. As well, *reflecting on the life stories of the Conqueror, and his children* (such as bodhisattvas) is also to increase the practice of giving.

The text continues :

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states how this is done:

I will give away without a sense of loss
My body and my resources
As well as all my virtue from the past, present, and future
For the welfare of all living beings.

So the objects to be given are one's *body*, one's *resources* or possessions and all one's *virtues*. Here, *without a sense of loss* implies no sense of stinginess, attachment or miserliness – one gives to others wholeheartedly. The benefit of developing the thought or intention of giving lies in counteracting attachment to things and stinginess with sharing them.

The text continues:

You focus on three things – your body, your resources, and your roots of virtue – and mentally give them away to all living beings.

These lines indicate the meditation of giving and taking, which we have been doing. In this meditation, you mentally give away all your belongings to other beings, who receive them and experience virtue in their mind as a result.

Then:

If you stop the craving that conceives everything to be your personal property and then repeatedly condition yourself to the attitude of giving it all away to others, you will be called a bodhisattva.

We need to reflect on the meaning of this line in the context of our own inner continuum. Although it says here, *stop the craving ... condition yourself to the attitude of giving it all away to others, you will be called a bodhisattva*, we remain strongly attached to craving for all our possessions thinking, 'These are my possessions.'

I have been emphasising over and over again to you that when you read the lam-rim, you should read slowly, and contemplate the meaning of every single word and sentence, relating each to your own thoughts and deeds. You will find this method of reading very effective in calming your mind and enhancing your inner peace and happiness. Our minds don't have to always be occupied with the usual objects of distraction. We know from our own experience that this only brings us inner disturbance, chaos and turbulence. We need to break the usual habit of allowing our mind to restlessly wander after various objects. We will find reading the lam-rim text and contemplating its meaning to be very rewarding and effective in calming our mind.

The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

"All these things are yours;
I have no pride that they are mine."
Someone who has this amazing thought repeatedly
And emulates the qualities of the perfect Buddha
Is called a bodhisattva – so said
The inconceivable Buddha, the supreme being.

At present, as your determination has not matured and is weak, you do not actually give away flesh, etc., though you have already mentally given your body to all beings.

As I mentioned earlier, it is important to read each sentence and then pause to reflect on its meaning in the context of your own practice. This is saying that at the moment, our

practice of giving may only be on a mental level as we are not in a position to actually give away things to others. So, you might wonder about the point of doing that.

The text then offers the answer:

According to the *Compendium of Trainings*, however, if you do not train in the thought of giving away your body and life, you will not become accustomed to it and so will remain incapable of giving away your body and life. Therefore, from now on cultivate this thought.

It is said only those on the bodhisattva *bhumi* level can actually give away their body or lives to benefit other beings. Having said that, there are some ordinary people in the community who donate body parts such as a kidney to others. That's a worthy cause. Generally speaking, before we can engage in giving away our body and indeed our lives, we need to train and habituate our mind with the thought of giving. When the thought of giving is sufficiently developed, the actual act of giving will naturally take place. That is what the text is saying here.

We need to understand, contemplate and meditate on the Dharma. In this way, we will receive its true blessing. That blessing is not going to come from outside of us; it comes from our own Dharma knowledge and practice. Then the text continues:

If you use food, clothes, shelter and so on that you have sincerely given away to all beings, and you do so with craving for your personal welfare, forgetting the thought, "I will use them for others' welfare," then you commit a major infraction.

There are different layers of meaning here. On one level this responds to doubts or questions concerning offerings to the Triple Gem. Some people have asked me what you do with the food and drink you have offered to the Triple Gem. As clearly stipulated here, if you take those offerings *with craving for your personal welfare*, then you commit a major infraction, that is, an afflictive infraction or downfall. Therefore, the advice is to use the offerings with a motivation to benefit other beings, *I will use them for others' welfare*.

Here we are talking about consuming things that we have wholeheartedly dedicated or given to others. Having forgotten about the fact that these things have been given to others, it is saying here that if you utilise those things with craving for your personal welfare or satisfaction, you commit a major infraction, or an afflictive downfall (Tib: *Nyon.mongs-pai ITung.ba*). However, if you utilise those things, not out of craving for personal welfare, but either because you forget to include all beings in your intention, or because you utilise those things for a particular living being out of attachment, then you will be committing a minor infraction, a non-afflictive downfall (Tib.: *Nyon.mongs ma.yin.pai ITung.ba*). The text states:

When you have no craving but forget to apply the idea of focusing on all living beings, or if you use those resources for a particular living being out of attachment, you commit a minor infraction.

When it says *if you use those resources for a particular living being out of attachment* the indication is that you use those resource for the sake of another living being out of attachment.

It continues:

With regard to the material goods that you have turned over to others, the *Compendium of Trainings* states that when you use them for your own welfare fully cognizant of their

being the property of others, you are stealing, and if the total value is enough, you commit a cardinal transgression of the vows of individual liberation.

This refers to whether or not the act of stealing is qualified as an act of a cardinal transgression, which in Tibetan is *pham.pa* or transgression of any root vows of an ordained person. Some argue about the occurrence of the transgression or *pham.pa*. As the text says:

In response to this, some say that since you have turned over your food, etc., to all living beings, it is impossible for the total value of any one being's portion to be enough, so you cannot commit a cardinal transgression. Others say this is not correct because you have turned over your belongings as a whole to each being individually. Others argue that even though you have mentally surrendered them to others, they do not take personal possession of them, so there is no cardinal transgression.

The intended meaning of the *Compendium of Trainings* is then summarised.

You incur a cardinal transgression (given that the total value requirement has been met) when you sincerely turn your food, etc., over to a human being, and this person knows it and takes possession, whereupon you, fully cognizant of their being another's property, appropriate them for your own use. Therefore, the positions stated by the others are wrong.

Here, Lama Tsongkhapa clarifies what is mentioned in the *Compendium of Trainings*, with respect to the occurrence of a cardinal transgression or *pham.pa*. Just as the consummation of a non-virtuous act such as killing is dependent upon meeting certain factors in the stages of committing the act, whether or not the act of stealing is considered as a cardinal transgression (Tib: *pham.pa*) is also dependent on certain factors.

As Lama Tsongkhapa clarifies it, *when you sincerely turn your food, etc., over to a human being*, the recipient is a human being who knows or is aware of the object being given, and who then takes ownership of that object. In this kind of scenario, if you make use of the object for your own purpose with the recognition that the object has been given to the recipient, then it said *given that the total value requirement has been met*, the act will be considered as a cardinal transgression or *pham.pa*. Then the text continues:

There is no fault in using some living beings' resources if you think, while using them, "I do this for their welfare." The *Compendium of Trainings* states:

There is no fault in using things if you think, "I am taking care of my body which is owned by others with these resources that are owned by others." Slaves have no material goods of their own with which to survive.

Here is a different scenario. It says here that it's fine to use things that have been dedicated or wholeheartedly given to others if the reason for using them is to benefit others. Sometimes people give things away to others, and then, later on, they decide to use those things by saying to other people they are doing so for their benefit. That seems to be acceptable, doesn't it?

From one aspect we can take what is being said here as an instruction for our everyday life. It shows us what kind of motivation we should have before acquiring things and while utilising things. For instance, in cultivating the thought or intention of giving, then our motivation for utilising things should be to benefit others. It continues:

You may think, "I incur a fault because, after I have turned over these belongings to living beings, I use them without their permission," but there is no fault. The *Compendium of Trainings* says:

A servant who labors hard on a master's behalf might use the master's belongings without permission when the master's mind is unclear due to illness and so forth, but incurs no fault.

Here the emphasis is on your motivation. If your motivation is to protect the interest of other beings, then it can be permissible to use the belongings of others. For example, a slave's act of utilising the master's belongings to save his master's life is not morally a wrong action. Similarly, as part of practising the bodhisattva deeds we should ensure that our motivation in utilising things is to benefit other beings, and that it is not stained with attachment to, or craving for, the objects you have given to others.

We are reading this profound text and going over its meaning together. In fact, you can read it and learn by yourself. This text provides the key points of Dharma practice and everything you need to know about your Dharma practice. As I have been saying, it is very important you read the text thoroughly and slowly. As you read, think and meditate over its meaning, you will find this way of learning very effective for your practice and also for enhancing a calm, clear mind of wisdom.

In essence, we must put our knowledge of Dharma into practice and integrate it into our everyday activities. For example, whenever we drink or eat something, we should recite the OM AH HUNG mantra three times and reflect upon the meaning of the mantra. The three syllables of the mantra can be explained together or individually.

To explain the meaning of the whole mantra, the three rounds of the recitation implies the purification, transformation and inexhaustibility of the offering objects. The first recitation of the mantra purifies the offering objects of all bad smells, appearance, colour, taste etc.; the second recitation transforms the objects into uncontaminated nectar and; the third recitation makes the objects inexhaustible.

As to the meaning of the mantra in terms of each individual syllable, then, the OM represents the seed syllable of the holy body which is associated with Vairochana Buddha; AH represents the seed syllable of the holy speech associated with Amitabha Buddha; and the HUNG represents the seed syllable of the holy or omniscient mind associated with Akshobhya Buddha.

Accordingly, you should think of this meaning of the mantra as you recite it, either when actually making an offering, or blessing an inner offering in a ritual. As we have discussed earlier, we need to ensure our motivation for eating and drinking is primarily to sustain a long and healthy life in order to practise Dharma, helping it to flourish and to benefit other sentient beings. As to the food or drink going into our body, think of giving it to the countless bacteria whose survival inside us depends on it. As a result of receiving food and drink you imagine that these bacteria experience uncontaminated bliss. You then pray: At the moment I am benefiting them only through material aid; may I soon be able to benefit them by giving Dharma teachings.

Next week we will have a teaching break so you can have a discussion session.

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The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

4 December 2018

We will begin with the usual meditation. [*Tong-len meditation*]

(b') How to begin the development of generosity (cont.)

We will just go over the last few passages that we finished in the last session.

The *Compendium of Trainings* states:

There is no fault in using things if you think, "I am taking care of my body which is owned by others with these resources that are owned by others." Slaves have no material goods of their own with which to survive.

You may think, "I incur a fault because, after I have turned over these belongings to living beings, I use them without their permission," but there is no fault. The *Compendium of Trainings* says:

A servant who labors hard on a master's behalf might use the master's belongings without permission when the master's mind is unclear due to illness and so forth, but incurs no fault.

Here, the text raises the question of whether it is appropriate to utilise other people's belongings without their prior consent. It is a social convention and morally correct to seek permission or check with owners before using their things. We teach this practice to our children too. However, the question raised here is in the context of a different scenario. If you refer to the above passage, you can understand without needing to go into detail the reason why there is no need for prior permission from the owners.

The commentary continues:

Do not lack faith and think, "Mentally giving everything away to living beings while not actually giving it is tantamount to a lie and, therefore, is without real substance." The *Compendium of Trainings* says:

Some people who are close to a bodhisattva who practices in this way fail to understand the bodhisattva's practice accurately and lack faith. This is unwarranted because they are well acquainted with someone who has a great and wonderful spirit of generosity. It is wrong for them to doubt this method.

The issue here is this: suppose you imagine giving things to others while you are not actually giving; doesn't that mean you are lying? It says here that this is not the case at all. In fact, bodhisattvas achieve the perfection of giving by initially habituating their minds with the thought of giving. Hence, the thought of giving is a marvellous quality to possess.

We can relate the question raised here to our everyday life. For example, some people promise they will give gifts to others, but they never give them. Others find this annoying and frustrating, and wonder why that person said they would give but never gave. If you tell a child you will give them a gift, and then don't give it, you will make them unnecessarily anxious and frustrated. Some parents tell their children that everything they own belongs to them (the

children); this makes the children wonder when they will get it!

Naturally then, we may have doubts about the bodhisattva's practice of training in the *thought* of giving. It is, therefore, important for us to understand the meaning and benefit of training in the thought of giving. Through such training, we must give rise to the thought of giving from the depths of our heart. When it says *wonderful spirit of generosity*, this refers to this genuine thought of giving that arises from the depth of our heart.

If we relate this to ourselves, we can understand that our practice of giving starts with having the genuine thought of giving within us. Therefore, we need to meditate on how to cultivate and develop that thought of giving. Based on our own experience, we need to understand the positive effect on our mental continuum when we give rise to the thought of giving – it eliminates stinginess and give us the impetus, later on, to actually give away our things to others without any hesitation when we see they are in need, and we have things to give away.

Now we move onto the next section:

(c') The divisions of generosity

The section on the divisions of generosity has three parts:

1. How everyone should practice it
2. Divisions of generosity relative to particular persons
3. Divisions of actual generosity (Chapters 9-10)

(1') How everyone should practice it

The text explains this in terms of the six excellences or supremacies.

Asaṅga's Mahāyāna Compendium says that you practice generosity in association with six supremacies. *Supreme basis* means that you practice generosity based on the spirit of enlightenment; i.e., you act after you have been motivated by it.

We have learned in the past that, for our practice of generosity to be qualified as the practice of the perfection of generosity, an important defining characteristic is the special thought or motivation for engaging in the practice. This motivation should be bodhicitta, the altruistic mind of enlightenment. This is the first supremacy of the *supreme basis*. We have got to remember and ensure that when we engage in the practice of giving, it is based upon or conjoined with the motivation of bodhicitta.

Supreme things means that in general you give all objects that can be given, and, even when you are engaged in specific acts of generosity, you do not give up this thought of giving away everything.

Here, the text is emphasising that even when we engage in the act of giving a specific thing, such as food or drink, we should not forget to think of giving *all* the objects of giving, including our body, resources and virtues.

You do not give up this thought of giving away everything relates to the situation where you engage in the practice of giving a specific thing, such as giving food and drink to alleviate the suffering of hunger and thirst. Even in this situation, mentally you are prepared to give everything away, not just those specific objects that you are giving.

Supreme aim is when you give things away to all living beings for the sake of their immediate happiness and ultimate benefit.

This clearly indicates that the purpose or aim of giving is to fulfil the immediate and ultimate purposes of the recipients.

It also indicates that the intention of giving should be unbiased or impartial, not discriminating between sentient beings.

Supreme skill-in-means is said to be when generosity is imbued with non-conceptual sublime wisdom; beginning bodhisattvas should take this to be the wisdom that knows the lack of intrinsic nature in objects.

The *supreme skill* or technique is to ensure that when we engage in the practice of giving, it is conjoined with the wisdom of emptiness. However, when the text says *imbued with non-conceptual sublime wisdom*, it refers to the exalted wisdom of superior insight that directly or non-conceptually realises emptiness. Such an exalted wisdom is the quality of arya or superior beings alone, or those who are on the path of seeing or above. Therefore, for *beginning bodhisattvas* – that is, those who have not yet reached the path of seeing, such as those who are on the paths of accumulation and preparation, or those who are ordinary beings – the *supreme skill* refers to the wisdom that knows the lack of intrinsic nature, that is, the wisdom of emptiness.

We can note here the mention of bodhicitta as the superior motivation, the wisdom of emptiness as the superior wisdom, and dedicating to complete enlightenment as the superior dedication. We have learned in the past that conjoining these three superior qualities with our practices, such as the practice of giving, will make that practice the perfection of giving. As to the view of emptiness, the various Buddhist schools of tenets have their own interpretation.

Supreme dedication means that you dedicate the virtue from generosity to complete enlightenment.

This is to emphasise that you dedicate the virtue you have created through engaging in the practice of giving to achieving complete enlightenment. Again, we should take note from our past study of the differences between dedication and prayer. Dedication requires a certain object or substance, in the form of virtue or merit, to be dedicated. When we speak of prayer, on the other hand, it simply means wishing for something: for example, we can simply pray by saying, 'May I have this or that' – we can pray for anything we like.

Supreme purity is when you stop both the afflictive and cognitive obscurations.

Here, we understand that the reason we engage in the practice is to abandon afflictive and cognitive obscurations.

Overall, we can find some important elements of our practice here. For example, whatever virtuous actions we create, we should always try to remember to rejoice by feeling positive and joyful about them, dedicating our virtuous actions to complete enlightenment and conjoining that with the knowledge of emptiness. Rejoicing causes our virtues to increase and multiply, whereas dedication makes our virtues inexhaustible, in the sense that they will not be destroyed by mental delusions such as anger. Although the six supremacies are explained here in the context of the practice of giving, we should incorporate them into whatever virtuous actions we engage in. In this way our virtuous practice will become more effective and profoundly beneficial.

The six supremacies concern the type of motivation we should have; our willingness to give everything; the supreme aim, which means benefiting all beings, without any sense of a biased or partial attitude; incorporating our

knowledge of emptiness; dedication; and, finally, supreme purity, which is to recognise our practice, such as the practice of giving, as a means to purify or abandon mental obscurations. It is said that simply recognising whatever virtuous actions you undertake as a means to abandon mental afflictions makes them a remedy for purifying those mental afflictions.

The text continues:

Haribhadra's *Long Explanation of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines* says that you practice generosity with the six perfections present. When you are giving the teachings, for instance, it is extremely powerful if you practice all six perfections.

The text goes on to explain how we can include or incorporate all the six perfections into the practice of each one of them. For example, we can include all six perfections into the practice of giving. In other words, when we engage in the practice of giving, we not only engage in giving, but also engage in the other five perfections of morality, patience, joyous effort, meditative concentration and wisdom. As you have learned in the past, this is similar to consolidating all seven limbs into each limb of the seven limb practice. As it says here, *when you are giving teachings*, you practise giving, as well as the other five perfections, such as morality.

You have ethical discipline when you restrain yourself from the considerations of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*; ...

When it says *restrain yourself*, this implies practising morality within the practice of giving – that is, restraining yourself from the self-concerned mental attitude of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. Having a self-concerned attitude goes against bodhisattva practice. In fact, curtailing self-concern is considered the root moral ethic of a bodhisattva's practice. Therefore, it is essential for bodhisattvas to possess the moral ethic of restraint from self-concern when they engage in their deeds. This shows how bodhisattvas practise ethics when they engage in the practice of giving.

When you are giving the teachings clearly implies the practice of giving itself. At the same time, the other perfections, such as the perfection of morality and patience, are also implied here.

... patience when you bear any hardship while you aspire to the qualities of omniscience ...

This means that whilst practising giving, bodhisattvas are patient with any obstacles or hardships they face: this is how they include patience in their practice of giving. Patience here includes all types of patience, such as the patience of non-retaliation, and the patience of accepting hardships and suffering. In fact, we can understand the need for patience for the effectiveness and success of all our practices.

... joyous perseverance when you yearn for the ever-greater increase of your generosity; ...

This refers to joyous effort, which is the great level of aspiration, interest and motivation that bodhisattvas show in their deeds of giving.

... meditative stabilization when you dedicate to complete enlightenment the virtue that you cultivate with one-pointed attention unmixed with Hinayāna considerations; ...

While engaging in giving, the bodhisattva's mind is single-pointedly focused on the virtue of achieving complete

enlightenment and benefiting others; it is not tainted by the self-concerned mental attitude of the lesser vehicles.

... and wisdom when you know that the giver, gift, and recipient are like a magician's illusion.

This shows that the bodhisattva's deed of giving also incorporates the perfection of wisdom, which is the understanding of emptiness of the giver, gift and recipient. While engaging in the deed of giving, they see the giver, gift or the object to be given, and the recipient as like a magician's illusion, for they are all devoid of inherent existence.

In this way, you should reflect on the meaning of the text by reading a few lines, contemplating their meaning, then reviewing what you have learned, such as the six supremacies in the practice of giving. It's good to go over them in your mind one by one: supreme basis, thing, aim, means, dedication and purity. Likewise, think over the meaning of consolidating all six perfections into the practice of giving. If you are unsure, then you should simply refer to the text, read it, and think over the meaning again. It is good to get used to this way of learning by relying upon the text, and at the same time, reflecting on its meaning.

(2') Divisions of generosity relative to particular persons

In general it is said that lay bodhisattvas make gifts of material things and renunciate bodhisattvas make gifts of the teachings.

Here, the text indicates that, when we speak of bodhisattvas, there are lay bodhisattvas and renunciate or ordained bodhisattvas. In terms of the practice of giving, the text says that lay bodhisattvas should primarily engage in giving material things, whereas ordained or renunciate bodhisattvas primarily engage in giving or teaching Dharma.

There is then a quotation:

The *Bodhisattva Vows of Liberation (Bodhisattva-prātimokṣa)* says:

Śāriputra, the renunciate bodhisattva who teaches just a single four-line stanza produces much more merit than the lay bodhisattva who makes offerings of buddha-realms filled with jewels, as many in number as the sand grains of the River Ganges, to the tathāgatas, the arhats, the perfectly enlightened buddhas. Śāriputra, the Tathāgata does not permit renunciates to make material gifts.

You will also find the same connotation in other sutras, such as the *Vajra (or Diamond Cutter) Sutra*, where the Buddha advises renunciates or ordained followers to primarily give away Dharma, not material things.

Then the *Compendium of Trainings* (by Shantideva) clarifies the context of *the Tathāgata does not permit renunciates to make material gifts*:

The *Compendium of Trainings* says the Buddha intended here material gifts that would become a hindrance to study and the like.

The *Compendium of Trainings* interpreted the meaning to be that the Buddha's intention was to forbid renunciates from engaging in the giving of material things, because accumulating these things affects the learning, contemplation and meditation practices of the renunciates. This implies that the renunciate must devote his or her time to learning and propagating Dharma. They should not engage in giving material things, if this impedes their learning and practice. The renunciates' primary focus

should be learning and teaching Dharma, not handling or giving material things. However, as it says here:

It is said that renunciates are prohibited from making offerings of material goods that they have worked to obtain, but they must give them away if they obtain many things through the force of their previous merit and without hindering their virtuous activities.

So the text doesn't imply that renunciate followers should not give the material goods to others at all. Renunciates are forbidden to engage in the giving of material things if this interferes with their learning and practice of Dharma. At the same time, the text clarifies here that renunciates must give away material things that they have acquired, without sacrificing any time and effort from their side that will impact their practice, or without causing any harm to their virtuous practice.

For example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, never pursues material goods, but people make offerings to him, which he gives away to those who are in need or to a good charity or cause. So, the implication is that if an ordained practitioner or renunciate acquires material goods effortlessly by virtue of their past good merit and karma, they should give away those things. Perhaps we can also make an exception for those bodhisattvas who take rebirth as a king or a leader to spread the Dharma and benefit others when, as part of their aspiration to benefit others, they practise the generosity of giving material aid.

The text continues:

Also, Sha-ra-wa (Sha-ra-ba) said:

I am not talking to you about the benefits of giving; I am talking to you about the faults of tightfistedness.

It is displeasing news when renunciates harm their ethical discipline as they strain to the utmost in their search for wealth to give away.

The kadampa Geshe Sharawa clearly says here that it is *displeasing news* if any renunciate takes part in accumulating material things to become a philanthropist, but undermines their own ethical practice or inflates their minds with pride by saying to others: 'I have extended help there'.

(3') Divisions of actual generosity

The presentation of the divisions of actual generosity has three parts:

1. The gift of the teachings
2. The gift of fearlessness
3. Material gifts [Chapters 9-10]

(a") The gift of the teachings

The gift of the teachings is teaching the sublime teaching without making mistakes, ...

The *sublime teaching* refers to the flawless doctrines, which serve as a cause to achieve the state of liberation or complete enlightenment. You can give teaching to others or facilitate or cause others to give teachings.

... teaching the arts and the like (worldly occupations which are blameless and proper to learn), and involving others in upholding the fundamental precepts.

The giving of teaching also includes teaching or inspiring others to make art works, like drawing mandalas or making stupas. However, when it says here being *blameless and proper to learn*, it means that while working on such arts, one should not commit any misdeeds or non-virtues; rather, one abides by the spiritual precepts as well as *involving others in upholding the fundamental precepts*.

The point being made here is one's act of giving teaching is to inspire or remind others to engage in virtuous practice, by fostering virtuous thoughts or causing them to engage in virtuous actions.

(b'') The gift of fearlessness

The gift of fearlessness is protecting living beings from fear of humans such as kings and robbers, ...

The gift of fearlessness is to protect others from the fear of death - here, it says *such as kings and robbers*, which means saving those who face the death sentence due to a court order or an order by a king, and protecting others from the threat of robbers. These are the fears of death caused by humans; then the text mentions the fears of death caused by non-human factors:

... from fear of non-human beings such as lions, tigers, and crocodiles, and from fear of the elements such as water and fire.

So, there are many situations that present us with an opportunity to practise the giving of fearlessness. For example, we can give fearlessness when we save insects from being drowned, or save animals from bushfire, and so on.

(c'') Material gifts

Material gifts are explained in two parts:

1. The generosity of actually giving material things [Chapters 9-10]
2. The generosity which is just mental [Chapter 10]

(1'') The generosity of actually giving material things

The generosity of actually giving material things has three parts:

1. How to give away material things [Chapters 9-10]
2. What to do if you are unable to give [Chapter 10]
3. Relying on the remedies for the hindrances to generosity [Chapter 10]

(a) How to give away material things

This section has four parts:

1. Recipients of giving
2. The motivation for giving
3. How to give [Chapter 10]
4. Things to give [Chapter 10]

As to the recipients of giving, the text lists ten types of recipients:

(1) Recipients of giving

There are ten of these: (1) friends and relatives who help you, (2) enemies who harm you, (3) ordinary people who neither harm nor help you, (4) those with good qualities such as ethical discipline, (5) those with flaws such as faulty ethical discipline, (6) those inferior to you, (7) those equal to you, (8) those superior to you, (9) the rich and happy, and (10) the miserable and destitute.

We should give to all beings without discrimination; however, there is a reason why the text identifies ten types of recipients. This is to direct our attention to the right kind of motivation or mental attitude that we should have, in contrast to the kind of mental attitude we normally have which depends on the recipient of our giving.

The first two types of recipient listed here are friends and enemies, towards whom our normal attitudes are attachment and hatred, respectively. So, the text is saying here that we must avoid these attitudes. Instead, we should develop love and compassion while performing any act of giving.

Similarly, our normal attitude to ordinary people or neutral beings who neither harm nor help us is indifference or ignorance. So the emphasis here is to show compassion for all beings, regardless of whether they benefit or harm us. They equally deserve our gift of giving.

Those with good qualities, such as ethical discipline, are those noble beings with admirable qualities. The text is saying we should not feel jealous of them but hold them with great admiration and respect.

We should not look down upon, hate or abuse those with flaws such as faulty ethical discipline, but should instead hold them with compassion.

Towards those inferior to us, we should not be arrogant and despise them; rather, we should show a genuine sense of care and compassion, and practise giving to them out of such a loving attitude.

To those equal to us, our normal attitude is competitiveness, which we need to overcome, whereas we need to avoid being jealous of those superior to us.

Towards the rich and happy, we also need to overcome jealousy and we need to hold the miserable and destitute with love and compassion.

With a good knowledge of Dharma and what to do in our practice, we will find our practice becoming more effective, in terms of counteracting mental delusions. We can have a broad knowledge of Dharma, such as the practice of giving. However, as we have found here, if we have a more detailed knowledge of the practice of giving, it makes a difference to our practice.

Understanding the above list of the recipients of giving gives us a different focus in our practice for countering specific mental afflictions. The important thing is that we must try to put our learning into practice as much as possible. Even if our practice doesn't noticeably change our present situation and give us a sense of accomplishment in the short term, it does benefit our mental continuum. As we always say, it leaves a good impression in our continuum.

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The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

11 December 2018

We shall begin with our usual Giving and Taking meditation.

[*tong-len meditation*]

Please reinforce your motivation by thinking: 'I will achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings and for this purpose, I will listen to the profound teaching and put it into practice.'

We'll continue from where we left off last week.

(2) The motivation for giving

The motivation for giving has two sections:

1. What kind of motivation is required
2. What kind of motivation must be eliminated

(a') What kind of motivation is required

Your motivation should have three attributes:

It says here, *your motivation should have three attributes*. However, instead of *motivation*, it is more correct to say: the focus of the *thought of giving* has *three attributes*.

Let me first read the three attributes:

(1) a focus on purpose, which thinks, "Based on this I will complete the perfection of generosity, a precondition for unexcelled enlightenment"; (2) a focus on the thing to be given, which thinks, "From the outset a bodhisattva gives away all possessions to living beings, so the material goods that I am giving belong to others, and it is as if they are receiving things kept in trust"; and (3) a focus on the recipient, which thinks, "Since these recipients, whether asking for the gift or not, bring to completion my perfection of generosity, they are my teachers."

The three attributes focus on the thought, or intention, of giving. The first attribute focuses on the purpose of giving, which is to think that through the practice of giving we will complete the perfection of giving as a means of gathering the accumulation of merit for complete enlightenment.

The second attribute focuses on the object of giving, whereby you think that the object you are giving already belongs to the recipient, or that you are returning the recipients' belongings that had been placed with you in trust. The focus of the third attribute is on the field or recipient. Recipients are the indispensable cause for you to complete the perfection of giving, and thereby achieve complete enlightenment. Therefore, regardless of whether recipients request, or beg, or do neither, they should all be regarded as one's spiritual guides or spiritual teachers.

In alignment with this last attribute, Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* says:

The Buddha's qualities are gained
From sentient beings and the Conqueror alike,
So why do I not respect them
In the same way as I respect the Conquerors?

The Buddha guides us along the path to enlightenment, whereas sentient beings serve as the supreme field to complete all six perfections. However, both buddhas and sentient beings are the same in their ability to enable us to

achieve complete enlightenment, and so both are equally worthy objects of veneration and offering.

The text continues:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

When someone comes to ask for something,
Bodhisattvas, so as to build up the
preconditions for complete enlightenment,
Consider what they have as belonging to
others, give it as from a trust,
And consider the person their teacher.

With respect to giving away individual things, understand in detail from the *Questions of Subāhu Sūtra* (*Subāhu-paripṛcchā*) and the *Compendium of the Perfections*, your motivation's focus on purpose, which is the thought, "I will give this away for this or for that purpose."

As to the focus of your motivation on the recipient, as explained above, it should apply to all situations of generosity, and so be the general motivation.

"The *general motivation* refers to the thought or intention of giving as discussed earlier. It is saying here that in all instances of the practice of giving, the cultivation of a genuine thought of giving is essential.

The text continues:

Specific motivations would be when you make a gift to those who harm you ...

We discussed this last session. This is concerned with the specific mental focus of the practice of giving, such as loving-kindness towards those recipients who harm you. The text says here that even if the recipients respond to your gesture of giving with hatred instead of appreciation, you should still maintain a loving attitude. The text then says:

... once you have established a loving attitude; to those who suffer, once you have established a compassionate attitude; ...

Generally speaking, we all feel compassion when seeing other beings in great pain and suffering. Hence, if recipients are beings who are afflicted with much suffering, then we should try to show a greater sense of empathy and compassion.

The text continues:

... to those who have good qualities, once you have established an attitude of delight; ...

This means that when you give things to those who possess excellent qualities, you should intensify the thought of delight and admiration in their qualities.

... and to those who help you, once you have established an impartial attitude.

As to giving things to those who help you, you need to ensure your attitude is impartial without attachment or aversion.

Moreover, you must be even-minded towards all recipients, give away to living beings—such as those who ask and so forth—all the virtuous results of giving, and, in particular, be compassionate to those recipients who are suffering.

This points out that you should think not only of yourself when giving things, but also any virtues or merits that you accumulate through your act of giving, and the result of those virtues and merits that you will gain in the future.

It's very important that you remember to integrate what you study here into your practice of giving in real-life situations. For example, remember *in particular, to be compassionate to those recipients who are suffering*. Normally, if people are angry at us, or don't appreciate our generosity, we won't give. However, it says here that we should give to them and enhance compassion and loving-kindness towards them.

The text continues.

Candrakirti says:

Once the giving is free from stinginess,
The giver must compassionately make gifts
Which are given equally with an even-mindedness
To those who are superior or inferior recipients.

The results of such giving
Go to both self and other at the same time.
Holy beings praise this giving without stinginess
To those who seek gifts.

Then there is a quote from the *Praise of Infinite Qualities*:

Even when someone sees a hopeful person who is
destitute and of low birth
They do not care and, out of desire for results, seek
other recipients who have good qualities.
They have a base motive; though givers, they are
the same as those asking for gifts, you [Buddha]
said.
Hence, you remain committed out of compassion
to giving to those who ask.

This verse from the *Praise of Infinite Qualities* highlights a very important aspect of the effective practice of giving. It says that the practice of giving is corrupted, or not effective if it is limited only to those recipients from whom we hope to get some sort of reward. Such giving clearly implies some sort of self-interest. This relates to those who give gifts to influential others with the hope of receiving their favours in return, and no consideration of giving to others, particularly those who are destitute and impoverished in miserable living conditions. In relation to this, His Holiness the Dalai Lama remarked that those who completely ignore impoverished beings who truly deserve help and support, while making offerings to those with power and status, are really pathetic!

They have a base motive; though givers, they are the same as those asking for gifts. This means that the deed of giving carried out by these people is not really giving, because it is not intended to benefit others, nor is given out of care, love or compassion for them. Rather it is driven by selfish mental delusions. It says here that these people are actually no different from the recipients: just as the recipients of giving are desperate to receive things, such people are also hoping and desperately seeking returns for their giving. This is because their giving is not based on any sense of care, love and compassion for others, but on their expectation of receiving rewards.

Here we learn about the meaning of giving, the motivation for giving, the mental focus in giving and the recipients of giving. We need to remember all these to make our practice of giving more effective.

Hence, *you remain committed out of compassion to giving to those who ask*, refers to the Buddha's deeds of giving in the past which were completely and wholeheartedly motivated by love and compassion for other beings.

(b') What kind of motivation must be eliminated

1. *A motivation that believes in the supremacy of bad views.*
Lacking this means that you do not give while

thinking, "There is no result from generosity," "Harmful blood offerings are religious," "I am giving as I apply myself to what is good and beneficial," or "Through just the completion of generosity alone I will be free of mundane and supramundane attachments."

This clearly implies that we should eliminate any wrong views as the supreme view concerning the practice of giving, such as no result from generosity and the ritual of animal sacrifice etc.

2. *A motivation that is arrogant.* Lacking this means that you do not despise the person who asks for something, you do not compete with others, and, after you give something, you do not conceitedly think, "I am so generous; no one else can do like this."

This reminds us that when giving we should never despise or look down upon the recipients but give sincerely and respectfully. This is very important. As mentioned earlier, you should give out of sincere love and compassion for the recipients, not out of an intention to compete with other givers by thinking 'I am also giving because they are giving.' And, after you give something, you do not conceitedly think, "I am so generous" as that inflates your mind with the pride that 'I am a very generous person.'

The text continues:

The *Purification of the Obscurations of Karma Sūtra* (*Karmāvaraṇa-viśuddhi-sūtra*) explains that when ordinary beings make gifts, they lose faith in those who are stingy, on account of which they get angry and are reborn in a hell, so it is said that this obstructs generosity. When these ordinary persons observe ethical discipline, they speak unflatteringly of those whose ethical discipline is faulty, so they lose faith in many living beings and fall into miserable realms on account of their loss of faith; and when these ordinary people maintain patience and the like, they speak disparagingly of those who do the opposite of these, and so obstruct their own ethical discipline and so forth.

Hence you should do as the *Praise of Infinite Qualities* says:

At the times when you were learned and very intelligent you did not praise yourself;
You extolled and revered other persons who had few good qualities.
When you maintained a mass of good qualities, you seized on even a small fault in your own behavior.

When it says *you seized on even a small fault in your own behaviour* it means that the more qualities you develop, the fewer the faults you have. Remember this. You may think you have been developing qualities - but this is not necessarily the case. It clarifies here that the sign of developing qualities is the decreasing of faults in our personalities. (The word 'quality' in Tibetan is *yonten* and the word for fault is *rKyon*.) So, if you keep developing qualities, eventually you won't have even minor faults. It is also said here that you should abandon self-praise, i.e. speaking highly of your own qualities. However, you should develop the habit of praising others for their qualities; not belittling or looking down upon them.

The third attribute:

3. *A motivation for support.* Lacking this means that you do not give with the hope of getting praise or fame.

It is wrong to engage in the practice of giving to gain fame and reputation.

4. *A motivation of discouragement.* Lacking this means that when you give after becoming joyful even before the act of giving, ...

This advises that even before beginning an act of giving, you should feel greatly excited and motivated. Furthermore, merely seeing the recipients should bring an involuntary sense of joy and delight to your mind. And then the text says:

... you are filled with faith ...

While actually engaged in the practice of giving, you should have great faith and a positive attitude towards your practice.

and then have no regret after giving;

And after finishing the practice of giving, you should only feel delight and joy, and never regret or have negativity toward the practice. The text continues:

and even when you hear about a bodhisattva's vast acts of generosity, you are not discouraged but intensify your enthusiasm without belittling yourself.

This highlights that as a result of hearing how bodhisattvas so extensively, selflessly and timelessly engage in the deeds of generosity, you should not feel discouraged or that you can't do the same - 'I am not good enough, I am not strong enough.' Saying these things to yourself is like belittling or despising yourself, which we are advised here to abandon. Rather, you should feel admiration for and be inspired by the bodhisattvas' deeds, as well as in the virtues of any other beings. You should learn to always rejoice in the virtues and merits created by others.

Then the fifth:

5. *A motivation in which you turn your back on someone.*

This is a literal translation. The text continues:

Lacking this means that you give out of an even-minded compassion that is impartial toward enemy, friend, and ordinary persons.

When it comes to the practice of giving, you should never discriminate between other beings on the basis of whether or not they are your friends, enemies, or strangers. You should give to all beings without bias or discrimination. If your mental attitude is biased, you are excluding some beings and turning your back on them.

The sixth:

6. *A motivation of expecting something in return.* Lacking this means that you do not give to others out of the hope that they will help you, ...

This means that your act of giving is conditional upon the recipient doing something like a favour in return. This must be avoided.

... but because you see that these beings are bereft of happiness, ...

Rather you should focus on the fact that *these beings are being bereft of happiness.*

... burned by the flames of craving, without the power to relieve their sufferings, and naturally miserable.

7. *A motivation of expecting fruition.* Lacking this means that you do not hope for the fruition of an excellent body and resources in future lives, but give because you see that all composite things are without substance but can contribute to unexcelled enlightenment.

This passage specifically points out that the aim of your practice of giving should not be finding a good body or

wealth and resources in future lives, because *composite things are without substance* although they *can contribute to unexcelled enlightenment*. This means they can be turned into the means of achieving complete enlightenment. As clearly mentioned below, you should not consider finding a good body (or rebirth) and resources as the final aim of practising giving.

This does not stop you from expecting these results in the short term, but stops you from taking the mere body and resources of cyclic existence to be your goal.

The text elaborates more here by raising questions and clarifying key points. His Holiness the Dalai Lama praises Je Tsongkhapa's writings because in them he elaborates on the topics which are unclear and difficult to comprehend, by raising all the doubts and providing comprehensive explanations.

The text continues:

Besides these, you should give without the motivation of wrong livelihood in which you think, "If I make this gift, the ruler, etc., will recognize me as a generous person, and I will get some respect."

This is self-explanatory.

Do not give from fear of becoming poor, ...

This is relevant because we often stop giving for fear of becoming penniless. When you are giving, there should be no fear that you will become poor as a result. The text then says:

... or with the motivation to deceive someone who asks for something.

This says that giving things with an ulterior motive such as deceiving the recipient is not on! And:

Give something when you are free from distraction and feelings of dislike or anger. Make gifts when you are not dispirited due the various wrong actions of the one who asks for something. Even when you see the faults of someone who has deceived you, etc., do not give with the motivation to proclaim these faults to others. Finally, give in the belief, from which others cannot dissuade you, that each individual act of giving will give rise to an individual result.

The text continues:

(3)) How to give

Prior to this, we have spoken about the intention of giving. Next, we'll look at the manner of the actual deeds at the time of giving.

This section has two parts:

1. How not to give

The manner which is negative is to be eliminated.

2. How to give

A manner which is positive is to be adopted.

These points are self-explanatory.

(a')) How not to give

Cast aside these thirteen ways of giving because they are to be eliminated: (1) not giving right away but only after you have delayed; (2) giving under stress; (3) giving after you have involved yourself in affairs that accord neither with the teachings nor with the ways of the world; (4) making a commitment beforehand that "I will give this much" and later making a gift of reduced quality or amount; (5) giving in return for favors; (6) giving in instalments when you could give all at one time; (7) as a ruler, giving away someone

else's child or spouse that you have kidnapped; (8) taking through pressure the belongings of your parents, servants, etc. and then giving them to others; (9) making a gift by a method that will hurt someone else; (10) while you remain idle, employing someone else to do the giving;

Here it says that you accrue more merit if you give things with your own hands.

The text continues:

(11) giving while you criticize and have contempt for the one who asks for something, while you are indirectly critical in a way that implies contempt, or while you intimidate the recipient with harsh words; (12) giving while you violate the Buddha's prohibitive precepts; and, (13) not giving resources as you acquire them but giving them after you accumulate them for a long time.

Indeed, bodhisattvas see that it is wrong to give resources that you have stored up, whereas it is not wrong to give them away as you acquire them. This is because there is no additional merit in storing them up and then giving them at one time, and because you turn away many requests for your goods while you are storing them up; you come to feel tormented and may give them to someone who has not asked for them. These points stated in the *Bodhisattva Levels* are very important, for you can see that during the period of storing up the goods you produce many afflictions such as stinginess and the like, that the trouble of safeguarding them and so forth becomes a hindrance to many virtuous actions, and that more often than not you lose them at some point and are not able to give them away in the end anyway.

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The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

18 December 2018

We begin with our usual meditation.

[*Tonglen meditation*]

Since you have all learnt about the bodhicitta mind, you should now cultivate it as a motivation for listening to this profound teaching.

Tonight, I will give a short teaching and after that, we will recite the *King of Prayers* for Liam's father who has passed away. Please remember to dedicate all the merit accumulated by us and others throughout the past, present and future.

We will continue from the section called:

(b') How to give

This section deals with the manner of giving. As the text states:

First of all, smile with a beaming countenance and then give to any recipient, showing respect by speaking honestly. Give with your own hands, at the appropriate time, without hurting anyone else, and bearing the suffering of any hardship.

The manner we should express while performing the act of giving is, as it says, *to smile with a beaming countenance*. Giving with a smile, and a clear positive facial expression is none other than good social manners, and that's what is being emphasised here. Even just offering a cup of tea to others is an act of giving. Accordingly, we should do so in accordance with the manners stipulated here, which includes holding the cup with both hands; offering with one hand is considered bad manners even in the conventional world.

Then it says *give with your own hands, at the appropriate time, without hurting anyone else*, which implies giving respectfully. We should show our sincere respect for all beings when offering things to them. We should not show respect and courtesy only to those who we consider as important, while not doing the same for others. In fact, it is said that even if we are giving food or drink to a dog, we should do so with all the good manners presented here.

The text continues:

The result of these actions is described in the *Chapter of the Truth Speaker (Satyakaparivarta)*:

By charity out of a sense of service, you will receive service from others such as your relatives; by using your own hands when giving you will obtain people who serve you; by giving when appropriate you will accomplish your aims on time.

Essentially this explains the result of the act of giving, which is gaining wealth and possessions in the future. From this, we need to recognise that the good living conditions and the wealth that we possess at the moment are the result of our practice of giving in the past.

Saying *give with your own hands* emphasises that we accrue more merit if we give directly with our own hands rather than giving indirectly by having someone else do it for us. This applies to making offerings too; there is more benefit in

making offerings directly with our own hands and effort. The late Gyarong Khensur (ex-abbot) Rinpoche was renowned for his practice of making offerings with his own hands. *Giving when appropriate* indicates the greater benefit of giving at the right time, such as giving food to someone who is very hungry or helping someone who is suffering. As a result of giving on time, *you will accomplish your own goals on time*.

Then the text continues:

By charity without hurting anyone else you will obtain stable resources; ...

Here, *obtain stable resources* means resources that are long-lasting and sustainable.

... by giving while bearing unpleasantness you will have intimate companions.

We all wish for an intimate companionship with others. Bearing unpleasantness while giving will bring intimacy in your relationships with others in terms of fostering mutual love from the depth of each others' hearts. It doesn't just refer to your relatives.

Then the text continues by referring to Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* which clarifies the above passage.

Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge (Abhidharma-kosa)* states that from giving charity with your own hands you get a vast amount of resources. The *Treasury of Knowledge Auto-commentary (Abhidharma-kosa-bhasya)* explains that "stable resources" means that others do not interfere with them and that fire, etc. does not destroy them. Furthermore, there is a way to help others to be generous. If you have some belongings, go to the homes of stingy people who have no experience of giving gifts even a few times. Joyfully and in a relaxed manner direct them as follows: "I really do own a vast amount of things. I want some people to ask me for things so that I can complete the perfection of generosity, so if you meet some people who ask you for something, rather than turning them away without giving them anything, take from my wealth and give it to them. Or else lead them to me, and then rejoice in my generosity."

This passage is self-explanatory. It explains how you can inspire other stingy beings to be generous to others, and to practise generosity. The text continues:

This does not destroy their wealth, ...

You can leave your things with stingy people for them to give away to those in need or ask them to refer those in need to you. In this way you can engage these stingy people in the act of giving because *this does not destroy their wealth*. In other words, they don't have to give away their own things.

... and they do this with pleasure. In this way they plant the seed for the removal of their stinginess.

However, they do *implant a seed for the removal of their stinginess*, and so they will eventually give away some of their small things. After that they will slowly get used to giving more and more things as their attachment to things becomes less and less. The text continues:

Contingent upon this, they will reach a moderate absence of attachment, and contingent upon that, a great absence of attachment. In like fashion, give belongings to your abbot, master, students, and friends who have a lot of attachment and are incapable of giving, and to those who are not like that but have no belongings, and then cause *them* to make

offerings to the three jewels, rather than doing it yourself.

Here, the text is saying that you can also motivate your abbot, teacher, students and friends who are incapable of giving because of strong attachment to their belongings. Similarly, you can also help those who don't practise giving because they do not have any possessions or things to give away. The way you can help them is by handing over your things to them and requesting them to make offerings to the Three Jewels on your behalf.

By doing this you produce a great deal of personal merit. It pacifies the afflictions of some, fulfils the desire to practice the teachings in others, gathers beings around you, and causes them to mature.

This shows how the bodhisattvas act to ripen the mental continuum of other beings.

Then:

Similarly, if you have no belongings, you may build up wealth through a craft or a job, and then give it away.

If you do not have any wealth or belongings to give, you can offer your services to others as a gift to them.

Or else you may tell others a religious story in which even the poor or miserly wish to give.

This touches on the giving of Dharma to others. If you do not possess any material object or any job skills, then you can give a Dharma teaching. By giving Dharma you can inspire even those who are poor or stingy to engage in the practice of giving.

Then the text continues:

Alternatively, send those reduced to begging to the houses of rich persons who have faith, and go there yourself to assist in the giving of gifts to the extent that you are able.

If you do not have anything to give at all, then, as suggested here, you could refer the recipients to other generous wealthy people. Not only that, but you can also accompany the recipients and be there to assist with the giving.

Also, as you sort through the material goods for charity, give the better first and always give away completely all the goods presented for charity.

This instructs us that when it comes to giving, you shouldn't only give things that are of no use to you while keeping all of the best, valuable and most useful things for yourself with a great deal of attachment. Instead of this, we should be giving the best to others and also give away all the things that we have put aside for charity. We shouldn't put things aside to give away, and then not give them away at the actual time of giving. We should give away all of the things we have put on our list of things to give away.

(4) Things to give

The explanation of the things to give has two parts:

1. Brief presentation of the things which are and are not to be given
2. Detailed explanation of the things which are and are not to be given

We'll stop the teaching here.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

12 February 2019

We will begin with our usual meditation.

[*Tong-len meditation*]

Try to cultivate the proper motivation by thinking that the reason why we engage in learning and practising Dharma is to benefit other sentient beings. So the motivation for listening to and practising the Dharma should be bodhicitta.

At the same time, it is also important to reflect on the fact that what we all seek is happiness, and there is a cause for happiness, and that we must create those causes of happiness. This kind of understanding reflects a true understanding of Dharma. If we develop some sort of conviction, faith and confidence in this understanding then we will naturally put it into practise.

Despite the fact that we all seek happiness, and we are always trying hard to achieve it, we are not finding that happiness. Obviously, the reason for that has to do with not creating the right causes. Therefore, we must have a clear knowledge of cause and effect with respect to achieving the happiness that we want and avoiding the suffering that we do not want. Without this knowledge, without an understanding of Dharma, then we will not find happiness or reduce suffering. In fact, our actions may run counter to what we want and do not want. So, when we talk about Dharma practice and receiving benefit from it, we need to understand that we must have a good basic knowledge of Dharma, which basically comes down to good common sense, related to how things operate in reality.

We are simply saying to ourselves that what we seek in life is happiness, and that happiness has causes. So, if we want happiness then we have to take responsibility for creating those causes. The next question is what and where are those causes? If we observe ourselves, we will find that the kind of happiness that we seek is related to our feelings about things and events, and the cause for that lies within us. On the other hand, happiness on a physical or material level is related to external factors in our lives. Therefore, if we want to experience inner peace, happiness and relaxation, then we have to recognise and acknowledge that the causes for that happiness are related to our mind and therefore lie within. So, from this perspective, it makes sense to understand the meaning of Dharma as being a means to transform or change our mind, and this is indicated by the literal meaning of the term for Dharma in Tibetan, which is *chos*.

If we follow Dharma practice, then our attention and focus should be on perfecting and purifying our mind. Indeed, in Dharma practice we need to prevent and even completely stop the mind from pursuing or wandering

off towards various objects of distraction or being overpowered by negative thoughts and mental attitudes. The point of Dharma practice is to direct, discipline and keep the mind pointed in the right direction, on virtuous and right objects, and on a right state of mind.

If we follow Dharma practice, our mental outlook and our attitude will become positive, and as a result we will feel good emotionally, and our deeds will be positive in the sense of benefiting ourselves and others. We can understand this from our own experience. Receiving benefit from the Dharma in this way is a true blessing. Strictly speaking, this true blessing doesn't come from outside beings or objects; rather it comes from inside through our own Dharma practices. So, we can say that our unfailing and completely reliable true refuge, true protection and true guide lies within ourselves. This inner refuge is the source of benefit for us in this temporal life as well as in all our future lives. It is nothing but the positive qualities within our own mind, which we can develop and achieve through practising Dharma. Initially we need to recognise this inner Dharma or the positive qualities within ourselves as a true, unfailing refuge and protection, both now and in the future. As we put that Dharma into practice, we will gain all the benefits, and truly understand and be able to attest to the value of the Dharma as an unfailing refuge object. This will further increase our conviction and faith in the Dharma which will, in turn, ensure our continuous progress along the Dharma path.

When we speak of Dharma as our unfailing refuge and friend, it doesn't necessarily refer to our long-term future such as future rebirths; rather the Dharma is our true refuge and friend in our present situation. If we practise Dharma, then in this very present moment we will find more mental peace and happiness and thereby enjoy better physical health. It is now a proven fact that enjoying a happy and peaceful state of mind automatically improves our physical health too.

Sometimes when we face hardship and difficult situations in our lives and we receive no help or support from others, or all outside things fail us, we feel totally helpless, vulnerable and lonely, and in great pain and misery. In such a challenging time, we will find that inner Dharma as an unfailing refuge and protection that we can lean on and trust. If, however, we lack the Dharma refuge, we can see that the suffering will be much greater.

Making progress from the small to the middling and great stages of the spiritual path all depends upon our Dharma practice, which again, is related to our mind and developing ourselves on a mental level. For example, if we want to fulfil the aspiration of the person of the small scope - which is the freedom from a bad rebirth - we need to engage in the practice of refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions. This practice will prevent bad rebirths as well as prevent suffering in this immediate life. Likewise, if we want to fulfil the aspiration of the person of the middling scope - which is the liberation from samsara - then we need to cultivate a renunciation of seeking liberation, which we do through recognising the shortcomings of cyclic existence. So again, we can see

how our progress along the path takes place on the mental level – it is an inner progress. The aspiration of the person of the great scope is to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. The way to go about this is to infuse our minds with an altruistic mind of bodhicitta and then engage in the deeds of bodhisattvas. So all of our spiritual progress relies on purifying, enriching and perfecting our mind.

You should be now very clear about what Dharma practice means, and what you have to do. Then, if you put the Dharma into practice you will naturally gain benefits from that practice. For example, the practice of loving-kindness means cultivating in your mind and heart a feeling of love and compassion for other beings. When you cultivate this beautiful mental attitude of love and compassion, you will feel delighted and joyful because this attitude prevents mental afflictions such as attachment, aversion, jealousy, competitiveness and so on, from arising. It is these mental afflictions that are our daily source of mental and emotional suffering and misery.

I consider a positive state of mind, such as the love and compassion for others that we cultivate within ourselves, as our true friend and guide who always brings joy, peace, and happiness and supports us in times of need. If we have this then we have inner peace and happiness and reliable support from within. Then, even if externally we lack friends or favourable conditions, we do not feel sad, lonely or unhappy. On the other hand, if we lack support in the form of a positive frame of mind, then even if we are surrounded by very good external conditions, we can undergo a great deal of suffering, including a deep sense of isolation, failure and confusion and depression. Our own experience clearly shows how, if we lack a good and positive state of mind, then no matter what external conditions we have, they don't actually fill our mind and life with happiness and enjoyment. We may have a very luxurious house, expensive clothes and cars and lavish foods and drinks to enjoy; no matter what good conditions we have externally they are meaningless and do not satisfy us.

So, in this way we can appreciate the benefit of Dharma practice, because it is through Dharma practice that we are developing and enriching ourselves with this inner quality. As we were saying before, if we have this inner quality as a friend, then even if there is no-one out there to befriend us or say, 'I love you', we won't feel loneliness or despair.

Without Dharma practice, however, our mind will easily be filled with afflictive emotions, such as pride, and aversion and feeling jealous; it will be all too easy to loathe some beings and be nasty towards others. As a result of showing these kinds of negative mental attitudes, nobody will like us or want to befriend us. The result is that we suffer internally and externally and we can end up with depression or a serious mental illness. We can understand why someone can feel this way because they lack inner support, and on top of that, they feel that everything they have accomplished externally with much hardship over a great length of time has failed to benefit them.

Some people have said to me that they find my advice about how true friends lie within us very beneficial; that is something they had never thought of looking at. Similarly, others find the advice that true happiness lies within one's mind but not in the external objects very beneficial, and a life-changing experience for them. They say that they reflect on this all the time and find it very beneficial. It is out of my friendship and love for you all that I sincerely share my knowledge and experience with you. I'm not trying to show off how much I know, because in fact I don't know much. What I share with you reflects my own reflections. I always pray and reflect: May all sentient beings have happiness; may they be free from suffering and how wonderful if they have happiness and are free from suffering.'

Through reflecting and directing your attention along these lines every now and again, whenever you get a chance, you will cultivate some sort of positive mental attitude, and feelings of love and compassion for other beings. That, I would say, is a true Dharma practice, and a meditation practice as well.

We understand very well that meditation practice means to familiarise our mind with virtuous objects and virtuous ways of thinking. It doesn't matter what you do, but if it induces a positive mental attitude and positive ways of thinking, then we can definitely call that deed a meditation practice, and a Dharma practice. On the other hand, we may sit in a perfect cross-legged meditation posture with both eyes completely shut, appearing to be engaged in a perfect meditation practice, but there is a question as to whether or not we are actually meditating.

A meditation practice that leaves some sort of positive impact on our mind is a true Dharma practice, and the benefits of Dharma practice flow to us now and in future, in this life and future lives. How does the Dharma practice benefit us in future lives? Well, we know when we leave this life we have to leave everything behind, such as our wealth and friends and also our bodies, but our mind stays with us, along with whatever imprints have been left on it by our actions.

This means that whatever qualities we develop within our mind through Dharma practice and meditation goes with us to our future lives along with our mind. From this perspective, we can understand how our Dharma practice benefits us, not only in this life but also in future lives. So, it is important that we practise Dharma every day, by taking a bit of time to reflect on the meaning of the Dharma. Even if the duration of our practice is short, at least during that time if our mind is directed towards reflecting on the meaning of Dharma, it won't be carried away by the usual distracting thoughts.

There are many familiar sayings we hear quite often such as 'happiness results from the tamed or calm state of mind', 'Dharma is the actual object of refuge' and 'you are your own master and protector'. All these resonate with the meaning of Dharma in terms of their description of the way the Dharma transforms or brings changes to our mind. So Dharma practice is very important.

The implication is that whenever we engage in Dharma practice, we direct our focus onto our mind. For the same reason, whenever we engage in a meditation practice,

our first task is to check our mind. Before we fix our mind on the main meditation object, we need to empty our mind of distracting and chattering thoughts. The most effective way to remove these distracting thoughts is by doing a bit of breathing meditation, wherein you simply direct the mental attention onto the incoming and outgoing breath. Then, when our mind is fully settled within ourselves through this breathing technique, we can then begin the main meditation. As much as possible, always try to ensure that your Dharma practice and meditation is directed at your mind, minimising mental afflictions, weakening the force of mental afflictions, and reducing your habituation with them.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama quite often comments that these conceptualising thoughts that we generate all the time are one of the main sources of our suffering and fear. Although there is no real cause to worry or be scared, our thoughts project or perceive things in that way and as a result we suffer. His Holiness recalls that one of his attendants warned him not to go into a particular dark room, which he said was haunted. 'He said this to me so I wouldn't wander off everywhere, and his warning worked because I was too frightened to go into that room.' As we can see here, the truth is that there is no scary thing in that dark room, but it appears like there is when our mind projects that there is something scary there. Likewise, people can sometimes be strongly affected by comments made by other people. For example, some normal people think they are mentally unstable or losing their memory just because of such comments made by others.

Sometimes we mentally create, or project causes of suffering and then, because of that, undergo totally unnecessary suffering. In the study of mind and awareness, the mind is categorised into two: mistaken and unmistaken states of mind. Accordingly, if we recognise a mistaken state of mind as a mistaken mind, then that mind cannot harm us.

Let me share a story with you. A long time ago when I used to live in Kopan monastery, we had there a female doctor from America. At one time a number of geshe started to cough a lot, and this doctor recommended acupuncture treatment for everyone. I refused the acupuncture treatment because I was not convinced it would help. The other geshe, however, had the treatment. Later, one of them confessed to me that the treatment hadn't worked for him. He then continued to explain to me that how during the treatment he was asked to rest for an hour, and as his condition got worse, he was prescribed some medicine. As the side effect of that medicine, he said he began to feel as if he was flying and seeing flowers in space. He said he even began to see some heads poking through the windows making noises. Nevertheless, he said, he didn't believe all these actually existed - he saw the hallucinations for what they were. Because of his ability to recognise these mistaken thoughts as mistaken, this whole experience of false appearances didn't cause fear or suffering.

Last year we left off at the point where the text says,

Also, as you sort through the material goods for charity, give the better first and give away completely all the goods presented for charity.

Next week we will continue from the subsequent heading, Things to Give

I must say that I am very happy to see all of us gathered here together tonight. Since our gathering is a gathering of spiritual friends, it benefits all of us. Having said that, it is also important that when we get together, we all make our best effort to make our time most meaningful and beneficial. When bad friends get together, they do bad things, but ours is a gathering of good friends so we expect a good outcome.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

19 February 2019

We can begin with the usual giving and taking meditation.
[Tong-len meditation]

I advise everyone to meditate as much as possible in order to maintain mental peace and happiness. If we think about it, our first responsibility is to ensure we secure the best outcome from whatever we do – especially from Dharma and meditation practice – which is enhancing a positive mental attitude within us. Simply wishing for peace, happiness or something good is not enough. We must be responsible for all our actions.

Every day, we need to ensure that any words that come out of our mouth, or any deeds that we carry out, do not harm our positive mental attitudes. Always be conscious and aware of your thoughts. Essentially, all the undesirable actions that we create and manifest derive from our mind, which is what initiates those actions. We can understand clearly from our own experience that having a calm and peaceful mind is the key factor enabling us to create positive actions and shun negative ones.

3)) How to give (cont.)

(4) Things to give

As far as the commentary on the lam-rim teaching goes, we are up to the heading ‘Things to give’.

You will recall that we have studied in detail how Lama Tsongkhapa explained the practice of giving in his great lam-rim treatise in terms of the object to be given, the manner of giving, and how to apply all these in practice. Along the way, the text cleared any doubts we may have had concerning the practice of giving and so forth. The explanation here is just amazing!

Listening to and studying the Dharma are very important to our spiritual practice; at the same time, in order to make progress along the path, we must also think about or reflect on its meaning. It is through learning and thinking about Dharma that we can gradually be motivated to put it into practice and benefit from it. I am not sure whether they were inspired by our study of the perfection of giving, but when we were in Bodhgaya recently, it was good to hear some students talking about engaging in the practice of giving.

Essentially, the more we learn about the practice of giving, the stronger our thought or intention to give will become, and the weaker our grasping and craving after things will be. This, in turn, will have the effect of reducing the intensity of our attachment to, and stinginess with the objects we own. We will find that desirable objects will give us more fulfilment, satisfaction and pleasure.

Let’s say there are two people, one who is attached to their wealth and stingy with it, and the other who is not. The latter person will find more satisfaction with their wealth, and also enjoy it with a peaceful state of mind, whereas the stingy person who is attached to their wealth will not find

pleasure and satisfaction; instead, their wealth will bring them more distress, worry and mental tension.

If we think about this, we’ll find we won’t be short of reasons or experiences to prove the fact that, even in the short term, wealth and possession won’t give us any pleasure if we are attached to them and feel stingy about them. However, if we don’t have attachment and stinginess, our wealth and possessions can be of more benefit to us in terms of personal satisfaction, and in terms of their value for ourselves and for others, now and in the future.

When we engage in the practice of giving, we also need to overcome attachment to and stinginess with the objects of giving. Thinking about the long-term benefits of giving, such as gaining wealth in a future life, may be too hard and abstract for us to prove right now. However, as far as immediate benefits go, as just mentioned, if we have little or no attachment and stinginess, wealth and possessions can add more satisfaction and meaning to our life. We can make others happy by offering them a gift, or help free them from physical suffering, such as hunger or thirst. When we do such acts of giving, we can clearly recognise the immediate benefit of being able to bring happiness and satisfaction to others and to ourselves. Sometimes, we witness incredible expressions of joy and appreciation from the recipients of our giving.

Due to such positive feedback from others, or the sense of satisfaction and accomplishment we ourselves experience from our act of generosity, we can feel fulfilled and proud of ourselves and think, ‘I am able to truly benefit others and do something for a worthy cause.’ By gaining firm faith and understanding in the immediate benefits of practising giving, we can then begin to understand and believe in the longer term benefits of giving.

To continue with the text, under the heading ‘Things to give’, it says:

The explanation of the things to give has two parts:

1. Brief presentation of the things which are and are not to be given
2. Detailed explanation of the things which are and are not to be given

Those of you who have a copy of the lam-rim text should read it and, at the same time, reflect on its meaning. In this way you will clearly understand it. The text is written in clear language, so you should be able to understand it just by reading it. The important thing is that you need to read slowly and reflect upon the meaning of the words.

(a')) Brief presentation of the things which are and are not to be given

In brief, bodhisattvas should give to others those things which immediately produce in the recipients pleasurable feelings that are free from the causes for a miserable rebirth and which ultimately will benefit them, either eliminating their sin or setting them in virtue. Even if these things do not immediately bring happiness, they should give them if they are beneficial in the end. ...

The text clearly points out here that it is right to give things, if giving these things will bring temporary pleasure to the recipients, won’t serve as a cause for them to take a bad rebirth, and will bring them ultimate benefit in terms of abandoning non-virtues or accumulating virtues. It is also right to give things if this giving will benefit the recipients ultimately, even if doesn’t benefit them temporarily. The text continues:

... They should not give things which immediately produce pain and ultimately cause harm, or which are immediately pleasant but ultimately harmful.

However, it is not right to give things if the giving will not bring pleasure to the recipients temporarily and will ultimately harm them. It also says here that giving is not right if it harms the recipients ultimately, even if it brings them temporary pleasure. When we engage in the practice of giving, sometimes we get confused or are unsure about whether it is better to give or not to give. These doubts are cleared up here.

(b'') Detailed explanation of the things which are and are not to be given

The detailed explanation of the things which are and are not to be given has two sections:

1. Detailed explanation about inner things which are and are not to be given
2. Detailed explanation about outer things which are and are not to be given

(1') Detailed explanation about inner things which are and are not to be given

As it says here:

Once you understand how not to give inner things, you will know the opposite of that, what you should give. Therefore, I will first explain how not to give.

This has three parts:

1. Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of time
2. Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of purpose
3. Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of the one who asks for something

In the Tibetan lam-rim text, the text goes straight into the explanation of the first of these three without first listing them.

(a) Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of time

Right from the start, bodhisattvas give away to all living beings their bodies, etc. with complete sincerity. Nevertheless, though you may be asked, do not give away the flesh of your body and so forth until you have developed an attitude of great compassion. Then you will not despair at the hardship of being asked for such things.

When the text says *right from the start, bodhisattvas give away to all living beings their bodies, etc...* it is indicating that bodhisattvas have already mentally given away all their possessions, including their bodies *with complete sincerity* or wholeheartedly. Here, 'bodhisattvas' refers to beginning bodhisattvas, such as those on the ordinary path of accumulation and preparation. Although these bodhisattvas have mentally and wholeheartedly given away everything, including their own bodies, to other sentient beings, they should not actually give away the flesh of their bodies, even if asked, until they develop great compassion to such a degree that they will not be distressed by the hardship of giving their flesh.

The text continues with a quotation from Shantideva's *Compendium of Trainings*:

The *Compendium of Trainings* says:

What is the joyous perseverance on account of which you become dispirited? It is when one who has little strength undertakes activity that is weighty or that extends over a long period of time; or when those lacking fully mature belief undertake difficult tasks like, for example, giving away their own flesh and so forth. Though these beginning bodhisattvas have given away their own body to all beings,

still they turn away from untimely uses of it. Otherwise they would despair about these beings who ask for flesh, and thereby squander huge masses of good results due to wasting the seed of their spirit of enlightenment. Therefore, the *Questions of Sky Treasure Sutra* says: "Untimely wishes are demonic activity."

It says here that beginning bodhisattvas whose great compassion is not sufficiently developed will risk losing their altruistic spirit if they give away the flesh of their bodies to others. There is a risk that, as a result of engaging in such a supreme act of giving, involving sacrificing the flesh of their bodies, the bodhisattvas may even end up regretting their deeds. We'll read more about this later, but bodhisattvas face the challenge of deciding whether or not to implement certain deeds such as giving their bodies. It says here that such decisions are based on whether engaging in a deed like giving away the flesh of one's body will benefit others, or whether not giving it away will benefit others more. For beginning bodhisattvas, the text says here that not giving away their flesh will allow them to benefit others more.

The text continues:

Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* also says:

Do not give away your body
While your compassionate attitude is impure.
In any case, give it away to achieve a great purpose
In this and future lives.

This verse sums up what has been said before in relation to giving or not giving one's body. It says here the body should not be given *while your compassionate attitude is impure*, meaning tainted with stinginess or, later on, with regret about having done the compassionate act of giving one's body. *In any case, give it away to achieve a great purpose in this and in future lives* suggests that if the giving were to enable one to accomplish a great purpose in this and in future lives – in terms of temporary happiness and benefits, and the ultimate goal of supreme enlightenment – then it is worthwhile.

The text continues:

(b) Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of purpose

Do not give away your body for some trifling purpose. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

For something trifling do not harm your body,
Which is for practicing the sublime teachings;
In this way you will quickly
Fulfill the aims of living beings.

Here, the reference is to the *purpose* of giving. If the purpose of giving one's body is inferior or limited benefit, the text says you should not give it.

In addition to this verse, there are other verses on the same theme in Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Deeds*. This advice is also mentioned in Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses*. Basically, the point here is that if utilising or keeping one's body, rather than giving it away, enables one to achieve the greater purpose of progressing in one's Dharma practice, then one should not give away the body.

As *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* says, *do not harm your body which is for practicing the sublime teachings for something trifling*. In other words, by relying on this body we can engage in the threefold trainings of moral ethics, meditative concentration and wisdom and then develop spiritual qualities. *In this way you will quickly fulfil the aims of living beings*. This is saying that it is inappropriate to give the body for lesser purposes.

When from your perspective you are free of the hindrances to generosity—stinginess, etc.—and from others' perspective there is the greater purpose of accomplishing the aims of many living beings if you do not give away your body, then you do not give away your limbs, etc. even if asked.

The reason one is advised not to give the body is not because one is attached to it, or feeling stingy about it. It says here that there is no hindrance of stinginess from your side for *you are free* from such *hindrances to generosity*. Rather, from the point of view of *accomplishing the aims of many living beings if you do not give away your body then you do not give away your limbs, etc. even if asked*. In other words, from the point of view of accomplishing the purpose of other beings, if you can accomplish or benefit more beings by not giving your body, then you don't give it.

The text continues:

If you are asked for your body, etc. for the purpose of engaging in wrongdoing such as killing and so forth that will harm yourself and others, do not give yourself away to another even temporarily.

It is very important to relate these teachings to our own practice. For example, think about these lines and find out what they are saying in relation to your practice. *If you are asked for your body, etc. for the purpose of engaging in wrongdoing such as killing and so forth that will harm yourself and others, do not give yourself away to another even temporarily*. Thinking carefully about these lines, we can draw something from them that we can apply and find very relevant to our practice.

(c) Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of the one who asks for something

This refers to the person who asks for the object of giving.

Do not give your limbs, etc. when demonic deities or beings possessed by them ask for them with an intention of inflicting harm, because it will hurt them. Do not give when asked by a mad person or by those whose minds are disturbed because they are not sincerely asking, and their request is not well-considered.

Because of their insanity, their request is not sincere, so therefore you do not give them what they ask for.

Not only is there no transgression in not giving to these beings, if you do give there is a transgression.

Again this is emphasising how it is inappropriate to give one's body in this context, because giving the body will become a *vinaya* transgression; whereas not giving will prevent such a transgression.

The text continues:

On occasions other than these you should give away your body when it is asked for. Furthermore, there are two ways to give away your body: (1) sectioning out your limbs and so forth and then making a permanent gift ...

This says that there are two categories of giving the body. The first is giving it in parts permanently. An example of this is donating one's organs: after having given them, you don't get them back. The second category is:

... and (2) giving yourself over temporarily into someone else's power as a servant, etc. in order to bring about their religious aims.

Giving yourself over temporarily into someone else's power as a servant, etc. in order to bring about their religious aims. If someone is pursuing, say a three-month retreat, and you say to that person, 'I will support you with my three doors, I

will do whatever I need to do to support your retreat', this falls into the second type of giving of the body temporarily.

(2') Detailed explanation about outer things which are and are not to be given

This section has two parts:

1. How not to give outer things
2. How to give outer things

We will recite the King of Prayers for Sue Young's mother, Nancy, who has passed away. I recall spending a weekend at their farm many years ago in the Ararat area. Sandup was also there. Nancy taught him dancing steps in the lounge room!

[Recitation of King of Prayers]

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

ལྷན་ ། རྟོག་ས་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

26 February 2019

We will begin with our usual meditation.

[Meditation]

We have to leave our meditation to listen to and teach the Dharma. Only a fully awakened being like the Buddha can sit in deep meditation and simultaneously perform activities of benefiting others, such as teaching Dharma. This is indicated by showing his right hand in the gesture of giving Dharma, and his left in the gesture of meditative equipoise. Since we are not able to do the same, we have to leave our meditation in order to listen to and teach the Dharma.

The meditation which we have just engaged in is called Giving and Taking. In this meditation we specifically focus on all sentient beings as an object of compassion, wishing them to be free from suffering, thereby enhancing the force of our compassion for them. We also specifically focus on all sentient beings as an object of loving kindness, praying for them and wishing them to have happiness, and through this enhancing or intensifying the force of our love for them.

The giving and taking meditation is essential to the practice of developing the bodhi mind, or bodhicitta, within our continuum. As an effect of such a meditation, our attitude towards other sentient beings should be such that if we observe any beings afflicted with suffering, we naturally feel compassion for them in the sense of feeling unable to bear to see them suffering. And, if we observe any beings being deprived of happiness, then we naturally feel love in the sense of strongly and passionately wishing them to have happiness. It is very important that we integrate this meditation of giving and taking into our practice of cultivating bodhicitta, which is the altruistic aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings.

There are two main methods for cultivating bodhicitta, the Sevenfold Cause and Effect method, and the method of Equalising and Exchanging Self with Others. Whatever the method we use, we will find that prior to cultivating bodhicitta, we have to cultivate an aspiration to benefit all other beings. This aspiration is an essential cause for cultivating bodhicitta. The difference between the two methods is that in the Sevenfold Cause and Effect, one of the causes is called 'superior intention' which we need to cultivate just prior to cultivating bodhicitta. This superior intention reflects a higher state of love and compassion where we also take on the responsibility for benefiting other beings by thinking: 'I will free them from suffering, and I will place them into a state of happiness'.

In the method of Exchanging and Equalising Self with Others, there is no mention of superior intention. Instead, there is mention of the practice of giving and taking, through which you cultivate this sense of taking up the burden of relieving all sentient beings from suffering and placing them into the state of happiness, but to a much higher and more powerful degree than at the beginning of the practice. This sense of the burden of taking

responsibility is likened to the responsibility a son feels for his beloved mother. You strongly feel that the responsibility for freeing all beings from suffering and placing them into the state of happiness rests entirely upon yourself and no-one else. With this strong sense of universal responsibility, you are single-pointedly focussed on benefiting other beings.

But, when you consider whether you have the capacity to carry out that responsibility, you will find that you don't have it. So, you investigate further. Who does have such a capacity to free all beings from suffering and place them into a state of happiness? In this way, you will realise that only a fully awakened being, a buddha, has that capacity and perfect quality. Then, the thought or aspiration to achieve that state of buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings will arise within yourself. We can clearly see here how this aspiration of enlightenment arises through developing a sense of universal responsibility or superior intention. As you further develop that aspiration to achieve buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings, it will eventually arise spontaneously and effortlessly, and this marks the cultivation of true bodhi mind or bodhicitta.

It is very important that we always relate Dharma and the practice of Dharma to ourselves and to our continuum. For example, here we are talking about bodhicitta mind, which is rooted in love and compassion. What does love and compassion mean? How can we relate this to our practice and mental continuum? In fact, if we understand love and compassion on the basis of our own experience, we will easily see the bodhicitta that is rooted in us. I am sure you have all heard a lot about the benefits of cultivating love and compassion. In Chandrakirti's *Supplement to the Middle Way*, compassion is said to be important in the beginning, in the middle and at the end. So what does that mean? It is emphasising compassion as a cause to benefit other beings. We should remember to relate this to the love and compassion that we all already possess within us.

I would say that there is no sentient being, not even a single one, who doesn't have some love and compassion within them. Even a tiny ant has some love and compassion. If you observe ants, we see them carrying and protecting their eggs with tremendous effort and self-sacrifice. Why are they doing that? What is it that makes them do this? The answer is obviously because of their unconditional love for their babies. Similarly, if you look at birds, again we can obviously see how they so lovingly and affectionately recognise their own chicks and interact with them. The way they feed, protect and keep close to their chicks is quite amazing. We, as human beings, are born with a higher and more advanced mental faculty than other forms of life in the animal world, so we are disposed to demonstrate more understanding and a better recognition of the value of love and compassion for ourselves and for others.

As we think of or hear about the benefits of love and compassion, we should be thinking of and recognising the love and compassion that already lies within ourselves. We should be getting the message that we must develop that love and compassion, because in that way we will gain benefits for ourselves as well as others. With the gift of our human intellect, we can recognise the benefits of love and compassion and at the same time, understand that we have the ability to actually apply various techniques and methods to generate and develop that love and compassion.

In Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, one such method is called Equalising and Exchanging Self with Others. Following this method, we reflect on the equality of self and others in the sense that we are all the same in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. On the basis of this, as we develop more love and compassion, we develop more respect for others and more consideration of their needs, which will, in the end, be of mutual benefit. Essentially this technique is applying to others the same methods that we use to avoid suffering and find happiness for ourselves, and in this way benefit them.

Love is defined as a genuine thought of wishing others to have happiness. Given that, we can understand that developing love will lead us to engage in giving happiness to others if there is a need. Likewise, compassion refers to a genuine thought of wishing others to be free from suffering. When we develop compassion, we will be driven to feel empathy and engage in ways of freeing others from suffering. Essentially, love and compassion cause us to benefit other beings, which in turn brings benefits to ourselves as well. The fact is that all beings like receiving benefits, and if you benefit them, even strangers will acknowledge and really appreciate that. As a result, they will become your close friends and if any opportunity arises for them to help us they will want to repay your kindness. So, we can see that in the end, our acts that benefit others also benefit ourselves.

Of course, the people we interact with in everyday life are usually our loved ones, such as family and friends. So, if we try to cultivate positive mental attitudes such as love and compassion in everyday life, we will be directly benefiting them, which means directly benefiting ourselves too. Love and compassion bring a harmonious atmosphere to our relationships, bringing more sharing and mutual support.

Another very important thing, and one of the strengths of our intellect, is the sense of discrimination that we must bring to preventing, reducing and solving problems, and bringing more satisfaction and happiness to our life. If we do this, we will clearly understand and recognise what we need to adopt and what we need to reject in terms of both worldly and spiritual practices. If we don't apply our wisdom knowledge then we will end up undertaking, for example, spiritual practices which don't have any direct meaning or relevance to our life, as well as being beyond our capability, at the expense of engaging in practices that are directly related to improving our life, which are well within our capacity. So, if we take the wrong approach to spiritual practice or don't apply the right practice, then, whatever practices we do won't make any difference to our lives, and therefore won't benefit us.

At the beginning, cultivating love and compassion for strangers is difficult, because feeling connected with strangers through love is not natural for us. Therefore, we have to fabricate love for them with a degree of effort. And of course, cultivating love for enemies is even harder. Therefore, in practical terms, it is easier for us to initially cultivate and develop love for those closest to us because of past life karma such as your parents, family, relatives, and so forth. After that, you can extend the same love and compassion to strangers and to all sentient beings – even your enemies.

The benefit of having love and compassion for all other beings is quite incredible. Through their research, modern scientists have recognised and acknowledged the beneficial effect of love and compassion in terms of improved

physical, as well as mental and emotional health. The benefit is also evident in relationships with parents and children too. It is obvious that children who were brought up by the parents in a very stable family atmosphere of love, affection and harmony, enjoy a more stable life emotionally and they show the same affection and love to their children as well. We can also observe the beneficial effects of love that animals show to one another. I saw on a TV show a lion feeding its cub. It affectionately ensured food was soft enough for the cub to chew and swallow, and gently pushed the food right into the cub's mouth to prevent it from spilling onto the ground. I was quite moved by this.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama frequently remarks that the evolution and survival of life depends upon love and compassion. We can observe the positive effect of love in our day to day interaction with other living beings. Once when I was at the St Kilda pool, I observed a woman with two children and the grandmother of the children. The younger child, who was about six months old, was initially with the grandmother, and I noticed that the child was a bit unsettled. But as soon as the child was handed over to the mother, it became very settled and quiet and seemed to be very happy. So we can see the magic of parental love in the upbringing of children, as well as their development as human beings in a wider world as they grow older.

I find simply observing the world around me inspires me to develop my spiritual practice such as cultivating love and compassion. When people hold other beings with love and compassion, they will do whatever it takes to truly take care of others and prevent harmful actions. This is true with animals too. When we observe some animals supporting and protecting their loved ones we can be moved to tears. I heard that some animals recognise their babies through their sense of smell and then look after them. Later on, they tend to forget or not recognise their babies. But some grown up babies tend to stay close to their parents which might be because of the parent and child bond in the past. Sometimes they continue to live close by and support each other for the rest of their lives.

One time, on a trip to Devonport in Tasmania, I saw a peacock and her chicks. When a large, aggressive looking bird soared above them, the mother peacock reacted with alarm and hid all her offspring under her wings. She stood absolutely still, fully covering all her chicks. I was really very impressed by her quick action and the skill she demonstrated. Sometimes observing external things and events can be very effective in calming our mind and for the progress of our Dharma practice. We may be a long way from cultivating genuine compassion, but we can certainly understand, recognise and acknowledge the benefits of cultivating compassion for other beings and for ourselves.

We are born as social beings, and we are all dependent on each other for our wellbeing and, indeed, survival. From this point of view, we really have no choice but to be kind, friendly, loving and compassionate with each other. If we look at other social species such as birds for instance, we see that they stick together in a flock. Yes, we sometimes observe that they fight but then they reconcile and are friends again. Although some animals don't remember the parent and child relationship as they grow, many of them still tend to live together in that way and thus support each other.

Once at a monastery debate attended by the well-known late Lati Rinpoche, we were debating the substantial or main cause for cultivating compassion. I mentioned that a

mother's love for her child is a substantial cause for compassion. The late Rinpoche paused for a moment and then acknowledged my statement. So, when we talk about compassion, we are talking about a compassion that is already within us, waiting to be manifested and further developed. Thinking of compassion as being somewhere out there is totally wrong and in fact meaningless because it already lies within us.

I just got carried away with these topics. There is not much time left but nevertheless, we will continue with the lam-rim teaching.

(2'') Detailed explanation about outer things which are and are not to be given

This section has two parts

1. How not to give outer things
2. How to give outer things

(a'') How not to give outer things

How not to give outer things has five parts.

(1'') Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of time

Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of time is, for instance, giving an afternoon meal to renunciates or those who have taken a one-day vow.

There are certain things that are not appropriate to give at particular times. One of the eight Mahayana or one-day precepts is not eating at wrong times. So, it is inappropriate to give food to them at that time.

The meaning of what follows is self-explanatory:

(2'') Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of the gift

Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of the gift is, for instance, giving left-over food and drink to one observing vows; giving food and drink contaminated and polluted by feces and urine, spittle and mucus, or vomit and pus; giving garlic, onion, meat, alcohol, or something tainted by these to those who do not eat or drink these things or who have vows for which it is inappropriate to use these things, even though they might want to eat or drink them; giving away a child, servant, and the like—even if you clearly convey the significance of the giving and they are pleased with it—when requested by someone you dislike, a *yaksa*, a *raksasa*, someone overcome by belligerence, someone who is ungrateful, or someone forgetful; when approached by a sick person who asks for food and drink, giving unwholesome food and drink, and even giving wholesome food without moderation; giving tasty food when asked for it by extremely greedy people who are already satiated; ...

With respect to giving *unwholesome food and drink, and even giving wholesome food without moderation to a sick person who asks for food and drink*, we know that sometimes giving certain foods to others, even with a good intention, will have a detrimental effect on their health, so in those circumstances it is not appropriate to give them what they ask for.

... *giving wholesome food without moderation; giving tasty food when asked for it by extremely greedy people who are already satiated* refers to taking the fault of not taking the receiver's mental attitude into account.

... and giving scriptures to non-Buddhist philosophers who have commercial interests

We do not give scriptures to those whose motivation or reason for requesting a text is based on commercial gain, or who regard scripture solely in terms of monetary value.

... are seeking points of criticism, or do not want to learn the meaning of scripture,

This refers to having no intention of learning the actual meaning of the scripture.

This is how the Bodhisattva Levels presents it. Understand it in more detail from the Bodhisattva Levels' Compendium of Determinations (Viniscaya-samgrahalani), where it says:

If you give a fully written Buddhist text to persons of childish intelligence who ask for it, you incur a misdeed.

In relation to the inappropriateness of giving scripture to those who have got a faulty motivation or intention of receiving the scripture, we need to be careful when we sell or give away cards with images of deities such as Manjushri or Tara. We need to ensure that the motivation or mental attitude of giving and receiving the deity cards is not tainted by simply considering them as having material or monetary value. That's why selling Dharma objects such as this is sometimes discouraged.

The word translated as 'misdeed' is *ka.na.ma.tho* in Tibetan, which literally means 'not coming out of the mouth', meaning unspeakable or unmentionable in the sense of misdeeds or moral downfalls that are difficult to put into words.

If you ask others for it to give to them, you also incur a misdeed. If you give it totally within thinking that you can cause them to become interested in or to embrace the profound teachings, you do not incur a misdeed.

We will leave off here and continue next week.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

5 March 2019

We will begin with our usual meditation of giving and taking [*tong-len meditation*].

I assume that you're taking this meditation practice seriously, with a clear recognition of its value and benefit to you. You should never underestimate the value of your meditation practice.

The end result that we seek from everything we do is happiness. Achieving happiness is why we do meditation practice – we want to achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence, or the complete state of enlightenment or buddhahood. Some may have a wish to be reborn as a human or a celestial god, but beneath that wish is the deeper goal to achieve happiness.

If you are engaging in meditation practice to seek happiness, then you have to ask, 'what is happiness?'. Generally, we can talk about two different types of happiness: inner happiness, which primarily arises from, and depends on, the mind; and outer happiness, which primarily arises from, or depends on, favourable external conditions.

External happiness and its causes and conditions are not that hard to recognise. In fact, we understand it well, and feel if we gain certain things, we will experience fun, excitement and happiness. Even less fortunate beings such as tiny ants know that external things bring satisfaction. This is evident from the fact that ants can find their way to sweet things, wherever they are: nobody needs to show them! They also know how to pass the message on to other ants about the location of the sweet food. We can also see from their reaction to any movement in their environment that ants know when they face any threat to their lives. The reason why ants are always keeping themselves busy, running here and there, is to find the external things that they recognise as a cause of happiness. Now, if we think about our own lives, perhaps our lives too reflect the life of busy ants, because we also seem to be living very busy lives, spending most of our time chasing after external things that we perceive as a source of happiness and fulfilment.

So, if we talk about happiness from the perspective of favourable external conditions, it is easy to understand. However, if we talk about happiness in terms of favourable inner conditions – such as having certain skills and education – then the causes and conditions become subtler, and not that simple. Even if we consider acquiring worldly education and skills, it may take years of hard work to gain them.

We need to ensure here that the kind of happiness we seek is inner happiness, which arises from within and has less to do with external causes and circumstances. It is more reliable and lasting than the happiness that depends on external conditions, which is unreliable, out of one's control and can change at any moment. The reason we engage in meditation practice is to understand this subtler and deeper level of happiness, for which we require knowledge and experience.

Lama Tsongkhapa stated that meditation is a practice whereby we place our mind on a virtuous object and familiarise ourselves with that object. The next question is, 'why do we meditate?'. The simple answer is that we meditate to bring the mind under our control. This is because the primary source of unhappiness or suffering in our life is our mind. Because we are always led by the mind, our situation will always reflect that mind. If the mind leads us in the wrong direction, then we will do wrong things, resulting in suffering. If we take a closer look at the type of mind that drives our everyday actions and shapes our character, we will notice that it is a form of delusion, an afflicted state of mind. In a nutshell, we are overpowered by our mind, but because our mind is overpowered by mental afflictions, we perpetually experience suffering.

Is it possible to gain control over the mind? Yes, it is possible, because we are not the mind and the mind is not us. It normally seems like the mind is the controller or the owner, and we feel as if we are controlled or owned by the mind. However, in reality, it should be the other way around. This is clear from our everyday use of the phrase, 'my mind', which sounds as if you – or the 'I' – are the controller or owner, and the mind is controlled or owned by you or the 'I'. But, this is not the case at all, for we have fallen prey to our mind. Unfortunately, the mind that overpowers and leads us is under the influence of, or intoxicated by, mental delusion or afflictions.

It is because of this force of the mental delusions that we are always rushing here and there. However, no matter what we do or accomplish, the result is not true happiness, but more suffering and restlessness. Even the good conditions we've gathered through hard work over a long time may end up as a further cause to increase and intensify misery and delusion; even these supposedly good and favourable conditions become bad and unfavourable, bringing suffering, instead of the happiness we seek. Take the example of achieving physical beauty: recognising this as the cause of more happiness and self-confidence, some people have worked hard and achieved it, but they have not become happier because they feel more pride, jealousy and competitiveness in relation to their outer image.

So, if we don't counteract the mental afflictions, no matter what we do or what we achieve, there'll be no end to our suffering, because the blame for our suffering lies with the mental afflictions. Now, when we talk about mental afflictions, we are referring to the various afflictive emotions we generate, such as attachment, anger, pride and jealousy. Attachment, as an emotion we experience, usually seems positive, harmless, or a cause of happiness. But, in reality, it serves as a perpetual cause of dissatisfaction and harm. The harm brought to us by other afflictive emotions, such as anger, pride, jealousy and competitiveness, on the other hand, is quite evident. Apart from all these afflictions, ignorance is the fundamental cause of all our faults. We know this from all the mistakes we have made, as a result of which we end up suffering and then regretting our decisions and actions – these mistakes would not have happened if we were not ignorant.

The key to cultivating a positive state of mind and overcoming negative states of mind is to be more aware of our thoughts and deeds. Most importantly, by understanding that our mental attitude is the source of all our actions, we need to be more responsible for the kinds of thoughts we generate. If we cultivate positive mental

attitudes – such as a good heart, loving kindness and compassion – we can definitely be a happier person, whatever we are doing, whether we are at the workplace, at home, or anywhere. At the same time, we can have a positive influence on other people around us, in terms of making them feel good and happy. So, this would naturally improve our relationships with them.

Therefore, our practice is to recognise that the true source of our happiness and suffering lies within us. Whenever we confront a problem, experience suffering, or cause others to suffer, we should try to recognise the cause within us. We should try to relate the cause to our inner mental delusions or afflictions. We should observe and recognise the mental afflictions within us as the source of all the troubles in our life, to the point where we can actually point our finger at them and put the blame on them. You can begin conversing with the mental afflictions, blame them for all your problems and mistakes, tell them off, scold them, even cite my name and say to them that Geshe Doga said they are the perpetrators, the trouble-makers, and the evil ones.

Indeed, we can trace the cause of every negative action we commit back to the mental afflictions – even when we utter a few harsh words or make a slightly unpleasant gesture or facial expression. The mental afflictions harm and destroy our life and cause us to harm and destroy the lives of other beings. Because of these mental afflictions, some parents always argue and fight over almost every issue, making their lives stressful and miserable. Their unending arguments not only destroy their relationship, but also affect the whole family, including relatives and particularly their children. Later on, when the children grow up and marry, they are likely to also end up living lives like their parents, arguing and being nasty to their partner. The main source of such conflict is the mental afflictions within us.

On the other hand, if we put an effort into cultivating and developing positive states of mind, such as love and compassion, we will find more peace and happiness in our personal life, and have a positive impact on our family, relatives, friends, and others. As I always say, the people who are most often directly impacted by our thoughts and actions are our own loved ones; the good and bad outcomes of our thoughts and actions affect those closer to us, which is another reason why we should cultivate positive mental attitudes and overcome negative states of mind within us.

We have all become very close and good friends over a long time. As friends, we share with each other those things we find to be beneficial, and those which are harmful. From my perspective, the most important thing is for us to realise that we must cultivate a positive mental attitude, and the best, most beneficial mental attitude is love and compassion for other living beings. I commend it as a priceless thing – it's benefit to oneself and to others is just incredible.

Relating to meditation practice, I say to people that the purpose of meditation is to free our mind from the bondage of mental affliction. We should always ensure that we feel fully relaxed and not feel any tension in our practice. Do not rush into practice or expect to see an immediate outcome. If we meditate with a relaxed mind and body, we will gradually see our practice benefiting us.

It is best that we initially aim our meditation to counteract any negative state of mind or mental affliction that inflicts suffering and harm upon us at the moment. For example, it could be a strong or compelling emotion of attachment, or aversion, that affects our normal life activities and functioning. Since the shortcomings of these afflictions are

easy to recognise, we will be more motivated to counteract them, and our practice will yield immediate benefits.

In other words, it is unrealistic for us as beginners to target our meditation at counteracting the mental afflictions at the level of the root cause. The point is that, as long as we perceive things as good or bad by boxing them into two categories – desirable and undesirable, or pleasant and unpleasant – we will continuously generate mental afflictions of some sort, such as attachment or aversion. Although they all are mental afflictions and harmful to us, not all of them necessarily disturb us by causing pain and inflicting harm on us at the present moment.

So, I am saying that we first need to get rid of those afflictions that are more aggressive and compelling, and which affect us right now, and then try to get rid of the next most pressing type of afflictions, and so on.

Now we turn to the text.

How to give

3)) Things to be given

(b'') Detailed explanation of the things which are and are not to be given

(2'') Detailed explanation about outer things which are and are not to be given

(a'') How not to give outer things (cont.)

(3'') Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of the person (cont.)

We will continue from the end of page 134:

Also, Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says, "Do not give up something exalted for something lesser," ...

So, *do not give up something exalted for something lesser*, is a quote from the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*. One should not forsake or give up the greater purpose for some lesser or inferior purpose. Here, the text is talking about instances of where it would not be appropriate to give certain things to others as part of the practice of generosity.

... so it is not that there is merely no fault in not giving it away.

The way to refuse to give is to avoid using harsh language, such as saying, "I am not giving it to you." Rather, communicate with skill-in-means and then send the person off.

This implies the importance of not undermining the person requesting the thing. Although you cannot fulfil that person's request, you have to be very careful in how you communicate with that person as to why you cannot give. Your communication must be wise and skilful, so that you don't show disregard or disrespect to that person, and the person will fully understand why you cannot give.

Skill-in-means is as follows. From the first, bodhisattvas turn over with pure intention all their belongings to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions.

The suggestion here is that you may want to imply that one of the reasons you cannot give is because you are not the actual owner of the thing the recipient is asking for, so it is inappropriate for you to actually give it away. Indeed, bodhisattvas view everything they have as belonging to buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The text continues:

This is like, for example, the way that fully ordained monks keep religious robes and the like which they have mentally earmarked for their abbot or master. Because the monks have transferred their robes in this

way, even though they accumulate belongings, they are called “bodhisattvas living in the noble family” and infinitely increase merit.

Bodhisattvas living in the noble family and infinitely increase merit means that, although bodhisattvas don’t give certain things and instead use these possessions themselves, they infinitely increase merit by their deeds. Why? Because they have pure minds. On the contrary, when we use our possessions and don’t give them to others, we simply increase our mental afflictions and our merit decreases. This is because we cling to our possessions. Bodhisattvas do not have such clinging, for they do not see their things as their personal possessions: they see them as belonging to others.

In relation to this, His Holiness the Dalai Lama always admires the way the Christian belief in Almighty God as a creator of all things inspires them to practise charity and contentment and live a very simple life dedicated to serving the community.

The bodhisattvas, then, hold their belongings in trust, as it were, for the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

If someone asks for something, and if the belonging is suitable to be given to this person, then bodhisattvas give it, thinking, “I have no belonging that the buddhas and bodhisattvas have not given away to all living beings.”

So we’ll just go to:

... let the person know the situation, saying with soothing words, “My good person, this belongs to someone else. It is not something that I can give to you.” Or else, the bodhisattvas might give the monetary equivalent of two or three times the price of the book to someone to whom they have refused a text. In any case, the person who asks for it will think with regard to the bodhisattva, “It is not craving that keeps this person from giving me the text; it is not in this person’s power to give it.” This kind of activity is the generosity of the wise.

(4”) Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of material things

Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of material things is, for example, such gifts as your parents; food and drink that have bugs; a child, wife, servant, etc. whom you have not told or, even if told, does not want to be given away; or a child or wife who are persons of the sort who have become accustomed to comfort. Though it is said that you should not give your child, wife, etc. into servitude, I have included them here among “material things” because the gift of material things is the form of generosity that is emphasized the most.

The *Bodhisattva Levels’ Compendium of Determinations* says that even if you do not satisfy a request for your three kinds of religious robes and any extra belongings [robes] other than those which the Buddha has permitted renunciates to own, you incur no fault if you do not have a stingy attitude toward them, and if they are requisite to your cultivation of virtue. Thus it says:

If renunciates bodhisattvas give away extra belongings—robes other than their three kinds of religious robes—that are permitted by the Buddha, are resources for their bodies, and are conducive to maintaining their comfort, and do so after they have looked carefully at the persons who want them and ask for them, they do not incur a misdeed. Even if they do not give them away, they incur no misdeed at all as long as

their not giving is for the purpose of their cultivation of virtue and they do not have attachment to them.

The *Bodhisattva Vows of Liberation* says:

Sariputra, if bodhisattvas give away their three kinds of religious robes, treating the one who asks for them as more important than themselves, they are not relying on few desires.

Hence, if renunciates bodhisattvas give away their three kinds of religious robes, they incur a transgression.

We will stop here.

Just before this teaching I spent half an hour reading and reflecting on the section we have covered today. I have found it extremely beneficial and began to realise the profundity of the bodhisattva practices. I encourage everyone to read the text and think about its meaning as much as possible. You will gain a lot of knowledge from simply reading it. Even coming across a term like ‘intelligent giving’, which we covered in tonight’s teaching, has a profound effect on my practice. Intelligent giving is a form of not giving, so how is this possible? We find from this text that, with the right skill-in-practice, we may even need to keep things instead of giving them to others; furthermore, using and enjoying things ourselves may become a source of increasing merit. Of course, the key here is not having any attachment to the goods but having a clear sense of good purpose behind possessing and enjoying things.

I encourage everyone to read the text. If you keep your mind busy with reading the text, it has no time for mischief and worry about other things! Whereas if you don’t look after the mind or preoccupy it with something virtuous, it will slip away and bring you trouble.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
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The Six Perfections

༄༅། །ཐེགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

12 March 2019

We can begin with our usual meditation.

[*Tong-len meditation*]

It is very important to always begin our practice with the bodhicitta motivation. If we maintain bodhicitta or a good heart we will be much happier regardless of where we are, who we are with and what we do.

If we maintain an altruistic mental attitude or good heart within us, we can automatically reduce and prevent various negative states of mind. However, if our mental attitude is very self-centred or self-cherishing, then we will be very insecure and temperamental, easily losing our temper, or getting upset about any minor hardship that we face. If we are the sort of person who is easily upset or who is very vulnerable to everyday events, then this is a sign that we lack familiarity with a good heart and that we are very familiar with the self-cherishing mind.

We can learn a lot about Dharma practice simply by observing other people. For example, there are some people who normally have a good and calm nature, who are joyful and very broad-minded and always very happy. They also have a positive influence on others. Others admire them and enjoy their companionship because it makes them feel good and happy. When we observe such positive people, we should recognise that the main cause of their admirable qualities is their positive mental attitude and understand that we are also capable of cultivating the same positive mental attitude. We should be inspired by observing those people, knowing if we too cultivate the same mental attitude then we can be exactly like them - very calm, joyful, admired by others and able to benefit those around us.

On the other hand, there are others who are unhappy, unpredictable, short-tempered and very tense. Not only are they very unhappy and difficult people, but nobody wants to be close to them because they cause stress and unease to those around them. As we observe such negative people, we should be inspired to develop more control of our own destructive thoughts and emotions, otherwise we will end up exactly like them - unhappy and tense. As a result, people will try to steer clear of us.

Spiritual practice is not just learning a lot about Dharma; more importantly it is about putting into practice what learning and knowledge we have. After learning something, we need to go through the process of contemplating it over and over again, relating it to our own thoughts and deeds and recognising the benefits and relevance of putting it into practise. Our spiritual approach should not be simply gathering Dharma information, saying to ourselves, 'Oh this is this and this is this etc.', as if we are counting something, and then later on forgetting it altogether. Instead of this, it is important that we integrate our study into our practice, firstly internalising the knowledge by contemplating it not once or twice, but over and over again, and then making it our experience by meditating on it. If we do this, then we can gradually make progress in our practice.

In short, we have to try to direct our focus towards cultivating positive mental qualities, such as a good heart. The way to cultivate and develop positive qualities is by making an effort to familiarise ourselves with positive ways of thinking. We also have to try, as much as possible, to combat the opposite of these positive states of mind, such as anger and so forth. This is how we benefit from our practice. If we apply Dharma practice by utilising our own intellect, then we are implementing the Buddha's advice that we are our own saviour and protector.

We will now continue with the teaching.

(2'') Detailed explanation about outer things which are and are not to be given

(a'') How not to give outer things (cont.)

(4'') Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of material things (cont.)

Last time we stopped at:

The *Bodhisattva Vows of Liberation* says:

Sariputra, if bodhisattvas give away their three kinds of religious robes, treating the one who asks for them as more important than themselves, they are not relying on few desires.

Hence, if renunciate bodhisattvas give away their three kinds of religious robes, they incur a transgression.

Here moral *transgression* refers specifically to a *renunciate* or an ordained person who does not possess any extra robes. In other words, it is a *transgression* if a renunciate who possesses only one set of robes gives them away.

(5'') Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of purpose

Although the explanation here relates to the practice of giving in terms of the objects of giving, the recipients and the manner of giving etc., we can also apply the same knowledge to our other practices of benefitting sentient beings. We learn here how to properly serve others and what to do when we face certain critical situations when we do so.

The text is self-explanatory.

Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of purpose is, for instance, when you fulfill a request for poison, weapons, fire or alcohol which is for harming either yourself or others; when you meet a request for things to play with and enjoy but which are associated with a prohibitive risk of accumulating the causes for taking a miserable rebirth; or when you satisfy a request for, or a request to learn about, pits and traps, ...

People use nets, traps and pits to catch animals.

... and so forth for the sake of hurting living beings.

It is inappropriate to give such traps to catch animals because they are harmful to other beings. Not only is giving harmful tools like traps inappropriate, but giving instructions on the skill of catching or hunting animals is also inappropriate if it is intended to harm other beings.

To continue:

This means that it is inappropriate even to give instructions about these things for the sake of bringing harm to the lives and resources of beings. Other examples are giving land or bodies of water when they are requested for the sake of harming beings that inhabit watery or dry areas; giving political authority over these or other places for the sake of bringing harm to the human inhabitants; or, when asked for such things by somebody whom you dislike, giving them instead to an enemy of this person.

(b'')) How to give outer things

You must give outer things if the timing is not prohibited by the Teacher with respect to the recipient, and if giving the gift to this person is appropriate and suitable. Moreover, if you as the giver are a person opposite to that explained above, and are stingy with regard to a text, you must give it to a person who asks for it and who wishes to understand it, even though you may not have finished using it. This is to say, if you have a second copy, you give that, and if you do not, then you should give the cost of having it copied out. If you do not have the money, you should definitely give the text away, thinking, "Though by giving this away I may be stupid in this life, it is all right; I will not acquiesce in my stinginess."

As to material things, you should give everything except those things listed above. If you are a ruler, and someone asks for others' children, wives, and so on, it is inappropriate to meet the request by separating each from their families, but you can give them as a whole together with the family dwelling and the like.

Even in Australia many aboriginal children were separated from their parents in the past. This is totally inappropriate.

Then the text continues:

Likewise, you must meet requests for things to play with that do not become a cause of taking a miserable rebirth; traps, etc. that do not hurt others; dry or wet places inhabited by living beings when no harm will come to the beings; and food and drink which do not have any bugs.

These lines make some reference to what has been explained before. It was said earlier that it is not appropriate to give things that are a cause of harm to other beings. However, it says here that if giving those things doesn't serve as a cause of harm, then giving them is appropriate. So, the text is now explaining the exceptions; sometimes it is appropriate to give things which are usually inappropriate to give.

It continues:

You should give even poison, weapons, fire, and alcohol if people ask for them in order to benefit themselves or others.

Then the text poses a question:

What should you do when you are giving material gifts and two persons ask you for something, one of whom is poor and the other of whom is wealthy?

The reply is:

If you are confronted by both of them right from the first and you are able to fulfill both of their wishes, you should do so.

If you are able to fulfil the wishes of two recipients – one poor and the other rich – who are requesting the same things at the same time, and *if you are able to fulfil both of their requests then you should do so.*

However:

If you are unable to do this, however, you should first think, "I will fulfill the wishes of the poor person," and work to give the gift to this person. So you should let the wealthy one know the situation, saying with soothing words, "My friend, I have already planned from the first to distribute this article to this poor person. Please do not think that I have spurned you," and then fulfill the wishes of the person who has no wealth.

As it says here, you have to prioritise your giving to the recipient who is poor, and you should explain to the wealthy person why you are doing this in an appropriate and skilful manner. It says here that you explain to the rich person how you have already decided to give to the poor

and apologise for not giving it to him. So you give it to the poor person but at the same time you do not displease the wealthy person.

Then it says:

I have written about the ways to learn these kinds of giving because they are extremely important for beginners who are keeping the bodhisattva vows. With the exception of some special cases I have explained all in accordance with the intended meaning of the *Bodhisattva Levels*.

Lama Tsongkhapa says here that the main reason why he is giving these detailed instructions is to guide beginner bodhisattvas.

(b)) What to do if you are unable to give

If you are overcome with stinginess when someone asks you for something, think as follows: "This material thing and I are definitely going to be parted by death; it will leave me and I will leave it. So I might as well take pleasure in giving this away and put it to good use, making a separation just as at the time of death. If I give this away, I will not have attachment to my wealth when the time comes for me to die. I will have no regrets and will give rise to feelings of pleasure and joy."

This is saying that if you are unable to give due to stinginess then you have to reflect on impermanence. It is inevitable that you will be separated from your possessions at the end of this life; your things will have to leave you and you will have to leave them. You should also reflect on the fact that if we are stingy or attached to wealth now, then we will experience great difficulty and suffering at the time of our death because of that attachment. However, if we are not attached or stingy then we will make good use of our wealth and possessions, and there will be no reason to feel regret, unhappiness and be disturbed at the time of death. Indeed, you will pass from this life in a joyful and relaxed state of mind.

Try to instil a motivation for giving by reflecting on the disadvantages of being stingy and attached to things in terms of experiencing suffering, and the advantages of not being stingy and attached in terms of finding more satisfaction and making good use of that wealth. If, despite this, you are still unable to give away something, then, as it says here, you should apologise and explain in a polite, honest and respectful manner the reason why you can't give the thing the other person asked you for. The text says:

If you are unable to give it away even though you reflect in this way, then inform the person who asks for it by means of the three things that they should know. This is described in the *Questions of Householder Ugra Sutra (Grha-pati-ugra-pariprcna-sutra)*, which states that you should say, "I am new to the practice of the Mahayana and am still a person of small ability whose roots of virtue are not yet ripened. Also, I am under the influence of an ungenerous attitude. Further, I have a strong grasping view of self and constantly conceive of a self and that which belongs to the self."

Then it continues:

"So, excellent person, please forgive me and do not make it difficult for me. I shall try to do just what satisfies your thoughts and the thoughts of all living beings." According to the *Compendium of Trainings*, this is to eliminate the further fault of each losing confidence in the other, but it does not get rid of the fault of stinginess, ...

By saying sorry and explaining the reason for your failure to give, the person who asked for the thing may understand your situation and won't be upset. Also, this may not cause any damage to the good faith and confidence that exists

between you. So, there are many benefits in saying sorry and explaining things to the other person in a courteous manner. This, however, doesn't mean that you have eliminated stinginess or that you don't have the fault of stinginess. As the text says:

... but it does not get rid of the fault of stinginess, a fault in bodhisattvas that is looked down upon. Still it seems that doing this prevents the cardinal transgression of not giving the teachings and wealth because of stinginess.

So *the cardinal transgression* here is a form of moral downfall which is called *pham.pa* in Tibetan. Because of your expressed regret and your confession of your inability to fulfil the wish of the recipient, you don't accrue *the cardinal transgression* or *pham.pa* of not giving the wealth of Dharma, which is one of the root bodhisattva vows. You are also not breaking this root bodhisattva vow because the breaking of any of the root bodhisattva vows is contingent upon the presence of the four fetters or four ever-binding factors or *kun.dkTri bZhi*. These are: not recognising the breach as wrong; not wishing to avoid it in future; rejoicing in it; and having no moral sense of shame or embarrassment.

Then it says:

Also, the *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

If you cannot give because your ability is so small
Though people come and ask you for something,
So as to not make them feel low,
Comfort them with gentle speech.

Henceforth when people come to ask for something,
Do your best not to make them feel low and despairing,
And clear away the fault of stinginess.
Earnestly strive to eliminate craving.

(c) Relying on the remedies for the hindrances to generosity

According to what is found in the *Bodhisattva Levels' Compendium of Determinations*, there are four hindrances:

1. The hindrance of not being used to generosity
2. The hindrance of declining fortune
3. The hindrance of attachment
4. The hindrance of not seeing the goal

(1) The hindrance of not being used to generosity

This means not being habituated with the thought of giving.

The hindrance of not being used to generosity is when you do not want to give to those who ask for something, even though you have material goods to give.

If we are habituated to or are familiar with the practice of giving (which is essentially a thought of giving), then this thought should arise spontaneously whenever we find an opportunity to give. The fact that we lack such a thought of giving, shows our lack of familiarity with generosity.

As the text says:

The remedy for this is to avoid succumbing to the shortcoming of not being accustomed to generosity by quickly becoming aware, examining the situation, and reflecting, "This shortcoming is definitely the result of my previously not getting used to generosity," and "Moreover, if I do not make this gift, I will dislike generosity in my future life as well." Then, be generous.

Essentially the instruction here is that in order to become familiar with the practice of giving, we must think about the shortcomings of not practising giving. Think about why we are not generous at the moment or we don't think of giving to others. It is because we have never familiarised ourselves with giving in the past. Therefore, if we do not make effort

to familiarise ourselves with giving, we will have the same stingy thoughts in the future and won't engage in the practice of giving. Just by reflecting on these points we can slowly instil a thought of giving, which we can then develop into the practice of giving.

(2) The hindrance of declining fortune

This refers to the hindrance of declining fortune such as poverty.

The hindrance of declining fortune is when you do not feel generous because of the sparseness of your resources.

It is very obvious that if we do not possess anything or if we are very poor, then even if there is an opportunity to give, we don't have the resources or anything to give. As a result, we cannot practice giving.

The remedy to this is to make a gift after you willingly accept the suffering of poverty, thinking, "During the time that I have been passing through cyclic existence I have not helped others and have experienced many unbearable sufferings such as thirst, hunger, and the like because of being under the control of something else—that is, my former karma. So even if I die from the suffering of this lifetime on account of my helping others, it is just better for me to be generous; whereas to turn away the person who asks me for something is not all right. Even in the absence of those resources, I will survive on some sort of wild plant."

Here again, it is important to reflect on the key point that the poverty that we experience now is the result of not practising giving in the past. Therefore, if we don't practise giving now, we will suffer from poverty in the future. In this way we are motivated to practise giving right now. Furthermore, we will also understand that it is worthwhile to accept some hardship, difficulty, and be prepared to take a personal loss as a result of the practice of giving. As the text says, as a result of giving all of one's resources, *even in the absence of those resources, I will survive on some sort of wild plant*. This is particularly important to the ordained or the renounced who live a simple and humble life with few needs.

(3) The hindrance of attachment

The hindrance of attachment is when you do not feel generous inasmuch as you have become attached to extremely attractive and excellent material goods that are to be given. The remedy for this is to quickly become aware of your shortcoming of attachment, and then to think, "This mistaken notion that thinks 'I am happy' with regard to what is by nature suffering will bring me suffering in the future." Understanding this, eliminate your attachment and give away your material goods.

The remedy for this is to quickly become aware of your shortcoming of attachment, and then to think, "This mistaken notion that thinks 'I am happy' with regard to what is by nature suffering will bring me suffering in the future." It says here that attachment gives us the wrong notion of an object as being a cause of happiness when in fact it is in the nature of suffering. When we are attached to something or somebody the pleasure that we feel seems like true happiness. However, it is not actually happiness but merely a reduced level of apparent suffering, which seems like a pleasurable experience. In Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*, an example of a very itchy skin disease is used to describe this. A person who is infected with this disease feels good when he scratches the infected area, but in fact scratching only makes it worse. We won't go into more detail, but I think misunderstanding suffering as happiness is the major source of our unending suffering in our life. It's not that we want

suffering but because we mistake suffering for happiness that we continuously create the causes of the suffering we don't want.

(4) The hindrance of not seeing the goal

This means not seeing the result of giving.

The hindrance of not seeing the goal is when you do not have in view the benefit of reaching perfect enlightenment that is contingent on generosity, but instead consider the benefit of a great amount of resources and then give things away. The remedy for this is to quickly become aware of this shortcoming; then to consider how, in general, all conditioned things perish moment by moment and how, in particular, your resources perish and leave you; and then to fully dedicate the giving of any gift for the sake of great enlightenment.

If you give while merely considering the karmic result of generosity—resources and the like—you will obtain a large amount of resources, but you will not attain liberation, just as business people who give without any hesitation all their goods to others for a price merely get a profit, but do not obtain merit. Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Stanzas (Catuh-sataka)* says:

From making gifts to this person
I will get a great reward.
Such getting and giving are looked down on
As being like wanting profit in business.

(2") The generosity which is just mental

The generosity which is just mental means that after you go to a quiet place and then withdraw your mind inward, with a pure motivation and faith from the depths of your heart, you construct with your thoughts an immeasurably vast quantity of diverse gifts, and you then imagine that you are offering them to all living beings. This increases merit immeasurably with little difficulty and, moreover, is the giving of wise bodhisattvas, according to the *Bodhisattva Levels*.

This is the kind of practice of giving that I do most of the time, because I do not have much in the way of wealth and possessions.

The text continues:

Although it says in the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* that this is to be done by those who do not have wealth, it is appropriate for those who have wealth to do it as well.

Essentially, we notice here how in this section Lama Tsongkhapa shows us how to integrate the explanation of the practice of giving we have just discussed into our practice. What you find here is how to engage in the meditation of giving. It shows us how we should sit in a quiet place and calm our mind. Then we mentally create various things in accordance with the needs of all beings and offer those things to them. As it says here, by doing this practice of mentally giving, we can create an *immeasurably vast quantity of merit*.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

19 March 2019

Try to establish a genuine bodhicitta motivation of wishing to achieve buddhahood to benefit all motherly sentient beings. With this motivation, we should think, 'I shall listen to the Dharma and put it into practice'.

Why do we use the term 'motherly' when we say 'to benefit all motherly sentient beings'? We refer to all other sentient beings as 'motherly' because their kindness and gratitude towards us in the past is the same as the kindness and gratitude shown to us by our mother of this life.

But simply saying 'motherly sentient beings' is not enough; we must also feel close to them in our heart, and in our mind think of all other sentient beings as if they were our own mother. This kind of recognition of all sentient beings as our mother is essential when we meditate on remembering their kindness.

In the motivation we also stated, 'wishing to achieve buddhahood to benefit all motherly sentient beings'. 'Buddha' is a Sanskrit word that the early Tibetan translators rendered as *sangye* – a word that carries a very special and profound meaning. 'Buddha' means 'awakened', in the sense of someone who has awakened from the sleep of ignorance. So the word buddha means an awakened one, and also connotes the enlightened state, in the sense of the blooming of a lotus flower. In Tibetan, the term *sangye* has two syllables: *sang-* means 'awakened' from the sleep of ignorance; whereas *-gye* connotes 'developed', which here means one who has developed all the excellent knowledge.

Therefore, when we say 'I wish to achieve the state of buddhahood' in our motivation, we are saying that we wish to achieve a state that is free of all faults and endowed with all the excellent qualities. The reason we wish to achieve the state of buddhahood is also indicated in our motivation – to benefit all sentient beings. In Tibetan, the term for buddhahood is *sangye go.pang*, where *go.pang* means status or position. So, in our motivation, we are expressing the wish to reach the status of a buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Therefore, if we include the bodhicitta motivation when we engage in any virtuous practice, it will make it very effective and a pure Dharma practice. If we don't want to waste our lives, we must practise generating bodhicitta, which will make our life truly meaningful.

10. HOW TO GIVE

(2') Detailed explanation about outer things which are and are not to be given

(2'') The generosity which is just mental (*cont.*)

We will now continue with the commentary on the lam-rim. We stopped at the section which reads:

These ways for wise bodhisattvas to give when they have no resources are employed until they attain the first level, the level of pure wholehearted resolve, whereupon poverty in resources no longer occurs.

This is a summary of what has been said before – how bodhisattvas who are materially poor can develop the practice of giving by engaging in the practice of giving away imagined objects. Now the text points out that they need to do this *until they attain the first level*, which refers to the first bodhisattva *bhumi* or ground, *the level of pure wholehearted resolve, whereupon poverty in resources no longer occurs*.

The text then quotes *Bodhisattva Levels*. We can note here how Lama Tsongkhapa presents the teaching by citing the great ancient Indian masters to show the authenticity of the scriptural sources. At the same time, he provides his own explanation, backed up with reason and logic. It is quite amazing.

For, the *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

Thus, this is the giving of gifts for wise bodhisattvas while they have no resources ...

We can recollect how, earlier on, this section presented the bodhisattva practice of giving away mentally imagined objects, a way of giving practised by intelligent bodhisattvas. This practice is recommended for wise or intelligent bodhisattvas when they have no resources to give.

... and until they attain pure wholehearted resolve.

They engage in the practice of giving away mentally imagined objects until they attain pure wholehearted resolve, which is the first bodhisattva *bhumi* or level.

Just as bodhisattvas of pure wholehearted resolve obtain a state which transcends miserable rebirths, so also they attain inexhaustible resources in all lifetimes.

Upon reaching the first bodhisattva level, they no longer need to rely on the practice of giving away imagined objects, because they are free from bad rebirths and also from poverty. They have now gained the quality of having inexhaustible resources at all times.

What follows is a summary of what has been mentioned before.

(d') A summary

After you have taken the bodhisattva vows, make aspirational prayers with respect to how to learn the practice of generosity on the high levels, and then train in these methods.

While bodhisattvas engage in the practice of giving within their capacity, there are some other practices of giving that are out of their reach – for example, only bodhisattvas on the high-level path or bodhisattva *bhumi* can practise giving away their body parts to others. However, as it says here, after taking the bodhisattva vows, beginner bodhisattvas can make an aspirational prayer to be able to engage in the giving practice of higher-level bodhisattvas.

The text is also implying that we, too, can make prayers to be able to do advanced practices that we cannot do right now, for example, by praying 'May I be able to engage in such a profound practice of giving'. When we aspire or pray, we are also acknowledging and admiring those who possess such qualities. So, we can at least prevent ourselves from feeling jealous about these qualities. On the other hand, if we are unable to admire and rejoice in the good qualities of other beings, instead of venerating others for their qualities, we will envy them and feel jealous.

The text continues:

Understand and learn what is permitted and prohibited with respect to the methods of making gifts that you can engage in right away, as explained above.

As mentioned earlier, you need to be very clear about what is permitted and what is not permitted, and then act accordingly. So, when the text says *understand and learn what is permitted and prohibited*, it is referring to what has already been said – what is and is not appropriate practice, from the point of view of the time, the object, and the purpose of giving. It was mentioned before, for example, that giving objects such as weapons to harm others is prohibited.

Next:

In particular, you must rely on the remedies to stinginess with respect to your body, resources, and roots of virtue.

With reference to the practice of giving our body, resources and virtues, it is very important that we avoid stinginess. Any benefit from giving with stinginess would be insignificant and weak. Whenever we practise giving, we must ensure that the practice is not tainted with stinginess and directed at counteracting miserliness.

Then:

After you strive to steadily increase your generosity, you must cultivate joy for this practice and generate a feeling of sorrow for not having earlier trained your mind in that way.

This implies that we should feel regret if we feel we haven't done this practice in the past when we should have. But, while we should feel remorse for not having done the practice in the past, we should also rejoice in the practice of generosity that we have done. Taking delight or rejoicing in our practice will multiply the benefits of that practice, just as making aspirational prayers will make the benefits of our practice inexhaustible. Therefore, we should rejoice in our practice with the same degree of joy as a beggar finding a lump of gold!

For, as it says in the *Questions of Subahu Sutra*, once you do this, you will be able to complete the perfection of generosity with little difficulty in another lifetime ...

This line is an inspiration for us to engage in the bodhisattva's practice. The fact that we find the practice difficult or have little interest in doing it indicates our lack of familiarity or habituation to the practice. As said in Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, 'There is nothing whatsoever that is not made easier through acquaintance' – whether we find something easy or difficult depends on how familiar we are with it. If we find the practice too hard or uninteresting, this is an indication that we have not familiarised ourselves with the practice in the past. If we don't familiarise ourselves with it now, we will face the same problem in the future. Hence, this line is to inspire us to exert effort and engage in the practice.

... whereas if you give all this up and set it aside, not only in this life will you be continually tainted by very grave faults, but in other lives as well you will not want to engage in giving, and it will therefore become extremely difficult to enter into the bodhisattva deeds.

So, in order to be motivated to engage in the practice, we should reflect on the shortcomings of not engaging in the practice right now: for instance, even in the future, you will not engage in giving and therefore find it difficult to enter into the levels of the bodhisattva deeds.

Furthermore, the *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

The spirit of enlightenment is the root of such generosity,
So do not give up this motive to make such gifts.
The Conqueror said, "In the world the supreme form of giving
Is the wish to give accompanied by the spirit of enlightenment."

Thus, being mindful of the spirit of enlightenment—the basis of the bodhisattva deeds—...

The basis of the bodhisattva deeds is the bodhicitta mind or the spirit of enlightenment. When it says *being mindful*, it is suggesting that we should remind ourselves of the bodhicitta mind by cultivating it as frequently as possible. If we can't cultivate actual bodhicitta, we should simply cultivate it in the form of an aspirational prayer, by saying aloud or wishing: 'May all beings be free from suffering and achieve happiness. May I be a cause to free them from suffering and place them into the state of happiness. May I be able to single-handedly free them from suffering and place them into the state of happiness.'

... cultivating it, aspiring to enlightenment, and making aspirational prayers to become enlightened form the root of all giving and the supreme kind of giving, so work hard at these. This is the excellent key point that sums up the meaning of the *Questions of Subahu Sutra*.

Lama Tsongkhapa is clearly highlighting here the supreme kind of giving, or the root of all giving – the bodhicitta mind. He is also emphasising that your aspiration to achieve enlightenment is the supreme prayer. Here, *the root of all giving* refers to the spirit of enlightenment or bodhicitta; *the supreme kind of giving* refers to aspirational prayers, such as dedicating your virtuous practice towards achieving complete enlightenment. So here we can also understand why Shantideva's dedication chapter in *Bodhicharyavatara* is regarded as the chapter presenting the perfection of giving.

The difference between prayer and dedication is that a dedication is contingent upon a substance or object, such as a virtuous practice we've done, to be dedicated towards complete enlightenment, and so forth. Whereas, prayer is not contingent upon, or requires any dedicated substance. We can pray, 'May all beings achieve the state of buddhahood'. This prayer is wishing for others to be free from suffering and to find everlasting happiness. In fact, this kind of aspirational prayer is known as 'the supreme form of giving'.

11: THE PERFECTION OF ETHICAL DISCIPLINE

We will now move on to the next chapter.

Lama Tsongkhapa elaborates on this topic of ethical discipline under the five main headings:

- (a') What ethical discipline is: What does ethical discipline or the practice of morality mean?
- (b') How to begin the cultivation of ethical discipline: Having understood the meaning of ethical discipline, you will then want to apply it in practice. To do this, you need to know how to practice. Hence, the second heading is how to begin cultivating ethical discipline.
- (c') The divisions of ethical discipline
- (d') How to practice
- (e') A summary

(a') What ethical discipline is

Ethical discipline is an attitude of abstention that turns your mind away from harming others and from the sources of

such harm. Therefore, you bring about the perfection of ethical discipline by progressively increasing your habituation to this attitude until you reach completion.

The term moral ethics generally implies a sense of refraining from harmful actions. Here, however, the term has a more specific meaning: *ethical discipline is an attitude of abstention that turns your mind away from harming others and from the sources of such harm.*

Here, *harming others* refers to physical or verbal harm. In terms of the ten non-virtuous actions, there are seven physically harmful actions – three of the body, which are killing, stealing and adultery; and four of speech, which are lying, slander, harsh speech and idle gossip. The *sources of such harm* refers to the intention, or impulse, to harm others, referring to the three non-virtuous actions of mind – covetousness, ill-will and wrong views.

Therefore, you bring about the perfection of ethical discipline by progressively increasing your habituation to this attitude until you reach completion. Here, it is important to understand the meaning of ethical discipline or morality within the context of our own mental continuum. We make progress in the practice of ethical discipline by habituating our mind to a sense of restraining from harming other beings.

The text continues:

However, it is not the case that you bring the perfection of ethical discipline to completion in the external world by establishing beings in a state free of all harm. Otherwise, since there are still living beings who are not free from harm, the conquerors who visited in the past would absurdly not have completed the perfection of their ethical discipline and would therefore also not be able to guide these beings to freedom from harm.

If we understand the bodhisattva's progress in the practice of ethical discipline on the basis of how much they have reduced or eliminated harm and suffering in the external world, then we will reach the absurd conclusion that the past buddhas have not achieved the perfection of ethical discipline and also have failed in guiding all other beings to achieve liberation from suffering.

Hence, in the context of the perfection of ethical discipline, whether all living beings in the external world are freed or not freed from harm makes no difference; the practice of ethical discipline is simply habituating your own mind with the attitude of abstention, which turns it away from thoughts of harming these beings.

So, it is good to repeat this line and think about it, over and over again, until its meaning sinks into your mind. We will then clearly understand the point made here with respect to the meaning of ethical discipline. Then the text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Where can beings such as fish be sent
Where they will not be killed?
So it is said that by attaining an attitude of abstention
You perfect ethical discipline.

I encourage you all to read this lam-rim text by Lama Tsongkhapa. It is profound in its meaning and also carries great blessings. You will find that simply reading the text and directing your mind to its meaning will be very effective in calming your mind and enhancing peace and happiness within you.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

26 March 2019

We will begin with our usual meditation on giving and taking.

[Tong-len meditation]

Make sure you reinforce your motivation for studying and practising the Dharma.

As much as possible, we need to habituate our minds with the thought of benefitting others and having a good heart towards others, while at the same time preventing any harmful or ill thoughts about others.

When we talk about integrating the practice of what to accept and what to reject, the key is cultivating a beneficial mental attitude towards others and getting rid of harmful thoughts towards them. For example, the meditation of giving and taking, which we have just performed, is about familiarising ourselves with the thought of giving and taking, through which we develop a good heart and rid ourselves of harmful thoughts.

By observing other sentient beings from the perspective of happiness, in our meditation we mentally give them the happiness they are lacking. Likewise, by observing all other sentient beings from the perspective of suffering, we mentally take their suffering upon ourselves in our meditation. Through training ourselves mentally with these thoughts of giving and taking, we habituate our mind with the thought of genuinely wanting other sentient beings to be happy and free from suffering.

I often say that our mind and our body always accompany us like inseparable friends. When these two are in a good state we are happy, and when they are not, we are unhappy. I frequently say that saying 'I'm happy' or 'I'm unhappy' simply reflects the state of our mind and body. For example, if our mind is disturbed and unhappy, we say 'I am not happy'. So, if we want physical and mental happiness, we need to ensure we practise good hygiene to protect our mind and body, and understand that it is we who are responsible for taking good care of our own mental and physical wellbeing.

The next question is, what do we need to do to take care of our mind and body? Physical hygiene primarily depends on the right external conditions that contribute to the physical health of our body. At the same time, there are other external conditions which are harmful to our physical health. So, in order to maintain a healthy body we need to understand what is good and bad for our health, and be responsible for meeting the right conditions, while avoiding the bad conditions.

Likewise, if we talk about our mental health or our happiness on a mental level, then within our mind we need to recognise the things that bring peace and happiness, and those that bring unhappiness and suffering. As we observe our experiences, we will note that the main cause of mental peace and happiness is cultivating a positive mental attitude or a virtuous state of mind.

As I mentioned earlier, if the mind that always accompanies us is positive and virtuous, then we will naturally be happy and peaceful, and if the accompanying mind is negative and restless, then naturally, we will be unhappy and restless too. Since we all want mental happiness, we must be responsible for our mind and take control of it, and that means making an effort to familiarise ourselves with positive mental attitudes.

Of course, this all sounds very good – it's not all that difficult to understand what is good or bad or beneficial or harmful for mental and physical hygiene. At the same time, of course, we must also put that into practise. For this we need to know what that practice is.

First of all, we need to correct our usual way of thinking. Our usual perception of unhappiness and suffering is that it is always derived from external causes and conditions. In fact, that is not the case at all; rather, our unhappiness and suffering primarily derives from our own mental attitudes and ways of thinking. The harm we inflict on ourselves is much greater than the harm caused by others. Furthermore, we don't have much control over the outside world in terms of the harm it can do to us. However, we do have the choice of changing our mindset – we can protect ourselves from harm by overcoming the mental, bodily and verbal actions that are harmful to the good hygiene of our mind and body. For example, harsh speech, negative body gestures and negative mental attitudes can damage our relationships with others to the point that even those who are close to us will become distant and their love for us will turn into hatred.

We know that having a good circle of friends and caring people around us makes a huge difference to our happiness and wellbeing. As said before, the single most important factor that affects our life and relationships with people is the state of our mind. If our mind is unchecked and unbridled, it will easily be filled with disturbing thoughts. As a result of that, our level of stress, tension and anxiety increases, which in turn makes us unhappy and miserable.

We will then become very susceptible to afflictive emotions such as anger and so forth. Overpowered by anger, we will cause much harm to others and harm ourselves as well. We need to understand that if we harm other beings, we are also harming ourselves. With this kind of understanding we will be more cautious about our actions, and more motivated to stop those actions that harm others because they are harmful to ourselves too. Likewise, if we benefit others, we will also benefit ourselves. This way of thinking is an effective and practical way of becoming kinder and more supportive, rather than being careless and harmful.

Sometimes when we think of cultivating a beneficial attitude or good heart towards others, we feel it's too difficult to put into practice. However, if we understand the reason why we should be kind and considerate of others' needs, that it is for our own benefit and interests, we will be more inspired and likely to be kinder and more helpful to others. Of course, we should also consider the needs of other beings by thinking that, just as we only want benefit and no harm, so too do all other sentient beings want happiness and no harm. On the basis of this reality, we cultivate a sense of consideration and empathy towards other beings. At the end of the day, a mental attitude that shows empathy, respect and care for others reflects honesty, fairness and positivity. When we cultivate such a mental attitude, we will find ourselves feeling positive and happy.

(a') What ethical discipline is (cont.)

We now continue with the text. Last week we left at this sentence:

Hence, whether all living beings in the external world are freed or not freed from harm makes no difference in this context; the practice of ethical discipline is just the habituation within your own mind to the attitude of abstention which turns away from harm to these beings.

Moral discipline, as defined here, refers to a sense of restraint and turning one's mind away from harming other beings. Rather than referring to freeing other beings from harm, when we talk about achieving the perfection of moral discipline, we are talking about perfecting our own moral sense of restraint, and we do this by habituating ourselves with it in our mind.

To continue:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Where can beings such as fish be sent
Where they will not be killed?
So it is said that by attaining an attitude of abstention
You perfect ethical discipline.

This summarises the way to achieve the perfection of moral ethics. The perfection of moral ethics doesn't mean actually eliminating all the harms in the world. If that were to be the case, it says here, then it would be impossible to achieve. It is impossible, for example, to find a place where sentient beings such as fish will not die. The practice of moral discipline is the restraining of harmful thoughts about other beings, and becoming familiar with this sense of restraint. The text then continues:

Although ethical discipline does indeed have three divisions [the ethical discipline of restraint, the ethical discipline of gathering virtue, and the ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings], it is explained in this context as the attitude of abstention in terms of the ethical discipline of restraint, the principal division.

This indicates that of the three types of ethical discipline, the ethical disciplines of gathering virtue, and acting for the wellbeing of living beings, do not by nature or identity involve a sense of restraint or abandonment.

Then:

Moreover, in terms that include motivation, it is the ten abstentions that eliminate the ten non-virtues;

The ten non-virtuous actions are generally considered to be the ethical discipline of restraint in the sense that they involve refraining from engaging in non-virtuous actions. When it says, *moreover, in terms that include motivation*, this refers to the three mental non-virtuous actions. The words *that include* refers to the other seven which are the three non-virtuous actions of the body - killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct - and the four non-virtuous actions of speech, lying, slander, harsh speech, and idle gossip. So the ten non-virtues by their nature belong to morality in the sense that they involve restraint. The three non-virtues of the mind are the motivation and the other seven are the actions.

The text continues:

... and in terms of what it really is, it is seven abstentions, which are the nature of the actions of body and speech that abstain from the seven non-virtues.

In terms of practice, morality means making an effort to restrain or safeguard our mind from heading in the direction of engaging in actions that harm other beings, mainly the seven non-virtuous actions. And then:

Candrakirti's *Explanation of the "Middle Way" Commentary* (*Madhyamakavatahabhasya*) says:

It is called ethical discipline because it does not acquiesce in the afflictions, because it allows no sins to arise, ...

The practice of moral discipline prevents our mind from falling under the influence of mental afflictions such as harmful thoughts. Mental afflictions are the source of sinful or negative actions. If we are under the influence of mental afflictions such as anger, then it is very difficult to prevent harmful or negative actions. The Sanskrit term for 'morality' is *shila*, which connotes coolness. Hence the text says.

... because it is coolness since it quells the fire of regret, or because it is that upon which the excellent rely since it is the cause of happiness. Moreover, it is characterized by seven abstentions. These are motivated by three qualities - non-attachment, non-hostility, and correct view.

These three qualities are the opposites of the three non-virtues of mind. Then:

Therefore, ethical discipline is explained as the ten paths of action in terms that include motivation.

(b') How to begin the cultivation of ethical discipline

As a person who generates the spirit of enlightenment and then promises to train in the bodhisattva deeds, you have promised to endow all living beings with the ornament of the ethical discipline of the perfect buddhas; therefore, you must accomplish the aims of all beings.

Here, *therefore* is a reference to what was said before, which is that the bodhisattvas' purpose in cultivating the bodhicitta mind is to establish all sentient beings into perfect ethical discipline, endowing them with *ornaments of the ethical discipline*.

In this regard you must first develop the strength of your own pure ethical discipline, for, if your own ethical discipline is impure and degenerates, you will fall to a miserable rebirth and will therefore not even achieve your own welfare, never mind the welfare of others. Hence, once you begin working for the welfare of others, value highly your ethical discipline. You need to sharply focus on safeguarding it and restraining your behavior. Do not be lax.

Basically, it is saying here that if you cannot achieve your own purpose, then you will have no hope of achieving the purpose of other beings. The indication here is that you need to practise morality, which is refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions, not only for the sake of accomplishing the purpose of others but also for the sake of accomplishing your own purposes. For example, if you don't practise morality then you will take a bad lower rebirth, such as a rebirth as an animal. Animals hardly have any capacity to benefit others, as all they can think about is their need to overcome hunger and thirst in the immediate timeframe.

The text then states:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Those who strive to endow all beings
With the ornament of the perfect buddhas' ethical discipline
Initially purify their own ethical discipline;
With pure ethical discipline they develop powerful strength.

And also:

If you cannot achieve your own welfare with faulty ethical discipline,
Where will you get strength for the welfare of others?

Therefore, those who strive for others' welfare
Do not relax their devotion to this.

Moreover, such pure ethical discipline is based on the practice (just as prescribed) of what to adopt and what to cast aside. This, moreover, depends on a strong and stable attitude of wanting to safeguard your ethical discipline. Consequently, develop a desire to safeguard your ethical discipline by meditating for a long time on the grave consequences of not safeguarding it and the benefits of safeguarding it.

With respect to the first, the grave consequences of not safeguarding your ethical discipline, the *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

Therefore, see the unbearable fright and
Eliminate even the smallest thing that should be eliminated.

Thus, once you are frightened by the grave consequences of your misdeeds, you strive to abstain from even the small ones. Think as explained earlier about the grave consequences of the ten non-virtues, the coarsest factors incompatible with ethical discipline.

The text now goes on to give instructions on the shortcomings of not practising moral ethics, and the benefits of practising moral ethics.

With respect to the benefits of safeguarding your ethical discipline, they are as explained earlier and as set forth by the glorious Aryasura in his *Compendium of the Perfections*:

In Tibetan the renowned Master Aryasura is known by names such as Mabo, dPa'bo and rTa dbYang. He was called ma bo because of his deep veneration and respect for his parents; dPa 'bo means a courageous one or bodhisattva and rTa dbYang means 'melodious one'.

Then:

The divine substances, the resources of humans in which to delight, and
The supreme bliss and supreme tastes which are the wonders of the deities –
Does anything more marvellous come from ethical discipline?
Even the buddhas and the teaching arise from it.

This says that the benefits of practising moral ethics include obtaining *the divine substances, the resources of humans*, but that these benefits are nothing to be amazed about because, as it says, *even the buddhas and the teaching arise from it*.

Further benefits of ethical discipline include:

Furthermore, in dependence on ethical discipline
your mind-stream progressively develops; ...

Through the practice of ethical discipline we will be able to eliminate all outer and inner mental distractions and conceptualisations, and thereby progressively bring about a calmer mind with more positive qualities. Having overcome all outer distractions, the practice of morality establishes a firm basis on which to accomplish meditative concentration, which will enable us to eliminate the coarse level of inner mental distractions and conceptualisations. Then, having overcome the coarse level of inner distractions and conceptualisations, that meditative concentration establishes a firm basis to bring about a discerning wisdom which enables us to eliminate subtle levels of inner distraction and conceptualisation. Hence, the development of meditative concentration and wisdom is dependent on the foundation of the practice of moral ethics.

The text continues:

... your training becomes the same as that of the *mahasattva* bodhisattvas, who have a compassionate nature; and you attain the pure sublime wisdom that eliminates all the seeds of wrongdoing. When worldly ornaments adorn the very young or very old, they make these persons seem ridiculous and therefore ugly. But no matter who has the ornament of ethical discipline – old, young, or in-between – it delights everyone; thus, it is the best of ornaments.

Here the text illustrates the excellent qualities of moral discipline through the use of analogies. It says here that the ornament of ethical discipline beautifies whoever wears it regardless of their age, whereas ordinary jewellery doesn't beautify children, and the very old will be a laughing stock if they wear it.

Then:

The pleasant fragrance of ethical discipline's good name spreads in all directions, whereas other pleasant fragrances must follow the direction of the wind and are thus limited.

Ordinary fragrances spread only where the wind goes, however the fragrance of moral ethics spreads in all directions.

Furthermore:

A lotion scented of sandalwood, which relieves the torment of heat, is prohibited for renunciates, but a lotion which protects against the torturous heat of the afflictions is not prohibited and is appropriate for them.

Similarly, a sandalwood lotion is not appropriate for everyone. For example, it is inappropriate for renunciates because it goes against their vows. However, the lotion of moral ethics suits everyone, including renunciates.

Someone who copies the outer appearance of being a renunciate but who has the jewel of ethical discipline is superior to others.

This emphasises that where there is a person who is a renunciate or ordained person by virtue of outer symbols or appearance, and another renunciate, who is actually adorned with the jewel of ethical discipline, the latter one is the superior renunciate. So, we can understand here that renunciates are not measured by outer possessions such as wealth, but by their jewel of ethical discipline.

Then comes this quote:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

Ethical discipline is the path of special attainment,
Achieves equality with those of compassionate nature,
And has the highest nature of pure sublime wisdom.
Free of flaws, it is called the best of ornaments.
It is a pleasant fragrance throughout the three realms,
And a lotion not prohibited for a renunciate.
Even those who copy appropriate attire, if they have ethical discipline,
Will be superior to other human beings.

This is basically a scriptural source that supports what was explained before.

Please read the text!

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering
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Edited Version*

The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

16 April 2019

We will begin with our usual meditation on giving and taking.

As a motivation for listening to the Dharma, we should try to overcome the self-centred mind, and in its place try to cultivate an altruistic state of mind, a thought of benefitting other sentient beings. It would be wonderful if we could cultivate this intention to benefit others as a motivation for listening to Dharma.

If all of us, and I include myself here, cultivate this thought of benefitting other sentient beings as our motivation, then whatever activity we undertake will serve as a cause for the Buddhadharma to flourish and benefit other sentient beings.

(b') How to begin the cultivation of ethical discipline (cont.)

Last time we stopped at this quotation from the *Compendium of the Perfections*:

Ethical discipline is the path of special attainment,
Achieves equality with those of compassionate nature,
And has the highest nature of pure sublime wisdom.
Free of flaws, it is called the best of ornaments.
It is a pleasant fragrance throughout the three realms,
And a lotion not prohibited for a renunciate.
Even those who copy appropriate attire, if they have
ethical discipline,
Will be superior to other human beings.

This summarises the benefits of observing moral ethics. If we gain a good understanding of these benefits, then we'll be more motivated and able to experience more delight and joy in practising moral ethics.

It's very important to reflect on the benefits of practising moral ethics, which include overcoming the fear of death, and the fear of taking a bad rebirth. We can be very sure that if we practise moral ethics well, then there will be absolutely no reason for us to fear death. Indeed, we may even be joyful when that moment of death approaches.

As you know, when we face death everything fails to support us and, as we say, our only protection and refuge lies within ourselves in the form of some sort of positive energy or force. This positive energy is nothing but the virtuous actions or spiritual practices we have accumulated throughout our lifetime, which includes the practice of morality. These positive actions remain in our mental continuum in the form of a positive force or energy, and at the end of our life, as I said before, that's the only thing that can serve as our true refuge and protection.

The last two lines of the quotation say *even those who copy appropriate attire, if they have ethical discipline, will be superior to other human beings*. This metaphorically shows how if there are two people, male or female, wearing exactly the same clothes, and one observes a very good moral practice and the other one doesn't, then the one who observes good moral ethics appears more beautiful than the other person.

We continue with the commentary:

Furthermore, other benefits arise from ethical discipline: although you do not speak flattering words and do not strive with great effort and hardship, you naturally gather immediately necessary resources;

This shows how a person who practises morality does not need to work hard to gather all the necessary resources, nor do they need to cheat, bribe or deceive others. An example of using flattering words to acquire resources, or receive the same gift from others again, is saying to them soothingly, 'Remember the thing that you gave to me last time, which I found extremely useful.' By practising morality, you will not need to work so hard, and you will *naturally gather immediately necessary resources* without the need to engage in this kind of cunning and flattering speech

The text continues,

... even without threats of force all beings pay homage to you;

This is quite obviously saying that as a benefit of moral practice there is no need to use any forceful means to gain respect from others. Rather, as it says, you earn their respect and *without threats of force all beings pay homage to you*.

... there is no casual talk about the lineage of your relatives, etc.;

In addition to being respected by your relatives and close friends, even those who are unknown to you, or who you have not benefitted previously will also be kind to you.

... people who previously did not know you or help you are naturally kind to you; and deities and humans revere the dust of your footprint and carry away what they can get as an object of worship.

If we think about it, these lines about the benefit of practising moral ethics are very true. For example, we Tibetans collect the dust from the ground where His Holiness the Dalai Lama has walked, and keep it as a holy object of faith, paying homage to it. It is definitely possible for us to experience the benefit of practising moral ethics as described here. Otherwise there would be no point in talking about it.

If we reflect on these lines, we can understand the positive impact the practice of morality has, not only on the person, but also on the place where the person resides. Both are suitable objects of homage. As it says here, even the dust under the feet of the person practising morality is an object of veneration by humans and deities. In old Tibet, at the end of the great prayer festival, a lot of ordinary nomads used to rush to collect the dust from the ground where the festival was held, which they took as a holy object for taking refuge and paying homage.

As we read and study this text, we must also try to relate our understanding to our practice. This is very important. We have to see that this text is a spiritual instruction and a spiritual guide. We all wish for a better future, and what this is saying is that if we aspire for a better future then we have to observe the practice of moral ethics and safeguard our moral practice.

The text gives another quote from the *Compendium of Perfections*:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Even without speaking or undertaking hardship
You gather immediate necessities and service.
Without threat all the world pays homage to you;

You obtain power effortlessly and without toil.

You are among those about whom it is improper to talk casually.

Even all persons who you did not know previously,
Who have not helped you or done what you need,
Pay homage to you, a person with ethical discipline.

Excellent beings revere the dust blessed by your feet,
Touching their heads to it; deities and humans bow down to it,

Place it on the crowns of their heads, and carry away what they can get.

Therefore, one who has ethical discipline is in the supreme lineage.

Basically, this summarises the benefits of the practice of moral ethics that we have discussed. With the practice of moral ethics, all the necessary resources and wealth come to us naturally or automatically, not requiring any hard work from our own side. Similarly, we gain respect from others naturally and automatically, without imposing or forcing ourselves upon them.

In short, as it says in the last line, *therefore, one who has ethical discipline is in the supreme lineage.*

The text continues:

The wise who reflect well on these benefits and grave consequences must safeguard their ethical discipline, as the *Compendium of the Perfections* explains.

Due to a craving for their own happiness, bodhisattvas
Will not compromise ethical disciplines, which must be protected.

And also:

Because you control yourself, you experience happiness;
Because you have the ornament praised by the learned,
you safeguard ethical discipline;
As you bring to perfection all the trainings,
Rely on ethical discipline completely and without pride.

Next the text states:

Moreover, after you have cleared away your mere fear of the miserable realms and your wish for the mere excellences of deities or humans, safeguard your ethical discipline for the sake of establishing all living beings in ethical discipline.

In this sentence, the text points out the kind of motivation you should have for practising moral ethics. It's saying there's a different way to consider our motivation. One motivation for practising moral ethics is the fear of taking rebirth in a lower realm, and finding a better rebirth such as a human or a godly being. It is also to establish all *beings in ethical discipline* or establish all other sentient beings into the state of complete enlightenment.

Another way is to think of our motivation for practising moral ethics as achieving the state of complete enlightenment to benefit all beings. As a benefit of our ethical practice, we will also find a good rebirth. Although the motivation for practising moral ethics is not intended to find a better rebirth for ourselves, we accomplish all our purposes automatically. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many other lamas quite often remark that if you direct your motivation or intention to benefitting other beings, then all your own interests and purposes will be accomplished automatically along the way. So, the automatic benefit of engaging in moral practice is the excellent rebirth that we need to rely upon in order to benefit others or to achieve full enlightenment.

The text continues:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Whoever aspires to establish in pure ethical discipline
Every living being in worlds beyond measure
And relies on ethical discipline to benefit the world
Is said to bring ethical discipline to perfection.

Therefore, clear away fear of the miserable realms
And the wish for the marvels of kingdoms and high status;

Safeguard a flawless ethical discipline, and depend on
Ethical discipline because you are striving for the welfare of the world.

We can clearly see here that Tsongkhapa's text is really a word by word commentary on these quotes from The *Compendium of the Perfections*. Having explained the benefit of practising moral ethics and the shortcomings of not practising moral ethics, the text now goes to the next section.

(c') The divisions of ethical discipline

There are three divisions of ethical discipline:

1. The ethical discipline of restraint
2. The ethical discipline of gathering virtue
3. The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings.

These three types of ethical discipline include all the deeds of bodhisattvas. We can talk about bodhisattva deeds in terms of either fulfilling the welfare of either oneself or the welfare of other sentient beings. Alternatively, we can talk about bodhisattva deeds in terms of ripening one's own continuum or ripening the continuum of other beings. In a way, the first type of ethical discipline of restraint pertains to the bodhisattva deeds for fulfilling one's own welfare or ripening one's own continuum. The other two types of ethical discipline encompass the bodhisattva deeds for fulfilling the welfare of other beings or ripening the continuum of other beings.

(1') The ethical discipline of restraint

The *Bodhisattva Levels* says the ethical discipline of restraint is the seven types of vows of individual liberation. Thus, given that there are those who have taken vows of individual liberation and are also keeping the bodhisattva vows, the ethical discipline of restraint is either the actual vows of individual liberation for the group of either laypersons or renunciates, or it is a practice of restraint and abstention that would be associated with those actual vows.

The *ethical discipline of restraint* with respect to bodhisattvas who have taken any of the individual liberation vows, which can be either ordination vows or lay vows, refers to the actual vow of individual liberation and any vows associated with it. The text continues:

Also, given that there are those who have taken the bodhisattva vows who are unsuited to be recipients of the vows of individual liberation, ...

This refers to those bodhisattvas who do not have an individual liberation vow. For these bodhisattvas:

... the ethical discipline of restraint is the practice of restraint and abstention that gives up any deed that is wrong by nature or any deed that is wrong by prohibition that would be associated with the vows of individual liberation.

The moral ethic of restraint that they possess refers to any ethical practice of restraint or refraining from negative actions which are negative by nature or which are prohibited moral codes. For those bodhisattvas without individual liberation vows, the ethical discipline of restraint

refers to the practice of *abstention that gives up any deed that is wrong by nature or any deed that is wrong by prohibition that would be associated with the vows of individual liberation.*

(2') The ethical discipline of gathering virtue

The text states:

The ethical discipline of gathering virtue means that you focus on virtues such as the six perfections and then develop the virtues that you have not developed in your mind, do not spoil the ones that you have already developed, and increase both of these even further.

The ethical discipline of gathering virtue refers to all your acts of virtue such as engaging in the six perfections within the context of the morality of abstaining from any harmful actions. Given the definition of ethical discipline as a mental attitude of abstention, the question of whether the individual who engages in the ethical discipline of gathering virtues should actually possess the mental attitude or thought of abstention or restraint is debatable. I would say it is not necessary to have a manifest thought of abstention or restraint, however the individual's deeds must be conjoined with the force of that moral thought.

3') The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings

The text continues:

The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings means that you focus on the welfare of eleven sorts of living beings, and then accomplish their aims in this and future lives in a suitable manner and without wrongdoing. Since I have already detailed these in my *Basic Path to Awakening*, you should definitely read that over and over again.

As homework please find out about the welfare of the eleven beings as described in the Tsongkhapa's *Basic Path to Awakening*, a commentary to Asanga's chapter on Ethics in *The Complete Bodhisattva*. Denis distributed a copy of this text last year, so you should find out about the eleven beings there. One of the eleven is helping those who suffer, and another is helping those who are ignorant of the method. In terms of practice, these eleven things can be integrated into practice in relation to an individual being, in other words to benefit each individual sentient being. Alternatively, the eleven can be taken to benefit eleven separate individual beings respectively. In not explaining the eleven to you now I'm not being stingy about giving Dharma to you. I want you to find out about these eleven by yourself as homework. I think studying and thinking about the topic before class is a very effective way of learning. Then what you hear from the teacher will complement and enrich your understanding. Students learn faster and more effectively when they study in this way.

At the same time, it is also important that after listening to or studying the teaching, you follow it up by reflecting on and recollecting what you have learned. You need to go through this process not just once but over and over again. This is what it takes to make the material really sink into your mind and have some effect in terms of subduing and calming the mind.

We face all kinds of problems in our life. Some problems are related to our physical health and others are related to our mental health. In order to overcome these problems, we have to apply the right remedies in our practice. If we do not apply the remedy thoroughly, then we won't be able to overcome our problems or illnesses.

Over the coming weekend we are running an Easter course, the theme of which is cultivating the bodhicitta mind which, as you all know, is a very important part of our spiritual practice. So, it would be good for you to do the course.

We often hear that first we should cultivate bodhicitta mind, and then, driven by that *bodhi* mind, engage in the deeds of a bodhisattva. We all consider ourselves to be followers of Mahayana Buddhism. Therefore, our core practice should be learning about and cultivating the bodhicitta mind. The spiritual benefits of bodhicitta practice are enormous. Even spending a short time trying to study bodhicitta will purify many negativities and accumulate much merit.

So, you must seize any opportunity to study and practise bodhicitta. Thinking of your situation from the point of view of your physical and mental health, as well as other external and internal life circumstances, you recognise your situation as being very conducive for practising Dharma. So you must make the best use of it. If you use your time for spiritual practice, you can be assured that your future rebirth will be a good one, better even than your current life.

Of course, I understand a lot of you have heard the teachings on the bodhicitta mind many times. However, you should study and reflect on it again and again, further developing and deepening your Dharma knowledge. For as long as our knowledge is not perfected, it needs to be further developed. Therefore, I encourage you to make the best use of your time and do the Easter Course if you can. There is no better way of using our time than studying the profound topic of the bodhicitta mind.

However, actually cultivating the bodhicitta mind is a tough call. Even a genuine thought of altruism or benefitting other beings is not easy. Let alone all sentient beings, or for that matter all human beings, or even of all people of faith, having such an altruistic thought is extremely rare. This is because most sentient beings have the mental attitude which is engrained with self-centredness. However, having said this, even if we spend a little time directing our mind towards bodhicitta, it's worthwhile and the benefit is enormous in terms of increasing our collection of merit and purifying negativities.

I am not teaching over the Easter weekend this year, so I want to say a few words to encourage you to utilise your time as much as possible for Dharma and spiritual practice. Whenever you study Dharma, reflect on its meaning such as by thinking about the bodhicitta mind. As a benefit of reflecting on a Dharma topic, you will find more calmness and happiness within your mind.

If you don't do any Dharma practice, and actively pursue worldly affairs then you are wasting your life and there will be no end to suffering as you go around and around the wheel of suffering. I meet some people who don't consider themselves to be spiritual believers. They come to seek my advice on how to solve their problems. They say they have plenty of money, a good job and all the rest, but they are confused and unhappy. They are not happy with their job, but they don't want to quit their job, saying they won't be happy not having anything to do. In a way they tell me their version of samsara, which is going around and around the vicious and perpetual cycle of suffering.

Essentially, the cause of their problems lies in the mental level, because most of the problems we experience are related to our mental and emotional wellbeing. As we all know, if we are not happy, or if we are extremely confused

and disturbed, then this can take a toll on our physical health.

On the other hand, if we improve our mental hygiene, then this can not only bring more meaning to our life in terms of more happiness, but it also helps to improve the hygiene of our body too.

I understand that people have different needs in their lives. If you have children or a family, you have to give time to them, but at the same time it's also important to recognise the importance of your own mental and physical wellbeing too. Taking all of this into account, find the time for learning Dharma. And even if you have already learnt it, it is still worthwhile to learn it again, and think about it over and over again. In this way your understanding will become deeper and more extensive.

Of course, as well as studying we also need to put Dharma into practice. Cultivating the bodhicitta mind depends on how much effort you put into your practice. If you put in enough effort, then it is possible that you can generate bodhicitta to the point where by simply hearing the term 'bodhicitta', your eyes will fill with tears and the hairs on your body will stand on end. If we could develop bodhicitta to that level, that would be most wonderful.

From time to time it's also good to think about what sort of person you were before you met the Dharma, and what sort of person you are now. In what way has the Dharma changed you as a person? Our mental attitude and way of thinking might have changed drastically due to the influence of Dharma. Our mental attitude might be a lot more positive, wholesome and loving now than it was before we met the Dharma. I would say the difference between then and now might be like the difference between the earth and the sky. Sometimes, you need to think like this to feel more positive about yourself and more motivated to follow Dharma practice.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering
Edit 2 by Adair Bunnett
Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

23 April 2018

Once again, try to cultivate the correct motivation for listening to this profound teaching by cultivating this thought: I wish to achieve complete enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings and for this purpose I will listen to the profound teaching and put it into practice.

It is important that we very clearly recognise the purpose of any activities that we undertake. The motivation here clearly shows us the purpose for listening to the teaching. It is also very important to be clear about our purpose whenever we engage in meditation practice.

As Lama Tsongkhapa said, we should first achieve calmness within our own mind, and only then will we be in a position to benefit other sentient beings. Therefore, if we think of engaging in any act of effectively benefiting others, we have to understand how important it is that we fully subdue our own mind and thus achieve mental peace and stability within ourselves. It is important that our purpose when we engage in spiritual practice is not related to fulfilling the temporary needs of daily life such as food, clothing and other mundane needs. If our concern is only related to mundane affairs, then let alone being able to properly engage in spiritual practice, we won't be able to achieve even these mundane purposes. Sometimes we are so obsessed with all of these mundane needs that we are not able to accomplish even that!

I am trying to emphasise the value of enriching ourselves with true mental peace and happiness. If we lack the richness of these inner qualities then no matter how good our external conditions are, or whatever success we achieve, all these external things will be of no real value to us – although that's not to say that they have no value at all.

Indeed, the reason why we engage in meditation practice is to enhance this mental peace and happiness. Through meditation practice we want to cultivate a very positive, wholesome state of mind, as opposed to the kind of mind that runs our life, which is dominated by mental afflictions or delusions, and where there is no happiness or peace.

(3') The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings (cont.)

The text states:

The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings means that you focus on the welfare of eleven sorts of living beings, and then accomplish their aims in this and future lives in a suitable manner and without wrongdoing. Since I have already detailed these in my *Basic Path to Awakening*, you should definitely read that over and over again.

The last few words of Tsongkhapa's advice is to *read it over and over again*, which is saying that engaging in spiritual practice and meditation once is not enough and we have to do it over and over again.

More specifically, we need to read Tsongkhapa's explanation of the eleven modes of benefiting sentient beings again and again. The early translators did a lot of

work to render the texts into various languages. So we should make every effort to study this text carefully and in this way honour the efforts the translator has made in order to make it available to us.

This text is available in English, which Denis has kindly shared with everyone. You will find Asanga's list on page 50, and pages 115 and 121-131 contain Lama Tsongkhapa's commentary on these.

If you have read that text, you will see that Lama Tsongkhapa hasn't just listed these eleven modes but has explained them in some detail under different sub-headings. I suggest you study the details of those eleven modes of benefiting sentient beings, and maybe use that as a theme for your next discussion session.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

30 April 2019

As usual, ensure that you relax yourself physically first. (*Tong-len meditation*)

Once again, try to reinforce your motivation. If we consider the purpose of engaging in meditation, it is to develop and safeguard our inner qualities, particularly our inner peace and happiness. Our inner qualities are not like our external possessions; we can share our possessions with others, and also lose them due to external causes. But we cannot share our inner qualities, or give them to others.

When we think about it, the conditions that make us lose our inner qualities lie within our mind. Whenever we give rise to negative or discursive states of mind – the mental afflictions – that’s when we lose our inner qualities.

If your partner or friend is unhappy, you may feel sorry for them and want to help them. But it isn’t easy to help another overcome their unhappiness and mental suffering. While you may be filled with joy and inner peace – which you may wish to share with your friend who is deprived of it – you cannot share it with them.

What we are getting at here is that, when we talk about inner peace and happiness, or inner suffering, each person has to undergo their own, individual experience. There is a limit to the outside help one can expect. Each of us has to create the causes for bringing about our own inner peace. Then, having found that inner peace, we are responsible for safeguarding and maintaining it.

When we speak of mental and physical happiness in our life, the more important of these is mental happiness. We have discussed this in the past – how we can lack happiness, despite being surrounded by favourable conditions.

It is good to give some thought to whether we enjoy happiness or not, in terms of both mental and physical happiness, because that’s what we always seek in life. Possessing good physical health depends on the actions we undertake to achieve it; in fact, we have no shortage of knowledge of what we should and shouldn’t do to improve our physical health. We are doing quite well in terms of maintaining the health of our bodies.

Where we are lagging is in improving the health of our mind and thereby enjoying more inner happiness. In fact, inner happiness is more important for our wellbeing than outer or material happiness. When we talk about having a happy life, we are not so much talking about outer happiness, but about how much inner happiness we enjoy.

Therefore, it is important to see whether you have such happiness. If you do have it, you should acknowledge it, and remind yourself to feel positive about it and contented with it, recognising its value and cherishing it. If you recognise its value, you will maintain that happiness. Even in the face of any change in your circumstances, you will still remember the value of that happiness, and do whatever it takes to keep it.

For example, sometimes when we face an adverse situation, we become so mentally and emotionally entangled that we can easily lose what peace and happiness we have within us. It is important to always maintain our inner calmness, resilience and happiness. If we enjoy inner happiness, we will always find ourselves in a state of happiness, regardless of what we do, or where we go and who we are with.

On the other hand, if we lack inner happiness, it will be difficult for anything to make us happy. No matter what we do or acquire, or whatever success we have, somehow, inside, there will always be a feeling of emptiness. Deep down, we will feel that something, some favourable condition, is missing, even if we are surrounded by favourable conditions.

Therefore, the question of how successful we are in our lives should also be measured by our progress on a mental level – that is very important. When we develop a good mental quality, for example, we should feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Whereas if we measure our success only against our material or external development, no matter how much we develop along that path, there is no guarantee that we can say we are doing well and that we have become more satisfied, contented and happy.

If we look into the main cause that brings us inner happiness, as we always say, it is cultivating a positive mental attitude, such as a good heart towards others: developing love and compassion for other beings. We can understand this from our own experience of showing love and caring thoughts towards others.

The positive inner qualities, in the form of wholesome mental attitudes that we cultivate within us, counteract or reduce the mental afflictions, such as anger, pride and competitiveness, which serve as a source of unhappiness and suffering. The more we decrease our mental afflictions, the more inner peace and happiness we will experience.

This discussion is to remind us that the purpose of engaging in meditation practice is to overcome the mental afflictions and develop positive attitudes. When we understand how the experience of happiness or suffering depends on the various states of mind that arise within us, we will understand the benefits of meditation practice, because meditation practice enables us to get rid of states of mind that disturb us and destabilise our mental peace and happiness.

Meditation practice is the most effective tool we have for enhancing inner peace and happiness. This is because, when we engage in meditation practice we are directing our mind single-pointedly, with one-hundred-percent attention, on the meditation object. When the mind is fixed on the meditation object, the arising of mental afflictions will cease. While it’s not necessarily the case that we’ll overcome the seed of those mental afflictions through the meditation session, at least we will prevent afflictions from manifesting within our continuum. When there are no mental afflictions arising, it will leave our mind in a state of peace and happiness.

Meditation practice should also benefit us even when we are not meditating, such as during the post-meditation period, we are more aware or mindful of our thoughts and actions. As a benefit of our awareness and mindfulness, we will be more alert or vigilant, and able to recognise any mental afflictions emerging when we confront adverse situations.

This, in itself, is beneficial in reducing the influence of the mental afflictions on our thoughts and deeds.

As we said before, it is important to be clear about the purpose of meditation, which is to counteract mental afflictions. Therefore, as part of our meditation practice, we also need to have a good understanding of the disadvantages of mental afflictions.

For example, we should see how, the moment a mental affliction such as anger arises in our mind, we immediately lose our peace and happiness. One moment you're mentally happy, but the next, you lose your temper with your friend or partner. Therefore, we need to try and recognise the faults of the mental afflictions, and ensure that our meditation practice is always aimed at counteracting them.

In terms of benefiting others, there is no way we can act beneficially if we hold anger or hatred towards them. Even though tantric texts talk about transforming hatred as a means of benefiting others, it is almost impossible for us to do this. Anger is unlike other mental afflictions, such as desire or attachment, which have the effect of bringing people towards us, and in some ways enable us to benefit others. Anger, on the other hand, has the nature of destroying things.

As to the commentary, last time we finished under the heading:

(c') The divisions of ethical discipline

(3') The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings (cont.)

The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings means that you focus on the welfare of eleven sorts of living beings, and then accomplish their aims in this and future lives in a suitable manner and without wrongdoing. Since I have already detailed these in my *Basic Path to Awakening*, you should definitely read that over and over again.

As I mentioned in the last session, you should discuss the eleven modes of accomplishing the welfare of other beings in the next group discussion session. I will let you know the timing of the discussion night. As usual, Denis will coordinate the discussion night and Ross could prepare more on the list of eleven and some subdivisions within it. You can also refer to the section of the perfection of moral ethics in other lam-rim texts, such as *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, which mentions the eleven benefits.

To continue:

Therefore, since the rules of the vows of individual liberation are one aspect of the precepts for renunciates who have taken the bodhisattva vows, they are not set off apart from the precepts for bodhisattvas.

Also, within the three divisions of ethical discipline, the ethical discipline of restraint – the actual rules of the individual liberation vows or the practice of engaging in what is to be adopted and rejecting what is to be cast aside that would be associated with these vows – is initially very important even for bodhisattvas, so train in this.

The Bodhisattva Levels' Compendium of Determinations states:

Among the three aspects of ethical discipline, the ethical discipline of restraint includes and reaches to the other two; when you are bound by it and safeguard it, you will be bound by the other two and safeguard them as well, and when you are

neither bound by nor protect it, you will not be bound by the other two nor safeguard them. Consequently, it is said that if bodhisattvas' ethical discipline of restraint degenerates, all their vows degenerate.

These lines emphasise the importance of observing the ethical discipline of restraint or vows [of individual liberation] by stating that if we abide by this moral ethic of restraint, we will also be abiding by the other types of moral discipline. On the other hand, if we don't observe this ethical discipline of restraint or vows, then we will also be degenerating or weakening the other two types of ethical discipline.

So, when we engage in the practice of ethics, we must engage in the ethical discipline of restraint or vows which serves as the basis or foundation on which we are able to develop the practice of the other two ethical disciplines.

The text now continues; the meaning of this text is quite clear if you read it:

If you think that the vows of individual liberation are for *śravakas*, and if you cast aside their prescriptive and proscriptive rules and say, "There are other precepts, bodhisattva precepts, to train in," then you have not grasped the key point of the bodhisattva training in ethical discipline, for it is often said that the ethical discipline of restraint is the basis and source of the next two types of ethical discipline.

This paragraph clearly implies the importance of observing the vows of individual liberation, even for a bodhisattva, to the point that, for anyone to think a bodhisattva precept is something other than observing the individual liberation vows, that indicates their lack of understanding of the key practice of the bodhisattva precepts.

Furthermore, the principal aspect of the ethical discipline of restraint is abstaining from deeds that are wrong by nature.

Here, the *deeds that are wrong by nature* refers to deeds that are called in Tibetan *ka.na ma.to.wae.le* – deeds that are wrong or negative *by their nature*, meaning whoever commits those deeds, even if they are a renunciate or ordained, is committing a moral transgression. By contrast, there are certain deeds that we call prescribed vows (or codes). When those who have taken such vows transgress them, they only accrue a misdeed, while others who don't possess these vows won't accrue a misdeed, even if they commit the same deed. So that's the meaning of 'wrong by nature'.

Moreover, it is taught in all the vehicles, higher and lower, that this abstention from deeds that are wrong by nature is the abstention from the ten non-virtues, which comprise the crux of the major faults of the deeds that are wrong by nature.

The text is emphasising that, if you go into detail regarding the ethical discipline of restraint, the main discipline is that of restraining from deeds that are negative and wrong by nature, such as the ten non-virtuous actions.

You must correctly restrain yourself physically, verbally, and mentally by not allowing a flicker of mere motivation for these non-virtues.

Here, the text further emphasises the importance of refraining from any deeds that are negative or wrong by nature, primarily the ten non-virtuous actions.

Technically, when we talk about the ten virtues or non-virtues in Tibetan, we don't use the term karma or action,

which in Tibetan is *le*. Hence, it is not accurate to say ten virtuous or non-virtuous 'actions'. In fact, the term action or *le* or karma primarily refers to the mental factor of volition or intention.

If we look at the list of the ten non-virtues or negativities, there are three of body – physically refraining from the act of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. Then there are four verbal: refraining from lying, slandering, harsh speech and idle gossip; and three of mind – mentally refraining from covetousness, harmful thought and wrong view. We have come across this topic many times in the past.

So when we talk about Buddhist ethics, refraining from the act of killing is taught first. We can understand why it is listed first, because we can all understand how precious life is for everyone. There is no more harm that we can cause to another than bringing an end to their life. This is followed by no stealing – again, for all of us, our wealth and possessions are also very important to us, so refraining from stealing is the next important ethical practice. Refraining from sexual misconduct is also important for the wellbeing of ourselves and others.

In terms of moral practice, here we are not just talking about not committing, for example, the act of killing – although, of course, it is very important that we do not commit an act of killing, as not killing is a virtue. However, what is pointed out here is that we cultivate the intention to refrain from engaging in the act of killing – this is the true meaning of this practice of ethical discipline. With such a thought or intention of restraint, our act of refraining from or avoiding misdeeds makes more sense, and our practice of moral ethics yields more benefits. When the text says *by not allowing a flicker of mere motivation for these non-virtues* it means that, even on a mental level, we have no thought of engaging in non-virtue.

From one perspective, when we think of the practice of morality or ethics, the challenge is not so much our lack of ability to engage in ethics. Rather, the challenge for us is to put some effort into understanding what the practice of ethics truly means – which is bearing a sense of moral restraint within our continuum all the time. For example, in terms of refraining from the act of killing, for most of us, there is little need for us to engage in killing. Likewise, there are other wrong deeds we don't need to engage in. Rather, here we need to understand what the ethical discipline of, say, refraining from killing means, as well as cultivating awareness of the shortcomings of committing such non-virtues. Recognising the shortcomings of the non-virtues is the key, and we have to develop this understanding.

Otherwise, we may consider ourselves a Dharma student or spiritual practitioner, but in fact lack a constant, conscious awareness of Dharma practice, such as refraining from non-virtues. Instead, we may have thoughts of wanting to commit non-virtues, and may regret being unable to do certain non-virtues. So, in reality, the way we live our life may contradict our spiritual or Dharma practice.

The text goes into the benefits of observing ethical discipline. This is something we can all easily recognise. If we talk about the peace, stability and safe environment of a country, obviously where there are rampant acts of people killing each other, lying to each other and stealing things, nobody will feel a sense of peace, freedom and happiness. On the other hand, in a country where people adhere to the rule of law and order and the principles of non-violence and compassion – where there is no killing or acts of violence –

there will be peace and stability and everybody can feel free to do things without fear and threat.

The text continues:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

Do not let these ten paths of action degenerate;
They are the path to the joys of high status or liberation.

Here, *high status* refers to higher rebirth as a human or celestial being. And *liberation* refers to either liberation from cyclic existence, or the liberation of complete enlightenment. These two lines are really saying that those who want to find the joy of a good rebirth as a human being in the future should follow the practice of the ten virtues. Likewise, those who wish to achieve liberation from cyclic existence or complete enlightenment should also follow the ten paths of virtuous action.

By maintaining these you reach your goals, which are
Special contemplations wherein you think of helping beings.

So, having established oneself on the right path leading to the desired goal, one can then benefit others and help them find the same path and the same result.

Correctly restrain your speech, body, and mind;
The Conqueror said, "This, in brief, is ethical discipline."
This is the basis that comprises all ethical discipline,
So train in this restraint.

The term *basis* here refers to ethical discipline as a basis for achieving all the excellent qualities. In some other scriptures, such as Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend*, 'ground' is used as an analogy to explain the benefits of moral ethics for growing all the excellent qualities. They all refer to the same thing.

The text continues:

The master Candrakirti also explains the practice of the perfection of ethical discipline as abstaining from the ten non-virtues in the chapter on the perfection of ethical discipline of his *Explanation of the "Middle Way" Commentary*, and such explanations also occur in many sutras such as the Sutra on the Ten Levels. Therefore, if you initially train your mind in such restraint as presented above, you easily accomplish the remaining two types of ethical discipline.

(d') How to practice

You practice the three types of ethical discipline in association with the six supremacies and the six perfections. When you practice in association with the six perfections, the generosity of ethical discipline is establishing others in ethical discipline after you have stabilized yourself in it. The remaining perfections are as presented before.

(e') A summary

Not to weaken and to increase steadily the spirit of enlightenment is the basis of the bodhisattva deeds – it is the root of engaging in deeds of ethical discipline and so forth.

Here, the text is saying that engaging in the bodhisattva deeds, such as the deeds of ethical discipline, is the paramount cause of developing the spirit of enlightenment or bodhicitta – which is like the root – and also of preventing it from degenerating.

It is also the best way to desist from harming any living being.

As part of our practice of ethical discipline, we commit ourselves to not causing any harm to other beings. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often advises people to make a pledge or resolve: 'If I am not able to benefit others, I will at least not cause any harm to them'.

Aspire to practice the ethical discipline of those at high levels and then train your mind in it.

Here, we are talking about the practice of ethical discipline as part of the bodhisattvas' practice at a very high or advanced level. As it is too difficult for us at the moment to apply this high level of ethical discipline in practice, we can at least practise through aspirational prayer - by sincerely aspiring, wishing and praying that one day we may be able to follow all the practices of ethical discipline at high levels.

Sincerely learn right now what to adopt and what to cast aside, starting with the ethical discipline of a beginning bodhisattva. In particular, each day frequently exercise an attitude of restraint with respect to what you know about deeds that are wrong by nature such as the ten non-virtues - and deeds that are wrong by prohibition. Among these also strive again and again to apply an attitude of restraint toward the fundamental transgressions of the vow to which you are committed. Once you do this, you will be able to complete the bodhisattva training in another lifetime as a causally concordant behavioral effect, with little difficulty and with little suffering. However, if you neglect these things now, you will be continually tainted by very grave faults and transgressions, and moreover for many lives you will be unable to learn the bodhisattvas' trainings. So from now on strive at these practices.

The great Lama Tsongkhapa has summarised very well the essence of ethical discipline in this section. So it is good to read and reflect upon the contents of this last paragraph.

We will leave tonight's talk here, and next week we will go on to the topic of developing patience.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

7 May 2019

We will begin with our usual meditation on giving and taking. *[meditation]*

As much as possible, try to generate a very good motivation for receiving these teachings. Any motivation that we generate before we begin an activity will guide and direct us, so if the motivation is a good one, then the deeds that follow it will also be good.

In a sense a motivation is a thought or intention that you will engage in a deed for a particular purpose, and this motivation drives you to engage in that deed. In Tibetan terms, action or karma is called *las* which can be either an intention karma or action, or an intended karma or action, referring to a mental factor of intention or volition that motivates or directs our mind towards its object. Intention karma is a thought that motivates us to engage in verbal or bodily deeds prior to engaging in those deeds. Whereas, intended karma is a mental factor of intention that is concomitant with our mind at the time of engaging in the deeds.

Simply put, the content of this thought or intention action is a spiritual guide for us in terms of indicating the kinds of actions that are to be accepted, and those that are to be rejected. The driving thought or intention action can be beneficial and positive, or it can be harmful and negative. Whether the intended actions and deeds that follow the intention actions are good or bad is predetermined by the intention actions, whether they are good or bad.

If the thought which is the intention action says to us that we should engage in a spiritual practice, such as doing prostrations or making offerings to the Three Jewels, or the thought says to help some other being, then obviously that thought is directed towards the right kind of actions that need to be adopted. Conversely, if the thought influences one to cause harm to other beings, for example, then one has to understand and recognise that one should not engage in that action and overcome that thought. In this way, we can change our deeds, behaviours and personality by understanding and changing the volitional thought or intention that presides over our deeds.

This is what I try to practice all the time, and we have discussed it in the past many times. Essentially our spiritual practice is to look into our mind, and through controlling and disciplining our mind, we develop ourselves in terms of finding more happiness and reducing suffering.

In this context we can clearly understand the Buddhist view that all the happiness and suffering that we experience in our lives is derived from our own thoughts and our own state of mind. When we understand how all of our actions are predetermined by our state of mind, we can understand how the mind is the source of our experience of happiness and suffering.

Regarding the text we are studying, I'm assuming that all of you at least know what the six perfections are. Tonight, we begin with the perfection of patience.

THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE

(iii) How to train in the perfection of patience

The explanation of how to train in the perfection of patience has five parts:

When you look at these five headings, or outlines, you will see that they are very similar to the outlines used in the explanation of the perfection of ethical discipline. These outlines cover everything we need to understand about the meaning of patience, as well as how to practice it.

The five divisions are:

1. What patience is

This introduces the nature of patience as a mental attitude.

2. How to begin the cultivation of patience

This shows how to engage in the practice of patience or in meditating on patience. Then having understood this, it goes on to show,

3. The divisions of patience

This covers the different types of patience.

4. How to practice

This explains what you actually do at the time of engaging in the practice of patience.

5. A summary

So, you can see how the outlines in the presentation on patience are the same as those in the presentation of ethical discipline, and how they show us the essential points of this topic.

(a') What patience is

Generally, we say that patience is an ability to not be mentally disturbed or affected when receiving any harm or confronting suffering in some way. It's a state of mind that is not affected by or disturbed or annoyed when afflicted with any form of harm or suffering.

When we talk about patience, we are talking about being patient with something. So, the question is being patient with what? It means being patient with any harm that we receive from others, or when facing any adverse circumstances. For instance, being able to be patient when somebody speaks harshly, or shows you a really angry gesture.

In terms of the time of practising patience, the most important time we need to practise patience is when we are mentally unhappy and unstable, or when we face an adverse situation. If we observe our experiences, we can see that when we easily lose our temper, become angry, react and throw tantrums it is usually a time when we are not in a good mood, not up to our normal self or when we are unhappy. In those times it doesn't take much for us to be provoked and lose our temper. Therefore, if we are able to practise patience in times of doom and gloom, then we can be more appreciative of the benefits of our Dharma practice.

What we have to understand here is that when we talk of practising patience, we are really talking in terms of patience as lying within us. Patience doesn't simply mean that when you confront some adverse condition or circumstance, such as if somebody says something mean to you or does something hurtful to you, that you externally

stay very quiet and passive while internally you are boiling with resentment and hatred. That's not being patient at all. In fact, you are more impatient because you are holding a grudge. That's why some people say that practising patience or tolerance is painful. Yes, it can be painful, but you definitely are not practising patience if you are holding onto hatred or resentment. On the other hand, I know a lot of students here who have been applying patience to their real-life situations. I have seen them finding the benefit of the practice of patience. When speaking of the benefits of patience, you don't necessarily have to talk about life stories of past great lamas. In fact, we can observe the benefits by observing the people who we know practice patience and who are good at it. There are some people that I know here who have been able to turn past objects of hatred and suffering into an object of forgiveness, love and compassion, and thereby experience joy and happiness.

By applying this practice of patience, and even trying to engage in the giving and taking meditation practice like we did at the beginning of the session, you can transform hurtful things that happened in the past which have caused you a lot of pain, into something very positive, which brings joy to your mind. Through applying such Dharma practice to our lives, we are able to transform adverse situations into favourable ones that give us joy and happiness. That is the real benefit or the blessing of the Dharma that results from our Dharma practice. Without putting the Dharma into practice, you don't receive any Dharma blessing or benefits.

On the other hand, if we lack the practice of Dharma, then whenever unavoidable things occur, for example if we get very sick or confront a very adverse situation, we would then worry too much. This worry adds more suffering to whatever hardship we are already experiencing. So, our situation will become even worse. Sometimes, the difficult situation then becomes too much for us to manage.

So, no matter what we face externally, if we are able to remain calm, strong and clear internally, then we can pass through any hurdles of life and maintain stable peace and happiness. And for safeguarding inner peace, happiness and clear thinking, there is no means more effective and beneficial than Dharma practice. Dharma practice is done within the context of each and every individual's mental continuum. Hence, when we talk here about the practice of patience, the essential point is cultivating and developing patience within our own mind.

Based on our own life experience we have to try to see the benefit that the Dharma brings to our life, and the changes that it brings to our life. Through following Dharma practice, we can expect that we will gain more excellent qualities and become a better person than we were before we met the Dharma. We should also aim to gain more excellent qualities in a year than we have now. In other words, the more we follow Dharma practice, the more spiritual qualities and realisations we will develop, and the more qualities we develop, the fewer faults we possess. In this way, we can get some idea of our ability to increase excellent qualities and decrease faults, and thereby establish the possibility of achieving the complete state of enlightenment, which is the supreme state where one is free of all flaws and faults, and perfectly completed with all the excellent qualities.

Returning to the text:

(a') What patience is

Patience is (1) disregarding harm done to you, ...

This can be understood in the sense of being not concerned about, or annoyed by the harm done to you, and not retaliating to any such harm. This is called *the patience of disregarding harm*

Then,

... (2) accepting the suffering arising in your mind-stream, ...

As it clearly says, patience means being able to voluntarily accept suffering. This will be explained in detail a bit later on. Of the three types of patience, this is the *patience of accepting suffering*.

This is very important because we perpetually undergo some form of suffering in our life due of our inability to accept or cope with suffering and difficulties. Therefore, it is very important to be able to develop a good understanding of this type of patience so we will be more able to tolerate suffering and not be completely overwhelmed by it.

The text continues:

... and (3) being certain about the teachings and firmly maintaining belief in them.

It is important to develop this patience of being certain about the teachings, and firmly maintain our belief in them. This is the *patience of definitely thinking about the Dharma*. For example, if we are studying the view of selflessness, we need to maintain our focus, interest, and enthusiasm in order to gain an understating of the subject matter. Of course, this needs a great deal of patience so that our mind doesn't waver from faith and interest in the Dharma. The patience of definitely thinking about the Dharma means an ability to firmly maintain one's faith and interest in Dharma practice.

The text continues,

There are three sets of factors incompatible with these: ...

This is talking about the three opposites of the three types of patience just listed. The detail about all this comes later on so we won't go through it now.

In brief it says here:

... for the first, hostility;

If we lack the first patience, the patience of disregarding harm done to you, then we will be easily provoked by any harm that we receive from others. We will usually become angry or lose our temper, and animosity will naturally arise.

Next:

... for the second, hostility and loss of courage;

When we face a certain degree of suffering to the point that we are unable to accept personal loss or the suffering becomes intolerable, then we will become very frustrated, feel deeply hurt, disturbed and annoyed. At the same time, we become very angry and feel hostile.

As well as this, as the text says, our mind becomes filled with these unpleasant thoughts and unhappiness, so we also feel depressed and lose our mental spirit and courage. The text uses the Tibetan term *Sro shi.ba* which can be literally translated as dying of spirit or passion, meaning loss of courage.

Continuing:

... and for the third, disbelief and dislike.

Those of you who have been studying the Dharma will know how, if you lack interest or motivation in learning, then you will not be able to develop faith in your learning and in your practice, and then you may completely lose

interest in your practice. There are many cases where people start following the Dharma and then completely give it up.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama quite often comments that the best way to tackle problems is to fully engage in the method for solving problems, and the best thing that he has learned from difficulties is that accepting the difficulties is the most effective means of overcoming difficulties.

The text continues:

Perfecting patience means that you simply complete your conditioning to a state of mind wherein you have stopped your anger and the like. It is not contingent upon all living beings becoming free from undisciplined conduct because you would not be able to bring this about, and because you accomplish your purpose just by disciplining your own mind.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Undisciplined persons are as limitless as space;
You could never overcome them.
If you conquer the single mental state of anger
It is like vanquishing all your enemies.

Where could you get enough leather
To cover the entire surface of the earth?
Wearing just the leather of your sandals
Is like covering all the earth.

We have already discussed these lines in the past and if you just read them, they are quite self-explanatory. In the first two lines Shantideva is explaining how to defeat the true enemy. If we target the external object of harm as our true enemy, instead of recognising that the true enemy lies within us in the form of anger or hatred, then, as it says here, as *undisciplined persons are as limitless as space; you could never overcome them*. If we see an external object or harm as our enemy, and try to win them over, then we will never be able to win because the number of such external enemies are, as it says here as *limitless as space*.

If, however, you conquer the single mental state of anger, it is like vanquishing all your enemies. If we recognise that our true enemy is our anger or the hostile mental attitude within us, then defeating it is equivalent to defeating all enemies. In other words, if we conquer our true enemy, our inner enemy such as anger, then there will be no more enemies.

We can observe this from our own experience. Someone who is very short-tempered and who becomes very angry very easily will upset many other people and will be viewed by a lot of people as an enemy. Whereas someone who practises patience, who is very tolerant and patient with things and people, actually draws people closer to them and so they don't have any enemies.

The lines beginning Shantideva's second verse, *where could you get enough leather to cover the entire surface of the earth* is an analogy showing how we need to defeat the inner enemy of anger in order to defeat all enemies. It is saying here that if we were to walk across to the other side of ground covered by thorns, it would be rather stupid to try *to cover the entire surface of the earth with leather to protect every being as you could not get enough leather to cover the earth's surface*. *Wearing just the leather of your sandals* to cover your own feet is the equivalent of covering the whole ground with leather. Likewise, conquering the anger within us is equal to conquering all enemies.

The quote from Shantideva continues:

Similarly, I cannot change
External things, but when
I can change my state of mind,

Why do I need to change anything else?

It is a waste of time trying to get rid of all undesirable things, because there is no end to them. However, as it says, *I can change*. If you *can change* your own *state of mind*, then there's no need for you to do anything to change the external circumstances, because once you have completely subdued your own state of mind, you have accomplished your purpose and there is no need to make any changes because there is no more any unfavourable situation or object to confront.

The text continues:

(b') How to begin the cultivation of patience

Although there are many ways to cultivate patience, to begin I will explain the meditation on the benefits of patience and the faults of not being patient.

This is saying that in order to engage in the practice of patience, we first need to reflect on the benefits of patience, and then reflect on the faults of anger. In this way, as we become more aware of the benefits of patience then we will be inspired and motivated to engage in the practice of patience, and as well as developing a greater understanding of the faults and shortcomings of anger, we will be then more motivated to challenge and counteract anger when it arises.

I will just read the next part of the text as it is quite self-explanatory.

The benefits are set forth in the *Bodhisattva Levels*:

Initially, bodhisattvas consider the benefits of patience. They think, "Persons who have patience will not have many enemies later on and will not have many separations from those to whom they are close. They will have much happiness and contentment. They will have no regret at the time of death, and upon the disintegration of their bodies they will also be reborn among the deities in the happy realms of high status." By looking at such benefits, they too are patient. They engage others in upholding patience, and they also praise patience. When they see patient persons, they are delighted and full of joy.

The text continues:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

It is said, "Patience is the best approach
For dealing with the inclination to disregard others'
welfare";

This is saying that patience acts like armour to safeguard our benevolent thoughts of benefitting other sentient beings.

Patience against the fault of anger protects
All that is excellent in this world.

As it says, patience is the source of all the possible excellent qualities that are achievable in this life and in future lives. It protects all these excellent qualities or goodness from harm caused by anger and hatred.

Patience is the best ornament of the powerful,
The greatest strength for those who practice asceticism,
And a stream of water on the wildfire of malice.
Patience clears away much harm in this and future
lives.
The arrows of undisciplined people's words
Are dulled by a superior being's armour of patience;

Through the armour of patience, the arrows of the harm that you receive from others (such as harsh speech) are all transformed into attractive flowers.

These unruly people then give pleasant flowers of praise
Which become attractive garlands of fame.

And also:

Patience is also the craftsman that creates a buddha's
embodiment of form,
Adorned with the beautiful signs of good qualities.

This indicates that as a result of the practice of patience, we
can find a very pleasant body in this life in a short period of
time, and ultimately find the excellent bodies of a
saṃbhogakaya and nirmanakaya buddha fully endowed
with all the major and minor marks of a buddha,

Lama Tsongkhapa explains the meaning of the previous
verses as follows:

Thus, Aryasura praises patience by way of its many
benefits: it stops you from turning away from others'
welfare on account of living beings' misperceptions; it
protects you from anger, the enemy that destroys many
roots of virtue;

As this clearly indicates, whenever anger arises, it has the
capacity to extinguish our virtues. However, we can protect
our virtues with the practice of patience.

... it is a captivating ornament because it endures the harm
of those of little power;

This line conveys quite a powerful meaning. Normally we
lack patience when we are harmed by a weaker living being.
For example, if a tiny mosquito lands on our hand, we won't
tolerate it and without a second thought we will just slap
and kill it. Whereas if we are bullied by a very strong
person, we will be very scared and won't have a word to say
or the guts to express our anger.

As it says here, if we develop practice of patience, then we'll
extend our practice even to those weaker beings or those
with little power who bring harm to us.

... it is the excellent strength of ascetics who are tormented
by the afflictions; it is a stream of water that extinguishes
the wildfire of malice; it is armor that cannot be pierced by
the arrows of undisciplined persons' misperceptions; it is
the skilled artisan who creates a fine form of golden color
that captivates the eyes and minds of beings.

This relates to the meaning of the above quotations.

Furthermore, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says: in this
way through the various ways the practice of patience is
highly commended, or highly praised.

Continuing with the text:

Furthermore, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Whoever works hard and overcomes anger
Is happy in this and future lives.

In the next paragraph you can see the great Tsongkhapa's
profound explanation of these two lines.

When you rely on patience continually, you do not spoil
your joyful attitude, so you are always happy even in this
life.

With the words *whoever works hard and overcomes anger* is
happy, he's talking about how the practice of patience can
ensure happiness in this life and in future lives.

Moreover, patience stops miserable rebirths in future lives,
gives special rebirths in happy realms, and ultimately
bestows certain goodness, so you are utterly happy in this
and future lives.

Meditate on these benefits until you gain a strong, firm
certainty about the cause-and-effect relationship wherein
benefits such as these arise from patience.

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

14 May 2019

As usual we will do some meditation first.

[Tonglen meditation]

We should all begin with the right motivation, so that when we either listen to or give a teaching, it serves the purpose of the Dharma.

Last week, we talked about the benefits of patience and the benefits of engaging in meditation practice. Essentially, the main benefit of meditation is that it enables us to calm our mind when it is disturbed and unstable – by relying on our practice, we know what to do when our mind is disturbed and agitated. However, if we lack an understanding of meditation practice, that is another story. In that case, when we are confronted with an agitated and disturbed state of mind, we will be completely ignorant and confused about what to do. We might turn to some other method, such as taking medication.

For our practice to be beneficial, it is not enough to simply know about meditation. Rather, we need to put our knowledge into practice. For example, when our mind is agitated or disturbed, we need to apply our understanding of meditation into practice – that is, to overcome or prevent that agitated state of mind, we need to direct our mental attention to a virtuous object. When we apply that knowledge, we can see how, the moment our mind rests in that object of meditation, we will really begin to feel our mind relax. Therefore, this knowledge gives us a positive motivation to engage in meditation practice. As the term ‘meditation’ [*gom* = to familiarise] implies, we need to apply the practice of meditation every time we are faced with a very agitated or disturbed mind. By doing this, we will become more familiar with the practice, and it will get easier over time.

Each one of us who follows a meditation practice must recognise the benefit of doing so. We must see how following such a practice enables us to achieve what we want and avoid what we do not want. Therefore, when we talk about gaining the benefits of meditation practice, as I said before, it is not enough to simply listen to Dharma or teach it to others. Rather, for an individual to really gain benefit, he or she must practise meditation and integrate their Dharma knowledge into everyday life.

As to learning about meditation practice, it is more important to utilise your rational, intelligent mind, and analyse what you know and what you have learned about the Dharma, rather than just listening to someone talk or reading a text. Through this process of utilising your power of discriminating wisdom or intelligence, the understanding that you develop is much firmer, more reliable and more definitive. On the other hand, if your understanding merely depends on someone’s hearsay or what you’ve heard from others, your understanding is not that stable.

Meditation practice has real benefits to offer us, not just as individuals, but to families and to society at large. For

example, if you look closely at our affluent, materialistic and materially developed society, the kinds of problems and difficulties people experience are primarily related to their minds being agitated, disturbed or confused. If we consider the most effective means or tools we have for overcoming emotional or mental problems, it is really meditation practice.

Of course, if the problems we face are more to do with our physical health, then meditation is not that relevant. For example, if somebody is undergoing a terminal illness, simply telling that person to meditate is not going to cure the illness and delay the death. Similarly, if you advise people who are starving to do meditation practice, that will not overcome their hunger, nor will their appetite be appeased. The exception here is advanced meditators who have gained a high state of meditative concentration: they are less dependent on physical needs, such as food, that we normally depend on to sustain our health and wellbeing. So, if our problem is related to our physical condition, it is a separate issue. But when it is related to our mind, we can see that the most effective means to solve the problem is really meditation practice, which focuses on changing our mind.

I have given a lot of thought to the matter of how our problems in life can be reduced and overcome by simply training our mind; I also have a great deal of knowledge and personal experience about this matter. What really helps us overcome our mental unhappiness or problems? To manage our problems, we need to find within ourselves our own support system, or what we call an ‘inner friend’. I can categorically say, from my own experience, that if you find that inner friend within yourself then, regardless of whether you are alone or with others, you will always be assured of inner peace and happiness. It can also safeguard you from outer causes of harm and disturbance, such as when someone provokes you. When you have the advantage of this inner friend, your mind cannot be harmed. This inner friend can serve as a shield to protect your mental peace and happiness from any adversary.

Speaking of outer problems or difficulties, I could say that I have been through a lot of that kind of hardship. So, when I talk about the benefit and effectiveness of meditation practice, I am not just saying it because I have clairvoyant power! Rather, the things I say here are derived from my own life experiences. If you observe your own life, you can see how, most of the time, your problems are creations or projections of your own mind. When we recognise and understand this, we will then understand that to overcome the problem, we need to change our way of thinking.

In fact, meditation practice is really about training our mind and changing our mental attitude or outlook. Through this process of training, controlling and disciplining our mind, we will be able to cultivate and develop a positive state of mind that serves as a stable source of inner peace, happiness and strength, whatever we face in life. Whether the situation is favourable or not, or whether our circumstances are difficult or easy, we can internally maintain a stable and lasting peace and happiness because of the positive mental outlook we have cultivated within us.

(b') How to begin the cultivation of patience (cont.)

We have been discussing the subject of developing patience, which is essential for us to cope with life’s challenges and maintain a stable sense of peace and happiness. When we look at our own life, we continually face inevitable

difficulties or unfavourable situations. If we are unable to tolerate or be patient with these, we will worry about them and become emotionally handicapped by them. Worrying, becoming agitated, and stressing out do not help us when we face difficult situations; rather, this attitude further adds to the problems we are already facing.

That's why the text here emphasises the importance of developing patience towards the harm we receive from others – particularly the patience of accepting suffering and hardship. When we accept hardship, we will be able to remain on top of a problem, rather than falling victim to mental pressure and suffering. In this way, hardship will not really become a hardship for us, because we know how to manage it. The tremendous benefit of practising patience is that we can maintain a calm, relaxed and joyful mind, which is even more necessary when we face adverse situations.

We can also note here that our mind is trainable, in the sense that if we train our mind, it has the ability to change in the way that we want. If you want your mind to change to a positive mental attitude, you can change it: you can train your mind to develop into that positive state.

Regarding our discussion of patience, last week we talked about the benefit of the practice of patience. We need to understand and reflect on these benefits: 'If I practise patience, what are the benefits?' You should make a list of the benefits of practising patience, then reflect on every single item on that list. This meditation will then inspire or motivate us to practise patience.

The text also talks in detail about the shortcomings or faults of anger. It is important to understand this well, so that you will be motivated and inspired to counteract anger. The text presents the visible and invisible faults of anger. Having a good knowledge and awareness of the faults or shortcomings of anger makes a significant difference when we need to counteract anger. Whenever anger arises, this awareness makes you more vigilant. It makes you think, 'I should not be completely overpowered by anger. I should not simply fall as prey to anger, or else anger will greatly harm me.'

As we learn about the faults of anger, we will understand how important and essential the practice of patience is. Indeed, it is one of the most important practices, the essence of Dharma practice. The text says anger is one of the main obstacles for bodhisattvas in engaging in the deeds of benefiting other sentient beings. This is why the text goes into specific detail about how to counteract anger. In comparison with other mental afflictions, anger is very powerful in disturbing our mind and causing us to damage things. The mental affliction of desire or attachment, on the other hand, is a force that attracts or pulls us towards others. Although it is not lasting, desire does attract or bring people together.

I don't have personal experience of this, but you may have. When you first develop a relationship with another person, desire or attachment may be the force that attracts you towards that person. So, desire can connect us with others so that we form a relationship with them and bring benefit to each other. Whereas there is no such benefit to oneself and others from anger. Rather, anger is a destructive force that wrecks things and doesn't have any positive outcome. For example, it wrecks our relationship and is a cause of separation. It is therefore important that you recognise the faults of anger within the context of your own life experience.

As I said before, desire or attachment is a force of attraction that brings people closer together. So there can be some positive outcome, in terms of extending benefit to others and forming a relationship with them. But I always say that, for such a relationship to be long lasting we must add love and compassion to it. Cultivating love and compassion is an essential ingredient for making our relationship meaningful, truly beneficial and satisfying. If we look at the nature or meaning of love and compassion, it is a genuine sense of affection, care and concern for others. We usually express love and compassion when the person we love is in despair or in need of help or support from others. At such a time, if we show our love and support, the other person will highly appreciate us. We must always be aware that everyone seeks happiness and does not want any unhappiness.

However, desire or attachment is based on the perception of the object as being beautiful and a cause of satisfaction for us. So, in the long run, what will benefit you most in having a healthy relationship with others is love and compassion. Sometimes, people say that after their breakup, their relationship may have become more meaningful, with each partner offering more mutual benefit and help. A healthy relationship is based on trust and mutual benefit, and this in turn depends on each having a shared feeling of true love and compassion.

Again, the reason why all this is important is that we all seek happiness in our lives. Therefore, working on developing love and compassion is an important cause for finding happiness.

As part of studying the practice of patience, we have to study the meaning of patience. Earlier, we talked about the faults of anger. First, we need to ask, what does anger mean and how do we define it? Anger is one of the six root mental afflictions and it arises in dependence upon any of the three factors: unwanted suffering, the causes of suffering, and sentient beings. As a mental factor observing any of these three, anger is a malicious thought that wants to harm its object.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama once told the story of his car mechanic in Tibet who was lying under the car to fix it, and accidentally hit his head on the car's underside. He got so angry at the car, he started banging his head as a way to take revenge on it. Of course, the result was a bigger headache! *[laughter]* This example clearly shows how our mind becomes confused and loses its rational thinking when overpowered by anger.

Along the same lines is another story from the late Senior Tutor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche. His story was in relation to a short-tempered Chinese painter, who once had a tantrum and threw a very expensive Chinese bowl and broke it. Afterwards, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche saw him holding the broken bowl in his hands looking worried!

In Tibetan, anger is called *khong-khro* which, in its initial stage, is just a hostile or malicious thought. However, if we allow ourselves to become habituated with it, this thought will continue to grow, until it reaches the stage where we are ready to take aggressive and violent action, such as being ready to hit someone with a stick. At this point, it has become *khro.ba* (Tibetan), which is a more intensified state of anger, like hatred or belligerence. This is the difference between *khong-khro* or anger, and *khro.ba* or hatred.

We will pick up the text from where we left it last time:

With respect to the faults of anger, the invisible faults are as follows. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Any good deeds, such as
Generosity and worshipping the sugatas,
You have collected over a thousand eons
Are all destroyed in one moment of anger.

This quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* where it says *any good deeds such as generosity and worshipping the sugatas* shows how the virtue you accumulate through the practices of generosity, moral ethics and so forth *collected over a thousand eons can all be destroyed in one moment of anger*. This shows the destructiveness of anger in terms of destroying virtue.

The text continues:

Aryasura formulated this exactly as it is presented in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*. The *Play of Manjusri Sutra (Manjusri-vikridita-sutra)* mentions the destruction of virtue accumulated over a hundred eons, and also Candrakirti's *Commentary on the "Middle Way"* says that virtue accumulated over a hundred eons of conditioning to the perfections of generosity and ethical discipline is destroyed even by the generation of just a momentary angry thought.

Concerning who or what the recipient of such destructive anger must be, some say that it must be bodhisattvas, while others assert that it is recipients in general. The former accords with the statement in the *Commentary on the "Middle Way"*.

Therefore, a moment's anger toward a conquerors' child
Destroys the virtue arising from generosity and ethical
discipline
Accumulated over a hundred eons.

With respect to the person who gets angry, Candrakirti's *Explanation of the "Middle Way" Commentary* says that if anger even by bodhisattvas destroys their roots of virtue, it goes without saying that the anger of non-bodhisattvas toward bodhisattvas does. Regardless of whether the recipient of the anger is ascertained to be a bodhisattva or whether the perceived faults that cause the anger are real, the destruction of virtue is said nonetheless to be just as explained above [i.e., the virtue accumulated over a hundred eons is lost].

In general, for there to be destruction of the roots of virtue it is not required that the anger be toward bodhisattvas. *The Compendium of Trainings* states:

The text of the Arya-sarvastivadins also says: The Bhagavan said, "Monks, consider a monk who makes a full prostration to a stupa that contains a buddha's hair and nails and who has an attitude of faith."

"So be it, Revered One."

"Monks, this monk will experience reigns as a universal monarch a thousand times the number of grains of sand eighty-four-thousand leagues under the ground his prostrate body covers - down to the disk of gold that supports the earth."

Then the venerable Upali, who was located off to the side from where the Bhagavan was seated, bowed with hands joined respectfully and asked, "The Bhagavan has said that this monk's roots of virtue are so great. O Bhagavan, how are those roots of virtue used up, diminished, erased, and extinguished?"

"Upali, when such a sin as malice is done to fellow practitioners, it is like a wound or maiming. I cannot see its full impact. Upali, this diminishes, erases, and extinguishes those great roots of virtue. Therefore, Upali, if you would not feel malice toward a burned stump, what need to

mention feeling that way toward a body with consciousness?"

If you read this text, you can quite clearly understand it. We find here the benefit of, for example, performing prostrations, in terms of the amount of merit you accumulate, which is many more times the number of sand particles in the ground deep beneath you when you fully stretch your body, enabling you to accumulate the merit of taking rebirth as a universal king, and so forth. Essentially this indicates the enormous merit we accumulate from engaging in the practice of prostrations. Of course, here the issue is not just the enormity of that merit, but how it can be lost by a moment of anger.

You can understand these quotations by reading them; the text raises some critical points, which we will discuss next week.

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Even just a small reminder from some friend would be enough to trigger us to engage in virtuous practice. For example, when Susan Coates, who was a Tara Institute member, passed away her familiarity with Tara practice helped her at the time of her death. She was very weak and could not respond much, but when Sandra visited her and told her that I had advised that she do the Tara practice, she understood that and expressed her thanks for that advice and became very calm. If we become very familiar with a practice, then it will only need a very small effort to engage in that practice. The support that Sandra gave her helped Susan to create the cause to find a good rebirth and help her to prevent bad rebirth.

The best way friends can help support each other is in developing virtue and positive qualities. If we are not careful, then, instead of helping our friends to cultivate positive qualities, we could be a very negative influence on them. As much as possible we should try to translate whatever we achieve or have in our life into a cause of virtue, because what we all seek is happiness which results from virtue.

We all have some fixed idea about what happiness means to us. We believe that happiness means having the right friends, plenty of wealth, a good-looking body and so forth. Accordingly, we pursue these things with a great deal of self-sacrifice. Therefore, it is important that when we attain those things we make sure they actually do serve as cause of happiness and support for our spiritual practice. Everything, such as our friends, our health, our wealth etc., has the potential to bring us happiness and be a cause to increase virtue. However, if we are not careful, then instead of bringing happiness and increasing virtue, these very things that we have worked so hard to accomplish, turn out to be a continuous source of suffering for ourselves and others, both now and in the future.

So it is important that we thoroughly check what we believe in and try to see where that belief is taking us, and whether holding that belief is beneficial or not. For example, some people believe that if they find the right person they will be truly happy. However, if they get too obsessed with that belief, they will continue to suffer for as long as their desire remains unfulfilled, and along the way they are also shutting themselves off from many other good opportunities in life.

What we have got to remember is that we want happiness and do not want suffering. Happiness results from virtue and suffering results from non-virtue. Therefore, we must also remember to cultivate a virtuous state of mind and habituate our mind with it, and on the other hand, diminish non-virtuous states of mind and break up their habitual patterns within ourselves. In this way, we can find more peace and happiness, both now and in the future.

The text continues:

Therefore, concerning this the master Bhavaviveka states (as already explained) that in the case of both the purification of nonvirtue by the four powers of confession and the destruction of roots of virtue by wrong views and malice, the seeds of the virtue or nonvirtue cannot give rise to effects even though they may later meet with the requisite

conditions, just as spoiled seeds will not give rise to sprouts even though they may meet with the requisite conditions.

The main point here is that when we purify non-virtue through applying the four opponent forces, purification means preventing non-virtue from producing its main results. In a sense, the purification has the effect of destroying the capacity of the seed of non-virtue or sterilising it so that it cannot produce its result.

So, purification of non-virtue doesn't mean completely abandoning or annihilating the seed of non-virtue. If a non-virtue is purified, then its seed is damaged. Just like damaged or rotten seed won't be able to produce a sprout, so too the purified non-virtue won't produce its main result. From this we should also understand how anger destroys the root virtue by preventing the desirable or pleasant ripening results of virtue from arising.

Then the text continues:

Moreover, as already explained, even though you cleanse your accumulation of sins through purification by the four powers, this does not contradict the fact that you are slow to produce higher paths.

As a benefit of purification practice, you prevent the result of negative actions from arising, however *it does not contradict the fact that you are slow to produce the higher paths*. It doesn't mean that your negative actions have not slowed down your progress on the path. In other words, despite purification, a particular non-virtue can delay one's journey on the spiritual path. This refers to an instance where someone who is not declared as a bodhisattva generates anger towards someone who is a declared bodhisattva. In this context, it is said that the person can purify the anger, however, the anger will still have the impact of slowing down speedy progress on the path.

So, we can see here how we can purify non-virtue and thereby stop the ripening result, but there are certain non-virtues which can be still be a cause to delay our spiritual realisation and progress on the path, even though we have purified them. We must be very cautious about not engaging in such non-virtues. This is important!

Now the text says:

Accordingly, for some persons anger destroys, for instance, their resources and excellent body - the respective effects of giving gifts and safeguarding ethical discipline, but is unable to destroy their ability to easily produce roots of virtue again through giving gifts and safeguarding ethical discipline by means of the causally concordant behavioral effect of their habituation to generosity and an attitude of abstention.

Here, the text goes into more specific results of virtue and non-virtue. For example, there are two types of karmic results called the ripening result and the result similar to its cause. It is saying here that destroying a root virtue doesn't necessarily mean that all the types of the result of the virtue are stopped from producing results. We could have instances where the ripening result is prevented from manifesting, but not the result similar to its cause and *vice versa*. In the context of the practice of giving, the primary or ripening result is gaining wealth. If anger destroys the virtue of giving, the result is that you won't gain wealth. Nonetheless, this doesn't mean that you will

not produce a thought of giving as a result similar to its cause from your habitual practice of giving. Similarly, a thought of moral restraint can still arise as a result similar to its cause with respect to your habitual practice of moral ethics, even if anger has caused damage to the ripening result of your moral ethics. This is the meaning of the words *by means of the causally concordant behavioral effect of their habituation to generosity and an attitude of abstention*.

The text continues:

For other persons, anger destroys the continuous occurrence of a similar type of causally concordant virtuous behavior like ethical self-discipline and so on but does not destroy the occurrence of an excellent body, resources, and so forth. Some [bodhisattvas] realize a path through which they progress to perfection within one eon, for instance, if they do not generate anger toward a bodhisattva who has obtained a prediction of his or her upcoming enlightenment (as explained earlier). If they produce a single angry thought toward such a bodhisattva, this path is not expelled from their mind-stream, but their progress on the path becomes slow for the length of an eon.

We touched on this point a bit earlier. It is saying here that if a bodhisattva on the path of accumulation generates anger towards a bodhisattva who has been predicted to achieve complete enlightenment, they won't go backwards on the path, however the length of the time needed to move onto the next path could be doubled – if the bodhisattva needs to accumulate merit for over an aeon in order to enter the next path, they will now need to accumulate the merit for two aeons.

In brief, just as in the case of the purification of nonvirtue there is no need to purify every behavioral effect, so with respect to the destruction of virtue there is no need to destroy every behavioral effect. However, as this is important and as it is critical to analyse it using the scriptures of the unique Buddha and the reasoning based on them, you should research the scriptures well and do an analysis.

It is said that generosity results in wealth, while moral ethics result in a happy rebirth and so forth. But the link between the cause and the effect is extremely subtle and difficult to understand. Gaining such an understanding of cause and effect requires us to rely on the Buddha's own words and other valid scriptures, and also we need to apply three modes of analysis to verify the validity of those scriptures. Therefore, it is very important that we study Dharma well and then think about and analyse what we have learnt to deepen our understanding.

The text continues:

Thus, the invisible faults of anger are that it projects its own fruitions, which are extremely unpleasant, and that it prevents the arising of the measureless very pleasant fruitions of its opposite [virtue].

This is saying that it is extremely difficult to recognise the various undesirable or unpleasant ripening results of a moment of anger. Likewise, it is also extremely difficult to recognise the extent to which anger destroys the desirable or pleasant results of virtue, and this is something beyond our normal perception. So, we need to further deepen our Dharma knowledge in order to transcend our perception and awareness.

Now the text turns to the visible faults of anger.

The faults of anger visible in this lifetime are that you do not experience a peaceful and good mind; ...

The moment anger arises we lose all mental peace and happiness.

... the joy and happiness that you had previously perish, ...

Whatever joy and happiness you had before will be all gone.

... and you cannot regain them; ...

Anger prevents joy and happiness in the future.

... you cannot sleep well; ...

It even spoils your sleep.

... and you weaken the stability wherein your mind stays calm

Your capacity to remain calm and think clearly will also be affected.

It is important for us to reflect upon all these shortcomings before anger arises and overpowers us. If we reflect on all these shortcomings it will really help us to be more cautious about allowing anger to arise, and also a sense of fright will arise within us even at the prospect of the approach of anger.

Then the text continues:

When you have great hatred, even those for whom you formerly cared forget your kindness and kill you; even friends and relatives will get annoyed and leave you; although you gather others with your generosity, they will not stay; and so on. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

In the grasp of the mental pains of hate,
Your mind does not experience peace,
You do not find joy or happiness,
Sleep does not come, and you become unstable.

Even those who depend on a master
Who cares for them with wealth and services
Will overcome and kill
A master who gets angry.

His anger disheartens friends.
Though he gathers people with gifts,
They will not serve him. In brief,
No angry person is happy.

The *Garland of Birth Stories* also says:

When your complexion is spoiled by the fire of anger,
You cannot look good, though adorned with jewelry.

If we think about our own experience, we will see how very true these words are.

You may sleep on a good bed, but
Your mind suffers the sharp pains of anger.

You forget to achieve goals beneficial to yourself;
Tormented by anger, you take an evil path.
You ruin the achievement of your aims and your good name.
Your grandeur fades like the waning moon.

Though your friends love you,
You fall into an abyss of wrong.
Weakening your intelligence about what is helpful and what is harmful,
You mostly transgress and your mind becomes confused.

Through anger you are accustomed to sinful acts,
So you suffer for a hundred years in miserable realms.
What harm greater than this could be done

Even by enemies avenging the great harm you have done?

This anger is the inner enemy;
I know it to be so.
Who can bear
Its proliferation?

Meditate until you are firmly convinced that grave consequences such as these arise from anger.

So as said before, it is important to reflect on the harm, damage and destruction anger does to our ourselves and others when we let it overpower us. Try, as much as possible, to reflect on this until you have a clear and strong understanding of anger as being a very harmful and destructive force.

The text then says:

Thus, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

There is no sin like hatred
And no fortitude like patience.
Therefore, earnestly cultivate
Patience in a variety of ways.

First, understand the benefits and faults, and then strive to cultivate patience in many ways. The reason behind the first line is set forth in Candrakirti's *Explanation of the "Middle Way" Commentary*.

You cannot measure the fruitions of anger, just as you cannot measure the water in the ocean with a balance scale. Therefore, for projecting unpleasant effects and damaging virtue, there is no sin greater than a lack of patience.

This indicates the amount of damage that anger causes to our virtue, as well as the undesirable ripening results that the anger produces. The shortcomings of anger are really beyond measurement.

For, although other sins result in extremely unpleasant fruitions, they are not great sins on that account alone, given that they do not destroy roots of virtue.

This is saying that not only does anger have the capacity to produce great suffering but at the same time it can damage the roots of virtue. Furthermore:

Still, there are many wrongs other than anger that combine both production of a terrible fruition and destruction of the roots of virtue:

As well as anger there are the other negative states of mind, such as wrong view, which also have a destructive force.

... wrong views that deny cause and effect; abandoning the sublime teachings; generating pride in relation to bodhisattvas, gurus, and the like and thus terribly belittling them; and so forth. You can know of these from the *Compendium of Trainings*.

Having discussed the faults of anger and so forth, the text then goes onto how to meditate on patience.

(c') The divisions of patience

We will continue with this next week.

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

28 May 2019

As usual we begin with a short meditation.

[Tong-len meditation]

We cultivated the proper motivation when we recited the refuge and generating bodhicitta prayer, and we should reinforce the same motivation for listening to the teaching.

The refuge prayer begins with, *I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha until I achieve enlightenment. By gathering the spiritual accumulation through practising giving and so forth, may I achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings.*

You have heard the explanation of this prayer many times in the past. Essentially, in this prayer it clearly shows the objects of refuge, which are the *Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.*

When it says, *I take refuge until I achieve enlightenment*, this implies the taking of the Mahayana refuge. The term, *enlightenment* can either refer to the state of dharmakaya to be achieved, or to present-day Bodhgaya, the place where you achieve complete enlightenment. The *I* in *I take refuge*, implies the person who is taking refuge.

The last two lines of the prayer are, *By gathering the spiritual accumulation through practising giving and so forth, may I achieve the state of buddhahood.*

It is important to understand the meaning of the prayer so that you can contemplate its meaning as you recite the prayer. Some Tibetan versions use the word *by gathering the accumulation of merit*, instead of just saying *the spiritual accumulation*. His Holiness the Dalai Lama suggests that it is better to say, *By gathering the spiritual accumulation through practising giving and so forth*, and in that way the accumulation includes the accumulations of both merit and wisdom.

As it says in the prayer, the way you gather two accumulations is through *giving and so forth*, and here *so forth* refers to the rest of the six perfections.

The words *to benefit all sentient beings* implies that the reason you gather the spiritual accumulation is to benefit other beings. There are two aspirations: an aspiration to accomplish the welfare of other beings, and an aspiration to accomplish one's own welfare. So *to benefit all sentient beings* implies the purpose for which you gather the accumulations and the aspiration to accomplish the welfare of other beings.

The word *buddhahood* implies the aspiration to accomplish one's own welfare. These two aspirations are in fact the main elements of the definition of bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment.

The words, *may I* indicate the actual generation of the bodhicitta mind, and the way it is generated here is in the form of an aspirational prayer.

There's no clear indication of the scriptural source of this verse, because you can't find it in any sutras or scriptures. The source is attributed to Atisha as this verse of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta has been a very common prayer in Tibet from the time Atisha introduced Buddhism to Tibet.

Now we will continue with the commentary. Last week we stopped at this section called:

(c') The divisions of patience

The section on the divisions of patience has three parts:

1. Developing the patience of disregarding harm done to you
2. Developing the patience of accepting suffering
3. Developing the patience of certitude about the teachings

Then the text goes into detail about each of these three types of patience.

(1') Developing the patience of disregarding harm done to you

This is further explained through two subheadings.

1. Stopping impatience with those who harm you
2. Stopping both dislike for harmdoers' attainments and delight in their troubles

Of course, the text goes into great detail about these two headings. But for the time being let's reflect simply on the outline of the subject matter. We will find such a reflection quite challenging as it strikes at our normal views and attitudes. Normally, we hate to see harm doers experiencing any success or goodness. We feel jealous about their success and accomplishments because we dislike them and feel they don't deserve to have anything that makes them happy. As some other lamrim teachings say, the greater their success the more jealousy we feel and the greater our feelings of dislike and animosity. As it says here, *we delight in their troubles*. Normally, we are delighted and pleased to see harm doers in difficulty, facing defeat or disgrace. So the outline *stopping both dislike for harmdoers' attainments and delight in their troubles* diametrically opposes our normal mental attitude.

If we think about it, many of our normal attitudes serve as an unnecessary source of suffering for ourselves. Feeling jealous about the success or goodness of others is not a pleasant feeling at all. Instead of feeling animosity and dislike about their attainments or success, we should try to feel positive and good about their attainments by cultivating love and compassion towards them.

If we have cultivated an unbiased, impartial compassion for all beings, without any discrimination between friends, enemies or strangers, then instead of feeling dislike and hostility we will rejoice in the success of other beings and feel empathy when they are in difficulty and want to help them.

Now we return to the text.

(a") Stopping impatience with those who harm you

Stopping impatience with those who harm you has two parts:

1. Stopping impatience with those who prevent your happiness and with those who cause you to suffer

These outlines used by the great Tsongkhapa reflect his own practice. Here, the topic is how to engage in the practice of patience as a remedy to overcome and prevent anger. We normally become angry when others cause harm to our happiness or when they cause us problems and suffering. Imagine being able to apply the practice of patience to both of these two circumstances and see that there is no cause for anger. Tsongkhapa has encapsulated the whole practice of patience as an antidote to anger into one line. How amazing!

The second subheading of this section is:

2. Stopping impatience with those who prevent your praise, fame, or honor, and with those who have contempt for you, or say offensive or unpleasant things to you

(1") Stopping impatience with those who prevent your happiness and with those who cause you to suffer

Stopping impatience with those who prevent your happiness and with those who cause you to suffer has two parts:

1. Showing that anger is unjustified
2. Showing that compassion is appropriate

Under these two outlines we find further details about how to engage in the practice of patience in situations where someone who prevents our happiness or causes us to suffer.

(a) Showing that anger is unjustified

Showing that anger is unjustified has three parts:

1. On analysis of the object, anger is unjustified
2. On analysis of the subject, anger is unjustified
3. On analysis of the basis, anger is unjustified

(1) On analysis of the object, anger is unjustified

Here the anger is on the basis of the object.

It has four parts:

1. On analysis of whether the object has self-control, anger is unjustified

This is looking at whether the harm doers, who are the object of our anger, have self-control or choice about harming us. It concludes that if they have no choice then our anger is unjustified.

2. On analysis for either adventitiousness or inherency, anger is unjustified
3. On analysis of whether the harm is direct or indirect, anger is unjustified
4. On analysis of the cause that impels the harmdoers, anger is unjustified

(a') On analysis of whether the object has self-control, anger is unjustified

Analyze, thinking, "What would be reasonable grounds for anger toward harmdoers?" Whereupon, you might think, "They first had the thought of wanting to harm me, prepared the method, and then either prevented my happiness or inflicted unpleasant physical or mental suffering, so my anger is justified."

If we read these lines very closely and think about their meaning, we will see their logic and how rational they are. With *Analyze, thinking*, "What would be reasonable grounds for anger toward harmdoers?" we see that our justification for anger evolved from our recognition of how a harm doer initially had an intention of harming us, and then engaged in various harmful actions which spoil our happiness or brought suffering upon us. As the text says, the scenario in our mind to justify our anger, hostility and impatience towards harm doers is thinking, "They first had the thought of wanting to harm me, prepared the method, and then either prevented my happiness or inflicted unpleasant physical or mental suffering, so my anger is justified."

Then the text continues:

Are you angry because they inflicted harm while they had the self-control not to harm you, or are you angry because they were utterly without any self-control and hurt you while helplessly impelled by something else?

This raises the question of whether, in this scenario, we are angry because the harm doer had self-control or had a choice not to harm us and chose to inflict harm, or because they had no self-control and so inflicted harm on us.

The text is saying that our anger on the grounds that the harm doers had the self-control not to harm us is unjustified. First of all, it is wrong to assume that the harm doers had such self-control. Secondly, the harm that we receive is not simply dependent on whether or not the harm doers have a thought to harm us. Even though we may think that they have self-control, if we actually take their true situation into account, we can understand that they lack self-control. We can also understand that there are many other facets to the cause of harm in addition to the intention of harm doers.

The text says:

In the former case, your anger is unjustified because those who inflict harm do not have control over themselves, for, when the conditions and causes – seeds left by afflictions to which they were previously habituated, ...

Here the text is saying the harm doers have no self-control because they are overpowered by mental afflictions and the seed or propensity of the affliction within them, due to their habituation with the afflictions. Then:

... a nearby object, ...

This indicates other necessary causes and conditions of harmfulness. And next:

... and erroneous conceptions come together, they give rise to the thought to harm, ...

The terms *habituated*, *a nearby object*, and *erroneous conceptions* refer to the necessary causes for mental afflictions to arise, as described in the *Abhidharma* teaching.

The *erroneous conceptions come together* refers to the subtle confused or mistaken state of mind that we have. With this underlying *erroneous conception* or confused state of mind, people perceive the object of harm as being very negative, unpleasant, unattractive and undesirable, and this in turn *gives rise to the thought of harm*. Next comes:

... even though the harmdoers do not think, "I will feel malice"; ...

We normally think that people harm us because they hold harmful mental attitudes towards us. The text is saying here that there is more to the cause of harm than just harmful thoughts. If all the causes and conditions of the harm are present then the result will be harm, even though the harm doers do not want to harm us. Whereas if the causes and conditions are incomplete, then harm will not occur *even though* they might think 'I will feel malice.'

The text continues,

These causes and conditions produce the desire to harm; this in turn produces the work of harming; and this produces suffering for someone else, so those harmdoers do not have even the slightest self-control. Moreover, they have become like servants of their afflictions, because they are under the control of others, i.e., their afflictions.

This clearly states that the eventuation of harm is not just a matter of someone's thought, rather it's a matter of all the causes and conditions coming together. It is only when these come together that harm will eventuate; if they do not come together no harm will eventuate. When all the causes and conditions are present then the desire to harm arises, and this desire to harm naturally propels the person to undertake harmful actions without any choice on their part. *So those harmdoers do not have even the slightest self-control. Moreover, they have become like servants of their afflictions, because they are under the control of others, i.e., their afflictions.*

If we reflect on the situation from this angle, then we can clearly see the very good grounds for feeling compassion towards these harm doers. The text continues:

In the latter case ...

This refers to the question of whether the person is utterly without any self-control, as indicated earlier in the text.

... you are angry because the harmdoers are utterly without any self-control and, being helplessly impelled by something else, they hurt you then your anger is totally unjustified.

This is quite self-explanatory. If the person who harms us totally lacks control, lacks freedom, and lacks choice about their behaviour, then we are unjustified in showing anger; rather we need to have compassion for them. In fact, if we reflect on the sequence of cause and effect, then we see how, when a person is completely overpowered by anger, they naturally lose their self-control and are completely controlled by the mental affliction of anger. When we reflect on their helplessness, then we are more likely to show compassion for that person.

The text continues:

For instance, some people who have been possessed by demons and have come under their control may wish to hurt those who are helping them to get free of their demons and thereupon beat them, etc. However, their helpers think, "They do this because their demons have eliminated their ability to control themselves," and do not have even the slightest anger toward them. They then strive to the best of their ability to free them from their demons. Likewise, when bodhisattvas are hurt by others, they think, "They do this because the demons of the afflictions have eliminated their

ability to control themselves." Without being even the slightest bit angry with those persons they then must generate the spirit of enlightenment, thinking, "I will strive at the bodhisattva deeds in order to free them from these afflictions."

When a person is completely possessed by some sort of evil spirit, or has become insane, then they will lack any ability to recognise who is helping them, and who is not helping them. So they will even attack those who are helping them. However, the person who is helping won't react with anger because they understand the true situation of the person they are helping.

This, the text is saying, is how the bodhisattvas view those who cause harm to them. They feel compassion and empathy for the perpetrator of harm. The blame for the harmful actions lies directly with the mental afflictions and not the person, because the person is completely controlled by their mental afflictions.

As it says in the text:

Accordingly, Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Stanzas* says:

Just as a doctor does not fight but helps
Patients who are possessed by spirits, though they
get angry,
So the Sage sees that the afflictions are at fault,
Not the persons who have the afflictions.

Here *the Sage* refers to a buddha, a fully enlightened being, who sees the affliction as the enemy, and never the person. Beings are so overpowered by their mental afflictions that they are helpless. So, they are objects of compassion.

Furthermore,

The master Candrakirti also states:

"This is not living beings' fault,
Rather it is the fault of the afflictions."
So the learned analyze
And do not fight with others.

The text continues,

Although many reasonings are set forth in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, it is easy to be certain of this one, and it is a very powerful remedy for anger. Also, the *Bodhisattva Levels* has the same meaning where it states that you can bear harm after you meditate on the idea of mere phenomena, so meditate repeatedly on this remedy until you reach certain knowledge of it.

As a way to counteract anger towards someone who harms us, we have to realise that the person has harmed us because they didn't have any self-control. As the quotation from Chandrakirti says, they are controlled by mental afflictions, and so have no choice and no control. It is these mental afflictions that are impelling that person to create those harmful actions.

When we understand the situation from this angle, we will see that the true harm doer is the mental affliction, not the person who is acting harmfully. The mental affliction is the driving force, and the person simply succumbs to the force of affliction. When we think of the situation like this, we will feel empathy towards the person who inflicts harm upon us.

The text continues:

If these beings had self-control, they would not have any suffering, because they would not want suffering and because they could control it.

If you read this carefully, then it is very clear how the person who causes harm is indeed totally enslaved by those mental afflictions and has no choice but to be driven by them. If we think along these lines, then if the person did have *self-control*, *they would not have any suffering, because they would not want suffering and because they could control it*. This also helps us to develop patience towards those who cause harm.

The text continues:

Furthermore, you should stop your anger by also thinking, "When these beings are moved by strong afflictions, they commit suicide, leap from cliffs, harm themselves with thorns, weapons, etc., and stop eating and so forth. [If they do this to even their greatly cherished and dear selves, of course they will hurt others."

This clearly indicates the destructive force of mental afflictions. Normally the self is what we most cherish, yet through the force of mental afflictions people can inflict a lot of harm upon themselves, culminating in self-harm and even suicide. The force of such mental afflictions is so great that people will injure what they hold most dear – themselves. If they do that then what need is there to say that they will cause harm to others. Reflecting on this is a very powerful way of counteracting anger and developing patience.

The text continues,

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Thus, everything is dependent on something else,
And, because that in turn is dependent, it is not
autonomous.
Understanding this, do not be angry
At anything, all things being like illusions.

This touches on overcoming anger and developing patience through reflecting on the ultimate reality of things and how all things lack intrinsic existence. Reflecting on things as being like an illusion serves as a remedy to overcome anger.

The text continues,

And also:

Therefore, if you see an enemy or friend
Doing what is wrong, think
"This arises from certain conditions,"
And remain happy.

This relates to what we have already discussed. If, when you receive harm from an enemy or a friend, you reflect on how things happen because of the coming together of various causes and conditions, the harm you receive will not detrimentally affect your attitude. Then you will be able to maintain your inner peace and happiness.

The text continues,

If all beings could achieve results
According to their wish, then,
Since no one wants suffering,
No one would suffer.

And also:

While under the control of their afflictions,
Some people will kill even their dear selves.
So how can you expect them
Not to harm the bodies of others?

All these verses contain very effective advice on how to counteract anger. Therefore, it's very beneficial to repeat these kinds of verses whenever we can, and even memorise them as a way to help us meditate on how to overcome anger and develop patience.

(b')) On analysis for either adventitiousness or inherency, anger is unjustified

We will continue with this next week.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

4 June 2019

We begin with the usual meditation.

[*Tonglen meditation*]

Ensure you cultivate a bodhicitta motivation – the aspiration to achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. As we are here to listen to a Dharma teaching, it is important that we begin with a bodhicitta motivation.

The bodhicitta mind is the genuine and pure wish to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. When we cultivate it, we are leaving a profound impression in our mind to achieve complete enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. Many scriptures state that there is tremendous benefit from generating a bodhicitta mind, even for just an instant. In fact, it is said in the commentary on bodhicitta by Nagarjuna (*Bodhicittavivarana*):

A person who for an instant meditates on the
awakening mind
The heap of merit [obtained from this]
Not even the conquerors can measure.

The benefit of bodhicitta is inconceivable, in that only the omniscient mind of a buddha can apprehend it.

The main cause of a bodhicitta mind is the cultivation of love – the genuine wish for all other sentient beings to possess happiness – and compassion – the wish for all sentient beings to be free of all suffering. Before we can generate bodhicitta, we must develop love and compassion to the point where we don't merely wish others to have happiness and be free from suffering, but also generate the strong sense of universal responsibility, or the superior intention, of taking on the burden of fulfilling the welfare of all beings. So, you not only wish for all beings to be happy but you take on the responsibility of placing them in a state of happiness and freeing them from suffering.

Having generated a superior intention, however, you realise your own limitations, and your inability to fulfil that wish of benefiting others. As you investigate how you can fulfil this thought of benefiting all beings, you realise that you need to achieve complete enlightenment. This is how a bodhicitta mind – the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings – is generated. In Haribadra's text called *The Commentary Clarifying the Meaning*, the term 'aspirational prayer wishing for the state of enlightenment' is used as another term for bodhicitta.

Having generated a bodhicitta mind, you then need to engage in the six perfections, which are the deeds of bodhisattvas.

In short, with the intention of benefiting all sentient beings as our motivation, we engage in the six perfections as our deeds. We have finished discussing the first two perfections of 'giving' and 'morality' and we are currently discussing the perfection of 'patience'.

Bodhicitta mind is cultivated through the stage-by-stage training and transformation of our mind. Prior to cultivating love and compassion for other beings, we need to have a

strong desire to free ourselves from the suffering of lower rebirth and cyclic existence. So, we need to meditate on the fact that if we took lower rebirth, for example, as an animal, we would go through unbearable suffering. We could, however, prevent being reborn in the lower realms by adhering to the karmic law of cause and effect.

We then need to realise that merely freeing ourselves from lower rebirth is not enough, because as long as we remain in cyclic existence we are subject to the nature of perpetual suffering. Hence, we need to cultivate a sense of renunciation which is the urge or definite thought to leave cyclic existence. After realising that merely liberating ourselves from cyclic existence and leaving behind all our motherly sentient beings is not right, we need to generate love and compassion.

We can see how this stage-by-stage development of our mind culminates in the bodhicitta mind, which serves as our mental intention. Driven by this mind, we then engage ourselves in the six perfections, the bodhisattva deeds, and the result is attaining the twofold body of a buddha.

I won't say I have gained any experiential realisations of the lam-rim, but I can say I have studied the lam-rim in depth over many years. From the ages of 20 to 26, I really devoted myself to studying and practising lam-rim. In those days, the facilities were very poor and I hardly had anything, but I used to work on calming down the desirous mind and trying to be contented with my life.

I also used to focus on the ten innermost jewels of the Kadampa masters. Around that time, I received a commentarial transmission of Kyabje Pabongka Rinpoche's *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*. Then, one day the late Khensur Ogyen advised me to focus on studying the great treatises of ancient Buddhist masters.

We shall now continue with the text.

(1") Stopping impatience with those who prevent your happiness and with those who cause you to suffer

(a) Showing that anger is unjustified

(1) On analysis of the object, anger is unjustified

(a') On analysis of whether the object has self-control, anger is unjustified (cont.)

Last week we stopped at the verse from *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* which reads:

While under the control of their afflictions,
Some people will kill even their dear selves.
So how can you expect them
Not to harm the bodies of others?

If we think about its meaning, this verse is saying that if we really understood what harmdoers are going through – that they are enraged with anger or hatred or are experiencing other mental afflictions or delusions – it would instil in us a feeling of compassion or empathy towards them. Then we would not generate any thought at all of retaliation, or of getting angry with them.

This verse is advising us that when someone causes us harm, we should try to understand their harmful actions as a manifestation of their mental afflictions (such as anger) and try to understand the suffering they are going through in that situation. Then, instead of retaliating, we will feel empathy and compassion for them, and at least try to adopt a mental outlook that will prevent that situation from disturbing our own wellbeing.

(b'') On analysis for either adventitiousness or inherency, anger is unjustified.

The commentary says:

The fault of doing harm to others either is or is not in the nature of living beings. If it is in their nature, it is wrong to get angry, just as it is wrong to get angry at fire for being hot and burning.

As this clearly implies, one way of overcoming the thought of becoming angry with someone who harms us is to examine whether or not it is in their nature to harm us, or whether it is due to some external condition which inflames their anger, causing them to harm us. In either case, we cannot justify showing them anger and retaliating. If it is in their nature to harm us, then it is not right for us to get angry and retaliate.

The analogy used here is fire: the nature of fire is hot, and it has the function of burning. If we touch fire, it will burn our hand; because we know that fire by its nature is hot and can burn things, we don't get angry at the fire that burned us. In the same way, if it were in the nature of other sentient beings to cause harm to others, then just as with fire, it would be wrong for us to get angry at them.

Similarly, if it is adventitious, it is also wrong to be angry, just as when smoke and the like appear in the sky, it is wrong to be angry at the sky on account of these flaws of smoke and so forth.

Likewise, the reason you receive harm from others is not because of their nature, but because of certain adventitious or immediate causes. Again, there is no reason for us to blame others for the harm we receive. It is like getting itchy eyes when the sky is polluted with heavy smoke. We don't blame the sky and become angry with it; rather, we blame the smoky pollution. Similarly, if cloud covers the clear sky, we don't get angry at the sky for the darkness, because we know the cause of the darkness is the cloud. Using the same logic, it is not right or justifiable to be angry with the person who harms us because the harm we receive is conditioned by adventitious causes.

The commentary continues:

Thinking in this way, stop your anger. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

If doing harm to others
Is natural for the childish,
It is wrong to get angry at them,
Just as it is at fire's burning nature.

Still, if the fault is adventitious,
And the nature of beings is good,
My anger is wrong, just as is
Anger at smoke's appearance in the sky.

(c'') On analysis of whether the harm is direct or indirect, anger is unjustified.

This gives us yet a different perspective to help us overcome anger. Here, the text says:

If you are angry at the agent of harm that directly inflicts the harm, you will have to be angry at the stick, etc., just as you are at the person. If you are angry at the harmdoer who indirectly inflicts harm, then, just as the person impels the stick and so forth to do the harm, so hostility impels the person. Therefore, get angry at the hostility.

This paragraph is raising the question of whether the object of our hatred or anger is a direct, or indirect cause of the harm, or pain we experience. Again, from either perspective, it is wrong for us to direct our anger at the harmdoer.

For example, if someone hits you with a stick, you will experience pain and therefore express anger towards the person. The question here is, why direct your anger at the person? Why not at the stick and the hostile motive of the person, both of which are the contributing causes of your pain?

It is clear that the reason you direct your anger at the person is because you believe that he or she is the cause of your pain. If so, then the direct cause of the pain is obviously the stick, so you should also get angry at the stick. But this shows your angry mind's lack of reasoning. Normally, your anger is not directed at the stick but at the person holding it; you may argue that the stick didn't harm you of its own accord, because it is controlled by and used by the person. Therefore, you get angry at the person, whom you hold responsible for the harm you receive.

The argument here is that, just as the person is an indirect cause of harm, so too is the harmful thought motivating that person. Just as the stick is used by the person, likewise the harmful thought within the continuum of that person uses or propels that person to harm you. When you consider this rationale, then really the main culprit behind the harm you receive is the mental afflictions, such as anger, within the continuum of harmdoers, and not the harmdoers themselves.

If two cars are hit by another from behind in a rear-end accident, the driver of the first car won't blame the driver of the second car, but rather he would blame the driver of the third car who initiated the crash.

Next:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

The stick and so forth directly cause the harm.
But if I am angry at the one who throws it,
Then, since hostility impels them,
It is better to get angry at hostility.

If you are not angry at the stick, it is also wrong to be angry at the one who throws it; if you are angry with the one who throws it, then you should be directing the anger at the harmful thought of the person too.

Not believing this, your mind has gone down a wrong path. Therefore, become certain about the overall sameness of the logic here and direct your mind toward not being angry at the person in the same way that you are not angry at the stick.

This emphasises that, for the same reason that you do not get angry with the stick, you can also prevent yourself from getting angry with the person. It then says:

Furthermore, use the reasonings taught earlier that negate the idea that anything has self-control in order to understand that you should not differentiate the stick and the one who throws the stick by whether they have a harmful intent.

So the harmdoer has no choice, but is totally under the power or influence of the anger or hatred in his or her mind; they are fully controlled by it. Therefore, the commentary advises us to *use the reasonings taught earlier that negate the idea that anything has self-control* – that is, reflect on what we covered in last week's teaching, the fact that when you receive harm from another person, try to recognise how the person is lacking self-control in that situation, and in this way try to generate tolerance.

(d'') On analysis of the cause that impels the harmdoers, anger is unjustified.

This section of the commentary advises us to overcome anger by focusing on the actual causes and conditions that impel harmdoers to carry out harmful actions. As it says:

The experience of suffering produced by those who harm does not occur causelessly or from discordant causes, so it occurs from concordant causes; that is to say, from non-virtuous actions you have done in the past.

This relates to the law of cause and effect.

Therefore, harmdoers are helplessly impelled to do harm by the power of your karma.

Here, the text touches on the function of the law of cause and effect, which is to say that everything that happens in our lives is the result of our own karma. This includes situations where, for example, friends seem to dislike us and do things contrary to our wishes. There are many such situations where we don't understand why things occur, or why people act towards us negatively.

We may feel that we don't deserve this and that, or that we have not done anything wrong towards others. But our assessment of the situation is only based on our limited knowledge and memory. In fact, as the text points out here, everything that happens in our lives, including the harm we receive from others, is the fruition or ripening or result of one's own karma.

Consequently, blame yourself, thinking, "This is my fault, and I am wrong to get angry at others," and stop your anger on all occasions.

When you receive harm from others for no reason, you can recognise that adverse situation as having been influenced or instigated by your own past karma. Therefore, you should try to see the cause of that harm as your own negative actions, rather than blaming it on the harmdoer.

Earlier, we came across the term 'concordant' or 'discordant' causes. This term is used to classify the two types of karmic result: the ripening result, and the result concordant with or similar to its cause. An example of the ripening result of a non-virtuous action is taking a rebirth in a lower realm, such as an animal. However, the concordant result or result similar to the cause of that same non-virtuous action could also ripen in a good rebirth. For example, the suffering we experience as a human would be the result concordant with its cause of a non-virtuous action.

The commentary continues:

For example, it is similar to the way that beings produce the guardians of hell with their own bad karma, and these guardians then inflict harm on them.

Here, the text is saying that when beings take birth in the hell realms, they encounter the guardians of the hell realms, which inflict suffering on them. But those guardians do not come into existence independently of themselves – rather, they are the result or manifestation of beings' own past negative karmas.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

I, at a former time, inflicted
Harm such as this on living beings.
Therefore, it is fitting that I, who hurt others,
Should receive this harm.

So it's important to acknowledge that the harm and suffering you receive is the ripening or exhaustion of your own negative karma. Since experiencing harm and suffering or facing difficulties indicates the exhaustion of our past negative karma, it is saying here that we should accept it

joyfully and rejoice. The situation should also be regarded as a lesson and inspire us to think: 'I should not create any more negative karma but should create only positive karma'.

We need to be very clear in our mind that if we harm others we will receive harm from them. Sometimes, we will notice that others immediately retaliate when we harm them. From this experience, we can learn that all the harm we receive from others and the suffering we experience in our life is the result or fruition of our own past karma.

The text continues:

And also:

The childish do not want suffering,
Yet crave the causes of suffering.
So why should I be angry with others
When it is my own fault that I am hurt?

In relation to this, one master said: 'I am happy when I receive suffering, but I am not happy when I receive happiness.' This master's outlook is based on the fact that finding suffering and misery in our lives is an indication of the exhaustion of our past negative karma, so from this angle it is good news. Whereas finding joy and happiness is an indication that our positive karma is being exhausted; this is bad news, as we don't want to use it up.

The commentary continues:

For example, just like the guardians of hell
And the Sword-leafed Forest,
I produce this harm with my own actions.
So at whom should I get angry?
Those who do me harm arise
Impelled by my own karma.
If thereby they go to a hell,
Have I not ruined them?

Also, Sha-bo-ba said, "When you say, 'I am not at fault,' it indicates that you, in fact, have not internalized even a bit of the teaching."

(2)) On analysis of the subject, anger is unjustified

If you get angry at a harmdoer through an inability to bear suffering, it is contradictory because, even as you are failing to bear slight suffering in the present, you are aggressively creating the cause of measureless suffering in the miserable realms.

As it says here *if you get angry at a harmdoer through an inability to bear suffering, it is contradictory*. Normally, we lose our temper and get angry because we don't want even the slightest suffering or cannot tolerate the slightest loss or harm from others.

If that's the case, then it is saying here that it is contradictory to let anger control our mind, because anger will bring a far greater amount of suffering and loss upon us. If you really do not want to experience suffering, then instead of getting angry, you should practise patience.

When the text says *because, even as you are failing to bear slight suffering in the present, you are aggressively creating the cause of measureless suffering in the miserable realms*, the implication is that if we do not practise patience, we will lose our mind to anger. When our mind fills with anger, it is almost as if we are deliberately creating the cause of suffering, which – compared to what we are currently experiencing from the harm we receive from others – may be measureless suffering in miserable realms.

The text continues:

Therefore, induce a sense of embarrassment, thinking, "I am very stupid," and work to contain your anger.

We need to truly recognise that when we get angry, we are in fact creating a cause for greater suffering in the future – all because of our inability to tolerate a slight experience of suffering now. So when we observe our situation holistically, we can see how narrow-minded, foolish and stupid our judgement is when we receive harm. In fact, we have reason to feel ashamed of ourselves.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

If I cannot endure
Even the slight suffering of the present,
Then why do I not stop my anger,
The cause of suffering in the hells?

The suffering generated by harm is the effect of previous bad karma; by experiencing it, you exhaust this karma. If you bear the suffering, you do not accumulate new sins and you greatly increase your merit. Therefore, you must not consider how harmdoers ruin their virtue, but view them as kind in that it is as though they are engaged in actions for the sake of clearing away your sins.

The main point here is to see the harmdoer as someone doing you a great favour. As it says here, *therefore you must not consider how harmdoers ruin their virtue* – that is, the harmdoer is ruining their own practice of virtue, yet is doing you a favour. So if you can bear the suffering, you will not accumulate new sins, and you will greatly increase your merit, and so on.

Next:

The *Garland of Birth Stories* says:

We note here how Tsongkhapa first gives the explanation, then cites the source of the explanation.

I do not think about this person ruining his virtue,
But that he is as if engaged in actions to clear away my
sins;
If I am not patient even with this person,
How could I be any more unkind?

It clearly implies here that we should cultivate a sense of gratitude towards harmdoers or enemies. His Holiness the Dalai Lama frequently emphasises that we develop the practice of patience thanks to our enemies or those who harm us. Indeed, it is not our spiritual gurus who provide us with practical lessons on developing patience, but it is our enemies or harmdoers whom we depend on to develop patience. So, thinking in this way, you can develop patience.

And Candrakirti's Commentary on the "Middle Way" says:

You want to say that you are exhausting
The effects of non-virtuous karma done in the past;
How then can you sow the seeds of further suffering
By getting angry and harming others?

This is aligned with what we discussed earlier. In a sense, the harm we receive from others benefits or helps us exhaust the result of our negative or sinful actions and is thus favourable for us. Therefore, we should not be angry with others in return. If we are angry with them, then we will aggravate their situation: as it says, *we sow the seeds of further suffering by getting angry and harming them*. So, as well as having harmed us out of their hatred for us, the harmdoers will also plant the seed of further suffering for themselves. Thus, this verse is saying that the person who receives the real harm is not us, but rather the harmdoer.

We can also understand here how, just as it is detrimental for everyone else to show anger towards others, we should

likewise not get angry at others. By doing that, we are creating the cause for our own future suffering. Therefore, there is no benefit, and nothing to win, when we generate anger within ourselves, or if we cause anger to arise in others.

On Sunday 16 June, we have the Saga Dawa puja. Geshe-la would like to sponsor lunch, but he will have to rely on volunteers to organise it. Then on 6 July is His Holiness' birthday. To celebrate this, Geshe-la suggests that maybe you students will host a lunch.

Saga is the Tibetan name for a particular very bright star that appears once in the fourth month of each year of the Tibetan lunar calendar. *Dawa* means month in Tibetan. So, that month is called 'Saga Dawa', which is observed as a very auspicious month, associated with the Buddha's birthday, which falls on the eighth, and the Buddha's enlightenment and paranirvana, observed on the fifteenth of the month.

In Tibet, many people take the Mahayana precepts and observe vegetarianism during Saga Dawa. In that month, you can only buy dry meat in markets but not fresh meat. The Saga Dawa month is very auspicious for engaging in virtue as it will be multiplied many times at this time.

At the Centre, we are holding a Nyung Nye this weekend. It is a wonderful practice of purification and accumulating merit. People who have done the Nyung Nye say that they find it hard in the beginning and during the practice, but at the end of the practice, they really feel very positive. As a benefit of the practice, they have found themselves mentally and physically much healthier, fresher and clearer. These are some signs of the purification of negativities and accumulation of merit. Years back, while I did a two-week retreat in Sorrento, Angelica did the Nyung Nye practice and she said she found it extremely beneficial.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

11 June 2019

We will begin with the usual meditation. [*Tong-len meditation*]

Try to reinforce your motivation for listening to this teaching which is really to extend benefit and happiness to all sentient beings.

Chelsea requested an explanation of Tara and Chenrezig mantras. To fulfil that request, I will briefly explain Tara's mantra tonight, but I'll leave the explanation of the Chenrezig mantra for another time.

The Tara mantra is OM TARA TUTTARE TURE SOHA. The word 'mantra' is a Sanskrit word, translated in Tibetan as *sNgag*. Mantra has two syllables 'man-' and '-tra', which together means protecting the mind from ordinary perception and apprehension, and from fear and suffering. Lama Tsongkhapa uses 'protection' from the point of view of protection from suffering. If you refer to *The Heart Sutra*, it also implies the meaning of 'mantra'.

Going into further detail, there are relative and ultimate mantras. In relation to the Tara mantra, the ultimate mantra refers to Tara's all-knowing exalted wisdom. The relative mantra refers to the sound and syllables of mantra that are recited. By relying upon the repetition of the relative mantra, we will get closer to the realisation of the definitive or ultimate mantra, the omniscient mind of a Buddha.

In Tibetan, Tara is called Dolma, which means 'liberator'. As a deity of compassion, Tara is called a liberator because she has liberated limitless sentient beings from cyclic existence.

OM is normally used in the beginning of mantras to symbolise the beginning or source of everything. The Sanskrit word OM comprises three letters, A-U-M, and in written Sanskrit, we see a dot or drop on top of the vowel AH - this symbolises the MA. So AUM symbolises the qualities of the holy body, speech and mind of a deity such as Tara. It said that if we repeat this sacred syllable, it will leave a positive impression within us to achieve the qualities of holy body, speech and mind.

TARE means liberating from cyclic existence; TUTTARE, liberating from all types of fears, such as natural disasters and wild animals; TURE, freeing from diseases and suffering; and SOHA means to stabilise in the path. In relation to Tara being called a liberator of cyclic existence, fears etc, there are many accounts of Tara to illustrate this. If you refer to the Praises to Tara - called Lek-dri-ma in Tibetan - you will understand more about Tara as a Liberating One.

So, taking into account the meaning of Tara's mantra, when we say it we are effectively taking refuge in Tara as

our liberator and protector. It is important that, when we say the mantra, we generate unwavering faith in Tara as our refuge object or protector and make a fervent supplicating prayer to her.

(1") Stopping impatience with those who prevent your happiness and with those who cause you to suffer

(a) Showing that anger is unjustified

(2) On analysis of the subject, anger is unjustified

Last week we stopped at:

Therefore, just as you tolerate bleeding or burning as a treatment to cure a severe illness, it is appropriate to bear small sufferings for the sake of preventing great suffering.

These lines from the text present a very good example: in order to be healed or cured of a severe disease, as part of the healing process or cure, we have to be patient with any pain associated with the treatment, which may involve the burning or cutting of our body. By tolerating the pain of the treatment, we can overcome the disease and thereby more pain in the future.

The implication here is that we should get used to tolerating minor harms that we receive from others. In that way, we are avoiding major loss and pain in the future. However if, instead of tolerating it, we lose our temper and generate hatred towards others, we will be creating the cause for much greater suffering in the future.

When other people, whether they are friends or not, do something unpleasant or undesirable to us, if we can tolerate it in the first place, then that will be the end of it. By tolerating some harm or unpleasantness that we receive from others, we will prevent a greater amount of suffering for ourselves and for others; whereas, by not tolerating it, we create the cause for greater suffering in the future.

The practice of patience is the most effective remedy for counteracting anger and hatred. To be motivated to practise patience, we need to think about the shortcomings of anger and, on the other hand, the benefits of practising patience. Even if we find it difficult to prevent anger arising, if it does arise and we make an effort to practise patience, we can at least prevent that anger from fully overpowering or controlling us.

For example, when anger arises, in the very next moment you can remain vigilant and aware of the shortcomings, damage and harm that anger would bring, or you can think of the virtue of practising patience. By doing this, it is possible to stop anger from further increasing in the next moment. That's what the text is saying here; we also talked about this earlier.

If you think about the shortcomings of anger, you will recognise it as one of the most powerful causes of destroying your mental peace and happiness. Also, it is very destructive in terms of its very negative impact on you as a person, on your good human nature and personality. Therefore, we should make an effort to at least minimise or decrease anger, as well as to reduce its control over us.

(3) On analysis of the basis, anger is unjustified

On analysis of the basis, anger is unjustified has two parts:

1. Analyzing the causes of harm and where the fault lies
2. Analyzing your commitment

(a') Analyzing the causes of harm and where the fault lies

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

His sword and my body
 Are both causes of suffering.
 He obtained the sword, I obtained the body;
 At which should I be angry?

This verse points out that, really, the object experiencing the pain is your body. The cause of that pain is the instrument or weapon used by the other person. So the text is just asking, at which do you direct your anger? Should your anger be directed at this body that experiences the pain, or at the weapon or instrument used to cause that pain?

The text continues:

If, blinded by craving, I have obtained
 This abscess with a human form,
 So painful that it cannot bear to be touched,
 With whom should I be angry when it is hurt?

This indicates that the nature of our body is subject to pain and suffering. It is similar to someone affected by a disease that causes the skin to fall off; even a gentle touch to the skin can cause them excruciating pain. These lines are saying that the body we have acquired is in the nature of such suffering. They are also saying that craving blinds us to it – that, despite our body having this nature of being easily harmed and thus susceptible to pain, we are still very attached to it. We can't even tolerate a tiny ant biting us.

So this verse raises the question, if it is in the nature of our body to experience suffering and pain, why we are so attached to it?

The next verse reads:

If some people, out of confusion, harm others
 While others in confusion get angry with them,
 Who is blameless
 And who is to blame?

This is indeed true. When we think of those who cause harm to others, the cause for them to do such harmful actions is related to their ignorant, confused state of mind. Due to that confused or ignorant state of mind, they can even kill other beings. Additionally, for those who receive the harm, the cause of not being able to tolerate receiving harm is also related to their ignorant, confused state of mind.

The particular type of confusion referred to here is ignorance of the law of cause and effect: of not knowing that virtue results in happiness, and non-virtue results in unhappiness. By being completely blind to the truth of the law of cause and effect, people harm others and also retaliate against others who harm them.

(b') Analyzing your commitment

Develop the fortitude of patience, thinking, "It is wrong for even *sravakas*, who act for their own purposes alone, to be impatient and get angry..."

So, in terms of fulfilling their spiritual goal, it is even inappropriate for *sravakas* – whose main aim is to fulfil

their own spiritual goal – to lose their temper or be impatient and become angry.

... So of course it is wrong for me. I committed myself to achieving the benefit and happiness of all living beings when I generated the spirit of enlightenment. I act for others' welfare and care for all beings."

This clearly reminds us that, in having cultivated the bodhicitta mind, we have resolved to work for the benefit of all sentient beings. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, if it is wrong for someone who is seeking their own spiritual goal to be impatient with others, what need is there to mention those who have committed to work for the welfare of all sentient beings? It is wrong for them to be impatient with others.

As the text says here, when you generate the spirit of enlightenment, you have genuinely aspired to achieve supreme enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. Having generated the aspiration for supreme enlightenment, to fulfil the welfare of all sentient beings, you then take the bodhisattva precepts and resolve to engage in the bodhisattva deeds of the six perfections, as well as the four means of gathering others. Therefore, you need to practise patience.

Also, Bo-do-wa said:

The Buddha's teaching is to commit no sin. When you fail to cultivate patience with a slight harm, you make the curse, "May this eradicate the teaching." Thereby you give up your vow, and this eradicates the teaching. We do not have the teaching as a whole; when we break our vows, we dissipate what we do have.

When we talk of the Buddhadharma, we are referring to the Dharma that exists in the world or within ourselves. The implication here is that the personal Buddhadharma existing within ourselves is more important. Even if the Buddhadharma exists in the world, it doesn't exist within us if we go against the Dharma, such as transgressing our spiritual precepts, and so forth. In that case, we are depriving ourselves of the Buddhadharma and also causing the decline of the Dharma. So *we dissipate what we do have*.

And also:

When a yak has been saddled up for carrying goods, if the saddle tightens around his tail, he bucks, and the saddle beats against his legs. If the saddle is loosened, the straps drop, and the yak is happy. Similarly, if you do not relax around a harmdoer, the harmdoer matches what you do, and you steadily become more unhappy.

(b) Showing that compassion is appropriate

In this section, Lama Tsongkhapa is saying that not only should we stop retaliating or being impatient with others, but we should be really cultivating compassion for them. It shows here how we can arouse compassion within ourselves:

Contemplate from the depths of your heart, "All living beings have been in cyclic existence since beginningless time, and there is not one who has not been my friend and relative – father, mother, etc. Being impermanent, they lose their lives and are miserable due to the three types of suffering. Crazed by the demon of the afflictions, they destroy their own welfare in this and future lives. I must generate compassion for them. How could it be right to get angry or to retaliate for harm?"

So we reflect upon the situation of all other sentient beings – that there is no certainty about our past relationships with them, in terms of their having been our friends, enemies or strangers since beginningless time. Also reflect upon the fact that all beings are in the nature of impermanence; therefore, they are all subject to death sooner or later. They will soon be separated from their present lives.

Further, they are all subject to the three types of suffering. Not only that, but their minds are completely under the influence of mental afflictions. Due to this, not only are they suffering, but they also don't know what is beneficial or harmful in the immediate and distant future.

If we reflect on these points, we will be able to give rise to a sense of compassion. Then there will be no way for us to feel animosity towards others. We will be able to cultivate an unbiased compassion. As implied here, there is no certainty about our relationship with others. There are no grounds for us to feel close to some beings with attachment; nor feel aversion towards others, seeing them as something distant; nor feel indifference towards others, feeling neither close nor distant. If we take what is mentioned here as a way to generate compassion, then our compassion will be unbiased and impartial.

This reminds us that we need to make a deliberate effort to cultivate compassion towards those whom we view as an enemy or a stranger. Compassion and love towards beings we feel close to will arise naturally, whether that closeness is the result of a family connection, or physical attraction, or whatever it is. There is little need for us to make an effort.

However, we need to put effort into showing compassion towards enemies and strangers. As mentioned here, to generate compassion for our enemies, we need to consider that they are no different from our present friends; in the past, they were also our friends. The fact that we see them as an enemy now doesn't mean they have always been our enemy. We can see they are no different from our friends. So we make a deliberate effort to generate compassion towards all beings.

(2") Stopping impatience with those who prevent your praise, fame, or honor, and with those who have contempt for you, or say offensive or unpleasant things to you

Stopping impatience with those who prevent your praise and so forth, and with those who have contempt for you and so forth has two parts:

1. Stopping impatience with those who prevent three things – praise, fame, or honor
2. Stopping impatience with those who do three things to you, have contempt for you, or say offensive or unpleasant things to you

(a) Stopping impatience with those who prevent three things – praise, fame, or honor

Stopping impatience with those who prevent three things – praise, and so forth has three parts:

1. Reflection on how praise and so forth lack good qualities
2. Reflection on how praise and so forth have faults

3. The need to delight in those who prevent praise and so forth

(1) Reflection on how praise and so forth lack good qualities

When others praise you and spread your fame, it serves neither of two purposes: for this life it does not bring you long life, health, and the like, and for future lives it does not bring merit and so forth. Essentially the advice is how to prevent the feeling of hurt or losing one's temper because of some other who is causing harm to one's fame, reputation, good name. Therefore it points here about if you reflect really on what is the advantages of having good name or fame.

If you think about the benefit of having a good name and reputation in this life or in the immediate future, as Lama Tsongkhapa points out here, does it cause you to live longer or help improve your health? Of course, there is no such benefit. Likewise, in terms of your future life, will fame help you to create or increase merit? Of course it has no such benefit. The text continues:

Therefore, do not get attached to fame and praise, but reproach yourself by thinking, "My displeasure when my praise and fame are ruined is no different from when small children cry upon the collapse of their sand castles, which lack any of the requisites for a dwelling."

A child's sandcastle has no real purpose. It doesn't provide shelter, but if it is damaged, the child or children who built it can become upset and cry. The text is saying we should regard damage to one's good name and reputation in the same way.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Praise, fame, and honor
Do not cause merit, nor longevity,
Nor cause strength, nor health,
Nor bring physical well-being.
Once I understand my own welfare,
What meaning is there for me in those?

This verse shows the practice of the bodhisattva: by applying this way of thinking, a bodhisattva never loses his or her temper, or feels hurt by their name or reputation being damaged. Harm to their name and fame doesn't cause harm to the mind of the bodhisattva. Otherwise, as it says here:

And also:

When their sand castles collapse,
Children cry in great distress.
Likewise, my mind is childish
When my praise and fame are ruined.

(2) Reflection on how praise and so forth have faults

Develop disgust for praise and so forth, thinking, "Praise, fame, and honor distract my mind with the meaningless, destroy my disenchantment with cyclic existence, make me jealous of those with good qualities, and spoil my virtuous activities."

Here, one overcomes desire for praise and fame by thinking about the shortcomings of praise and so forth. As it says here, *praise, fame and honour* can serve as a cause of great distraction. We see people who become popular, getting invited here and there, and becoming distracted from what they are supposed to be doing. And *destroy my disenchantment with cyclic existence* is the effect on one's renunciation, the thought of wanting to free

oneself from cyclic existence. Praise, fame and honour also *make me jealous of those with good qualities, and spoil my virtuous activities.*

So when we think about the shortcomings of fame, it helps us not to lose our temper or feel impatient with those who harm our good name.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Praise and so forth distract me,
Destroy my disenchantment,
Promote my jealousy of those with good qualities,
And destroy all that is good.

(3)) The need to delight in those who prevent praise and so forth

This section shows, in fact, there is reason to feel joy and take delight when others harm one's fame or prevent one receiving praise, and so forth. Reflect on this.

Stop your anger and feel delight from the depths of your heart, thinking, "In that case, damage to my praise, fame, gain, and honor protects me from going to miserable realms, cuts the bonds of my attachment, and, like the Buddha's blessing, blocks the door through which I am about to enter into suffering." Thinking like this, you should from the depths of your heart stop anger and feel happy.

This provides a different and more positive way of looking at damage to one's reputation.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Therefore, are not those involved in destroying
Praise of me and the like
Engaged in protecting me
From falling into miserable realms?

I diligently seek freedom
And do not need the bonds of gain and honor;
How could I get angry
With those who free me from bondage?

I am about to descend into suffering,
But, like the Buddha's blessing, they are
Giving me an opportunity to avoid it.
How could I be angry with them?

(b)) Stopping impatience with those who do three things to you have contempt for you, or say offensive or unpleasant things to you

This is the next heading.

We are now going to recite the Samantabhadra Prayer for Jools Gardner's mother, who is apparently unwell. Jools is one of the oldest students and members of this centre. We will also dedicate the prayer for the wellbeing of Helen Sinnema.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

25 June 2019

As usual, we will start with tong-len meditation. [*Tonglen meditation*]

Try to cultivate a proper motivation. If you consider any activity that you engage in to be special, then generating the right motivation prior to the activity is particularly important. Whereas, if the action is insignificant, it may not be that necessary.

What all beings wish for is happiness, and what they don't want is unhappiness. Virtue is the cause of happiness and non-virtue is the cause of unhappiness. This fact relates to ourselves and to all other beings. When we engage in the meditation of giving and taking, we imagine all sentient beings in the space in front of us. Then, with our love and the thought of giving, we wholeheartedly give away all our happiness, including the causes of happiness – which is what all sentient beings desire or wish for. And with our compassion and the thought of taking, we imagine taking upon ourselves all the suffering, together with the causes of suffering, of all living beings.

Hence, we can understand how profound this meditation of giving and taking is, in which we generate and increase the genuine thought of wishing all beings to have happiness and to be free from suffering. Indeed, it is said that this is a cause for us to accumulate enormous merit.

However, we can't just leave it there; we should also follow up on this meditation by taking upon ourselves the responsibility of freeing all beings from suffering and placing them in a state of happiness. Therefore, after cultivating and developing love and compassion, we should also cultivate what we call a sense of universal responsibility, that 'I will free all beings from suffering and cause them to have happiness'. This is called the *superior intention* of taking the welfare of all sentient beings upon oneself.

Then, as we think over how to accomplish the welfare of all beings, we will realise that we must achieve complete enlightenment, the state of buddhahood – this is the only way by which we can truly accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings. In this way, we end up generating an altruistic mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, which is an aspiration to achieve buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings.

In this meditation of giving and taking and cultivating bodhicitta, we are resolving to give all beings all the things they want, and to free them from all the things they do not want. It is important that we try to live up to this resolution by integrating the bodhisattva deeds into our everyday life. This means applying the practice of giving and taking to those we live with, befriend and interact with, in our everyday life. As a result, we will be

adding genuine love and compassion to our relationships, as well as making others happy and helping them overcome difficulties in their lives.

In addition to benefiting those around us, we ourselves will directly benefit from practising love and compassion. We can see that, as a benefit of such a practice, we will appear pleasant and admirable in the eyes of those close to us, such as family, friends, and work colleagues. In fact, everyone, regardless of whether they are believers or non-believers, will greatly appreciate and admire anyone who practises giving and taking through showing love and compassion for others. Therefore, it is good to remember the profound and beneficial effect that such a practice has on ourselves and others. It is no doubt the most effective cause to build, strengthen and develop beneficial relationships with others.

As the great Lama Tsongkhapa advises, it is important that we put this teaching into practice according to our own capacity. Even though we may be learning about very advanced stages of spiritual practice, when it comes to our own practice, we should begin from where we are, and with whatever is most relevant for us, according to our ability. As we just said, in our everyday life, we must try to practise being a very caring, kind and gentle person with whomever we interact or meet. For example, when communicating with others, we must try to use gentle and pleasant words or gestures, knowing that even a few pleasant words or a little bit of pleasantness in our body language can be a cause to bring happiness in the minds of others.

At a practical level, there is no way we can match the deeds of a bodhisattva, but this doesn't really matter right now. What matters most to us is applying those practices we are capable of, even though they may be very simple and basic. In other words, we can only make progress on the path through practice.

We begin by implementing those practices that are within our reach, then move on to the next level, and so on. If we put aside the practices that we can do, and instead try or pretend to practise something that is too high or too advanced for our level, we will never progress along the path.

We will continue with the text from the heading:

(b") Stopping both dislike for harmdoers' attainments and delight in their troubles

Before we go into detail, think about what this heading tells us. What does 'stopping dislike for harmdoers' attainments' mean? It relates to the hate or dislike we feel when we witness the success or goodness of a harmdoer or someone we dislike. But what good and benefit is there in disliking their success and attainments? By disliking their success, do we really vanquish or harm them? Does this attitude bring more profit, joy or happiness to us?

On the other hand, when we see our enemies fail and go downhill, somehow it makes us feel good and happy; we like to see that happen. This is so wrong. So we need to consider whether or not there is a real benefit of holding this attitude of resenting harmdoers' attainments and delighting in their downfalls.

We can see here, just in the outlines and headings of his writing – and indeed in every sentence throughout the lam-rim teachings – how the great Tsongkhapa makes very profound statements about finding happiness and eliminating suffering. However, to fully understand the meaning and derive benefit from them, we need to think over these statements with good concentration and discriminating wisdom.

Here, the teaching is simply saying that we should not feel jealous of others' success and good achievements. We all know that when we feel jealous, we lose our own happiness and feel bad. Therefore, this teaching motivates and helps us overcome such suffering in our life.

When it says here that we should stop dislike for harmdoers' attainments, the text is conveying to us a very beneficial practice: that we should not feel dislike for or hate harmdoers' attainments because, if we do feel such resentment, the result will be mental pain and suffering for us. Alternatively, if we take delight or rejoice in harmdoers' attainments, the effect will be mental joy and happiness for us.

Likewise, if we 'delight in their troubles', in harmdoers' downfalls, the result is that we prevent love and compassion from arising within us. It is wrong to hold such an attitude.

The presentation continues:

Contemplate as follows, "After I have generated the spirit of enlightenment for the sake of accomplishing all living beings' benefit and happiness, I get angry at harmdoers when they obtain happiness on their own. After I have said that I want all beings to become buddhas, I get unhappy when harmdoers get even minimal prosperity or honor. This is extremely contradictory."

The meaning of this is quite self-explanatory. It is saying we must try to overcome the thought of disliking others' success by thinking of how contradictory it is that, on the one hand, we think of cultivating bodhicitta or the altruistic mind of enlightenment – a resolve to benefit others – then, on the other hand, we dislike or hate other beings' attainments and successes. We should rather think of their attainment of happiness on their own as if they have completed half of our task of benefiting them. So, we only have to attend to the other half. This gives us a good reason to rejoice and take delight in their attainments and happiness.

The commentary continues:

You must eliminate your jealousy regarding any sort of attainment by other persons and delight in it from the depths of your heart. Otherwise your spirit of enlightenment and the achievement of the welfare and happiness of beings are nothing but words.

Earlier, we engaged in the meditation of giving and taking, which essentially is based on a loving and caring thought and the bodhicitta mind to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all beings. Giving and taking meditation is done with the spirit of the bodhicitta mind, whereby we mentally give away all our happiness and take the suffering of all beings upon ourselves. The text is saying here that if we always allow jealousy to arise in

response to others' happiness, then all our practices will be nothing but words.

The commentary continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Since you want all beings to be happy,
You have generated the spirit of enlightenment.
Then, when beings find happiness themselves,
Why do you get angry with them?

If you wish to attain for living beings' welfare
Buddhahood, which is worshipped in the three worlds,
Why are you tormented when you see
Their most paltry gain or honor?

When a relative finds sustenance
For those whom you should nurture –
Objects of your care and generosity –
Instead of being pleased, are you angry again?

If you do not wish even that for beings,
How can you wish them enlightenment?
Where is the spirit of enlightenment
In someone who gets angry at others' attainments?

Whether your enemy gets something from someone
Or it remains in the benefactor's house
It is never yours, so why be angry –
Whether it is given or not?

This is a direct quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*. So, to understand this in more detail, you should refer to any commentaries on that text.

Even your mere malicious thoughts that delight in your enemies' troubles or that wish for their destruction do not harm your enemy; they lead only to your own suffering. Yet, if such malice were to harm them, you should stop it completely, reflecting on the drawback that this would bring ruin to yourself and others.

Here it talks about *malicious thoughts that delight in your enemies' troubles*. When we see our enemies fail, we take pleasure in it. We also wish them to lose and go downhill, and we hold malice and ill-thought towards them. It says here that, to overcome this, we need to consider whether taking joy in their downfall and wishing them to fail actually harms them, in the sense of defeating an enemy, or not. Of course, it doesn't defeat them. Instead, if we let such an ill-mind and malicious thoughts arise, we suffer and become unhappy as a result. As it also says here, *yet if such malice were to harm them* – even if we did hold malicious thoughts and did something to them, the result would not only be harm to them, but also harm to ourselves. So, thinking about the detrimental consequences of causing any harm to others, both for ourselves and others, we should try to overcome such thoughts.

The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

When my enemies are unhappy,
What am I pleased about?
My wishes alone
Will cause them no harm.

Even if I should effect their suffering with my wish,
What could I be pleased about?
If I say I will be satisfied,
What could be more ruinous?

Here it is saying that, usually, when we challenge or cause harm to our enemies, it gives us satisfaction and pleasure; we have a sense of accomplishment and achievement from being able to make them unhappy and harm them. These verses are saying that having such an attitude simply reflects our deep-seated anger and hatred towards them.

The text continues with the next verse from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*.

Once I am caught by the terrible, sharp hook
Cast by the fishermen, the afflictions,
I will surely be cooked by the hell-guardians
In a kettle for the beings of hell.

This analogy explains the shortcomings of mental afflictions, such as strong anger and hatred.

The text continues:

You will be unhappy if you view as absolutely undesirable the obstacles to what you and your friends want, movement in directions you do not want, and the prosperity of your enemies. If this unhappiness increases, you become hostile. If you stop your absolute dislike of these three things, you prevent unhappiness. Once you do this, you will not feel hostile. Thus, dispel your absolute dislike of these by using the reasonings previously taught. Take many approaches to stop your anger, because it is a very great fault.

The content of the above lines is quite self-explanatory. The point being made here is about the causes and conditions that give rise to, and increase, anger and hatred – such as our intolerance towards harm done to ourselves or our ‘side’, or our intolerance towards the happiness and prosperity of our enemies. Hence, we are advised to counteract anger and hatred in whatever way we can, through applying various ways and means.

The text continues:

These instructions – the lines of reasoning of the conquerors and their children presented above – provide the techniques for defeating your greatest enemy, anger. They involve arguing with your own afflictions and looking within yourself.

Referring to all the things we mentioned earlier – such as the shortcomings of anger, and the benefits of patience – the text is saying here that we need to turn our mental focus and attention inward, and defeat anger and gain patience.

When you analyze well with discerning wisdom and stop anger with many lines of reasoning, you prevent many different types of anger, and you become patient in many ways. Since this is an experience engendered by penetrating understanding that uses flawless reasoning to get at the meaning of correct scriptures, it leaves an extremely stable latent propensity.

Those who reject meditative analysis with discerning wisdom are those who reject the whole of the great undertaking of bodhisattva deeds such as these. Understand that such rejection is the worst hindrance to using a life of leisure for the benefit of yourself and others. Get rid of it as you would poison.

Here and in many other texts, we will note that Lama Tsongkhapa emphasises developing discriminating wisdom more than developing single-pointed concentration. Indeed, of the two types of meditation – stabilising and analytical – the latter is more effective and

important for beginners in establishing a firm ground or basis on the path. Having said this, it is also crucial that we employ both analytical wisdom and single-pointed concentration together in our meditation.

If, instead of focusing on developing wisdom, we only focus on developing single-pointed concentration or a state of relaxation, the text warns here that we need to *understand that such rejection is the worst hindrance to using a life of leisure for the benefit of yourself and others. Get rid of it as you would poison.* You would have heard about how some godly beings, such as the long-lived gods, can remain in single-pointed concentration for as long as they want, yet at the end of their lives, they are subject to falling into lower rebirths. This clearly shows the drawback of concentration without wisdom.

Therefore, as indicated here, the union of calm abiding (*shamatha*) and superior insight (*vipasyana*) is crucial in our meditation because the mind is not only able to focus in a perfect state of single-pointed concentration, but at the same time is able to discern and penetrate reality with analysing wisdom. Further, in conjunction with single-pointed concentration, when that wisdom deeply and finely analyses the truth, the bliss of pliancy will arise as a result. It is said that this bliss of pliancy resulting from the force of wisdom analysing the truth also maintains a perfect single-pointed state of concentration.

In short, the implication here is that we should not reject analytical wisdom and simply direct our focus to single-pointed concentration. Rather, we should engage in the union of both single-pointed concentration and analytical wisdom, or the union of calm abiding and superior insight.

(2') Developing the patience of accepting suffering

Developing the patience of accepting suffering has three parts:

1. The reason you must definitely accept suffering
2. The way to develop acceptance
3. A detailed explanation from the viewpoint of the bases

Again we can see here how the outline follows a logical progression, for example, immediately after the presentation of *the reason you must definitely accept suffering is the way to developing the acceptance.*

The text then goes into detail under each of those headings.

(a'') The reason you must definitely accept suffering

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

The causes of happiness sometimes occur,
Whereas the causes of suffering occur frequently.

As you continually experience whatever suffering is appropriate to you, you absolutely must know how to bring it into the path. Otherwise, as the *Compendium of Trainings* says, you either generate hostility or you become discouraged about cultivating the path, either circumstance interfering with applying yourself to virtue.

When we talk about the practice of accepting suffering as a type of practice of patience, broadly speaking, it is applicable to almost all situations. Whereas, when we talk about the other two types of patience – the patience of disregarding harm or of non-retaliation, and the

patience of thinking of the Dharma - they are applicable only to specific situations and circumstances.

As it clearly says in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, 'the causes of happiness sometimes occur' – the reason we need to accept suffering is that if we think about it, the causes of happiness are few, whereas the causes of suffering are many. So we must know how to transform adverse situations into favourable ones. We are not necessarily talking about turning the experience of suffering itself into the path – rather, of making it a favourable condition for us on the path.

This technique of transforming adversity or a suffering situation into a favourable one is very important. Without this capacity, *as the Compendium of Trainings says, you either generate hostility ...* which is referring to how, whenever you confront adversity or something undesirable or unwanted, you begin to feel hatred or dislike or ... *you become discouraged about cultivating the path, either circumstance interfering with applying yourself to virtue.*

Moreover, some sufferings will be caused by others, and some will be produced by your former karma, whether or not you strive at the path.

This is talking about the causes and conditions that result in the various kinds of suffering we experience – how certain things arise, regardless of whether we are following the path or not, and due to those causes and conditions, suffering arises.

Some, as will be explained below, occur when you engage in virtuous activity but do not occur when you are not so engaged.

This specifies how some instances of suffering don't arise in a normal day, but arise when one engages in virtuous practice.

For the time being, you cannot dispel the sufferings definitely produced by the power of former karma and immediate conditions. You must accept them when they arise, because (1) if you do not do this, in addition to the basic suffering, you have the suffering of worry that is produced by your own thoughts, and then the suffering becomes very difficult for you to bear; ...

This clearly implies how certain sufferings are inevitable, we cannot stop them. On top of that, if we worry about suffering, or feel unhappy about the experience of suffering, we will be adding more suffering to the suffering we already have.

... (2) if you accept the suffering, you let the basic suffering be and do not stop it, but you never have the suffering of worry that creates discontentment when you focus on the basic suffering; (3) since you are using a method to bring even basic sufferings into the path, you greatly lessen your suffering, so you can bear it. Therefore, it is very crucial that you generate the patience that accepts suffering.

Essentially, it is saying here that we should try to stop worrying about suffering.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that accepting suffering is the most effective means of eliminating it. His Holiness further said that he learned his most important lessons during the most difficult parts of his life. We can understand here that there is a positive side to the suffering and hardship we experience in our lives.

We will do the 'Twenty-one Tara Praises' for Ingrid for her quick recovery. It is said in the sutras if a person has enough merit, then all his or her wishes will be fulfilled. So, we will recite this prayer to increase merits for Ingrid, so that she will recover from illness, live long and find happiness.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

འདྲུག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

2 July 2019

As usual we will do the giving and taking meditation.

Meditation

There's no need to mention that we need to have the right motivation for receiving the teaching. The motivation should be bodhicitta, which is an aspiration to achieve enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. Essentially bodhicitta is a pure intention to benefit all beings and fulfil their wishes.

Hence, whenever we generate bodhicitta as a motivation for listening to the teachings or undertaking any activities, we are resolving to extend benefit and happiness to other beings. Everyone, believers and non-believers alike, recognises the excellent, admirable qualities of this thought of giving benefit and happiness to others. We should also understand that when we cultivate this marvellous wonderful thought within us, not only do we give peace and happiness to other beings, but we will also experience tremendous peace and happiness ourselves. We know this from our own experience, and also because it is common sense. We all admire and acknowledge the worthiness of this thought of altruism.

We praise this altruistic thought, but when we look into our own mind and check, 'Do I have this thought within me? Are my daily actions driven by it?' we'll find that most probably we don't have that thought of altruism. Rather we have a self-centred mind and everything we do is driven by that. Then, rather than that thought of altruism, we generate its opposite, i.e. thoughts of causing harm and trouble for others. In following Dharma practice, we must understand that our main goal is to eradicate negative states of mind and cultivate positive states of mind. This really is the essence of Dharma practice. If our practices have no effect in subduing our mind and cultivating positive or virtuous states of mind, then either we are not practising the Dharma, or we are not practising properly.

The main purpose of practising the Dharma is to bring about positive changes from within - to bring about peace and happiness within ourselves. Although there are some occasions where we rely on and seek help from others, we all have to take personal responsibility for bringing about that personal peace and happiness. What is that responsibility? It is to achieve what we want to achieve, which is happiness, and to avoid what we want to avoid, which is suffering. We follow Dharma practice to fulfil that responsibility. Although we talk a lot about benefiting other sentient beings, how can we benefit others if we can't take care of our own mental and physical health?

So, we need to ensure that whatever we do is beneficial for our own wellbeing too. As to the point of view of benefitting ourselves, one of the things that matters most is our own state of mind. That's why I was saying before that cultivating a mind of altruism, loving kindness and a good heart will automatically bring us the peace and happiness we seek. Indeed, altruism is the remedy to a lot of the problems we experience, which mainly result from generating negative mental attitudes. So, if we hold a

positive state of mind within ourselves, we will no longer experience those unnecessary problems, and we will find more happiness from within, which in turn supports our physical health too. In this way, we are in a good position to benefit other beings.

Normally, when we talk about helping others or contributing to the community, we primarily think in terms of material aid, such as giving away money. But in fact we can benefit others and society far more effectively by cultivating and sharing a positive state of mind, such as a good heart and loving kindness towards others. Then whatever actions we do will be truly beneficial to others, as well as to ourselves.

I hope I am not boring you because I feel that I often sound like I am telling you my own life story, and you are hearing the same thing again and again.

We know that those who live in the third world or in poor countries undergo suffering mainly because of not having shelter, clothes, food and drink. Every day they struggle to overcome that suffering. It is amazing to see how some Christian practitioners dedicate their lives to eliminating poverty in the third world, giving charity to those impoverished people. We could say that as living conditions get better in the third world people there will find more happiness and satisfaction.

On the other hand, in the developed world people undergo suffering that is mainly related to their mental and emotional wellbeing. There is no real problem of shortages of food, clothing or shelter. As the cause of the problem is related to mental health, people need to make an effort to bring a change within their own mind to remedy the problem. For example, cultivating loving kindness and a good heart is very effective in getting rid of mental illnesses and bringing lasting happiness and joy within us.

Usually we identify happiness with external objects. We seek the seeming pleasure of experiencing beautiful forms, pleasant sounds and tactile sensations and so on. In other words, our experience of happiness is contingent upon the contact of our sensory faculties with their respective objects. For example, many people identify happiness with money. So, when they have no money, they feel they are bereft of happiness. Likewise, people feel they can't be happy and there is no meaning to their life unless they gain whatever external or material object they are seeking. If, after gaining their sought-after object, they lose it, they feel empty.

The real question is this: Do material objects satisfy us of their own accord? No, they don't because satisfaction arises with contentment of the mind. If the mind is not contented, then no matter how much or what we possess we cannot be happy. Although there is an abundance of wealth and material comfort in the developed world, people live very unsatisfied and frustrated lives. This is because they are not mentally contented and are always looking for more and better goods. People always think that if I make good money, I will be happy; if I could have this, I would be happy; or if I win that person as my friend, I will be happy. However, if our mind remains unchecked and unsubdued external objects bring no satisfaction and happiness. In order to be happy and at rest, we need to prevent and reduce the mind of desire. Without controlling desire, we cannot be happy and satisfied, even if we possess a lot and live a very comfortable life. Likewise, feeling jealous of the possessions of others, wanting to compete with others or feeling pride can also be a cause for unhappiness and restlessness, despite being surrounded by good external conditions. So, it is

important to recognise the fact that filling our mind with states of mind like desire, anger, jealousy and pride and so on is suffering, and being free from such minds or having a state of mind lacking desire, anger, jealousy, pride and so on is happiness. If we don't recognise this difference, then we simply become prey to those miserable states of mind.

Does jealousy bring you joy or not? People who understand that jealousy is not beneficial and is in fact very harmful, because it destroys peace and happiness, will think of getting rid of it. Those who lack that knowledge won't think of overcoming jealousy and will have to put up with the suffering it causes. As a way of releasing the pain of jealousy they knowingly or unknowingly start criticising and denigrating others. Then things will go from bad to worse. At other times people lose their peace and happiness simply by seeing the goodness of other people, and then get tense and want to compete with them. Again, what use is this? With minds filled with mental afflictions we won't find peace and happiness, no matter how rich we are or how much wealth we possess.

In the third world and other poverty-stricken countries, people are subject to very poor living conditions. Every day they suffer and struggle to find food, drink, clothes and a roof over their heads. Their suffering is obviously related to poor material conditions. As it is not so much related to their mind, because they can be immediately contented and happy as soon as they meet their material needs, such as finding food and drink. We often see families enjoying the time they spend together having meals together and so on, even though they are very poor. So, from one angle, people in poorer countries are living more contented and happier lives than those in wealthier countries.

In summary, if we cultivate love and compassion, we can diminish mental afflictions and thereby enhance peace and happiness. And love and compassion underpin the essence of Dharma practice.

You would have heard of this advice from Geshe Chengawa, one of the most prominent Kadampa masters renowned for his mind generation of bodhicitta. He said, 'In general, if you were to condense all the teachings – all three baskets and the two vehicles – they can be embodied in two: refraining from harming others and helping others. Forbearance is critical to putting these two into practice, for without forbearance you will retaliate when others inflict harm upon you, and you will not turn away from causing harm when this happens. Without this forbearance there is no helping others. So, to succeed in your Dharma practice, forbearance is essential.' Essentially Geshe Chengawa was saying that even though the corpus of teachings is very extensive it can be condensed into the three baskets of teachings, or two vehicles, and practising them can be condensed into either refraining from causing harm to others or benefitting them. Furthermore, the practice of patience is indispensable to putting this advice into practice. If you have patience, then you will be able to make consistent progress. Without patience, then whenever you face adversity or receive harm from others, you will lose your temper and retaliate. If you continually hold onto a sense of retaliation, then you will never be able to prevent harmful actions.

2') Developing the patience of accepting suffering (a'') The reason you must definitely accept suffering (cont.)

Last week we stopped at this line:

Therefore, it is very crucial that you generate the patience that accepts suffering.

Here we need to have some idea of what this patience of acceptance means. It means being able to tolerate any harm you receive from others, or any adversity you face, so that they don't disturb or provoke your mind. We also learn how the patience of accepting suffering is very important, because if we lack it, then we will just be adding more suffering to the suffering we already experience. Our inability to tolerate suffering and difficulties, mentally worrying about them and being disturbed by them, just adds more suffering to the initial problem.

(b'') The way to develop acceptance

The way to develop acceptance has two parts:

1. Rejecting the idea that when suffering occurs it is absolutely unpleasant
2. Showing that it is appropriate to accept suffering

(1'') Rejecting the idea that when suffering occurs it is absolutely unpleasant

This section talks about the importance of overcoming the thought that suffering and hardship is always very negative and harmful. If we hold that view, then whenever we confront hardship, we mentally view it as bad and begin to hate it, which then gives way to anger. As the text says:

If you can remedy a situation wherein suffering occurs, you do not need to feel that it is unpleasant. If you cannot remedy it, it is not helpful to find it unpleasant, so there is no need for, or effectiveness to, your displeasure; there is even a disadvantage.

This particular piece of advice is widely known and applied; many people have found it very useful because it helped them to transform their negative and pessimistic perspective of hardship or adverse situations into something positive and optimistic. The advice here is that whenever we face or confront certain difficulties pertaining to our physical or mental and emotional health, then rather than simply worrying about it, we should be directing our mind to thinking about whether there is a remedy. Is there any remedy to overcome that difficulty or hardship? For example, if it is a health issue that you face, then you have to ask what you can do by focusing on treating the illness that you have. Fortunately, these days when it comes to physical health, we have very good resources such as good hospitals, doctors and nurses. This is something we enjoy as humans, although animals don't.

What the text is saying is that when you consider what you can do to overcome a problem, then you can find the remedy and see an end to the problem. This gives you hope and helps to eliminate unhappiness. However, if there is no remedy, then why should we worry because worrying will add more suffering and be of no use. This advice is very educational and very enlightening because when we think like this, it makes us feel we are on top of the suffering; otherwise we fall under the pressure of suffering. Without that kind of perspective, the suffering and hardships of life can completely control us. Then we will lose all hope and experience despair.

As the text states:

If you are very impatient, a slight suffering is extremely difficult to bear, whereas if you minimize your impatience, you can endure great suffering.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

If there is a remedy,
Why be displeased?
If there is no remedy,
What is the use of being displeased?

I shall not be impatient with
Heat, cold, wind, and rain,
Illness, bondage, beatings, and so on;
If I am, the harm increases.

(2") Showing that it is appropriate to accept suffering

Showing that it is appropriate to accept suffering has three parts:

1. Reflecting on the good qualities of suffering
2. Reflecting on the advantages of bearing suffering's hardships
3. How it is not difficult to bear suffering if you gradually grow accustomed to it, starting with the small

(a) Reflecting on the good qualities of suffering

Suffering has five good qualities: (1) *The good quality of spurring you on to liberation.* This is because if you had no suffering, you would not develop the determination to be free of it.

The first positive quality of suffering is that it gives us an opportunity to cultivate renunciation. Renunciation refers to your desire to leave cyclic existence or the suffering of this worldly existence. It is saying here that the experience of suffering stimulates a sense of renunciation, a sense of wanting to emerge from suffering. So, with renunciation we begin to strive for the state of liberation. Therefore, the quality of suffering is that it causes renunciation.

(2) *The good quality of dispelling arrogance.* This is because when suffering strikes you, it reduces your sense of superiority.

This is again very true. Suffering causes a reduction in pride. For example, people who are normally very arrogant lose their pride when they face severe hardship; under adverse circumstances they may even look low and weak physically.

(3) *The good quality of causing you to shun sin.* This is because when you experience very painful feelings, they arise from non-virtue, so if you do not want these effects, you must avoid their causes.

When we experience suffering or any hardship, we do not want it and we have a strong wish to be free from it. So, the suffering situation can motivate us to look into the causes of suffering and make an effort to avoid suffering in the future. Essentially, suffering teaches us about the law of karma, for it shows us that sinful and negative actions are the cause of suffering, and if we do not want suffering, we must avoid non-virtues or sinful actions.

(4) *The good quality of causing you to like cultivating virtue.* This is because when you are tormented with suffering, you desire happiness, and once you want it, you must cultivate the virtue that causes it.

It is also a paradox that we recognise the value of happiness in the experience of suffering. It is when we face suffering or problems that our desire for life's happiness and joy becomes more apparent. Therefore, the experience of suffering can lead us to live life more skilfully and wisely and recognise accumulating virtues as a cause of the

happiness and joy we seek. In this way, suffering can inspire us to engage in virtuous actions.

The text continues:

(5) *The good quality of producing compassion for those who wander in cyclic existence.* This is because after you have assessed your own situation, you think, "Other beings suffer like this." From these five and what they indicate, recognize other good qualities on your own and then repeatedly train your mind to think, "This suffering is a condition that I want."

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Since without suffering there is no determination to be free,
You, mind, stay fixed!

And also:

Furthermore, the good qualities of suffering are that you
Dispel arrogance with disenchantment,
Develop compassion for the beings of cyclic existence,
Carefully avoid sin, and delight in virtue.

This fifth quality of suffering is that suffering helps us to gain a better understanding of the suffering of other beings and thereby have more compassion for them. Based on our own experience of suffering, we have a better understanding of what beings are also experiencing. Therefore, we can easily feel empathy for those who are suffering. It is said that just as contemplating one's own suffering can instil a sense of renunciation and a wish to achieve liberation, contemplating the suffering of other beings can instil compassion, a wish to free them from suffering.

When Lama Tsongkhapa says *From these five and what they indicate, recognize other good qualities on your own* he is referring to the good qualities of suffering and hardship. Then he encourages us to *repeatedly train your mind to think, "This suffering is a condition that I want."* Through this we generate a positive mental outlook in relation to suffering and hardship.

In essence, we understand here the value of implementing the patience of the acceptance of suffering. Without it, then instead of finding peace, we will easily generate anger and hatred and harmful thoughts. As a result of holding such ill thoughts towards other beings, we will find no end to misery and suffering in our lives. So, the whole point is that if we want to be able to maintain a very happy and joyful state of mind, we must integrate the patience of the acceptance of suffering into our lives.

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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

འདྲེན་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

9 July 2019

As usual we will begin with a short meditation. [*Tong-len meditation*]

Try to cultivate the proper motivation which makes a lot of difference to the efficacy of our practice.

Last week we discussed at length the benefits of developing the patience of accepting suffering. If we lack the patience of accepting suffering, then whenever we face any suffering or difficulties, we will loathe it and become very irritated or even angry. However, if our situation is favourable and pleasant and we like it, we then get attached to it and desire it.

As Dharma practitioners, we should be clear about what we should do and what we should not do. Whether we engage in meditation practice or any other form of Dharma practice, there are things we should do or accept, and things we should not do or reject. There is no point in being pretentious about our Dharma practice or appearing to be Dharma practitioners outwardly if we don't put this important point into practice.

Every event in life, good and bad, provides us with an opportunity to develop our practice of what to accept and what to reject. They give us an opportunity to practise the Dharma. When we experience suffering or any situation that we do not want, we should try to recognise that as being a result of non-virtue. This in turn should help instil the thought of refraining from engaging in non-virtues. Therefore, adverse situations serve as a cause to remind us of refraining from non-virtue. These adverse situations should also remind us to practise virtue because when we experience adverse situations we miss out on the joys and happiness of life even more than usual. Realising that happiness results from virtue, we should be inspired to practise virtue.

If we really apply this practice of adopting virtues and abandoning non-virtues, then we will find that as we develop this practice, and as our minds become more familiar with the thought of adopting virtues, and abandoning non-virtues, we will find lasting peace, stability and clarity within our mind.

The more we increase virtues and decrease non-virtues, the more peace, happiness and stability will we find in our life. So, it is essential that our spiritual practice integrates the practice of adopting virtue and of abandoning non-virtue. We know the Lord Buddha clearly said to us that the ten virtues are what we need to practise, and the ten non-virtues are what we need to abandon. This reflects the fundamental teaching of the Buddha. If we put this teaching aside and try to engage in something else that we think is very profound and meditate on that, then we are deluding ourselves.

The practice of adopting virtues and abandoning non-virtues is not only emphasised in Buddhism but is also advocated by all other major religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. You'll find that in the doctrines of all the spiritual traditions there are set guidelines as to what to adopt and what to discard. We need to adopt the ten

virtues, and discard the ten non-virtues because the ten virtues serve as a cause for yielding the desirable result of the happiness we seek, and the ten non-virtues serve as a cause for yielding the undesirable result of the suffering we do not want.

It is the same for all of us. Deep down we all have the desire for happiness, and the desire to abandon suffering and unhappiness. Yet the way we live our lives is quite the opposite; the causes we create are contrary to what we really seek in our lives. In other words, what we want and what we do are contradictory.

If we continue like that then there is no real hope of finding true peace and happiness. Even if we think we are following the Dharma and doing meditation practice, our daily actions do not accord with the Dharma teaching. I am simply saying that you should integrate the Dharma into your daily actions. This is how I try to live my life and I see it as my core Dharma practice. If we really want to gain some benefit from the Dharma and see positive change with our lives, we must integrate the Dharma into our everyday activities. The best thing I can offer to my close friends, which means all of you, is to tell you to put the Dharma into practise. I know I have been repeating myself over and over again, but I have a good reason to do so. However, if there are any among you who find what I say too noisy, I say simply close your ears. In fact, I note that even His Holiness the Dalai Lama quite frequently tells the public during his lectures that if they find his lecture too boring or deafening, they can simply cover their ears.

It's very important to remind ourselves about Dharma practice, because what we are lacking is the application of the Dharma to our daily thoughts and conduct. Through the practise of Dharma, we need to modify our daily thoughts and conduct. If we don't do that then what use is our Dharma learning! How can we expect the Dharma to benefit us and help us to achieve what we want if our thoughts and deeds run counter to the Dharma?

Now we'll continue with the text.

(b) Reflecting on the advantages of bearing suffering's hardships

Reflecting on the advantages of bearing suffering's hardships has two parts:

1. Reflecting on the crucial benefits such as liberation, etc.
2. Reflecting on the benefit of dispelling immeasurable suffering

I'll continue reading from the text which you will find very striking. It says:

(1) Reflecting on the crucial benefits such as liberation, etc.

Repeatedly make your mind steadfast, thinking, "I know that in the past while passing through cyclic existence I suffered for the sake of trifling desires and minor needs, yet I disregarded the many sufferings, undergoing a great deal of purposeless suffering that will in turn cause immeasurable suffering for me in my future lives. Given this, now that I know that I am engaged in virtue that will accomplish immeasurable benefits and happiness for myself and others, it is appropriate that I accept suffering a trillion times more than before - so of course I will accept sufferings smaller than that."

I won't go into this in detail, as the meaning is very clear. Essentially it is saying that in pursuit of very trifling, meaningless and minor purposes we sacrifice a lot. Not only

do we accept a great deal of hardship and suffering, but at the same time we accumulate a great number of non-virtues. Although the text is explicitly referring to the kinds of hardships and sufferings that we go through in association with our quest for trifling goals in the past and future lifetimes, this is also very relevant to our current life too.

The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

For the sake of my desires I have experienced
Being burned, etc., thousands of times in the hells,
But have not achieved either my own welfare
Or the welfare of others.

This quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* really summarises the meaning of the preceding passage. When it says, *for the sake of my desires I have experienced*, the word 'desire' can imply that you are misled by the wrong path. It also refers to the desire relating to any of the five sensual objects like beautiful forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch. To be more specific, out of craving for meat, people commit the act of killing of animals, out of attachment to wealth they commit the act of stealing, while lust can lead to sexual misconduct, and so forth. The word 'desire' incorporates all of this.

As result of the actions we create due to desire and attachment we experience *being burned, etc., thousands of times in the hells*. Basically, because of desire and attachment, we experience great suffering, such as of the suffering of the hell realms. Further, we *have not achieved either our own welfare or the welfare of others*. Let alone the welfare of other beings, the actions we have created out of desire have not even achieved our own purpose. Our actions have achieved nothing but a great amount of suffering!

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds continues:

This is not as harmful as that,
And it achieves great purpose,
So it is correct here only to delight
In suffering that clears away all beings' hurt.

When it says, *this is not as harmful as that*, Shantideva is referring back to the previous verse which relates to the great amount of suffering we have endured in the past to achieve worldly desires and mundane goals, and the great hardship we will endure in future lives in order to achieve small mundane goals. The amount of suffering we go through and accept in the pursuit of trifling purposes of the world is very great, but when it says here *this is not as harmful as that*, the word 'this' refers to the effort we put into our Dharma or meditation practice. Compared to the hardship and suffering we endure in our pursuit of trifling goals, the hardship and suffering we experience in our Dharma and meditation practice is very small. As it says here, *this is not as harmful as that. And it achieves great purpose*, which indicates that our practice doesn't make us suffer or harm us as much as the pursuit of mundane goals, and the effort we put into our practice does not entail a great deal of hardship. Moreover, the suffering we experience and have to tolerate in Dharma practice is very little, yet what we gain from the Dharma practice is very great. *So it is correct here only to delight in suffering that clears away all beings' hurt*. There are many benefits to ourselves and all other beings from our spiritual practice. Therefore, as the text says, *it is correct here only to delight*. This is saying that whatever the degree of hardship, or the suffering that we experience in our Dharma practice, it is worthwhile and something that we should delight in.

The text continues:

Thus, after you reflect on how you have previously created only hardship that did not accomplish any of your own or others' aims, uplift your mind, thinking, "Why am I not now bearing a suffering that achieves great purpose? Although I am suffering, how excellent that I have found something like this to do."

The effort we put into Dharma practice has the great benefit of achieving complete enlightenment. Realising this great benefit, we should think that it is worthwhile to confront and tolerate any hardship and suffering in Dharma practice. In the face of any obstacles in our Dharma practice, we should never feel despair. Rather we should feel more inspired and raise our spirits and courage.

This makes us reflect on our deeds and their outcomes. Are we are gaining enough benefit from the various things in which we invest so much of our time, effort, and resources and which lead to much hardship? If we are not really achieving our desired goals, then what is the point of doing the things we do? What is the purpose of our life? The purpose is undoubtedly to achieve happiness and eliminate suffering.

As we carefully examine our everyday mundane activities, we will develop a sense of distaste or renunciation because they even do not fulfil our own purposes. To quote the master Shantideva:

Although seeking to avoid pain,
They run headlong into suffering.
They long for happiness, but foolishly
Destroy it, as if it were their enemy.

This very popular passage from the Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says that even though beings have a strong wish to avoid suffering, they run after the causes of suffering. They have a strong desire for happiness, but out of ignorance, they destroy their happiness, as if happiness was their enemy. This may very well reflect our situation because it shows what we desire and what we do are contradictory.

The text continues:

Moreover, develop a fearless attitude toward hardship, thinking how you were misled by bad teachers to ignoble, purposeless paths whereon you endured ascetic practices such as leaping on a trident, sitting close to five fires, and the like. Also think how for the sake of inferior, mundane purposes you made yourself bear many sufferings in farming, business, and war.

Here, the purpose is to encourage us to overcome any hardship and suffering we face in our Dharma practice by recognising that our practice will result in achieving supreme enlightenment, fulfilling the true wishes of ourselves and all other beings. Hence, our Dharma practice has the most marvellous purpose, and we should definitely maintain our determination, courage, and motivation to practise at all times.

There are those who are *misled by bad teachers to ignoble, purposeless paths*, etc., believing that if they leap onto on a *trident* (a three-pointed steel spike) then they'll achieve liberation. As a result, they are able to tolerate a vast amount of suffering. Others say that if you engage in the ritual of fire, burning the tips of your five fingers, then you can reach liberation, and this involves tolerating the extreme pain and suffering too. Whether misled by teachers, or out of their ignorance, some people tolerate this sort of suffering but for no good reason or purpose.

If we look at farmers, we can see how hard they have to work to make their living – they have to work on the farm in extreme weather conditions, whether it's hot or cold or wet. Business people also have to work hard without any rest in order to make a living. The hardship we face in our Dharma practice is very small compared to the hardships people face to make a living in the world or for some inferior reasons. But our Dharma practice has a far-reaching goal and thinking along these lines should instil the courage and motivation to continue our practice.

Here there are guidelines for both worldly life as well as spiritual life. As it says, in worldly life you have to make a lot of effort, face hardships and problems to fulfil your wishes and dreams. If a farmer wants to have a good harvest he can't just say, 'Oh I own a lot of land' but then sleep all day. That won't achieve anything. Rather he has to go out and work in his fields to achieve a good harvest. Whatever activity we undertake, we have to make the effort to gather all the suitable conditions, one after the other, and try to overcome all the obstacles, and in this way we are able to achieve our goal.

I once watched a TV series about the life of an American farming family. There was a young couple with five children who owned a very big piece of land. The father and mother worked hard on the farm to support, care for, and educate their family. In the end the whole family became very successful, so the show (which went on for a long while) had a good ending. The hard work and endurance of suffering paid off in the end.

Sometimes we can be inspired when we learn about the life story of successful people who climb from the bottom to the top of the ladder of success. There are the stories of those who come from a very poor background, and through hard work have gone on to become very successful in their chosen field. There are very successful people who initially had nothing, so they started with small jobs, and then moved on to better ones and after that even better ones. Likewise, when we follow spiritual practice, we have to be very clear about the purpose of our spiritual practice which, compared with mundane works, is far higher and greater, because it is aimed at achieving our full potential and our own ultimate spiritual goal, as well as benefitting all sentient beings. We can be inspired to overcome problems and not lose our motivation and courage when we think about how people exert themselves and work hard in order to achieve their goals, even if those goals are mundane and small.

Therefore, we have to say to ourselves, 'Compared to that, the hardship I face in my practice is very minor, but the outcome is so great.' With this way of thinking, we will never lose our motivation, determination and courage when we face hardships or problems in our spiritual practice.

It can also be inspiring to learn about the stories of the early migrants in Australia who worked so hard and built this nation and began a new life for themselves.

The text continues as follows:

(2) Reflecting on the benefit of dispelling immeasurable suffering

Reflect well on the differences between short-term and long-term suffering, thinking, "A man who is to be executed is overjoyed when he is freed from execution by having merely his finger cut off. How excellent it would be if similarly, by means of this slight suffering of human hardship, I could permanently dispel the suffering of

limitless cyclic existence in general and in particular the suffering of miserable rebirths such as the hells, etc." If you do this well, you produce fearless courage with respect to hardship.

When you are doing the giving and taking meditation, you can reflect on the suffering and hardship other beings go through and take them upon yourself. Not only that, but you can think of the hardship and the suffering that you will undergo, and accept this suffering as taking on suffering of all other beings, including their future suffering. Then think, 'By accepting this, may all others be free from suffering.'

As a way to instil motivation and courage into your spiritual practice, think of the benefits and results of the spiritual practice that you do, which has the potential to stop lower rebirth, and achieve liberation from cyclic existence. So whenever you do a Dharma practice it has a very important purpose. For example, if you practise the act of refraining from killing, the benefit is that you prevent a bad rebirth. Likewise, if we refrain from the act of stealing, the result will be finding wealth and good resources in the future. Thinking like this is a way to help us understand that whatever the hardship or difficulty we go through in spiritual practice, or the effort we put into the practice, it is all very worthwhile.

The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

How is it unfortunate if a man who is to be executed
Is freed from that by having his hand cut off?
How is it unfortunate if by human suffering
You are released from hell?

(c) How it is not difficult to bear suffering if you gradually grow accustomed to it, starting with the small

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

There is nothing whatsoever
That does not become easier through habituation.
So by becoming used to small harms
You will bear great harms as well.

Here we learn that whether something is hard or easy depends on our familiarity or our habitation with that thing. We understand that with habituation we can change anything. This gives us more inspiration.

The text continues:

After you have conceived the armor-like thought to accept suffering, you gradually blend it with suffering, starting with small sufferings. When you do this, you steadily increase your capacity to accept suffering.

This shows us that the best way to develop our practice of patience is to start with practising patience with things that are within our capacity. For example, if you are living with someone who has the habit of always speaking harshly to you, try to first make an effort to tolerate a few unpleasant words. From there you can move on to developing patience with speech that is even more harsh. Likewise, you can develop patience with respect to unpleasant bodily gestures that others show to you, starting from a small unpleasantness to bigger unpleasantness.

The text continues:

The Compendium of Trainings says:

Once you have first grown used to small sufferings, you will become accustomed to the difficult and the very difficult. For example, just as all living beings have the idea that suffering is happiness through the power of conditioning, so you maintain the idea of joy whenever

you experience suffering by becoming used to applying the idea of joy to these experiences.

As to how this comes about, the *Questions of Householder Ugra Sutra* states:

Free yourself from a mind that is like a piece of cotton.

Like a piece of cotton is easily blown about, the mind is easily disturbed or agitated when any disturbing thoughts arise.

And the *Array of Stalks Sutra* says:

Daughter, in order to destroy all afflictions you should develop a mind that is hard to defeat.

Thus, you need courage that is very firm and stable; you will not be able to accept suffering with a fragile mind.

If you initially develop a significant degree of courage, even great suffering becomes helpful.

The implication here is that the greater the challenges that we face, or the challenges that lie ahead, if we are already prepared in advance with a higher degree of courage then those great challenges will no longer be a difficulty. Indeed, that difficulty and suffering can be transformed into an aid to our practice.

The commentary continues,

It is just like the case of warriors entering a battle and using the sight of their own blood to increase their boldness. If right from the start you belittle yourself, saying, "I have never heard of such a thing, and even if I had heard of it, I could never do something like that," then even a small suffering becomes a cause for you to turn back from the path. It is just like the case of cowards who see others' blood and, fainting, fall unconscious.

If you get a chance it's good to read these lines out aloud. Just hearing them has a good effect. Just by saying *I have never heard of such a thing, and even if I had heard of it, I could never do something like that* we are undermining our own potential. Then *even a small suffering becomes a cause for you to turn back from the path*.

People have come to me and said they have problems with their son or daughter, and all day long keep saying to themselves, 'I have this problem. It's no-one else's problem but mine.' I tell them not to worry and they say to me, 'But I'm their mother and I worry about them all the time.' I tell them there's no benefit for you in worrying and there's no benefit for your son or daughter if you worry. Be there for them and help them. And they say, 'But my daughter or son is suffering.' I say, 'Worrying doesn't lessen their problems. Take a little holiday, go out for lunch, go outside for some fresh air. That's more beneficial than worrying.'

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

ལྷན་པོ་གྲོ་བུ་ལ་བསྐྱབས་ཀྱི་ལུས་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

16 July 2019

We will begin with our usual meditation followed by the Tara Praises. [*Tonglen meditation*]

(c) How it is not difficult to bear suffering if you gradually grow accustomed to it, starting with the small (cont.)

We will continue with the text, which reads:

If you initially develop a significant degree of courage, even great suffering becomes helpful. It is just like the case of warriors entering a battle and using the sight of their own blood to increase their boldness. If right from the start you belittle yourself, saying, "I have never heard of such a thing, and even if I had heard of it, I could never do something like that," then even a small suffering becomes a cause for you to turn back from the path.

Here, we find inspiring advice regarding the question of how much we can tolerate any difficulty, hardship or suffering we experience. These lines are saying that it depends on our spirit, courage and determination. We will talk more about this in the next chapter on the perfection of joyous effort.

Here, the analogy of warriors going into battle is used to illustrate mental spirit or courage in the face of hardship. Rather than losing their courage, some warriors become even more determined to combat their enemy the moment they see any kind of injury, such as their own blood. Similarly, if we consider ourselves as Dharma practitioners, we are engaged in a battle against the enemy of our mental delusions or the afflictions within us. Our approach should be such that the stronger or greater the enemy appears to be, the more courage and determination we should muster in fighting it.

On the other hand, if we fail to show such inner courage, especially if we undermine ourselves in the face of such difficulty by simply saying to ourselves: 'It is too hard, too painful' and so on, then we may easily give up the fight. In that case, as it says here, you won't be able to tolerate even minor difficulties and problems in life.

The text continues:

It is just like the case of cowards who see others' blood and, fainting, fall unconscious.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Some, seeing their own blood,
Become more intrepid.
Some, seeing others' blood,
Fall unconscious.

This comes from the mind's fortitude
Or from its timidity.

In following Dharma practice, if we lack patience, then as soon as we face some adversity – even something very small – we will easily give up our practice and make all kinds of excuses for ourselves. I normally say that the way two people, who may be equally fit and physically strong, cope when facing the same circumstances, can be different. One person may cope very well without any mental stress and

unhappiness, whereas the other, despite being in the exact same situation, may mentally experience more stress and unhappiness. So, we can clearly see that sometimes the way adversity affects us doesn't always depend on the external conditions, or even the condition of our physical body. Rather, it has much to do with our way of thinking and mental courage, and how we inwardly cope with the situation – this determines whether the situation causes mental stress and unhappiness.

Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Way of Life* also uses the analogy of warriors who become more inspired when they see their own injuries caused by an enemy. However, when others see such injuries – even a tiny bit of blood – they will immediately lose courage and collapse to the ground, fainting. If we look for the main cause of why some people show courage in that difficult situation, while others completely lose their courage, it isn't to do with external causes, because both can physically enjoy the same health and strength and confront the same circumstance. Therefore, the different responses are clearly to do with different mental dispositions, spirit and courage.

The strength of our mental spirit and determination is important for achieving both the goals of our Dharma practice and those of our worldly ventures. We learn here about the importance of maintaining a positive mental outlook, self-courage and determination. Whatever goals we wish to achieve, we must maintain strong inner courage, and the willpower and determination to face any hardship to reach our goals. In my case, I have to apply this teaching to Dharma practice because I don't have any worldly affairs to worry about. But you must apply this advice for a successful worldly life, even if you are not all that serious about Dharma practice. You can't afford to be laid-back, always relaxing and enjoying yourself, while at the same time wanting to accomplish many things. So really, this advice is very important and relevant.

The reality is that in whatever work you do – even if you go to work for one day – you must be prepared to face some hardships or undesirable conditions. To be productive and to enjoy the work you do in that one day, you have to maintain a level of good, positive motivation and courage. Without that, you will easily lose interest in going to work. This advice also applies to school students. For example, they can't say to themselves, 'I am not going to school because I am hungry'. If their motivation is weak, they will easily miss going to school and fall behind in their learning.

So the message here is the importance of developing and maintaining our positive spirit, courage and determination. Then, whatever work or activity we do, even if it is worldly, we will not only be able to overcome any hardship or difficulty we face, but overcome it with great ease. With inner courage and determination, you handle the situation with a pleasant and positive state of mind, and this can be a cause for you to feel positive about what you are doing. If we lack that positive spirit, determination and courage, then we will always be complaining about even the very small problems we face.

In relation to the analogy of the warriors used to illustrate the power of mental spirit or courage, let me tell you about something I heard about that happened during a fighting incident in Tibet. A person engaged in the fight had received multiple bullet wounds, but he held his gun tightly and kept it aimed at the enemy. It seems he was so determined to kill his enemy that he couldn't even die or let go of the gun. Then he heard his friend say, 'Don't worry, I've already

killed the enemy'. As soon as he heard that, he relaxed. So, brave warriors do not feel pain even if they are severely injured and are able to keep fighting their enemies.

(c") A detailed explanation from the viewpoint of the bases

Question: Given that one must accept the suffering that occurs, from where do these sufferings come and how does one accept them?

In this presentation, the great Tsongkhapa makes a good connection between what he has said before and what he says next. What he said before was all about the importance of practising the patience of accepting suffering. In this section, the text goes on to elaborate further, focusing on the kind of suffering that we should accept in cultivating patience or tolerance, explaining the causes of how these sufferings arise, on the bases from where their suffering arises.

Reply: There are eight bases for accepting suffering:

1. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on objects.* Robes, alms, bedding, seat, medicine, and necessities are objects that enhance pure conduct. Without displeasure and disappointment you accept the suffering that arises when these are given to you and you find them to be inferior or too few, or when they are given with disrespect or after a long delay.

Here, the first basis for the practice of accepting suffering is particularly recommended for renunciates or ordained persons. The basis here refers to the base or condition for experiencing suffering, such as living conditions or resources which, as it says, include *robes, alms, bedding, seat, medicine*, etc. In obtaining such resources, renunciates may face a situation where they experience *suffering that arises when they are given to you and you find them to be inferior* – that is, the object or alms given to them or offered to them are inferior in quality. Not only that, but, as it says *they are given with disrespect* – they may be given to them in a disrespectful way *or after a long delay*, even to the point of making them suffer hunger or thirst.

The second basis is:

2. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on worldly concerns.* The nine worldly concerns are: (1) loss; (2) disgrace; (3) blame; (4) pain; (5) disintegration; (6) extinguishment; (7) aging; (8) sickness; and, (9) the death of what is subject to death subsequent to its decay. After you have analyzed the sufferings based on all or each of these, you accept the suffering.

The third one is:

3. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on physical activities.* The four physical activities are moving around, standing, sitting, and lying down. When all day and all night you purify your mind practice of obstructions by means of the first [moving around] and third [sitting] of these four, you are accepting the sufferings that arise from them; however, you do not relax on a couch, chair, or bed of straw or leaves when it is not the time to do so.

We are just reading this out because the meaning is quite self-explanatory. The fourth is:

4. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on upholding the teaching.* The teaching is upheld in seven ways: by (1) worshipping and serving the three jewels; (2) worshipping and serving the guru; (3) understanding the teachings; (4) teaching extensively to others what you have understood; (5) reciting its praises in a loud, clear voice; (6) correctly reflecting on it in solitude; and (7) cultivating meditative serenity and

insight that is imbued with yogic attention. When you strive at these, you accept the sufferings that arise.

The fifth is:

5. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on living by begging.* The seven aspects of living by begging are (1) you experience having an ugly appearance due to shaving off your hair, beard and so forth; (2) you experience wearing cloth that is patched together and is of poor color; (3) you live by restraining yourself from the conduct of worldly persons and act in a way other than they do; (4) you give up farm work, etc., and then live by getting material goods from others, so you live in dependence on others; (5) since you do not accumulate or employ material gain, you seek things such as robes, etc., from others for as long as you live; (6) since you give up sexual intercourse, you turn away from human desires until you die; and (7) since you give up dancing, laughter, and the like, you turn away from human merriment until you die in order to give up friends, intimate companions, childhood friends, and the like, as well as pleasures and enjoyments. You accept the suffering that comes about based on these.

Then:

6. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on fatigue due to perseverance.* You accept the suffering that arises from mental and physical fatigue, hardship, and disturbance while you are persevering at cultivating virtue.

This relates to all the difficulties or obstacles we face in our spiritual practice or meditation practice. Sometimes, we might find the practice of meditation boring, and it can sometimes be physically exhausting. There is also the difficulty that, during our meditation practice, we have to try to keep our mind focused on the meditation object; however, there may be various distractions that can pull our mind out of meditative concentration. Making an effort to prevent such mental distractions can be very difficult. This is what the text is talking about here. We have to accept such difficulties as part of applying the patience of accepting suffering in practising virtue and the Dharma.

The eighth is:

8. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on current tasks.* You accept the suffering that arises from tasks for a renunciate, such as the work associated with the begging bowl, robes, and so forth, or from the tasks for a householder, such as faultless work on a farm, in business, as a government employee, etc.

Even if you are stricken with any of the sufferings that arise in dependence on these eight bases, you do not give up your joyous perseverance at each. You act for the sake of enlightenment, joyfully, not letting such sufferings become an obstacle that causes you to turn back once you have set forth.

(3') Developing the patience of certitude about the teachings

There's not much left now, so we will try to finish this section today.

The patience of certitude about the teachings means generating the forbearance of conviction. It has eight objects:

1. *The object of faith.* This is the good qualities of the three jewels.

2. *The object to be actualized.* This is the reality of the two selflessnesses.

3. *The desired object.* This is the great powers of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, of which there are three – the power of the superknowledges, the power of the six perfections, and the power which is innate.

4. *The object to be adopted.* This is wanting both the cause – good deeds – and the effect of these deeds.
5. *The object to be discarded.* This is wishing to avoid both the cause – misdeeds – and the effect of these deeds.
6. *The object of meditation that is the goal to be achieved.* This is enlightenment.
7. *The object of meditation that is the method for achieving the goal.* This is all the paths of training in the spirit of enlightenment.
8. *The object of subsequent practice through study and reflection.* According to Dro-lung-ba (Gro-lung-pa), this refers to the province of what is to be known, such as impermanence and so forth. *The Power-Lineage Chapter (Bala-go-tra-parivarta)* of the *Bodhisattva Levels* mentions that the eighth is the sublime teaching – the twelve branches of scripture and so forth – so I think you have to take it as being this.

These eight show the objects of our practice or the objects of faith relating to our practice. As it says here: (4.) *The object to be adopted. This is wanting both the cause that is good deeds and the effect of these deeds.* (5.) *The object to be discarded. This is wishing to avoid both the cause and misdeeds and the effect of these deeds ...* We have talked about these in relation to our spiritual practice, in which the key elements are to recognise that there are things we should do, accept or adopt, and there are other things we should not do and that we need to discard or abandon. This is what the text is explaining here.

When we think about what to do and what not to do, we have to take into account the causes of both. When it says here *wanting both the cause* or in the next one it says *wishing to avoid*, basically the former relates to the practices we need to adopt. The reason why we need to adopt them is because the result of these things that we need to do are desirable. Whereas we need to discard or avoid other things or practices, because the results of these are undesirable and unpleasant. Therefore, when we talk about the object to be discarded, we must take into account both the cause and the effect.

To continue:

6. *The object of meditation that is the goal to be achieved.* This is enlightenment.
7. *The object of meditation that is the method for achieving the goal.* This is all the paths of training in the spirit of enlightenment.
8. *The object of subsequent practice through study and reflection.* According to Dro-lung-ba (Gro-lung-pa), [one of the great Kadampa masters] this refers to the province of what is to be known, such as impermanence and so forth. *The Power-Lineage Chapter (Bala-go-tra-parivarta)* of the *Bodhisattva Levels* mentions that the eighth is the sublime teaching – the twelve branches of scripture and so forth – so I think you have to take it as being this.

The way to have conviction is to become certain about these objects just as they are, and then to think about them again and again, apprehending them without conflict.

This sentence describes what it means by gaining *conviction* or ascertainment in our knowledge of the Dharma. This means that our knowledge or understanding of the meaning is so definite and so clear that there is no room for any conflict to arise in our mind – no contradictory thought or view against our understanding can arise. When we gain such an understanding, we habituate our mind with it – as it says here, we think about it again and again until our mind becomes habituated with this definite understanding.

In accordance with passages in the *Bodhisattva Levels*, I have set forth the set of eight bases with respect to the patience of

accepting suffering and eight objects with respect to the patience of certitude about the teachings. In particular, there is extensive coverage there of the patience of certitude about the teachings.

(d') How to practice

When practicing any kind of patience, you practice it in association with the six supremacies and all six perfections. These are the same as in the earlier explanation, except the generosity of patience means to establish others in patience.

These were all covered in the earlier sections of this teaching.

(e') A summary

The recollection and cultivation of the spirit of enlightenment - the basis of the bodhisattva deeds - is the root of the wish to establish all beings in a patience wherein they have extinguished the contaminations. After you steadily increase this spirit, then aspire to practice the patience of those at high levels and then train your mind in it. Distinguish the trainings for the patience of a beginning bodhisattva, and then learn these properly. If you transgress the boundaries as explained, you must make an effort to amend this. If you neglect these transgressions at the time of practicing these trainings, you will be continually tainted by many great misdeeds, and even in future lifetimes your practice of the marvelous deeds of the bodhisattvas will be extremely difficult. Seeing that the essentials of the path are supreme, practice right now what you can, and inculcate the intention to practice even those you now cannot. If you do this, then, as the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* says, you will bring the perfection of patience to completion with little difficulty and minor suffering.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

ལྷན་ ། རྩེག་བ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

23 July 2019

We begin with the usual meditation.

[Meditation]

Before we begin the teaching, ensure that you cultivate the proper motivation, which is very important, as it predetermines the type of actions we create. For receiving the teachings, we need to make sure our motivation is to extend benefit and happiness for all sentient beings.

We have finished the teaching on the perfection of patience, which we went through in great detail.

The next is the fifth perfection, which is the perfection of joyous effort or joyous perseverance.

The presentation of the perfection of joyous perseverance in the text begins with:

(iv) How to train in the perfection of joyous perseverance.

This section has five parts.

(a') What joyous perseverance is

Obviously, in order to learn and train ourselves in the perfection of joyous perseverance, we first need to know what joyous perseverance is. In the presentation of the topic, the text first explains the definition or the meaning of joyous perseverance. This applies to anything we are trying to learn; we begin with its definition, otherwise we may be talking about it for hours and at the end we still don't have the faintest idea of what it is we have been talking about.

The next heading is:

(b') How to begin the practice of joyous perseverance

Simply looking at the outline, we can clearly see the logical structure and sequence, and the purpose of the topic that we are studying. First the text introduces what joyous perseverance means and then it goes into the means of engaging in the practice of joyous perseverance.

The third heading is:

(c') The divisions of joyous perseverance

The text then it shows the divisions or the different types of joyous perseverance. Then it goes onto:

(d') How to practice

And finally:

(e') A summary.

We can notice here the consistency in the outline of this presentation and that of the previous chapters.

(a') What joyous perseverance is

When you have focused upon something virtuous, joyous perseverance is enthusiasm for that virtue.

This, in a nutshell, defines joyous perseverance. It is saying that joyous perseverance is focusing on a virtuous object and its mental attitude or aspect, and taking joy, delight and enthusiasm in that object of virtue.

Here we come across the term, translated as 'joyous perseverance' in English, which is called *tsongdu* in Tibetan. It refers to a specific kind of perseverance or effort or enthusiasm. As implied in the definition, joyous perseverance is a type of perseverance, which sincerely takes joy in virtue. So, it is a wholehearted, joyful and positive mental attitude towards virtue.

The generic term for active effort in Tibetan is *bay.tsol* or *dug.ru*. When we say 'put in an effort', the object or direction of our effort, can be virtuous or non-virtuous, or even neutral. We can also feel joyful or positive in that effort. Hence, the generic term 'effort' or 'perseverance' or 'active enthusiasm', and the term 'joyous perseverance' or 'joyous effort' are quite different. An effort in non-virtue or any worldly activities, or even in some neutral things, is an effort but not joyous perseverance. Likewise, we can sometimes have joyous perseverance in terms of great enthusiasm in virtue but only on a mental level, and not actually putting it into practice by making an effort. In this context, our effort is a joyous perseverance but not an active effort, or in Tibetan *bay.tsol*. Of course, there are instances which are both effort and joyous perseverance, and others which are neither.

The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

What is joyous perseverance? It is delight in virtue.

As we discussed before, essentially the object of enthusiasm or perseverance, whatever term is used, has to be something virtuous and the delight connotes the mental aspect or the attitude of perseverance or enthusiasm.

The definition of joyous perseverance is that which is directed at an object of virtue and sincerely takes delight in virtue. It is a kind of wholehearted, joyful and positive mental attitude towards virtue. The meaning of the terms laziness or slothfulness is the opposite of joyous perseverance in that it takes delight in non-virtue. I would even say, mental afflictions of desire and anger etc, belong to the type of laziness.

In terms of our practice, the implication here is that when we put an effort into our virtuous practices, we must generate joyous perseverance or joyous effort, which is to say mentally enjoying and taking delight in our practices.

The text continues:

The *Bodhisattva Levels* [a text by Asanga] explains it as a flawless state of mind that is enthusiastic about accumulating virtue and working for the welfare of living beings, together with the physical, verbal, and mental activity such a state of mind motivates.

Joyous perseverance, as indicated here, is a force which motivates, directs and drives the actions of our three doors toward virtue in a very joyous, delightful and positive way.

(b') How to begin the practice of joyous perseverance

Frequently reflect upon the benefits of joyously persevering and the faults of not doing so. When you habituate yourself to this reflection you will develop joyous perseverance.

The practical advice here is that we have to develop joyous perseverance and overcome, as much as possible, falling under the influence of laziness. The means to achieve this is by reflecting on the benefits of joyous perseverance. We need to reflect on the benefits of generating joyous perseverance over and over again, until we become very habituated to the knowledge of its benefits. When we become habituated to this knowledge, then, as we wish to gain those benefits, our reflection will lead to the development of joyous perseverance. Conversely, reflecting on the disadvantages and shortcomings of laziness leads us to the thought of abandoning laziness.

I will continue reading from the text.

As to its benefits, the *Exhortation to Wholehearted Resolve (Adhyasaya-samcodana-sutra)* says:

Always rely upon noble joyous perseverance,
Which clears away all suffering and darkness,
Which is the basis of freedom from miserable realms,
And which is praised by all the buddhas.

One who joyously perseveres
Has no difficulty accomplishing any project
Whether mundane or supramundane.
Who among the learned is disheartened by joyous
perseverance?

Those who set forth for the buddhas' enlightenment,
Perceive the faults of lethargy and sleepiness,
And then continually persevere with enthusiasm.
So have I advised them.

Perhaps if you read the verses you will understand their meaning.

Always rely upon noble joyous perseverance
Which clears away all suffering

You can think of the word *suffering* here in terms of immediate and long-term future suffering. The immediate or temporary suffering is that which we experience in this life, such as hunger, thirst and the suffering related to our living conditions, such as not having good shelter and so forth. As a benefit of developing joyous effort or perseverance we can eliminate these kinds of immediate suffering, and we can also eliminate the long-term future suffering related to future bad rebirths or samsara entirely. The term *suffering and darkness* in this text has the same meaning as we find in the *Garland of Birth Stories* by Aryasura which says, 'Listening is the supreme lamp dispelling the darkness of ignorance.' Similarly, joyous perseverance has the benefit of dispelling mental dullness.

Which is the basis of freedom from miserable realms,
And which is praised by all the buddhas.

This refers to the long-term benefit of being able to prevent future bad rebirths. The very fact that we have found a good human life and have also been born in a good country is the result of the virtuous practices we have done in the past. For example, taking rebirth in a

good country is the environmental result of a positive karma.

One who joyously perseveres
Has no difficulty accomplishing any project
Whether mundane or supramundane.

These lines explain how, even in worldly terms, we must make an effort to achieve our goal if we are to accomplish anything. The houses, temples, big towns and so forth that we see are the result of the effort and hard labour of the people who made these things. Likewise, taking rebirth in a pure land or a celestial mansion in a supramundane world is dependent on joyous perseverance. As a result of putting in joyous effort, all *mundane* and *supramundane projects* can be achieved.

The next lines are:

Those who set forth for the buddhas' enlightenment,
Perceive the faults of lethargy and sleepiness,
And then continually persevere with enthusiasm.
So have I advised them.

Here we are advised that after one sets one's mind to achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence, or the supreme liberation of complete enlightenment, then it is important to develop a consistent effort in one's practice on the path, both in the immediate time frame and also in the long term.

Also, the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

Joyous perseverance is supreme among virtues;
Based on it, you subsequently attain the rest.
Through it you immediately gain a supreme state of joy,
As well as the mundane and supramundane attainments.

When it says, *through it you immediately gain a supreme state of joy*, that refers to gaining the meditative state of calm abiding and, as a benefit of calm abiding, gaining the joy or bliss of the state of concentration *as well as the mundane and supramundane attainments*.

With joyous perseverance you attain the pleasures desired
in life;
Become possessed of utter purity;
Are liberated, transcending the view of the perishing
aggregates;
And reach buddhahood, the supreme enlightenment.

In these last three lines, the words *utter purity* connote the small stages of the path, and *liberated, transcending the view of the perishing aggregates* connotes the middling stages of the path, and the last one, *reach buddhahood* connotes the great stages of the path.

And also:

One who has joyous perseverance
Is not brought down
By prosperity, afflictions,
Discouragement, or petty attainments.

If we have *joyous perseverance* we won't be deprived or short of wealth or *prosperity*, nor will we be brought down by, or be under the control of the *afflictions*. With joyous effort, we will be overruling the afflictions rather than being brought down by them. *Discouragement* indicates that if we maintain joyous perseverance then we will not experience a loss of courage or distress in our practice, while *petty attainments* indicates that with joyous effort relating to cultivating virtue, we won't be content to reap a small attainment of virtue, rather we will

continuously seek the perfection or full attainment of virtue.

The *Bodhisattva Levels* as well says:

Because joyous perseverance alone, nothing else, is the principal and highest cause for the correct attainment of a bodhisattva's virtuous qualities, the *tathagatas* have pointed it out, declaring, "Joyous perseverance is what brings about the attainment of unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment."

If we read these lines slowly and then reflect on them, then we will realise that the most important thing is to apply this by trying to bring joyous perseverance into our practice, knowing how this joyous perseverance is the principal cause for achieving a bodhisattva's qualities and so forth. Thinking on this we should be motivated to bring joy into our practice.

The *Compendium of the Perfections* also states:

If you are free of fatigue and have great joyous perseverance,
There is nothing you cannot attain or accomplish.

And also:

Even all non-human beings delight in helping you;
You attain all types of meditative concentrations
And spend all periods of the day and night fruitfully.
Your collection of good qualities does not decline,
And your purposes surpassing the affairs of humankind
Flourish like the blue utpala flower.

Can you find the *utpala* flower here? I have heard that it is a flower which comes in white or red and has a very nice fragrance, which lasts for two days. We don't find them in Tibet.

As said in the previous lines, *Your collection of good qualities does not decline*, which is to say, in order to prevent our virtuous qualities from declining we must maintain joyous perseverance, and your purposes surpassing the affairs of humankind, flourish like the blue *utpala* flower. We have covered this.

As to the faults of not joyously persevering, the *Questions of Sagaramati Sutra* states:

The enlightenment of the lazy is exceedingly far off and distant.

Enlightenment is very far off and distant for someone who is *lazy*.

The lazy lack all perfections from generosity to wisdom.

With laziness there is no way we can develop all the practices of the perfections: giving, patience, joyous effort, concentration, wisdom and so forth.

The lazy do not work for others' welfare.

It is also very true that somebody who is lazy will not engage in the act of benefiting others.

And the *Mindfulness of the Excellent Teaching (Sad-dharmanusmrty-upasthana)* states as well:

Whoever has laziness -
The single basis of the afflictions -

This is to point out how laziness can act as a cause for all other kinds of affliction to increase. Laziness is almost the single cause for the arising and increase of all other afflictions.

Whoever feels some laziness
Lacks all good qualities.

This means that if you have one laziness, then you don't possess all the excellent qualities.

Thus, if you lack joyous perseverance, you come under the influence of laziness and become poor in all good qualities. Then you lose every temporary and ultimate purpose of being human.

We will stop the teaching here and we recite the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* and dedicate it for the deceased mother of Jools Gardner.

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Edited Version

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As I mentioned last time, if we reflect on the logical sequence of these outlines, it will give us a very good understanding of the topic.

(1') The actual divisions

The section on the actual divisions has three parts:

1. Armor-like joyous perseverance
2. Joyous perseverance of gathering virtue
3. Joyous perseverance of acting for the welfare of living beings

Then the text goes in detail on each.

(a") Armor-like joyous perseverance

When bodhisattvas joyously persevere, prior to actively engaging themselves they put on the armor of a preliminary enthusiastic thought such as, ...

When it says, *when bodhisattvas joyously persevere, prior to actively engaging* it's talking about what they do prior to engaging in their actual deeds. *They put on the armor of a preliminary enthusiastic thought.* Obviously, the analogy is the wearing of armour. I don't know if armies have to wear armour these days, but in earlier times, depending on the types of battle and weapons used, such as swords, bows etc., warriors used shields and armour to protect themselves from enemy strikes.

Likewise, bodhisattvas adopt an *armor of a preliminary enthusiastic thought such as:*

"For a trillion sets of three immeasurably great eons each composed of days as long as a thousand great eons, I shall not relinquish my practice of joyous perseverance.

I'll leave it up to you to find out the details of this measurement of time, but basically it means an infinite amount of time.

I shall not relinquish my practice of joyous perseverance refers to how, before engaging in the actual bodhisattva deeds, bodhisattvas train their minds in developing the bodhisattva's spirit, or courage. As it says here:

"For the sake of relieving the suffering of a single living being, I would rejoice at remaining only as a hell-being until I attain buddhahood.

Before engaging in their deeds, bodhisattvas train their mind, resolving that for the sake of even one sentient being they would stay in a hell realm for countless aeons.

The text continues:

"As I exert myself in this manner for the sake of complete enlightenment, what need is there to mention my perseverance over a shorter period or in the face of lesser suffering?"

The implication is that when your mental courage or determination has reached such a very high level as being determined to remain in the hell realms for countless aeons of time for the sake of one sentient being, then *as I exert myself in this manner for the sake of complete enlightenment, what need is there to mention my perseverance over a shorter period or in the face of lesser suffering?* So in this way, perseverance for any causes that require less time and hardship becomes very easy. Of course, when we actually think about this great bodhisattva spirit, we cannot even imagine ourselves as having such incredibly great courage. However, we have to understand here that we can train our very ordinary mind to become habituated with such a great thought of determined altruism. At least we can see that on a theoretical level our mind has the potential to develop this vast bodhisattva spirit and resolve.

The bodhisattva's spirit as described here is in accordance with the sutric path. In the tantric path the bodhisattva wishes to achieve enlightenment with a much greater sense of urgency and hence follows a quick path, whereby the practice of both method and wisdom is simultaneously present within a single instant of mind. However, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, the extent of the bodhisattva's spirit and courage seems greater in the sutric than in the tantric path.

We need to train our mind with the thought of wishing all beings to be liberated from suffering and to have the everlasting state of happiness. It is said that if we train our mind like this then, through the force of our familiarity with this altruistic thought, we will be able to actually engage in the deeds of liberating other beings and place them in the state of happiness.

The text continues:

Such is the joyous perseverance that is like armor. A bodhisattva who produces even an aspiration for, or just faith in, such joyous perseverance is steadfast; how much more so one who is endowed with this perseverance, given that he or she develops measureless causes for joyously persevering for the sake of unsurpassed enlightenment. The *Bodhisattva Levels* says that for such a person there is absolutely no action for the sake of others and for enlightenment that is discouraging or entails hardship. When you become conditioned to such a state of mind, it becomes the definite cause of awakening your potential for the Mahayana lineage, so train in it.

When it says, you become *conditioned to such a state of mind*, it is referring to what has just been said about training and habituating our mind with the bodhisattva spirit. It's saying that such training can actually result in *awakening your potential for the Mahayana lineage*. Generally speaking, when great compassion arises within your mind it is considered as a sign of the awakening of the Mahayana lineage, or your potential to follow the Mahayana lineage.

Therefore, we understand this mind training as being a very important cause to awaken our Mahayana lineage, which is essentially great compassion. Hence, this is also a very important cause to awaken the bodhicitta mind as well.

The text continues:

Concerning armor-like joyous perseverance the *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

In as many eons as there are drops of water in the ocean,
Eons in which the years are composed
Of long, drawn out days and nights equal in duration
Even to the temporal limits of cyclic existence,

You produce the spirit of supreme enlightenment once.
Though you likewise have to accomplish every other
collection,
You do not become disheartened because of your
compassion,
And undiscouraged you achieve sublime enlightenment.

To generate this immeasurable steadfast armor
While disregarding your suffering in cyclic existence
Is declared the first proper undertaking
For the disciplined hero possessed of compassion.

The text then clarifies the meaning of these verses.

Furthermore, even if it took you a hundred thousand years to produce the spirit of enlightenment once and to see one buddha, where each year is composed of twelve months, each month of thirty days, and each day as long as the time from beginningless cyclic existence to the present, and even if it took you this length of time multiplied by the number of

grains of sand in the Ganges River to know the mind and behavior of one living being, you similarly must come to know the minds and behaviors of all living beings. The *Teachings of Aksayamati Sutra* says the armor of being undaunted is the inexhaustible armor; it is armor-like joyous perseverance of the highest caliber.

Then Tsongkhapa gives this summary:

In short, if you can generate a single attitude such as this, you easily complete limitless accumulations and purify measureless obscurations. This becomes the most excellent cause for never turning back; by just being joyful no matter how long it takes, you quickly become a buddha. Those who want to become a buddha in a short time, but take no joy at all in the limitless deeds and great length of time required, take a very long time to reach buddhahood, because they thereby fail to produce the wonderful courage of the conquerors' children.

Essentially this indicates that the duration or the length of time that bodhisattvas resolve to work for the sake of all sentient beings is an unfathomably very, very long period of time. We should also not think of the duration of our practice in terms of an hour, a day, a month, or a year; rather think of practising for days, months, years and life after life. Cultivating such a spirit can serve as a cause to accumulate enormous merit and purify obscurations and so forth.

The line *by just being joyful no matter how long it takes, you quickly become a buddha* relates to the true bodhisattva spirit, where bodhisattvas take more joy if they have to serve sentient beings longer to benefit them with happiness or free them from suffering.

Those who want to become a buddha in a short time, but take no joy at all in the limitless deeds and great length of time required, take a very long time to reach buddhahood refers to our attitude in Dharma practice where we wish to find happiness and enlightenment very quickly. They will take a long time to reach enlightenment, *because they thereby fail to produce the wonderful courage of the conquerors' children*. Having this very short-sighted view acts as a hindrance or an obstacle. Therefore:

After you have put on such armor, you joyously persevere for two purposes: to gather virtue and to act for the welfare of living beings.

(b") Joyous perseverance of gathering virtue

The joyous perseverance of gathering virtue is applying yourself to the practice of the six perfections in order to properly accomplish them.

By wearing this armour of joyful perseverance, bodhisattvas engage in this *joyous perseverance of gathering virtue*, which mainly refers to the deeds of the six perfections – giving, moral ethics, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom. Essentially, what we can understand is that by wearing this armour of joyful perseverance bodhisattvas don't face any obstacles or hindrances in the performance of their deeds. In the perfection of giving, for example, they do not face any hindrances in giving their body, their virtues, their possessions, and so forth. Likewise, when engaging in the perfection of moral ethics, they will be able to maintain the perfection of moral ethics and so forth under all circumstances.

(c") Joyous perseverance of acting for the welfare of living beings

The joyous perseverance of acting for the welfare of living beings is properly applying yourself to the practice of the eleven activities for others' welfare.

You should find the list of eleven activities or modes of benefiting others in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*.¹

(2') The method of developing joyous perseverance

Having realised how wonderful it would be to have such joyful perseverance, the text goes on to explain the method of developing this joyful perseverance.

As explained above, since you produce, maintain, and increase all the virtues of the two collections in dependence upon joyous perseverance, the practice that develops it is very crucial.

Here we understand that *produce* refers to producing or generating a virtue that we have not yet produced or generated; *maintain* refers to preventing it from declining or decreasing; and *increase* refers to how to develop and increase the virtue that has been generated. This is just emphasising how all these are dependent upon joyful perseverance.

The text continues:

I shall discuss the system of the text of the great scholar and adept Santideva, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, ...

So, the explanation will be based on Shantideva's chapter on joyful effort.

... noting that it is complete as well as easy to understand and to sustain in practice.

The text continues:

The method of developing joyous perseverance has four parts:

1. Eliminating unfavorable conditions that prevent joyous perseverance
2. Gathering the forces of the favorable conditions
3. Based on the elimination of unfavorable conditions and the accumulation of favorable conditions, being intent on joyously persevering
4. How to use joyous perseverance to make the mind and body serviceable

(a") Eliminating unfavourable conditions that prevent joyous perseverance

This has two parts,

1. Identifying factors incompatible with joyous perseverance
2. Employing the methods to eliminate the incompatible factors

(1") Identifying factors incompatible with joyous perseverance

There are two factors incompatible with entering the path: (1) not entering even though you see that you can do the practice, and (2) not entering because you become discouraged, thinking, "How can I do such a practice?" Indeed there is also not practicing because you are unconcerned with whether you are capable or not, but this is irrelevant here since this explanation is for those pursuing liberation.

The text then elaborates on these two sub-headings:

¹ Ed: (1) helping those who toil and those who suffer; (2) working for the sake of those blind to the right methods; (3) working for the sake of people by benefiting them; (4) working for the sake of those threatened by danger; (5) working for the sake of those afflicted with miseries; (6) working for the sake of the deserted; (7) working for the sake of the homeless; (8) working for the sake of those without like-minded people; (9) working for the sake of those on the right path; (10) working for the sake of those on the wrong path; (11) working for the sake [of all these people] through miracles. We can carry out ten of these, the exception being working through miracles.

Within the first factor, there are two possibilities: (1) you have the laziness of procrastination, thinking, "There is still time"; and (2) you are not procrastinating but you are overwhelmed by your attachment to inferior and common activities.

In this vein *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

The factors incompatible with joyous perseverance
Are said to be laziness, adhering to what is ignoble,
And self-contempt out of discouragement.

Causes for the production of laziness are indolence, ...

We need to recognise that we fall under the influence of laziness due to certain causes and conditions, and without these causes and conditions we won't fall prey to laziness. As the text says:

Causes for the production of laziness are indolence, attachment to the taste of inferior pleasures, craving the pleasure of sleep, and a lack of disenchantment with cyclic existence. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Laziness arises from craving based upon
Indolence, enjoyment of pleasure, and sleep;
And from a lack of disenchantment
With the suffering of cyclic existence.

The meaning here is quite clear and self-explanatory. Even if we are interested in engaging in practice, and even if we know that we have the ability to practice, we don't engage in practice because of laziness. We can also relate this to our mundane activities. Sometimes we might have some very important work, which we know we have to finish, but we decide to go to bed and sleep. In this instance sleepiness acts as a form of laziness.

The text then states:

Some assert that the first two lines indicate the form that laziness takes rather than its causes.

(2") Employing the methods to eliminate the incompatible factors

Employing the methods to eliminate the incompatible factors has three parts:

1. Stopping the laziness of procrastination
2. Stopping attachment to ignoble activities
3. Stopping discouragement or self-contempt

(a) Stopping the laziness of procrastination

This involves the following three meditations: you contemplate that the body you have at present is rapidly disintegrating, that after death you will fall into miserable realms, and that it will be difficult to find an excellent life such as this one again. Meditation on these stops the laziness that holds to the notion that there is plenty of time, thereby generating the conviction in your mind that there is no time to spare.

Through this laziness of procrastination, you never seize the time to engage in Dharma practice. You are always putting it off saying, 'I'll do it the next day or the day after' and so on. The great master Gungtang Jamyang advises us never to procrastinate in our Dharma practice as the time for practising is right now. In order to overcome the laziness of procrastination, we need to cultivate the thought that 'the time for practising Dharma is right now'. In other words, to counteract the laziness of procrastination, we should contemplate the three points clearly laid out here.

The body we have at present is rapidly disintegrating. Given the impermanent nature of this life it is wrong to think that we can put off practising the Dharma or procrastinate. Then, at the end of this life there are two destinations: a lower or

bad migration, or a happy migration. These two are the only destinations. If we don't seize this opportunity to practise Dharma now, then we will definitely fall into a lower realm and never find an opportunity or freedom to practise Dharma again.

Then the text continues,

These three meditations were explained earlier in the section on the person of small capacity.

It's important to overcome the laziness of the procrastination. Otherwise we'll never engage in Dharma practice. Probably the most effective and powerful meditation to overcome this specific laziness is, as instructed here, to meditate on death and impermanence. As an effect of the death and impermanence meditation, meditators can lose all attraction to worldly pleasures and see no meaning in worldly life and activities. Therefore, we can understand how the death and impermanence meditation can direct our lives towards Dharma practice.

This meditation on death and impermanence also counteracts our clinging or attachment to the objects of this worldly life. Unless we overcome attachment, we will find no satisfaction. For example, if we are afflicted with strong attachment, then we will find no satisfaction no matter what we accomplish because it is not good enough. So, overcoming attachment is necessary to live a happy and satisfying life, even in this current life.

(b) Stopping attachment to ignoble activities

You see that the sublime teaching is the source of endless joy in this and future lives, and that you lose its great purpose when you are distracted in idle chatter and amusements which are the source of much pointless suffering later. Meditate on this and stop your attachment.

This again touches on thinking about the benefits of practising the Dharma.

The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

How could you abandon the source of infinite joy,
The highest of pleasures, the sublime teaching,
And delight in distractions and amusements
That are the causes of suffering?

Gungtang Jamyang said that the reason you should engage in Dharma practice is because even though this body will deteriorate in age, you will gain joy and self-confidence as a benefit of your practice. Although you cannot avoid death, when it comes you can make it a joyful experience just like a child coming home.

Remember that our future is in our own hands, and the most beneficial thing we can do is to cultivate a positive state of mind which, as we discussed before, will be our real saviour and protector.

Next Tuesday you have a teaching break for a group discussion. At the discussion, it's very important everyone is humble and courteous in conveying your views; never be harsh or abusive to others in your language. Other people can get really hurt by harsh words. Those who have more understanding of the topic should not undermine others with less understanding. We should be aware that everybody is different. Some may have more understanding, but they may be practising less; others may have less understanding, but they may be doing more practice.

The Six Perfections

འབྲུག་གི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ལཱ་ལཱ་ལྷན་ལྷན་གྱི་ལཱ་ལཱ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

13 August 2019

Try to cultivate the motivation 'I wish to achieve the complete state of enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. For this purpose, I will listen to this profound teaching and put it into practice.'

The point of practising Dharma is not just to gain knowledge for stimulating our mind, but to really transform or subdue our mind. In our approach, Dharma must serve as a means to subdue our mind; it should serve as an antidote to, or counteract, the negative or undisciplined states of mind. For example, when we talk about the practice of loving kindness and compassion, it is not good enough to simply understand what compassion is all about and how to cultivate it. What is more important is that we actually cultivate compassion, so that it actually arises within our mind stream.

So when we talk about meditating on loving kindness and compassion, we are talking about the state of loving kindness and compassion actually arising in our mind. In contrast, when we talk about meditating on the view of selflessness or emptiness, we are talking about a meditation in which we take emptiness as the object of our mind. When we meditate on love, however, we are habituating our mind with love, which means that the mind arises in the nature of love.

Usually, whenever we hear these words 'love and compassion', we say to ourselves, 'love' means wishing others to have happiness, and 'compassion' means wishing them to be free from suffering. But we should not think that this understanding is the meditation on love and compassion. It is not, because such love and compassion simply pays lip service to the notion and we don't really feel it in our heart. In fact, we would have the notion that such love and compassion is something outside of us. This kind of approach brings us no real benefit.

We need to cultivate love and compassion within ourselves, within our mind. Then, as it is said, the mind of love and compassion will become our true, priceless, inner treasure, enhancing the happiness in our lives. We will notice that when love and compassion arise within us, it will automatically make our state of mind positive, joyful and happy. And a positive, joyful state of mind also serves as a cause to enhance our physical wellbeing, thereby increasing our longevity.

When we understand the Dharma, and effectively apply it, we can truly appreciate the benefits of practising Dharma. The more effort we put into developing love and compassion, the more love and compassion will increase in our mind. The more love and compassion in our mind, the more happiness and joy we will find in our life. Since we all are seeking happiness all the time, we must create the cause, such as cultivating love and compassion.

Basically, if we wish for a result, we need to understand that we must create the cause, because the result depends on the cause. If the result were not dependent on the cause, it

should arise automatically. The mind of love and compassion is the true source of happiness and joy for ourselves and others. When the causes are created, the results will automatically happen. Hence, if we put an effort into habituating our mind with love and compassion, these qualities will naturally increase. Then, as our mind becomes habituated with them, these qualities will arise with minimum effort on our part, or when we meet with the minimum causes and conditions.

This I know from my own experience of practising cultivating love and compassion. I am sharing my experience not with any intention to praise myself, but to say that it is possible to develop love and compassion within us. In the past thirty years or so of practising love and compassion, I found that initially, it didn't arise easily. Yet I persisted with the practice and, as a result, I can now say that it arises easily, even when I observe other beings experiencing a minor suffering. This shows that mental habits do change through training our mind. If we train our mind through meditation practice, our mind will become habituated to love and compassion.

We have been talking about joyful effort, which is an essential factor for cultivating any virtue that we have not cultivated, or to increase the virtues we have already cultivated. We have learned that cultivating joyful effort really means to cultivate a genuine, sincere, heartfelt joy and interest in engaging in virtue. Therefore, we can understand how, when we have joyful effort in our practice, we are also rejoicing in our own virtue, which fulfils the practice of the branch of rejoicing within the seven branches or limbs.

As we know, rejoicing is an important cause of multiplying or increasing our virtue. Most of you have studied the seven-branch practice. But the question is, do you apply it in your practice? Practising all seven branches is essential, because if we miss one of them in our practice, we won't be able to reach the state of buddhahood. That's why the seven are called the 'branches' to achieve enlightenment. It is similar to a car that has some of its essential parts damaged or missing – it won't start.

The seven branches of the seven-limb practice – beginning with the first two branches of prostration and offering – are for accumulating merits and purifying negativities, which is how we reach complete enlightenment. The third branch is confession, which – in contrast to the branch of rejoicing in virtue – means to regret any negativities or non-virtues we have accumulated. It is very important that we feel regret or remorse about our negativities, from the depths of our heart. While the branch of rejoicing inspires us to accumulate more virtues, the branch of confession inspires us to avoid accumulating non-virtues again. It is said that through the branch of confession, half of that negativity or sin will be purified.

In Tibetan, the word *digpa*, which means 'sin', connotes something very negative or undesirable. I would interpret undesirability as referring to the result of that negative or sinful action, which is something we don't want; that's why the action is called *digpa*, or a sin. Feeling regret about negativities will naturally result in us cultivating the purifying force of promise, which is a resolution to refrain from doing that same negative action in future.

Then, there are the branches of requesting the Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma and not to pass into parinirvana. Finally, the branch of dedication is also extremely important for increasing our virtue and making it inexhaustible.

As I have said before, putting Dharma into practice is what matters most, and our everyday actions can be integrated into our Dharma practice. For example, whenever we drink a cup of tea or eat any food, we can integrate that into our Dharma practice, such as the seven-limb practice of making offerings to noble beings. Here, we should remember what to think of – that, having made the offering to the enlightened beings, we have pleased them and caused uncontaminated bliss to arise. By feeling positive and rejoicing in the practice of offering, we integrate the branch of rejoicing. We can also integrate our everyday eating and drinking into the practice of giving, by thinking we are feeding all the bacteria and microorganisms that live in our body. At the end, we can dedicate any virtue we have accumulated through these practices to sustain our lives, so that we will cause the Dharma to flourish and benefit all sentient beings.

Khunu Lama Rinpoche said in his text *Jewel Lamp: A Praise of Bodhicitta*:

When you walk, walk with bodhicitta.
When you sit, sit with bodhicitta.
When you stand, stand with bodhicitta.
When you sleep, sleep with bodhicitta.
When you look, look with bodhicitta.
When you eat, eat with bodhicitta.
When you speak, speak with bodhicitta.
When you think, think with bodhicitta.

This beautiful passage showing the benefit of bodhicitta indicates how we can integrate all our actions of sleeping, sitting, standing and walking with our bodhicitta practice.

So, not practising Dharma is our main drawback; it is not as if we don't have the opportunity, or lack Dharma knowledge. Many of us make the seven-bowls water offering daily, which represents the seven-branch or seven-limb practice. Rather than doing it as just a ritual, we should remember that the main purpose of the offering is to reflect on the meaning of the seven branches and integrate them with our everyday practice. In this way, we engage in the practice of accumulating merits and purifying negativities on a daily basis.

It is by integrating Dharma with our daily activities, even something as ordinary as eating food or drinking tea, that we cultivate and maintain a positive state of mind. It is the same when we go to sleep. As we all know, sleeping is really for resting or rejuvenating our body. However, we should not just simply sleep to rest our body, but think that the purpose of resting is to serve the Dharma and all sentient beings. As we practise Dharma, we will notice our mind being calmed and subdued, and as a result we will find a stable and lasting state of peace and happiness.

[Geshe-la continues teaching from the Six Perfections chapter on joyous perseverance or joyful effort]

(2") Employing the methods to eliminate the incompatible factors (cont.)

(c) Stopping discouragement or self-contempt

It is not enough just to delight in the sublime teaching after you have stopped your procrastination and your attachment to ignoble activities; you must train as a Mahayana practitioner. Therefore, if you become discouraged, thinking, "Someone like me is unable to practice that," you must eliminate this discouragement. Stopping discouragement or self-contempt has three parts:

1. Stopping discouragement about the goal
2. Stopping discouragement about the means to attain the goal
3. Stopping discouragement because wherever you are is a place to practice

(1) Stopping discouragement about the goal

Qualm: If the goal is buddhahood – the total elimination of all faults and the total completion of all good qualities – then, since it is extremely difficult for me to accomplish even a few good qualities or to remove even a few faults, how could someone like me be capable of attaining such a result?

Reply: If such a sense of discouragement manifests, it is a very great fault because it constitutes giving up the spirit of enlightenment. Even if such a thought does not fully manifest, you must stop it at its incipient stage.

With respect to the lines *If the goal is Buddhahood – the total elimination of all faults and the total completion of all good qualities* a question may arise in the mind of someone with a very good background knowledge of what constitutes the perfect state of buddhahood or enlightenment. They already know that buddhahood means the total elimination of all faults and being endowed with all the excellent qualities. So this qualm about achieving this state may arise in the mind of such a person. As it is saying here, they may realise that, in the light of their own situation, even gaining a single quality or to eliminate a single fault is extremely difficult let alone achieving the infinite qualities or eliminating all faults. Such a person might get discouraged by thinking, 'how it is possible for someone like me to achieve the state of buddhahood?'

It is said that if one has already cultivated the bodhicitta mind, and becomes discouraged by thinking, 'I won't be able to achieve the state of enlightenment', there is a danger of losing that bodhicitta mind. So, how do we overcome this low self-esteem or sense of discouragement? It says here:

Reply: If such a sense of discouragement manifests, it is a very great fault because it constitutes giving up the spirit of enlightenment. Even if such a thought does not fully manifest, you must stop it at its incipient stage.

As a remedy, or to counteract discouragement, we need to reflect on something to uplift or lighten up our low self-esteem and bring positive thoughts and inner joy. This reflection is similar to counteracting mental sinking in the calm abiding meditation. The text continues:

How to stop it? Encourage yourself with this thought: "The Bhagavan – the authoritative person who speaks what is true and correct, never what is false or erroneous – said that even flies, etc. will attain enlightenment..."

The 'bhagavan' here refers to a fully awakened one, who is called in Tibetan *kyebu tsema* – an authoritative or valid person. *Kyebu* means person, and *tsema* means valid cogniser, which is a type of mind that is incontrovertible or infallible with respect to its object. Here, the bhagavan Buddha is called an authoritative or valid person because a buddha is an infallible or fully reliable person who only speaks *what is true and correct*. For example, Buddha taught the four noble truths, laying down the instruction of what to adopt and what to abandon, and so forth. Everything the Buddha has taught is valid and infallible and aligned with reality. Hence, the Buddha is a valid person. Lama Tsong Khapa says here that the Buddha had said *even flies, etc. will attain enlightenment*. So, since Buddha has said that even flies can attain enlightenment, why can't I? You need to think:

“...That being so, why should I not attain it – so long as I do not give up persevering – in as much as human birth...”

So, you say to yourself, ‘I have been born as a human being, and as a human being I am able to communicate and cognise the meaning of life.’ Of course, when it says you are able to communicate and understand the meaning of life, it is not in the same context as saying, ‘here is your food, you eat it’ i.e. understanding that your purpose is to eat that food. Rather, the purpose or meaning referred to here is the state of liberation and omniscience – enlightenment. You think about how, if Buddha has said that a fly can achieve enlightenment, then you can say to yourself, ‘I am a human being, I can do it’, and in this way uplift your mind and diminish discouragement.

“...human birth gives me an excellent basis and I have the mental capacity to analyze what to adopt and what to cast aside?”

As well as being born as a human being, you also have the gift of a good sense of discernment, or the intelligence to know the difference between what is right and what is wrong. This is how we dispel discouragement or sinking in our mind: by reflecting on something very positive that brings joy to the mind.

However, just as we don’t want our mind to feel so low that we lose our spirit and interest in our practice and become discouraged, we also don’t want our mind to feel so high or uplifted that it will be inflated with pride and arrogance. We need to cultivate the right level of mental attitude, not making us feel too low or too high.

Continuing with the text:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

“How could I attain enlightenment?”

I shall not indulge in such discouragement,
For the truth-declaring Tathagata
Has spoken this truth:

“Even flies, mosquitoes,
Bees, and worms will attain
Unsurpassed enlightenment, so hard to attain,
Once they generate the power of perseverance.”

Why should someone like me –
Born into the human race, recognizing benefit and harm –
Not attain enlightenment,
As long as I do not give up the bodhisattva deeds?

The two lines *Why should someone like me, Born into the human race, recognizing benefit and harm* are points we need to seriously reflect on. Being born as a human, do we really recognise the difference between what will benefit us or harm us? Unfortunately, we might be confused about the two, and think of benefit as harmful, and of harm as beneficial.

Furthermore, stop your discouragement with this thought: “In the past there were former buddhas, now there are living buddhas, and in the future there will also be those who reach buddhahood. It is not the case that just one person who has already become a buddha accomplishes the path. Rather, those just like myself, gradually progressing upward, have become buddhas and will become buddhas.”

To inspire us, we must think that past buddhas became buddhas, not because they were already buddhas and then became buddhas, but rather, once upon a time, they were exactly like us. It says here, *it is not the case that one person who has already become a buddha accomplishes the path, Rather those just like myself...* Buddhas in the past were just like us;

each was an ordinary person, filled with all the negativities and faults.

However, the line, *just like myself, gradually progressing upwards*, indicates how all the buddhas reached the state of enlightenment through following the stages of the path to enlightenment or the lamrim. Beginning with the practice of relying on the spiritual guru, they then meditated on the precious human rebirth – recognising its rarity, meaning and transient nature – then on the sufferings of lower rebirth. Following this, they reflected on the law of cause and effect, the four noble truths, and the faults of cyclic existence, cultivating renunciation. This is followed by cultivating bodhicitta, through the sixfold causes and effect – from recognising all beings as having been our mother, to compassion, to superior intention, culminating in the bodhicitta mind. They then engaged in the six perfections and finally reached the state of enlightenment.

In this way – even though once upon a time they were exactly like us, completely afflicted with all negativities – all the buddhas progressed, stage by stage, to complete enlightenment. So, we must think that we too will reach complete enlightenment by practising according to our current capacity, such as initially working on counteracting a specific fault or cultivating a specific excellent quality. We can at least understand the possibility of achieving the same state of complete enlightenment that all the buddhas have achieved.

The text then says:

The bodhisattva thinks as follows: “All the tathagatas, arhats, perfect buddhas who have attained, who are attaining, and who will attain complete enlightenment have, are, and will attain complete enlightenment through this kind of method, this kind of path, this kind of joyous perseverance.” Thus, it is not the case that all these tathagatas are just one person who has already become a tathagata attaining complete enlightenment...

...Rather, I too shall reach total perfection in utterly unsurpassed, perfect, and complete enlightenment. With joyous perseverance in common with all living beings and joyous perseverance focused upon all living beings, I too shall seek and strive for enlightenment.

This indicates the truth of cause and effect – that, if we are to achieve the state of enlightenment, we must recognise that it doesn’t arise without causes and conditions. Here, the text is showing us that we all can achieve enlightenment, for we all have the buddha or tathagata nature or potential.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

འདྲེན་གྱི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལ་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་ལུགས་ཀྱི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

20 August 2019

As usual, we will begin with a short meditation. [*Tong-len meditation*]

As we need to ensure we have the correct motivation, it's good to reflect on the meaning of prayers like the *Taking Refuge and Generating Bodhicitta* prayer that we have just recited. Then, through this reflection, we are cultivating the proper motivation.

When we talk about taking refuge in the Three Jewels, and following all the precepts relating to that, it is very clear that we will find that there is a true refuge and protection for us at the end of our life, which has to be placed into our mindstream. So, while we have the opportunity and freedom, we must make the effort to seize that opportunity to recognise and cultivate faith in that inner refuge and protection, which is completely reliable at all times.

As we have said in the past, when we face the imminent reality of death and impermanence then no matter how beautiful or strong our body is, it is of no use at all. Similarly, no matter how many friends we may have, even if we are surrounded by them all at the time of death, they cannot help us. Likewise, all of our wealth and possessions are of no benefit to us then.

At that moment it becomes very clear that the only thing that can be of true benefit is finding refuge and hope within our own mind. That which guides and protects us from within is the true Dharma. In fact, the purpose of engaging in meditating on death and impermanence is to recognise the value of the Dharma and be inspired to put it into practice. If you are familiar with that meditation, there are three main reasons that you apply to see why death is inevitable. Then, as an outcome of those reasons, we have to come to three definitive decisions in relation to our approach to Dharma practice. We have the opportunity to engage in this death and impermanence meditation right now to come to these three decisions, and to realise the deeper purpose of understanding the meaning of our life.

When we don't engage our mind with such meditation practices then all we will be doing is feeding our mind with all kinds of various disturbing thoughts, which only bring more disturbance and more confusion to our minds. But if we direct our mind to a meditation topic such as death and impermanence, then not only will it benefit us at the time of death and beyond, but it will enhance our peace and happiness in this immediate timeframe.

In other words, ultimately there's no benefit in this body, in our possessions or our worldly friends. The message here is that we must at the very least overcome very strong attachment to our body, wealth, friends and so forth. We will find that the moment we ease or release this forceful pressure of attachment, our mind will become relaxed and joyful.

The cause of the problems and suffering in our life is not completely related to our physical body or external living conditions. The major cause of our problems is worrying

about things. For example, if you have some physical illness, then of course that can cause pain and distress. However, if on top of the problems directly related to the illness, you mentally worry about those problems, then those overly negative thoughts about your situation will only add more problems. Quite often, we suffer because of mental worries and our inability to cope with that. This is unnecessary and we can overcome it through training our mind and engaging in meditation practice.

That is why we have to recognise that the main purpose of following a spiritual practice – such as taking refuge, or any other Dharma practice – is to combat states of mind that bring suffering. Then we will be combating the real cause of our problems which lies within and not in the external world. As we were saying before, most times the causes of hardship and suffering in our life are not external; rather the real cause is our mind unnecessarily worrying and thinking negatively about things. So if we want to get rid of a problem, we really must subdue this worrying and restless mind, and the Dharma is the most effective means of subduing the mind.

We must understand that we all have the freedom and capacity to train and bring changes to our mind. Our mind works with and goes after whatever is most familiar. If the mind becomes habituated to positive thoughts, then they will arise more easily. We can change the mind through training it. When we engage in a virtuous practice, we might find it difficult and challenging in the beginning to keep our mental attention on the practice. However, as we habituate our mind with a practice, we will be able to do that practice more easily. Then even at the time of death, we will be able to apply that practice easily in peace and joy.

When we learn that there is no essence to our body, wealth and friends, we should not literally take that to mean there is no value or benefit in having them. Of course, they are of benefit, and our wellbeing can be dependent on them. Many people have a misconception that being a good Buddhist means not possessing wealth or caring about beauty and so forth. Sometimes these people comment to Buddhists, 'Why are you making money?' They have a preconception that if you are a Buddhist you should not be making money. I want to say to them, 'Is it true that after becoming a Buddhist you don't need to eat food, wear clothes, or have a house for shelter?' If it wasn't true, then Buddhists wouldn't need to work and earn money.

So, the teaching on the shortcomings of body, wealth and friends is not meant to advise us to say we don't need them, or even throw them away. Rather it advises us to stop being attached to, craving or desiring them. We need them for our livelihood and to support us in our life. Indeed, wealth is the most important factor when we talk of the wellbeing and development of the whole country .

It's important to always point the teaching to our own mind, rather than to any external people or things. When we talk about cultivating a sense of contentment in relation to wealth and so forth, we're not saying we should not have wealth or get rid of our wealth. That is not the point. The main focus of the practice of contentment is mentally having less attachment to, or even eliminating attachment to wealth. The benefit of the practice of contentment is a sense of satisfaction and inner peace, which occurs when we reduce or overcome attachment and desire.

I've side-tracked from the topic, which happens frequently, because we have known each other for many years and I

tend to talk about whatever I see as relevant or beneficial for you at the moment.

However, we had better continue with the teachings.

(1) Stopping discouragement about the goal

Last week we finished at this sentence:

Rather, I too shall reach total perfection in utterly unsurpassed, perfect, and complete enlightenment. With joyous perseverance in common with all living beings and joyous perseverance focused upon all living beings, I too shall seek and strive for enlightenment.

The text continues:

The *Praise of Infinite Qualities* also says:

“Even some who have earlier obtained the state of a sugata previously fell to states much lower than this one.” Thinking thus and in order to inspire us, you [Bhagavan] did not disparage yourself even when you fell into a dreadful condition. To disparage oneself is wrong, causing those with well-developed faculties to become discouraged.

If we look into the meaning of this passage, we find is essentially a reflection on what we should do in order to inspire ourselves so that when we face any hardship or difficult situation we won't be discouraged or give up. We should think that all the buddhas faced great hardship and difficulty before they reached their state of complete enlightenment. However, they never lost their spirit or their courage. Rather, when they faced obstacles, they became even more determined by thinking about the benefit of fulfilling their aspiration to achieve supreme enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. The passage is saying that if we reflect in the same manner, we will not disparage ourselves or let ourselves down in the face of hardship.

When the text says *well-developed faculties*, it is referring to well-developed virtue, or faith in virtue. So, in a sense, through disparaging ourselves we will become discouraged even if we have developed good faith in virtues. When it says, *to disparage oneself is wrong, causing those with well-developed faculties*, this means that if we disparage ourselves, then even if we have well-developed virtue and faith we will *become discouraged*.

Furthermore:

As to this discouragement, since a buddha's good qualities are infinite and results follow from causes, you must accomplish good qualities and remove faults through limitless avenues while on the path. After you have understood this well, you may become discouraged when you then take a look at yourself.

When the text says, *as to this discouragement*, it is further explaining the meaning of the previous line. Here, the person who is in danger of becoming discouraged really refers to someone who has developed a good understanding of the framework of the entire path in terms of what is required to achieve complete enlightenment. As it clearly mentions here, *a buddha's good qualities are infinite*, and the *results follow from causes*. We need to understand that as the qualities of buddhas are infinite, it follows then we have to create infinite causes because the result follows the cause. So, those with a complete understanding of the path to enlightenment can get discouraged through knowing that the ultimate goal here is to *accomplish all good qualities*, and in order to *accomplish infinite good qualities* you have to eliminate or *remove all faults*, and we feel, 'I can not do that.'

As said before, here the person who is discouraged clearly refers to someone who has a complete understanding of what is involved in order to achieve complete enlightenment. *After you have understood this well* implies that many of us don't get discouraged because we don't have a good understanding of the path to enlightenment, and so we don't have a clue as to the amount of work that is needed to achieve supreme enlightenment. However, having understood the path well, *you may become discouraged when you then take a look at yourself* or when you consider yourself to be a follower this path, there is the possibility of becoming discouraged.

The text continues:

However, this particular discouragement will never arise at a time like the present when an erroneous understanding of the path is in operation.

As it clearly points out here, people like us who lack the understanding or hold an erroneous understanding are not people who could become discouraged.

Now, when practicing to attain the limitless buddha qualities, you suppose that they are achieved by one-sidedly pursuing just a single, small portion of a quality and intensively working on it.

This clarifies the point about why those with an erroneous understanding are not discouraged. It says here that they think that they're on the right path and that they can achieve complete enlightenment, not because they have correct and complete understanding of the path, but because their partial or wrong understanding makes them think like that. We sometimes hear people saying that you can achieve enlightenment if you complete a hundred thousand prostrations or accumulate a hundred thousand Vajrasattva mantras or mandala offerings and so forth. According to them you can reach the state of enlightenment in one year, because you can accumulate one hundred thousand prostrations in a year.

Yet, in this case your not getting discouraged is not a good sign.

As it clearly says here, *in this case not becoming discouraged is not a good sign*.

Rather, it is the result of your not being certain about how to proceed on the path – or, having a rough understanding but not putting it into practice – so you are confused by its apparent ease. For, when you come up against the practice and receive an explanation of a fairly complete outline of the path, roughly arranged from beginning to end, you say, “If that much is needed, who could do it,” and thoroughly give it up.

These lines indicate, again, how a person with an understanding of the *complete outline of the path* can be discouraged.

Also, Sha-ra-wa said:

For bodhisattvas who have not engaged in practice all the bodhisattva deeds seem easy, like looking at a target for arrows, and they do not even get discouraged. At present, we lack a complete practice of the teachings, so we have not even reached the level at which we would have discouragement or self-contempt. When we more fully appropriate the teaching, then there is great danger of discouragement and self-contempt.

This is quite true.

That finishes the causes of discouragement with regard to the goal, which is the state of buddhahood. Complete

enlightenment means the state that is endowed with infinite excellent qualities, and when we think of the ultimate goal in this manner, we may become discouraged.

(2) Stopping discouragement about the means to attain the goal

We may also be discouraged when we think about the path to attaining that goal.

The text starts with this qualm:

Qualm: To accomplish buddhahood you have to give away your feet, hands, etc., but I am not capable of such feats.

When we think about the sacrifice of giving *away your feet, hands, etc* to accomplish buddhahood we may become discouraged thinking, *I am not capable of such feats.*

The reply is:

Reply: You must bear suffering to that extent, for even those who live as they please without engaging in the bodhisattva deeds ...

The deed of giving becomes a bodhisattva deed when the giving is conjoined with the bodhicitta mind, and it includes giving away parts of your body, and so forth. Thinking about this can really discourage us.

The text is, however, saying we must bear in mind that even if we don't engage in such a bodhisattva deed, but live life recklessly in the way we want, we will still experience *unspeakable sufferings* because of being within cyclic existence. They:

... experience as they pass through cyclic existence unspeakable sufferings, such as having their bodies cut open, torn to pieces, stabbed, set on fire, and so forth, but they do not accomplish even their own welfare.

Because we are subject to cyclic existence such suffering is inevitable. Even if we don't engage in bodhisattva deeds, we can fall victim to being stabbed, killed, and other such unspeakable sufferings.

The text continues:

The suffering occasioned by undergoing hardships for the sake of enlightenment is not even a fraction of this suffering...

The suffering and hardship that we experience by engaging in the bodhisattvas' deeds is only *a fraction* of the suffering that we endure in this worldly existence.

... and also has the great purpose of accomplishing both your own and others' welfare.

Despite all the suffering and hardship that we go through in our life, we are not able to achieve the purpose of our own welfare, let alone extending benefit to others. The suffering we experience in following the practices of a bodhisattva is only a fraction of the suffering we experience in cyclic existence, but it has the result of accomplishing all our own purposes, as well as achieving the welfare of all other beings.

The text continues with a quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* which summarises what has just been discussed.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

"But it frightens me that I must
Give away my feet, hands, and the like."
Without distinguishing heavy suffering from light,
Confusion reduces me to fear.

For countless tens of millions of eons

I will be cut, stabbed,
Burned, and torn asunder numerous times,
Without thereby attaining enlightenment.

This suffering which brings about my enlightenment
Does have a limit.

It is like undergoing the pain of an incision
To excise an injurious internal disease.

All doctors eliminate illness
Through forms of discomfort which heal it.
Thus, I will bear a little discomfort
To destroy numerous sufferings.

The text continues:

With respect to giving away your body, you do not give it in the beginning when you are afraid. But through graduated training in generosity, you end your attachment to your body. Once you have increased the strength of your great compassion, you have no difficulty when you give it away, provided it is for a great purpose.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

The Supreme Physician does not employ
Ordinary remedies such as those.
He heals limitless chronic diseases
With the most gentle treatments.

At the beginning the Guide enjoins you
To give vegetables and so forth.
Later, after you are used to this,
You gradually offer even your flesh.

Once I come to conceive of my body
As being like a vegetable and so forth,
What difficulty will there be in giving away
Such things as my flesh?

This is saying that if we train ourselves in the practice of giving stage-by-stage from easy to difficult we will make progress. The important point is that there is no need to become discouraged because of the practice of giving away your own body or flesh, as you are not expected to give your body away in the beginning or if you are not ready for it. Rather you train your mind in generosity by giving what is within your capacity such as food or a small amount of money and so forth.

As the text says:

Some say that since practitioners of the perfection vehicle must give away their bodies and lives, they undergo torment and are on a path that is very difficult to follow. This text clearly refutes this, because you do not give away your body so long as you perceive it to be a difficult deed, but rather do so once it becomes very easy, like giving a vegetable.

Some might say that the *practitioners of the perfection vehicle must give away their bodies and lives, undergo torment and are on a path that is very difficult to follow*, and refuse to follow that path on the grounds that it's too hard. *The text clearly refutes this: that is not the case because you do not give away your body so long as you perceive it to be a difficult deed.*

We are advised not to do something that is beyond our capacity. Rather, as the text says, *do so once it becomes very easy, like giving a vegetable*. One starts with giving something small and then develops that practice of generosity by giving something a bit bigger next time. There's a clear indication in the text that if there are deeds that we feel are too difficult to follow, it is reasonable not to attempt them.

(3) Stopping discouragement because wherever you are is a place to practice

The path to supreme enlightenment takes many lifetimes; achieving it in a single lifetime is extremely difficult. This means that one has to have a good rebirth as a human over many lifetimes, which in turn means that one is subject to the suffering nature of a human rebirth for a long period of time. This can be very discouraging. To overcome this the text begins with:

Qualm: Reaching buddhahood requires taking limitless rebirths in cyclic existence, so I will be harmed by the suffering therein. I am not capable of such a thing.

To overcome that qualm the text says:

Reply: Reflect as follows. Bodhisattvas have eliminated all sin; therefore, sin's effect – the feeling of suffering – will not arise because they have stopped the cause.

Here, *bodhisattvas* refers to those bodhisattvas who intentionally take rebirth in cyclic existence. And because they *have eliminated all sin; therefore, sin's effect will not arise*. Since bodhisattvas have overcome sinful actions, they have overcome the result of sinful actions, which is *the feeling of suffering*. Therefore, even though they take rebirth, they do not undergo the experience of suffering, because they've stopped the causes.

Through firm knowledge that cyclic existence lacks an intrinsic nature, like a magician's illusion, they also have no mental suffering.

This clearly indicates how bodhisattvas view things and events through the lens of their knowledge of emptiness. They see everything as being like a magician's illusion, and the effect of such knowledge is that there's no mental suffering. The result arises from their perception of the way things exist.

Given that their physical and mental bliss increases, they have no reason to become disheartened even though they are still in cyclic existence.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Since sin is eliminated, there is no suffering.
Through knowledge, there is no lack of joy.
Misconceptions and sin
Harm the mind and body.

Through merit the body is blissful;
Through knowledge the mind is too.
Though remaining in cyclic existence for others' welfare,
Why should the compassionate ones be disheartened?

And also:

Thus, after mounting the steed of the enlightenment spirit,
Which dispels all dejection and fatigue,
You proceed from joy to joy.
What sensible person would become discouraged?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama quotes this last verse frequently as does Khunu Lama Rinpoche. It is a great source of inspiration for retaining the bodhicitta mind. Because of their bodhicitta mind whatever a bodhisattva does, even taking rebirth in worldly existence, becomes a cause to accumulate merit as well as wisdom. So whatever they go through on the path is only joyful. As it says here, *you proceed from joy to joy, therefore, what sensible person would become discouraged?*

The first of Shantideva's verses quoted above is saying that we have to recognise that all the suffering we find in our life is the result or outcome of our creation and accumulation of sinful actions. Conversely, if we put an effort into overcoming such sinful actions, then we won't be afflicted with suffering.

The lines *Through merit the body is blissful; Through knowledge the mind is too* refer to merit or virtue being the main cause for achieving happiness and joy on a physical level while knowledge or wisdom is the main cause of happiness and joy on a mental level.. Essentially this advice is to motivate and encourage us to abandon sinful or negative actions. And since we want more happiness and joy in life, then we should create its cause, which is accumulating merit or virtues.

Really what do you need? You need happiness. So what do you do? You do virtuous practice. You really don't need suffering. So why create the cause of suffering? That comes from a negative mind. Keep a good mind and let the rubbish mind go. A rubbish mind is a really harmful and negative mind with too much anger, and jealousy, and no happiness. There are many kinds of negative mind here, but with happiness there is no room for negative minds. There's no room in a good mind for a negative mind.

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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

འདྲེན་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

27 August 2019

As usual, we will begin with the giving and taking meditation. [*Meditation*]

Now, cultivate the right motivation, which is to achieve complete enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. Then think that it is for this reason that we are listening to this profound teaching and will put it into practice.

We understand that the meaning of joyful effort is having a genuine sense of joy or delight in whatever virtuous practice we do. When we engage in meditation practice, it is important that we place our mental focus on a virtuous object. However, it is not sufficient to just be able to retain that object of meditation. We should at the same time have a sense of real joy and delight in engaging in meditation practice.

(c) Stopping discouragement or self-contempt

(3) Stopping discouragement because wherever you are is a place to practice (cont.)

Now we continue with this line from the lam rim teaching:

Likewise, do not become discouraged even by being delayed in cyclic existence for an immeasurable length of time, ...

Then a few lines further on the text quotes *Precious Garland*.

Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland* states:

When suffering, even a short time is hard to bear;
What need mention a time that is long?
But when free of suffering and joyful,
What harms you over even endless time?

Bodhisattvas have no physical suffering;
How could they have mental suffering?
Out of compassion they feel distress for the world;
Thus they remain for a long time.

So do not be discouraged,
Thinking, "Buddhahood is far away."
Always strive at these collections
So as to eliminate faults and gain good qualities.

As I always emphasise, as we go through this text the most important thing is to relate it to our own practice. We must see in ourselves some sort of difference between when we study and gain knowledge about the Dharma, and when we don't study or we lack knowledge of the Dharma. In this topic, the emphasis is that whenever we engage in virtuous practice, not only should we have very positive thoughts, strong interest and great enthusiasm, but also a genuine sense of joy and happiness about our practice.

In practical terms, we need to ask ourselves where our thoughts, interests and enthusiasms normally lie. What kinds of deeds or things do we take a great deal of joy and pleasure in? We find that the answer is that it is all mainly related to something opposite to the Dharma or spirituality; we are not short of enthusiasm or taking joy and delight in engaging in negativities. The text is saying that we need to

prioritise Dharma or virtuous practices over those other activities.

Fundamentally, we all wish for happiness and do not wish for suffering, both of which depend on their respective causes. The cause of happiness is virtuous actions, whereas the cause of suffering and unhappiness is non-virtuous or negative actions. So it should occur to us that, if we wish for happiness, then we should also have interest in and be enthusiastic and happy about creating virtue. Likewise, if we do not wish for suffering, then we should not have interest in, be enthusiastic and take joy in creating non-virtuous actions. Hence, in order to bring more happiness and reduce suffering we must change what we take interest and joy in. Unless we change this, we cannot expect to see the change we want to see, which is to experience more happiness and less suffering.

As followers of the Dharma, we have to be aware that if we create any negative action it will result in suffering. Therefore, we should think, 'I must purify negative actions by engaging in a purification practice.' Similarly, as we always wish for more happiness, then we should always remember to create virtuous actions, knowing that this is really the main cause of happiness. As a way to increase our merit and virtue, we should remember to rejoice and dedicate our virtue and merit. In this way, it is very important that we put our Dharma knowledge into practice so that we acquire the benefit of the Dharma, in terms of enriching our life with happiness.

True Dharma is related to our own mind, our own way of thinking and our daily deeds. Therefore, when we talk of Dharma practice, we must think of applying it to our thoughts and deeds. Dharma practice means changing or amending our mental attitude and conduct, for example adopting the ten virtuous actions of refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct etc., and abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions of killing, stealing etc. in both thought and deed.

The reason we need to adhere to the right practice of karma - in terms of what to adopt and abandon - is because adopting what needs to be adopted will bring happiness and abandoning what needs to be abandoned will prevent suffering in our life. However, in order for us to be motivated to follow the right practice of karma we must gain a firm and definite conviction faith in the law of karma - positive karma results in happiness and negative karma results in suffering. Once we gain such a conviction faith, we will follow the practice of karma because we all have the natural tendency to wish for happiness and avoid suffering.

Then the text continues:

... "To become a buddha requires completing limitless collections of merit and sublime wisdom.

Essentially, the text is talking about the various causes of discouragement that impede our practice, and how to overcome them. One of the causes of discouragement will arise when we think about the enormity of the accumulation of merit and wisdom required to achieve the state of enlightenment, when we may feel, 'This is too much, I can't do it.' In order to achieve enlightenment, we have to complete the two accumulations of merit and wisdom, which subsequently serve as the primary cause to achieve a buddha's form body (rupakaya) and truth body (dharmakaya). The word 'completion' in the context of the *completion of the endless collections*, emphasises the necessity of perfecting the two accumulations of merit and wisdom;

partial accumulation of merit and wisdom is not enough to achieve the state of buddhahood. If we truly understood the extent of the accumulations required to achieve complete enlightenment, we could easily become discouraged about seeking enlightenment, thinking:

... This is so difficult that I could not possibly do it."

Then, the text explains the way to overcome such discouragement:

First, motivate yourself with the desire to attain the goal of limitless buddha qualities for the welfare of the limitless beings you intend to help. Next, focus on remaining in cyclic existence for a measureless period of time and take the bodhisattva vows, thinking: "I shall accomplish limitless collections!"

These lines imply that there is no need to become distressed about accumulating enormous merit, for if you generate the spirit of enlightenment, and also take the engaging vows of the bodhisattva deeds - *the bodhisattva vows* - then you will constantly generate merit. It shows here the process of generating aspirational bodhicitta, followed by generating engaging or active bodhicitta through taking the bodhisattva vows. In this process, your mind is aimed at benefitting a limitless number of sentient beings in order to achieve the goal of limitless buddha qualities. To achieve that, you intend to accumulate limitless merit, even if it takes a *limitless period of time*. We then generate this kind of an aspirational bodhicitta and subsequently take the bodhisattva vows. Then the text continues:

Then, as long as you keep the vows, whether your mind is distracted by other things or not, asleep or awake, you will constantly accumulate merit as vast as space.

If you cultivate the spirit of enlightenment in such a manner *and take the bodhisattva vows* as mentioned here, then, *whether your mind is distracted or not*, or whether you are *asleep* or not, you are *constantly accumulating merit*. There is no reason to feel discouraged when you know that this is the way to accumulate merit.

Next, there is a quote from *Precious Garland*, the meaning of which has just been discussed.

The *Precious Garland* states:

Just as in all directions
Space, earth, water, fire, and wind
Are limitless, so, we assert,
Suffering beings are without limit.

This is indicating that the number of sentient beings are as infinite or as limitless as space, water, fire, wind and so forth. Then:

With compassion the bodhisattvas
Extricate these limitless beings
From suffering and then determine
To set them in buddhahood.

Those remaining steadfast in this way
Properly make this commitment,
And then, whether asleep or awake,
And even when careless,

They constantly accumulate merit as limitless
As living beings, for beings are without limit.
Because of the limitlessness of this, know
That limitless buddhahood is not hard to gain.

Those who remain for an immeasurable time
Seek immeasurable enlightenment
For the sake of immeasurable beings
And accomplish immeasurable virtue.

Hence, though enlightenment is measureless,
How could they fail to attain it
Before long through a combination
Of these four immeasurable ways?

This also indicates how the accumulation of merit becomes limitless and the sentient beings for whose purpose you accumulate merit is limitless. So, as the purpose of taking bodhisattva vows is directed to limitless beings, the merit you accumulate through it is also limitless.

Then the text continues:

It is most wonderful to think, "If only I could attain buddhahood in a brief time for the sake of living beings," because you are moved by the very intense power of your love, compassion, and spirit of enlightenment.

This sentence is saying that it is wonderful and praiseworthy if those, who, having cultivated a strong force of love, compassion and bodhicitta towards all sentient beings, and then moved by the force of love and compassion, generate an urge to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible, in the shortest timeframe. When it says here, *it is most wonderful*, this could refer to bodhisattvas who engage in the tantric path. However, bodhisattvas don't engage in the tantric path from the beginning; they first cultivate and develop love, compassion and bodhicitta. Because of the intense and strong force of their love and compassion towards all beings they follow the quick path to enlightenment.

Then the text continues:

However, when you are not within the sphere of these motivations, and you see the necessity of a very long training in endless deeds and that much hard work is required, you might think, "If this is the case, who could possibly do it?" If you should then claim that you are seeking a quick path, you directly damage the engaged spirit of enlightenment and indirectly damage the aspirational spirit of enlightenment.

Those who choose the quick path are making a mistake because their rationale for following the quick path is that they think the sutra path is too difficult, as it requires accumulating an enormous amount of merit over such a long period of time. In other words, they lack the courage to follow the sutra path. Moreover, their way of thinking could directly damage their engaging bodhicitta and indirectly damage their aspirational bodhicitta.

As the text states:

Your capacity for the Mahayana lineage steadily weakens, and your enlightenment fades into the remote distance, for you have utterly contradicted what Nagarjuna and Asanga determined to be the Conqueror's own thought on how to increasingly strengthen the spirit of enlightenment.

Thus, since becoming discouraged and remaining so brings no benefit at all and only leads to further discouragement, understand well the methods for achieving enlightenment and uplift your mind.

In these lines, the text asks us if there are any benefits or advantages to feeling discouraged. There are none at all. If we feel discouraged and don't overcome that, then that can lead to further discouragement, eventually making it impossible or extremely difficult to come out of that state. Therefore, we need to realise that discouragement can be a great obstacle to achieving our goals; whether they be spiritual or worldly. So we should think of overcoming that discouragement, and the method is to reflect on something

which will help uplift the mind. *So understand well the methods for achieving enlightenment and uplift your mind.*

When you do this, the completion of your aims is as if in your hand.

Rather than feeling hopeless and discouraged, we should direct our mind to what can be done to achieve our goal. As we do this, we will begin to see how we can achieve that goal completely. When we gain confidence about how we can achieve the goal, then, as it says here, we feel as though we have already accomplished the goal; *the completion of your aims is as if in your hand.* Then there's a quote:

The *Garland of Birth Stories* says:

Discouragement does not help to free you from misfortune,
So, rather than torment yourself in sorrow,
Develop stable proficiency in the required goals.
Then even the very difficult becomes easy, bringing liberation.

So achieve what must be done by the indicated method
Without making yourself fearful and unhappy.
Support yourself with stability that has the brilliance of proficiency,
Then, the achievement of all aims is in your hand.

This passage from *The Garland of Birth Stories* is very effective advice, and also very inspirational. I would encourage you to memorise these words so that you can easily remember this advice and its meaning whenever you need to apply it.

Saying *discouragement does not help to free you from misfortune*, this is something we have to say to ourselves. Sometimes we feel discouraged by not being able to achieve what we want to achieve, or not being able to have things that we want to have; whether that is in the form of knowledge, material objects, or whatever it may be. There is a desire and interest to have something, but for whatever reason we are discouraged from pursuing it, and we think we will not be able to accomplish it. As a result, we will feel despair and anxiety and even depression. That's what it is saying: *discouragement does not help to free you from misfortune or from your despair*, and it won't help you to come out of that despair.

Rather than torment yourself in sorrow means that you may be discouraged and suffering because you don't understand certain things, or you are unable to have certain things. In this situation, you need to recognise that the knowledge you want is not going to arise through feeling discouraged and doing nothing, nor is the thing you want going to come to you.

So rather than torment yourself in sorrow, develop stable proficiency in the required goals and focus on directing your attention towards achieving that. Educate yourself on how to achieve what you want to achieve. In this way, *even the very difficult becomes easy, bringing liberation.*

The next verse, beginning with *So achieve what must be done by the indicated method without making yourself fearful and unhappy* indicates that rather than being overwhelmed by a sense of discouragement, if we focus on how to achieve what we can do, then our knowledge will increase, and through this we will be able to get rid of discouragement. Then some positive thoughts about our ability to achieve the goal will arise, which is as if the goal was already in our own hand.

As we can see here in the *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*, Lama Tsongkhapa cites the scriptures written by great and well-known early Buddhist masters; this is one of the hallmarks of Tsongkhapa's writings.

The text continues:

Arya Asanga says repeatedly that you have both to know well the methods of training in extensive practice without being discouraged and to not be satisfied with only minimal qualities.

As we direct our attention to learning the major scriptures, we will begin to find out more and more about the subject matter. However, this should not cause us to feel discouraged from learning more. Nor should this cause us to be satisfied with just a partial understanding. If we are not careful, this can easily happen with us. As we make some progress with our practice or we gain more knowledge, we inflate ourselves with a sense of pride. With this pride, we feel some sort of contentment, as if we have finished learning or have no more to learn. Such a false sense of contentment is an obstacle for our progress.

Then the text says:

At present you think, "I have reached a high level of the path," when you have produced a single approximation of a good quality; even if it is an actual good quality, it is only one aspect of the path. You are content to meditate solely on it. But then those knowledgeable in the key points of the path explain from within the guidelines of scripture and reasoning that it is indeed a fraction of virtue, but with just that alone you have not reached anywhere. When you understand what they have said, you become extremely discouraged. Thus, those who do not remain satisfied with just some portion of virtue, who seek higher distinction, and who are not discouraged even with the necessity to learn limitless trainings are extremely rare.

It says here that, amongst those who find out precisely what it takes to achieve supreme enlightenment, not becoming discouraged is very rare.

However, if we relate this to our practice, then as Lama Tsongkhapa said here, we are not one of those people. That is because at the moment we rather think that we are doing well in our practice and are satisfied with it. Not only is our knowledge very limited, but we are so satisfied with that limited knowledge that we cannot see anything beyond that, or the need to learn beyond that. Then, if we go outside of what we know and what practice we do, we will be discouraged.

For those who truly follow the path, the instructions given here are very real and the true practitioner will find them very effective and beneficial for making progress.

(b") Gathering the forces of the favorable conditions

This section has four parts:

1. Developing the power of aspiration
2. Developing the power of steadfastness
3. Developing the power of joy
4. The power of relinquishment

(1") Developing the power of aspiration

As it is said that yearning acts as the basis for joyous perseverance, aspiration here refers to yearning.

The Tibetan word for the first power - yearning - is *mopa* which is said to refer to aspiration, of *dunpa* in Tibetan.

Then the text says:

The need to generate it is stated in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*:

My present destitution has arisen
From my not aspiring for the teachings
Both now and in the past.
Who would forsake aspiration for the teachings?

The Sage declared aspiration
The root of all aspects of virtue.

It then states how to develop aspiration:

Its root, in turn, is constant meditation
On karma's fruitional effects.

This means that the way to develop aspiration is to meditate on how pleasant and unpleasant effects arise from virtuous and non-virtuous karma respectively.

In fact, this is exactly what I brought up earlier in this talk. In terms of our practice it is most important to aspire to practise karma, in terms of what to adopt and what to avoid. This aspiration is the root cause of developing virtue. Then, as a way to cultivate that aspiration, the text refers to the subject matter of knowing the results of positive and negative karma, or actions. Therefore, it is talking about the aspiration to adopt virtue or positive actions, and to abandon non-virtue or negative actions.

Then the text continues:

This is because it is taught that faith acts as the basis for yearning, so that the faith of conviction in the two types of karma and their effects will generate two kinds of desire: to eliminate non-virtuous karma and to adopt virtuous karma.

In order to generate an aspiration, we need to cultivate faith. Here, faith refers to a 'conviction faith'. There are two types of conviction faith relating to the cause and effect of good and bad karma: good karma results in happiness and bad karma results in suffering. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate this conviction faith in the infallibility of the causal link between these two karmas (good and bad karma).

The fact that we are very behind with our practice, or that we lack interest in our practice, is clearly because of our lack of conviction faith in the functioning of good and bad karma. Essentially, in order to generate such a conviction faith, we have to ask ourselves whether or not there is a cause for things and events to happen.

Of course, everything happens because of causes. For example, in order to reap a good harvest the farmers initially sow the seed, and thus create the causes. They sow the seed because they know that the harvest depends on the cause. The happiness we seek and the suffering we wish to avoid also depends on causes. So, to cultivate such conviction faith in karma we have to ask the question, 'What is the cause?'

If it were the case that there is a cause for everything, what is the cause for happiness? To go into more detail about the law of karma we should refer to the explanation of karma in the section of the small stages of the path. In Buddhism, the teaching on the law of karma explains how beings are born in different realms according to their individual karma, and that's how the idea of past and future lives comes into being. However, those who don't accept this doctrine of karma of course think that, 'everything is created by God', and that God's creation is absolute, which gives no room for any questioning.

We will finish at this point in the text:

Furthermore, you consider karma and its effects in general, and in particular, the causality underlying the benefits of the bodhisattva deeds and the faults of violating them. Understand these from the relevant sections of this text.

So, we will leave it here and do the Twenty-one Tara prayers for Venerable Jampa who is having an operation on Friday, and for Ingrid Sorum.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

འདྲེན་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

3 September 2019

We will do our usual giving and taking meditation.

[Meditation]

Try to begin with the proper motivation. We need to cultivate whatever understanding of the proper motivation we have, and put that understanding into practice.

The reason why we follow the Dharma or meditation practice is to train our mind to be more kind-hearted and more wholesome. So, as we engage in this training, it is important that right at the beginning we make an effort to generate a positive and very good state of mind as part of our motivation.

I have mentioned in past teachings that there should be a difference between people who have knowledge of the Dharma, and people who don't have knowledge of the Dharma, in terms of how you live your life, and in particular, the way you manage any adverse or difficult situations. It is very important that those with knowledge of the Dharma and mind training apply it in their lives, otherwise having that Dharma knowledge will make no difference. Let's say you confront a situation where someone is annoying and harming you. With the application of Dharma knowledge you can prevent feelings of anger or wanting to retaliate, and thereby feel empathy and love for the perpetrator while maintaining your peace and sanity. One effective way to handle the situation in a more positive and holistic way is to view the perpetrator as being separate from their actions.

As Dharma practitioners we need to prepare ourselves not only in managing afflictive emotions such as anger as they arise, but also preventing them from arising in the first place. On the other hand, those who lack Dharma knowledge do not contemplate overcoming afflictive emotions, and when they face adverse situations, they won't consider tolerating that so they generate hatred and react negatively towards the perpetrator. The fact is that if we let anger control us, then we lose our peace and happiness and will also cause harm to others. Alternatively, if we overcome anger and cultivate loving kindness, we can maintain inner peace and happiness and be in a position to prevent any harmful actions. This is what the Buddha meant when he said in the *Dhammapada*, 'One truly is the protector of oneself; who else could the protector be? With oneself fully controlled, one gains a mastery that is hard to gain.' If you utilise your understanding and knowledge of the right approach then you can prevent any adverse or unfavourable situations from disturbing your mind.

(b") Gathering the forces of the favourable conditions

(1") Developing the power of aspiration (cont.)

At the last teaching we stopped at this sentence in the text:

Furthermore, you consider karma and its effects in general, and in particular, the causality underlying the benefits of the bodhisattva deeds and the faults of violating them.

Following this quotation, the text refers back to an earlier quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*.

It then states how to develop aspiration:

Its root, in turn, is constant meditation
On karma's fruitional effects.

This means that the way to develop aspiration is to meditate on how pleasant and unpleasant effects arise from virtuous and non-virtuous karma respectively.

This means that the way to develop aspiration primarily refers to conviction faith in *how pleasant and unpleasant effects arise from virtuous and non-virtuous karma respectively*. Here we find an instruction on the importance of applying the fundamental Buddhist practice of the law of karma. In order to feel motivated to put this into practice, we need to generate and develop a conviction faith in the law of karma which is that the result of good karma is pleasant and desirable, whereas the result of evil or non-virtuous actions is unpleasant or undesirable. Cultivating this conviction faith in the pleasant and unpleasant effect of virtuous and non-virtuous actions respectively is the very core of our practice.

The result of virtuous actions is pleasant and desirable to us, so we need to understand that we must adopt virtuous actions. On the other hand, we must abandon non-virtuous actions because their results are unpleasant and undesirable. We can think of the pleasant or unpleasant result of karma in terms of a ripening or an environmental result. Therefore, here the emphasis is on cultivating and developing two types of conviction faith relating to the pleasant effects of virtuous actions and the unpleasant effects of evil or non-virtuous actions, and as a result, deciding to adopt virtuous actions and abandon non-virtuous actions.

The text continues:

Furthermore, you consider karma and its effects in general, and in particular, the causality underlying the benefits of the bodhisattva deeds and the faults of violating them.

Furthermore, you consider karma and its effects in general relates to the presentation of karma in general as expounded in the small stages of the path. The four general characteristics of karma are:

- Karma is definite
- Karma increases
- We cannot meet with a result of karma that we have not created
- The karma we create isn't exhausted.

This is emphasising that we should cultivate conviction faith in these four characteristics of karma in order to feel motivated to engage in practice with joyful effort.

For example, karma is certain or definite refers to the certainty that virtuous actions produce the result of happiness. If we cultivate a genuine strong faith in that, it will affect our actions and our practice. Simply cultivating such faith alone can be an effective cause to deter us from evil actions and lead us to create positive actions through positive thoughts and deeds. We can only reap the benefits of the Dharma by putting it into practice.

The text also touches on the bodhisattva deeds in terms of the six perfections of giving, morality and so forth, and the faults of violating these six, such as miserliness, immorality and so forth. In saying *causality underlying the benefits of the bodhisattva deeds and the faults of violating them*, the text is referring to the benefit of the six perfections followed by the faults or shortcomings of the opposite to each of those six perfections.

Next the text states:

Understand these from the relevant sections of this text.

Once you aspire to the Mahayana, you enter its door through a commitment to clear away all faults and achieve all good qualities for yourself and others.

Here, the words *once you aspire to Mahayana* indicate the generation of the bodhicitta mind which has two aspirations: the aspiration to achieve supreme enlightenment and the aspiration to achieve the welfare of other beings. Once you generate this bodhicitta then *you enter its door* which refers to entering the door of the Great Vehicle or the Mahayana. Then *through commitment to clear away all faults and achieve all good qualities* – referring to the cultivation of the aspirational bodhicitta mind – you commit yourself to achieving enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings.

We continue with the text:

You must exhort yourself, thinking, “I will have to meditate for many eons to purify myself of every single fault along with its latent propensity and to develop every single good quality to the fullest extent. Yet since I have not even a fraction of the joyous perseverance needed to clear away faults or accomplish good qualities, I have pointlessly wasted my leisure.”

Here we reflect on what it takes to achieve enlightenment. Initially you generate the bodhicitta mind through which you enter the Mahayana door and then commit yourself to achieving complete enlightenment, the state where you *clear away all faults and achieve all good qualities* for yourself and others. With the bodhicitta mind, you must have the motivation and courage to say, “I will have to meditate for many eons to purify myself of every single fault along with its latent propensity.” The indication here is that it is not enough just to abandon all the mental delusions, such as desire, but the latencies of all such delusions have to be abandoned as well. Even though an arhat or foe destroyer of the Lesser Vehicle has abandoned afflictive obscurations, they have not abandoned the latencies of those afflictive obscurations, i.e. they have not abandoned the subtle form of false or dualistic appearance.

You need *to purify [ourselves] of every single fault along with its latent propensity and to develop every single good quality to the fullest extent. Yet since I have not even a fraction of the joyous perseverance needed to clear away faults or accomplish good qualities, I have pointlessly wasted my leisure.* As indicated here, as you gain a full and complete understanding of what it takes to achieve complete enlightenment, and then consider where you are and your capability in terms of the path to enlightenment, there is a good chance that you will become discouraged. This is because you realise that you have not removed even a single fault or achieved a single excellent quality. When you think about this, and the amount of merit needed to achieve the major and minor signs of a buddha, the amount needed to achieve even a single hair of a buddha is enormous. With an understanding of the stages of the path and how little one has progressed on the path, a sense of discouragement may arise.

The text continues with this quote:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

I will destroy the immeasurable
Faults of myself and others.
To destroy each fault
Will take an ocean of eons.

But if I cannot see in myself even a fraction
Of the effort needed to terminate a fault,
I am a source of measureless suffering.
Why does my heart not break?

I will accomplish numerous
Good qualities for myself and others.
To cultivate each good quality
Requires an ocean of eons,

But I have never conditioned myself
To even a mere fraction of a good quality.
Somehow I have obtained this life –
It is appalling to waste it.

(2") Developing the power of steadfastness

Having generated joyful effort through the power of aspiration, we need to cultivate the power of steadfastness in order to maintain our effort until we successfully achieve our goal.

As the text says:

Developing the power of steadfastness means that you bring to conclusion, without turning back, anything at which you joyously persevere. First, do not try to do everything; examine the situation carefully. If you see that you can do it, you engage in it; whereas if you cannot do it, you do not engage in it.

This relates to how to bring steadfastness to our effort. As indicated here, whatever the task that we commence, whether it is spiritual or worldly, if we are steadfast, we will never give it up until we complete it. The first piece of the advice is *do not try to do everything; examine the situation carefully*. This is clearly saying that we should not jump into taking on tasks. Before we commence a task, we should carefully examine if we have the ability to accomplish that task. If we lack the ability, then, as the text is saying, it is better not to begin it in the first place. However, *if you see that you can do it, you engage in it*. If you have confidence that you can achieve the task, then you engage in it.

If you doubt that you are able to achieve that task then, as suggested here, *if you cannot do it, you do not engage in it*. The text then elaborates on why it is better not to begin a task if we think that we cannot achieve it.

You should not even start in the first place things you will do for a while and then discard.

As the text clearly says, if we start some task that we are not able to achieve then we *will give up in the middle*. Essentially the reason is:

The reason is that if you become habituated to giving up in the middle what you have committed yourself to do, then through this conditioning you will in other lives again abandon your commitment to the training, etc.

Rather than acquiring the habit of starting something and then giving up before you complete it, it is better not to start that task in the first place. Quite often we do things simply because someone else is doing them. We want to do the same thing, but don't give much thought to whether we can, in fact, do it. For example, we take too many commitments in our practice and later we are not able to keep up with them.

If you start something without thoroughly examining the task in advance, you may give it up in the middle and not complete the task. That's why the text is saying it is wiser not to engage in a task that you think you cannot accomplish, in order to prevent the habit of stopping tasks

in the middle and not completing them. Otherwise, we become habituated *through conditioning* and then *you will in other lives again abandon your commitment to the training*. As the text clearly states, not completing tasks will not only prevent us from achieving our set goal in the immediate time frame or in this life, but this habit of giving up in the middle of a task will also have an impact on our future lives as well.

Consequently, your sin will increase in that life, and in subsequent lives the suffering that is the effect of this sin will increase. Furthermore, you will not accomplish other virtues because you will be thinking of carrying out your earlier commitment; there will be an inferior result because you turned away from your earlier commitment; and your earlier commitment itself will not be fulfilled because you did not follow through.

Essentially this is indicating that if we fall into this habit of not completing whatever task we start, not only will we fail to achieve the task we started, but it will also be an obstacle to undertaking other tasks as well.

The text continues:

In sum, committing yourself to do something but leaving it unfinished is a hindrance to your accomplishment of other projects, and the conditioning also destabilizes your commitment to the vows you have taken. In this vein, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

First I examine the endeavor
And then undertake it or not.
If unable, it is best not to undertake it,
But once begun, I will not turn back.

Otherwise I will be conditioned to this [starting and then stopping] in other lives
And my sin and suffering will increase.
Also, other actions and their results
Will be poor and unaccomplished.

Therefore, if you want to complete what you have committed yourself to do, cultivate three types of pride.

The three types of pride are explained in the following quote:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

You should have pride in three areas:
Action, ability, and afflictions.

The three types of pride are pride about action, ability and afflictions. Here the term 'pride' is not used in the sense of pride being an affliction or delusion. It is used in the sense of generating spirit or courage and determination. Next, we look into the meaning of each of these types of pride.

Pride about action means that no matter who else may be your companion as you practice the path, you do not count on them but accomplish it yourself alone.

This clearly states that pride about action is a form of mental spirit and courage that we need in our spiritual practice. We need the kind of courage that says, 'I can do it all by myself and don't need help from others.' As the text says:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

"I alone shall do it."

Also Nagarjuna's *Friendly Letter (Suhrl-lekha)* says:

Liberation depends on oneself;
It never occurs through the help of others.

To be more specific, in order to reach the state of liberation we have to make an effort; if we do not make effort, then we won't reach the state of liberation. Our liberation is

dependent on ourselves alone and no one else. Therefore, we need to say, 'I must make effort to achieve liberation, and I won't rely on others to give me that.'

Then:

The thought, "I alone shall achieve this without having any expectation of others," is similar to pride, so it is given the name "pride about action."

As mentioned earlier, 'pride' in the context of pride about action, is not the pride that is a type of mental delusion. Here it is the kind of spirit and courage that we need to generate as we engage in spiritual practice, which provides an impetus to maintain steadfastness in our practice.

Next:

Pride about ability means that you accomplish your own and others' welfare, thinking: "Since living beings are under the power of afflictions, they are unable to achieve even their own welfare, much less the welfare of others. I am able to accomplish the welfare of both myself and others."

Pride about ability indicates that you have confidence in your ability which, you are saying, no other beings possess. They cannot even benefit themselves due to the power of their mental afflictions let alone working to benefit others. However, as says here, *I am able to accomplish the welfare of both myself and others*. With this you are generating pride in your ability.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

The beings of this world, subject to the afflictions,
Cannot achieve their own welfare.
They are not as able as I am,
So I shall do it for them.

Then the text continues:

Furthermore, practice while thinking, "If these beings strive at lowly activities without interruption, why should I not perform the actions that will achieve the perfect effect?" *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

If others perform lowly actions,
How can I be idle?

However, when you achieve these two prides [about action and ability], you should not do so with self-conceit, out of contempt for others. Rather, regard others with compassion, and do not mix in any pride.

Again, the text is clarifying how pride about action and ability is different from the deluded form of pride, because it is not a mental attitude of pride or arrogance where the self is viewed as above all others. *You should not do with self-conceit*, indicates that normally pride means looking down on or belittling others. An example to illustrate a person with pride is someone on the top of the hill who sees himself above all others, who are below them. However, the word 'pride' here doesn't have that deluded sense of self-importance. *Rather regard others with compassion and do not mix in any [deluded] pride*.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

I do not do it out of pride,
I should have no pride.

Thinking, "Others are not capable; I am able," again resembles pride, so it is labelled "pride."

Next, the third type of pride is introduced.

Pride about afflictions means that with contempt for the afflictions on all occasions, you think, "I shall be victorious over these; they shall never defeat me." It means being

steadfast after you have generated the courageous thought to destroy the incompatible factors.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

I shall conquer all;
Nothing shall defeat me.
I, a child of the Victorious Lion,
Shall continue to have this pride.

Otherwise, if you lose courage, even a small incompatible factor will harm you.

This clearly refers to showing courage in combating the afflictions. If you cultivate such courage you will not fall under the influence of mental afflictions; rather you will be on top of them at all times. So we can see how it is very important to have this kind of courage because it strengthens the force of our ability to counteract the mental afflictions for which we need to have a strong opponent force. Developing that courage is what cultivating pride about afflictions is all about. As the text says, *if you lose courage about the afflictions then even a small incompatible factor will harm you.*

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Even a crow acts like a garuda
When it finds a dying snake.
If I am feeble,
Even a slight shortcoming will harm me.

According to this example, when a crow, which is an ordinary bird, sees a dying snake, it will act like a *garuda*. Likewise, if we are weak and lack spirit and courage then even a minor downfall in our practice can cause us great harm.

How can one who gives up, discouraged,
Find freedom from destitution?

Can you reach your goal if you simply remain discouraged and give up whatever you have studied in the past? Does this help you to reach your goal? Of course not!

Sha-ra-wa said:

The happiness of those who cast aside the teaching does not exceed their happiness before doing so. Consider the fact that if you give up the teaching in this lifetime, you must hereafter undergo endless suffering.

Sharawa is raising this question: if we give up or don't follow the teachings or the Dharma will we find more happiness? Of course, not. Sharawa continues:

If you make no effort, the afflictions will not look upon you with compassion.

Earlier the text talked about the necessity of having this courageous mind in order to combat the mental afflictions. If we give up our practice because we hope that the mental afflictions will show us compassion and mercy, then, we are wrong, because the afflictions will never show us compassion. Furthermore:

Also, the remedy will not say, "You are unable to cultivate me, so I will complete the task for you." Even the buddhas and bodhisattvas will not be able to protect you.

We have a saying that if we don't have the ring of faith in the Dharma then the hook of the compassion of all the buddhas cannot hold us up. Again, the text is saying that without making an effort from our own side and maintaining a good motivation and high spirit in our practice, then even the buddhas and bodhisattvas will not be able to protect us.

In conclusion:

If you apply the aforementioned three prides, even great incompatible factors cannot block you, so you must generate these three kinds of pride. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Against one who strives with pride
Even great obstacles will be in trouble.
So with a steadfast mind
I will overcome my shortcomings.

Otherwise, if practitioners are defeated by their shortcomings, their desire to conquer the afflictions of the three realms will be an embarrassment among the learned. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

If I am defeated by shortcomings,
My desire to conquer the three realms is a joke.

It is called "pride about afflictions" because you have contempt for the afflictions and then want to destroy them.

Some commentators to *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* explain this pride about afflictions differently, but I think the above explanation accords with the text.

Thus, stop expecting something from others and put on the armour of doing it alone. That is, be confident and think, "Unlike me, others cannot do it. I can do it." When you practice with this perspective, you are sure that you will defeat the afflictions – that they will never defeat you – and you consider that it would be a mistake to abandon your commitment after a while. Train yourself until your mind is steadfast in the desire to finish everything to which you have committed yourself after you have carefully examined whether you can do it.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

འབྲུག་ཤིང་ལྷོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

10 September 2019

As usual, we will begin with a short meditation. [*Tonglen meditation*]

It would be good to try to do at least some meditation regularly. To meditate properly, you should first have a good understanding of the practice - you need to gain what we call the wisdom arising from contemplating the subject matter. With wisdom based on contemplation, the subject matter you meditate on is fully established in your mind, by your own knowledge, based on your own reasoning.

However, to gain such a wisdom arising from contemplation, you have to first gain the wisdom arising from listening to the Dharma through studying. Even if the meditation you engage in is a very simple one, you still need to have some understanding of it.

The topics of our meditation should be based on teachings as taught by the Buddha. Therefore, we must first study the Dharma well to gain the wisdom based on listening to the Dharma. Without the wisdom arising from listening, we cannot produce the wisdom arising from contemplation, and without that, we cannot produce the wisdom arising from meditation. Therefore, it is very important to combine all three - listening, contemplating and meditating - in our practice.

The wisdom arising from listening is just based on information we have gathered from other people or scriptures; it does not give us a firm ground on which to make steady progress in our practice. In other words, the faith in the Dharma of a person who merely possesses such knowledge can be easily shaken.

Hence, it is crucial that we contemplate and critically examine and analyse the knowledge we gain from listening, and thereby make that knowledge our own. Then, when we engage in meditation practice, we can make good progress.

We will benefit from studying and practising the Dharma if we know it well and do it effectively. It is said, 'being peaceful and (self) controlled is the sign of learning; a decrease of mental afflictions is the sign of meditation.' As a measurement or sign of studying the Dharma, our continuum should be pacified and controlled, and the sign of meditation should be a decrease in our mental afflictions.

(3") Developing the power of joy

We've finished the section 'developing the power of steadfastness'. Now we move to the next topic, which is 'developing the power of joy'.

The text continues:

You develop the power of joy after the power of aspiration, an intense yearning, produces a joyous perseverance not previously present, and you have achieved the power of steadfastness (also called the power of pride) which causes the perseverance that has already developed to be irreversible. The power of joy means that when you first engage in an activity, you do it joyfully, and once you have

engaged, you have a sense of being insatiable in that you do not want to discontinue the activity.

Here again we find a profound instruction from Lama Tsongkhapa's own experience relating to how to sustain and develop joyful effort. What is clearly explained here is how, through cultivating the power of aspiration, we can generate the joyful effort we have not yet generated. Then, through cultivating the power of steadfastness or pride, we can maintain the joyful effort we have already generated. Regarding the power of steadfastness, we have already learned about the different types of pride, which really refer to types of courage. By cultivating such courage, we will be able to increase whatever joyful effort we have generated.

Regarding the power of joy, the text says that *the power of joy means that when you first engage in an activity, right from the very beginning, you do it joyfully, and once you have engaged, you have a sense of being insatiable*. The implication is that you enjoy the virtuous activity so much that, no matter how much you do it, you want to do it more; as it says here, you feel insatiable and *you do not want to discontinue the activity*.

The last sentence - *the power of joy means that when you first engage in an activity, you do it joyfully, and once you have engaged, you have a sense of being insatiable in that you do not want to discontinue the activity* - summarises the meaning of the power of joy. The text then further explains the meaning of the power of joy:

With respect to how you develop this sense of insatiability, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

Like those who want the pleasure that results from play,
Bodhisattvas are passionate
About any activity they have to do.
Insatiable, they take joy in their work.

This verse from Shantideva's text shows us the insatiable joy that bodhisattvas take while engaging in practice. The verse refers to *any activity they have to do*, meaning virtuous activities, which may be listening to or contemplating the Dharma, meditating on bodhicitta, and so forth. So, you take tremendous joy in doing your practice. Your joy is so great you have a sense of insatiability in that you continuously want to engage in that practice.

The text continues:

So strive with an attitude like that of children who engage in play without being satiated.

As this example clearly explains, we should engage in virtue as joyfully as when children immerse themselves in play and can never have enough of it.

The text continues:

That is, you must be just as insatiable about what causes pleasurable results as you are about the results themselves.

Further, here Lama Tsongkhapa points out that, just as we should be insatiable about the pleasurable results of our actions, so too should we be insatiable about what causes these pleasurable results.

The text continues:

For, if ordinary persons strive even when they are uncertain whether they will obtain a pleasant result, what need is there to speak about activities, which are certain to bear pleasurable results?

To show why we should be motivated to put continuous effort into virtuous activities, the analogy is used here of how ordinary people, like business people, or farmers, put tremendous effort into what they're doing, even though

there's no guarantee of achieving the anticipated result. Yet we see them putting great effort into their endeavours.

As it says here, *what need is there to speak about activities which are certain to bear pleasurable results?* The words *what need is there to speak about activities* refer to virtuous activities; we need to understand that when we engage in virtuous practice, there is no doubt that this will bring happiness. There's no question about that. If we engage in any kind of virtuous action conjoined with a bodhicitta mind, or thought of renunciation, there is no doubt the benefit will be enormous. The short-term benefit is finding a good rebirth, and the long-term benefit is achieving the everlasting state of happiness of liberation, or even the omniscient state of buddhahood.

As we think about the fact that virtuous practice will definitely bring us the result of happiness, and observe how ordinary people direct tremendous effort into something that is not guaranteed to achieve their desired result, we can be inspired to generate joyful effort in virtuous practice and clearly see the reason and worth of not saying to ourselves, 'that is enough virtue.' In relation to this:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Even though they work for the sake of happiness,
It is uncertain whether happiness will come.
But as for those whose work itself is happiness,
How can they be happy unless they work?

The text continues:

This is also the reason why being satiated is wrong.

Here, it says that being satiated or contented with our virtuous practice is wrong – it is wrong to feel that it is enough to do a bit of practice. Rather we should not be contented with our practice. As it says here:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

If I am never satiated by sensual desires,
Which are like honey on a razor's edge,
How could I be satiated with merit,
Whose fruition is happiness and peace?

So, while we should not be satiated with virtuous practice, we should be satisfied with sensual pleasures. As it says here:

Develop an attitude of being insatiable, thinking,
"Indulging in sensual pleasures is like licking honey off the
sharp blade of a razor; it is the source of a little sweetness,
but it slices up the tongue.

The analogy here compares sensual pleasure to the sweet taste of honey on the sharp blade of a razor. If you try to lick honey smeared on the sharp edge of a razor just to experience its sweetness, you will end up cutting your tongue, and you will suffer greatly. This analogy shows how we inflict great suffering and pain on ourselves as a result of our attachment to, and indulgence in, short-lived sensual pleasures.

The text continues:

If I cannot get enough of this experience, which gives me
great suffering for the sake of just a slight, temporary
pleasure, what sense could there be in feeling that I have
had enough of the collections of merit and sublime wisdom,
which give flawless, infinite happiness, both immediate and
long-term?"

Here, we find a really valuable subject to contemplate and meditate on. Our situation is quite different to what is instructed here. The text advises that we should engage in

virtuous practice, and then explains why – because the long- and short-term benefit we derive from such practice is enormous. So, not only should we engage in virtuous practice, but we have good reason to engage in such practice with joy, with an insatiable desire for virtue, because of the great benefit we derive from it.

Yet we are attracted to sensual pleasures, such as the pleasure of the five sense objects – form, sound, smell, taste and touch. We go after and are never contented with sensual pleasures, even though such pleasure is short-lived, and the suffering we experience for the sake of it is great. This is very important to meditate upon and recognise. Our meditation practice should enable us to throw light on the reality, the truth, of what's truly beneficial or harmful for us, in both the short- and long-term. Our practice must transform us from inside. In this way, we can become true Dharma practitioners, not just externally, but from inside.

Otherwise, if we don't overcome whatever confusion we may have about what really brings benefit or harm to us in the long-run, we will willingly and deliberately engage in things that give us only short-term pleasure, but immense suffering in the long-run.

If we observe our own experience, we will notice that we have a narrow view of reality, because we only see and are attracted to things that directly appeal to us. We remain blind to the longer-term effect of things, as if there were no long-term effect at all. We crave sensual pleasures for the joy they bring us right now, in the immediate timeframe. However, this joy does not last long, and we don't think of the future outcome of indulging in that object, as if that future outcome did not exist or matter to us. However, when we recognise the long-term effect of sensual pleasures, we will be able to direct our mind more towards virtuous activities, which bring more benefit to us in the long-run.

The text continues:

Thus, in order to bring to completion the virtuous activities
in which you have engaged, enter them as a sun-scorched
elephant enters a pleasing lotus pond at noon. Train in this
attitude until you produce it.

Here, it clearly says we must contemplate what has been said and familiarise ourselves with this point about the benefit of engaging in virtuous practice and the shortcomings of engaging in worldly activities. As part of our practice, we must really contemplate this, over and over again, to the point where we always feel ready to engage in virtuous practice. Here, the analogy used is that of an elephant that has been experiencing scorching heat on a hot day; at noon, when the elephant sees a pond, it will go and submerge itself in the water. We should contemplate this until the enthusiastic desire or wish to engage in virtue arises naturally.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Thus, in order to finish the work,
I shall enter into it just as
An elephant, scorched by the midday sun,
Comes upon a pond and plunges in.

Now, we've finished the section on 'developing the power of joy', which we understand as the practice of cultivating such joy in virtue that our wish to engage in virtue becomes insatiable.

(4") The power of relinquishment

If you become physically or mentally fatigued from your perseverance, you must rest for a while. Otherwise, you will

become exhausted and very disheartened, thereby later preventing your joyous perseverance.

Here, the text talks about the need for our mind and body to rest, especially when we engage in practice for a long period of time, whether that is meditation practice, or a retreat. We must understand that if we feel mentally or physically tired, it's important for us to take a break or rest. We must acknowledge the fact that, right now, at this moment, we have some mental and physical limitations or impediments to our practice, because our mind and body are not as serviceable as they could be. On both the mental and physical levels we have not overcome negativities known in Tibetan as *lus* or *sems-kyi gNed ngan.len*. Therefore, it is important that we take a rest when we get tired in our practice.

The text says, *otherwise, you will become exhausted and very disheartened, thereby later preventing your joyous perseverance*. We know this from our own experience: if we push ourselves too hard in our practice, we can sometimes experience mental stress or tension; we may even physically experience tension, in the form of an acute pain in the back, and so forth. Such pain could then discourage us from engaging in practice, and we may even lose interest in the practice. Therefore, it's important to take a break and have a rest.

However:

Immediately after you have rested, persevere again, and when you have completely finished your earlier activity, do not let this satisfy you.

When it says, *immediately after you have rested, persevere again*, it is advising that we should, however, go back to the practice immediately after resting. In our case, we tend to feel a sense of contentment, coupled with a sense of accomplishment, after engaging in a practice for a while, and say to ourselves 'that's enough', and then not go back to the practice. The text says we should not do that, but rather we should continuously carry on with our practice.

Really, we should be taking what is being said here as advice for our practice. The text says, *immediately after you have rested, persevere again, and when you have completely finished your earlier activity, do not let this satisfy you*. In reality, if we check how we go about our practice, we will note that we have not even finished what we've already started, yet we think we have finished, and satisfy ourselves with our incomplete practice then move on to the next one. The text is saying that, even if you accomplish what you have already started, you should not be satisfied with that, but should strive to achieve even more with your practice.

In a way, this also indicates how we should progress in our spiritual practice, stage by stage.

The text continues:

You must joyously persevere at other, higher activities.

This explains why we should not stop after we have accomplished the first level of our practice. Next:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

When my strength declines,
I shall leave the task so I can do it later.
When it is really done, I shall set it aside,
Seeking the next task and the next.

This summarises what has already been explained.

The text continues:

The next task is important, because if you consider each earlier good quality sufficient, this will be a big obstacle to the attainment of many higher attributes.

'The next task' refers to what was mentioned earlier – after you take a rest, you should not be satisfied with what you have initially accomplished, but rather, after accomplishing the first quality, you should go on to accomplish the 'next task'. This is important, because if you consider each earlier good quality sufficient – if, instead, you satisfy yourself with whatever you have achieved earlier – this will be a big obstacle to the attainment of many higher attributes. In other words, you won't achieve any more or greater qualities.

In a lot of cases, whatever we think we have achieved this year, last year, or even the previous year, we remain at the same level, or with little increase in our knowledge and our qualities. So it's important that we keep working on our practice.

The text continues:

The above presentation shows how to joyously persevere.

This shows us the manner in which we should generate or maintain joyful effort. Next:

Do not overexert yourself. You must avoid both being overly intense and being overly relaxed, so make your effort continuous like a river.

This is saying that what is required is consistency in our practice and maintaining joyful effort. We should not get overly enthusiastic and overly exert ourselves, then suddenly lose interest and even feel depressed. The text is saying our effort should be like the flow of a river – we should try to maintain a steady effort, and neither push ourselves too hard nor be too relaxed, but practise in a balanced way. This indicates the importance of having a relaxed approach to our practice.

Next, there is a quote from the glorious Matrceta, or Asvaghosa (or Aryasura), one of the other names for this master:

The glorious Matrceta's *Praise in One Hundred and Fifty Verses* states:

In order to make yourself more exalted
You never overexerted or relaxed too much.
Thus your good qualities are indistinguishable
By former and later phases.

Bo-do-wa also said:

The scouts of Se-mo-dru-wa (Se-mo-dru-ba), for instance, never get there. But the scouts of Chang-wa (Byang-ba) take their time at the start and pursue the robbers until they reach them. Likewise, practice at a measured pace that you can sustain. For example, a louse proceeds at a modest pace but never stops, so it soon arrives; whereas a flea takes great successive leaps and then stops, so it never gets there.

A while ago, I used the example of a race between a louse and a flea. What it's saying here is that our effort should be consistent, and we should proceed like the louse, never stopping; we should not be like a flea, which takes a few jumps and then stops.

If you maintain consistency in your joyful effort, you will achieve success in whatever goal you pursue. But if, instead of being consistent, you make sporadic efforts, you won't achieve your goal.

**(c'') Based on the elimination of unfavorable conditions
and the accumulation of favorable conditions, being intent
on joyously persevering**

After you have thus identified the three conditions unfavorable to joyous perseverance, you attend to their remedies. You generate three powers: the power of aspiration which is the favorable condition for weakening those as-yet unweakened unfavorable conditions, the power of steadfastness which is the cause of not turning back once you have started, and the power of joy which never wants to discontinue the activity once you have engaged in it. Through the power of relinquishment you become adept at how to joyously persevere. At this point you must develop the power of being intent on joyous perseverance, so I will explain this.

As it says, *at this point you must develop the power of being intent on joyous perseverance* – so what follows after this is the explanation of how to apply joyful effort in our practice. We will continue with that next week. We'll just read this for now:

As to how you are to act when you joyously persevere at eliminating what is to be eliminated, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

As a seasoned warrior approaches
A sword-fight with an enemy,
I shall parry the blows of the afflictions
And strongly strike the afflictions, my enemies.

Using the example of a great experienced warrior in the battlefield vanquishing an enemy, we should be like that warrior in combating the enemies of the mental afflictions.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

འབྲུག་གི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ལྷན་སྐྱེད་ཀྱི་ལཱ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

17 September 2019

We will do our usual meditation.

[*Tonglen Meditation*]

As usual, both the teacher and the listeners should begin by cultivating a proper motivation. The best motivation is the bodhicitta motivation, which we cultivate by thinking, 'I am listening to or teaching this profound Dharma to achieve the full state of enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings.' If we begin with such a proper motivation, then our meditation or whatever practice we engage in will be very beneficial and effective for us in progressing along the spiritual path.

(c") Based on the elimination of unfavorable conditions and the accumulation of favorable conditions, being intent on joyously persevering (cont.)

We are up to this quote in the text:

Through the power of relinquishment you become adept at how to joyously persevere. At this point you must develop the power of being intent on joyous perseverance, so I will explain this.

Here we learn that the *power of relinquishment* is a very important factor in maintaining joyful effort. The power of relinquishment means the necessity of taking a break or rest in our practice if we become very fatigued and tired mentally or physically. However, it also advises here that we must get back to the practice soon after taking rest. As we become used to, and good at applying the power of relinquishment, we will be able to engage in our practice with joyful effort, naturally, with ease and no sense of obligation.

The next line reads:

As to how you are to act when you joyously persevere at eliminating what is to be eliminated, ...

This shows us where to direct our joyful effort and enthusiasm. When it says it is to *persevere at eliminating what is to be eliminated*, this indicates that our joyful effort should be directed at the practice of eliminating what is to be eliminated i.e. the mental afflictions, which are a destructive force. We eliminate them by applying a remedial force through our joyful effort. In short, 'mental afflictions' refers to our unruly, vulgar state of mind.

It is very important that we relate what we learn here to our inner continuum, personal experience and Dharma practice. We need to understand that the implication here is that all our unhappiness, misery and suffering primarily derives from our unruly mind, the mental afflictions within us, not from any external things or events. The cause of our unhappiness is not something external 'out there'.

This line also implies that we should rely on our discriminating knowledge relating to what is to be

eliminated, which is the mental afflictions or delusions, and what is to be adopted and cultivated, which is a virtuous state of mind. So, we must direct our joyful effort at preventing and eliminating afflicted states of mind and cultivate, safeguard and increase a virtuous state of mind.

The point being made here is that the primary cause of our discontent and unhappiness lies within ourselves. This is evident from the fact that whatever measures we take to eliminate whatever external things and conditions we regard as being the cause of our problem does not eliminate our unhappiness. This implies that the cause of our unhappiness and dissatisfaction lies within us, and likewise the remedy also lies within ourselves. So what is that remedy? It is the positive mental attitude and energy that we need to cultivate within us. This is the counteforce that eliminates the causes of suffering within us.

The primary cause of true happiness also lies within us – it's not out there either. Therefore, directing all our effort to finding happiness or removing suffering in the outside world is futile. No matter how much effort we make that won't help to find the happiness we seek. No matter how many external things we manage to accumulate, they are not going to bring the happiness and satisfaction that we are looking for in our life. As soon as we acquire one thing we go after the next thing and the next, because the first thing that we have found didn't satisfy our mind – and neither did the next thing. We might keep chasing after things externally, but until and unless we change our mental attitude, we will never find the happiness that we are searching for. Likewise, external causes of problems seem to be unending.

It is very clear that our usual externally orientated way of finding happiness and avoiding suffering is ineffective and wrong. If not, then why do we see people who are very unhappy and continuously suffering when there is no external cause? They have a good house, good food, plenty of wealth and friends and so on, but none of these seem to give them any comfort. Obviously, they are suffering because they cannot separate themselves from their troubled mind, a mind that goes around and around thinking about and fixating on a problem and their suffering. Sometimes, such people end up taking drugs, which as we know, does long-term harm to their wellbeing.

Most people are fixed on the view that suffering arises from the external world, yet they can't effectively single out or pinpoint the cause to any particular things or events. This can sometimes make them extremely anxious and frustrated and even depressed. They try their best, but nothing seems to be helping them to resolve their problem. So, they become confused about their lives and keep asking themselves why they experience so much suffering, and why they can't live a normal life. Out of such deep frustration and unresolved problems and conflict, some people then see no meaning in life. So, they choose suicide, whereas others outrageously resort to violent acts such as murder. If external things were the cause of suffering it would be just a matter of getting rid of those things and then being

happy. If happiness simply results from external objects, then just obtaining those objects should bring happiness.

As we realise that we cannot buy happiness from the external world, we can appreciate the benefit of Dharma knowledge which really comes in very handy, particularly when the external world lets us down.

Knowledge of the Dharma gives us a different perspective on things and events and the world. We will find this perspective very powerful in maintaining inner peace and happiness, and an optimistic way of looking at things at all times. However, it is very important to understand the perspective of the world from the point of view of those who lack Dharma knowledge. Those who lack Dharma knowledge are misguided by some perverted or wrong view, which navigates them through life. If you imagine being in their situation, then you can understand the reason behind their deeds and the cause of their plight. Thus, you can be more patient and empathetic with them.

We must direct or relate whatever knowledge of the Dharma we have towards our inner continuum. As a benefit of learning the Dharma, we should develop within us a good sense of discrimination, which we call wisdom. Through this discriminating wisdom we recognise that suffering and happiness arise from a cause that lies within us. We gain a clear knowledge from our Dharma practice of what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected within ourselves. We understand that what is to be accepted is an inner value in the form of wholesome states of mind and what is to be rejected is inner negativity in the form of various mental afflictions. In other words, the primary objective of our practise of the Dharma is to get rid of mental afflictions together with their latency, and to enhance and fully perfect all the excellent qualities within us. This is how we can put an end to suffering and achieve everlasting happiness.

To continue with the text:

As to how you are to act when you joyously persevere at eliminating what is to be eliminated, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

As a seasoned warrior approaches
A sword-fight with an enemy,
I shall parry the blows of the afflictions
And strongly strike the afflictions, my enemies.

An explanation of the meaning of this verse will come in the next passage in the text. Here, the enemy can be defined as something that destroys our happiness and joy, while inflicting suffering and problems. From this perspective we can say that the mental afflictions within us are also our true enemy. The moment these afflictions such as strong desire or hatred arise within us, we lose our joy, happiness and peace and then we succumb to misery and suffering. So, the mental afflictions are enemies that lie within us.

When we compare the suffering caused by these inner enemies with that caused by external objects, the suffering caused by the inner enemy of the afflictions is greater and more severe than that caused by external causes and conditions. This also means that inner value and happiness is more valuable than outer value and happiness. Therefore, we need to understand that if we

lose any external possession, we should not be concerned or worry too much. What really does matter a lot to us is our inner peace and happiness. That's why it is important to think about how to maintain our inner peace and happiness and recognise its enemy. It is quite natural that we would have an impulse to combat anything that we recognise as an enemy. Therefore, we first need to recognise that the mental afflictions within us are our worst enemies.

In the first two lines of the above verse, *as a seasoned warrior approaches a sword-fight with an enemy*, you are talking about a warrior who is very skilful and very experienced in the art of battle, who has a many strategies they use in the battlefield to defeat enemies.

The commentary continues:

For example, when seasoned warriors - the adepts who are accustomed to the activity of fighting battles - enter into a sword fight, etc., with their enemy, they do not put value only on destroying their opponent. Rather, they must accomplish two things - skillfully avoiding the blows of weapons directed at them and destroying their opponent.

When it says, *they must accomplish two things - skillfully avoiding the blows of weapons directed at them and destroying their opponent*, we understand that the warriors in the analogy here are those who are highly experienced and skilled in battle. They don't just focus on striking the enemy but at the same time they will do everything to protect themselves from being harmed. They will also have a broader perspective on how to position themselves on the battlefield. If you lack experience, then even though you manage to run away from one area, you will become a very easy target for the enemy from a different area. However, experienced warriors will make the right move, know how to strike to weaken and destroy the enemy, as well as know how to defend themselves against attack.

As the text says:

Likewise, when practitioners battle their afflictions, they must persevere as they become proficient in two things - taking defensive precautions and thus avoiding a wound to their mind, and, on the offensive, destroying the afflictions by applying their remedies.

It is saying here that spiritual practitioners should be like skilled warriors when they combat the inner enemy of the mental afflictions. Like the warrior in the battlefield, they must remember two important things. Offensively they must direct the remedy to completely destroy the mental afflictions, while defensively they must protect themselves from being harmed by other mental afflictions. As the text puts it: *taking defensive precautions and thus avoiding a wound to their mind, and, on the offensive, destroying the afflictions by applying their remedies*. In other words, you eliminate some afflictions while at the same time making sure that there are no other mental afflictions wounding some other part of your mind.

As the text continues:

For, otherwise, while they may use the remedy to stop the activity of one portion of the afflictions, they are either robbed of some aspect of virtue by other afflictions, or else they develop a great fault in their mind so that the harm of the afflictions and the creation of virtue are equal, in which

case it will be hard to make further progress in the virtuous practice of applying the remedy.

Essentially this is saying how it is important to not only try to counteract a particular affliction with a remedy, but it's also important that there are no other mental afflictions in different parts of our mind that will attack our virtue and wound our mind. If this happens, then even if you have a remedy for a particular affliction, other afflictions will harm your virtue and so forth, and the end result will be that they cancel each other out. In other words, you don't make any progress.

The text continues:

To cite an example, some people may think that knowledge is most important for practicing the teaching and make knowledge alone crucial. When they then inquire into the teachings, they dispel by means of study the confusion of ignorance, but meanwhile – because they were not cautious about the other afflictions – their mind-stream is utterly ruined by the stain of wrong behavior.

Here the text further explains the importance of having a holistic approach to our practice. It is wrong to think that studying and listening and acquiring this knowledge about the Dharma is what is most important. Doing that undermines our practice. Of course, it is important and, as it also says here, learning has the benefit of expelling ignorance of the Dharma. It is said that listening is like a lamp which dispels the darkness of ignorance.

However, a one-sided approach of focussing only on the learning, and ignoring the practice is ineffective and not the right way at all. With a lack of practice, then let alone your learning diminishing and eradicating mental afflictions, it can become a cause to increase mental afflictions. For example, the learning turns into a cause to fill your mind with more pride and self-importance. There are situations where people say, 'Oh he is a very knowledgeable person, but at the same time he is very arrogant!' That is the end result of directing all attention or focus in our spiritual pursuit towards learning. Since we pay no attention to contemplating and meditating, our learning increases pride and other mental afflictions within our mental continuum. Not only that, but it also doesn't help us to observe good ethical practice or morality.

Then the text gives another example:

Other people may think that disciplining the mind is much more important than knowledge and thus emphasize meditation. Casting away caution about the enemy, confusion, they neither study nor learn the teachings, so they become greatly confused about engaging in what is to be adopted and rejecting what is to be cast aside under the rules of the vows they have taken and are thus continually overcome by infractions.

With a one-sided spiritual approach of just studying or learning, we don't derive any benefits from our practice, such as being calm and subdued, while at the same time our inner continuum is quite the opposite to calm and subdued.

Here the text cites another example of a wrong approach. We might say, 'OK, listening to or studying the Dharma is not crucial, but meditating and observing the precepts is crucial.' However, if, in the name of following

meditation practice, we neglect learning, then we might unknowingly commit various moral downfalls and negativities because of our lack of knowledge. Sometimes I see people who do the Nyung Nye practice, but who are confused or unsure about the precepts. So, people commit negativities out of ignorance; their ignorance is to blame for their wrongdoing. Furthermore, some people even say that meditation brings more mental dullness and makes their head feel heavy. This shows their lack of learning and contemplation prior to the meditation. According to Lama Tsongkhapa, beginners must combine stabilising and analytical meditation, but of the two, analytical meditation is more important.

Then the text continues:

If in battle your sword were to fall from your hand, you would without hesitation immediately retrieve it out of fear for your life.

The example given here is really very effective in showing what we need to do in our practice. If a warrior drops his sword while in battle, he immediately tries to pick it up, for he fears the danger of being killed.

It then says:

Likewise, when you battle the afflictions and lose the weapon of mindfulness (which does not forget the subjective and objective aspects of engaging in what is to be adopted and rejecting what is to be cast aside), you must immediately reapply mindfulness out of fear of falling into miserable realms.

Likewise, in our practice the *weapon of mindfulness* is like the sword. If we lose mindfulness, we face the imminent danger of *falling into miserable realms*. This emphasises the importance of relying upon mindfulness in our practice. Without it, we could easily accumulate sinful actions or misdeeds, which will propel us into the miserable realms. So, this is particularly relevant to our practice of what is to be adopted and what is to be rejected. Mindfulness is the most crucial part of our practice.

As to the practice of what to accept and what to reject, we can simply think of the ten virtues as what to accept and the ten non-virtues as what to reject. From this perspective, our practice not only reflects the essential Buddhist practice but also the fundamental ethical practice which encompasses most of the higher bodhisattva and tantric vows too. So the benefit of adopting the ten virtues and abandoning the ten non-virtues is enormous.

Essentially *you must immediately reapply mindfulness out of fear of falling into miserable realms* means that if we lose mindfulness of practising the ten virtues and refraining from the non-virtues, we must immediately *reapply it out of fear*. We should be really fearful about losing mindfulness, because we will then be prone to accumulating non-virtuous actions, which will throw us into the lower realms. The great non-virtues will throw us into the hell realm; the middling non-virtues will throw us into the preta realm, and the small non-virtues will throw us into the animal realm. Nobody wants to take bad rebirth and if we apply mindfulness in our everyday life and practise the ten virtues, we can be very sure that we won't fall into such a lower rebirth. Moreover, the practice of adopting the ten virtues and

abandoning the ten non-virtues also gives us a firm ground on which to eradicate all the mental afflictions together with their latencies, gain the wisdom of emptiness and cultivate bodhicitta and so forth.

To continue with the text:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says;

If you drop your sword in battle,
Out of fear, you quickly pick it up.
Likewise, if I lose my weapon of mindfulness,
In fear of hell, I quickly retrieve it.

The protector Nagarjuna [in his *Friendly Letter*] also taught the great importance of mindfulness:

O lord, the Sugata declared mindfulness of the body
To be the one path to follow.
Hold fast to it and guard it.
When mindfulness declines, all virtues perish.

The Kadampa master declares that mindfulness and introspection are our best friends. Here again, mindfulness refers to what to adopt and what to reject, while introspection refers to a sense of discernment of our actions of the three doors of body, speech and mind. His Holiness the Dalai Lama always advises others to not forget about the application of mindfulness and introspection.

The text further clarifies the meaning of mindfulness when it says:

Furthermore, regarding the object to which mindfulness attends, mindfulness apprehends an object that wisdom has fully discerned; mindfulness does not distinguish its object on its own.

Here the text clarifies that even though mindfulness is very important, more important is what mindfulness is mindful of. Mindfulness only becomes an effective tool when it is applied to an object we find through our discriminating wisdom, such as our knowledge of what to adopt and what to reject.

Then the text says:

Question: What does wisdom discern?

This relates to the object of your mindfulness.

Reply: In general wisdom discerns everything to be adopted and everything to be cast aside as explained in scripture; ...

Here 'scripture' means all of the Lord Buddha's teachings.

... in particular, it discerns what is to be adopted and what is to be cast aside according to the vows that you have taken.

As well as the knowledge you gain about the general teaching of the Lord Buddha the object of your mindfulness also includes your personal spiritual practice such as any vows, precepts or commitments that you have taken.

Therefore, once you apply mindfulness and vigilance to these, you will complete your practice; you will not be successful by just applying mindfulness and vigilance within the narrow confines of attention to an object of meditation.

This is saying that the object of mindfulness should be all your spiritual instructions on what you are meant to be practising and what knowledge you have gained through

your discriminating wisdom. Without that knowledge, mindfulness in its own right or applying it to a narrow subject matter is not of much benefit.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

འབྲུག་གི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

24 September 2019

Try to produce a good motivation by cultivating a genuine aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. Then think that this is why we are listening to this profound teaching and resolve to put it into practice.

In our everyday life, it would be wonderful if we always tried to prevent any harmful thoughts arising, and always generated and maintained a very kind, beneficial mental attitude. In terms of our spiritual practice, we can say there is none more profound than this attitude: it is a supreme Dharma practice. Also, there is no better friend to rely on than this inner friend.

Therefore, in our everyday life, whether we are sitting or walking, throughout all our actions, it is important to maintain caring thoughts and a good heart towards others and prevent harmful thoughts towards them from arising. A good heart and caring thoughts will naturally bring people closer together, and these are important factors for developing trust and reliable friendship among people. We can observe the same situation among animals – for example, if there is an animal in a group that is friendly and never shows an aggressive nature, the other animals in the group will befriend that animal.

In the same way, we admire people who are warm-hearted and never want to harm others. We feel we can rely on them and trust them, and want to befriend them. This is just because we all have a natural desire to seek happiness and avoid suffering. So, it is natural for us to admire and befriend those who are kind-hearted towards others and refrain from harming them.

Therefore, as part of your daily practice, I suggest that each morning, as you wake up, spend a moment cultivating this altruistic mental attitude towards others. Then, throughout the day, remind yourself of this thought. Even though it is just a short moment of reflection – of affirming each morning that you will be a good-hearted person – that short moment will have a strong positive influence on your mind and attitude throughout the day. When we cultivate the thought, ‘I will follow an altruistic mental attitude and the principle of compassion’, we are really surrendering ourselves to the Dharma. The benefit that we will reap for ourselves and for others is enormous. Unfortunately, we normally give in to wrong thoughts, and hence suffer as a result.

We all understand that the purpose of the Dharma is to achieve happiness and alleviate suffering in our life. However, the way the Dharma directly benefits us, as individuals, is through each of us internalising it. Therefore, it is important that we always relate the Dharma to our own mind, and put it into practice. Quite often, people get confused. When it comes to practising the Dharma, they might ask: ‘What should I practise?’ or ‘What is the most beneficial Dharma practice for me?’ In fact, the most beneficial practice is obvious – it is what we are discussing here. There is no more profound Dharma than that which

will help one cultivate this altruistic mental attitude, and overcome any harmful or ill-thoughts towards others.

In relation to how to cultivate and develop such an altruistic mental attitude, we all know that there is a detailed guide in the lamrim teachings. For example, the lamrim says that, initially, we will find it easier to cultivate this attitude towards those who are close to us, like our friends. Then, we should cultivate it towards those who are neutral or indifferent to us, towards whom we neither feel close nor distant. After that, we should extend it to our enemies: those who are objects of our hatred.

If we put the Dharma into practice, we will be able to realise it within ourselves – this is how we derive the benefit of the Dharma.

(c”) Based on the elimination of unfavorable conditions and the accumulation of favorable conditions, being intent on joyously persevering (cont.)

To continue with our teaching, last time we stopped at this paragraph, which says:

Reply: In general wisdom discerns everything to be adopted and everything to be cast aside as explained in scripture; in particular, it discerns what is to be adopted and what is to be cast aside according to the vows that you have taken. Therefore, once you apply mindfulness and vigilance to these, you will complete your practice; you will not be successful by just applying mindfulness and vigilance within the narrow confines of attention to an object of meditation.

The key message, as it says here, is: *you will not be successful by just applying mindfulness.* The kind of mindfulness emphasised here is a special kind of mindfulness because, generally speaking, mindfulness does not have the attribute of being able to see the truth, to discern or differentiate right from wrong, and so forth.

Of course, mindfulness is important, but what is also important is the object, topic or subject to which you apply mindfulness – as it clearly says here, there is no point in mindfulness practice if it is applied *within the narrow confines of attention to an object of meditation.* As said before, we need to be mindful of the things that we understand through our wisdom knowledge that we should aspire to or eliminate. So, mindfulness becomes very beneficial when you use it as a way of not forgetting what to do or not to do, according to your wisdom knowledge.

However, if we look at the kind of mindfulness we normally have, we will note that it is mostly associated with the ten non-virtuous deeds. To be more specific, our mindfulness is mostly under the influence of desirous attachment. We are concerned about desirable objects – either those that we are unable to obtain, or those that, once obtained, we fear losing, and worry about whether we can hold onto them. This is where we normally direct our mindfulness, in terms of what preoccupies our mind.

The point that Lama Tsongkhapa is making here is that mindfulness, by itself, is not a big thing: it is simply a state of mind that has the ability to remember things. Rather, what is important here is this: *In general wisdom discerns everything to be adopted and everything to be cast aside.* This shows *where* we should be applying mindfulness. When the text says, ‘in general’, it is referring to the teachings generally, which show us the things we should be doing, and those we should cast aside or abandon. This is where we should be applying mindfulness.

The text also says, *in particular, it discerns what is to be adopted and what is to be cast aside according to the vows that you have taken*. Specifically, here, it is saying that if we have taken any vows or precepts then, most importantly, each of us should apply mindfulness to the precepts we have taken. Observing those precepts or ethical practices is very important because moral ethics is regarded as the root or base from which all virtues arise.

The text then goes on to explain how we go about applying mindfulness:

What is more, when warriors are in a battle, they strive from the beginning not to lose their sword;...

There is no need to mention how important it is in battle for warriors to firmly grasp their weapon, and not lose it from the outset.

...when by chance they do drop it, they pick it up immediately.

So if, by chance, a warrior dropped his weapon on the ground, he wouldn't waste a second, but would attempt to immediately pick it up. Why does the warrior have to do that? The next line explains:

These two actions rest on a fear of being killed that is not mere words.

The moment the warrior loses the weapon, what he feels in the depth of his heart is the real and imminent threat of being attacked or even killed by the enemy. This sense of threat to his own life is not just words, but something he feels profoundly. That is why he won't waste any time picking up his sword from the ground.

The text continues:

These two actions rest on a fear of being killed that is not mere words. Likewise, those who cultivate the path are afraid to lose the mindfulness that does not forget what is to be adopted and what eliminated; even if they do lose it, they immediately reapply it.

By providing an analogy, Lama Tsongkhapa makes the presentation of the teaching and advice very clear. What is required of us is to read the text slowly, and reflect on its meaning. As said before, the mindfulness we need to practise relates to the instruction of what to adopt and what to reject. In a sense, relating mindfulness to ethical practice and the instructions on what to adopt and what to reject also refers to the practice of the law of karma.

As it says here:

These two actions are based on the development in their minds of a real terror of falling into miserable realms as a result of the pollution of infractions and faults that occur when mindfulness lapses.

Just as when the warrior feels fear about the threat to his life when he drops his sword, similarly, if we lose mindfulness, we will forget our core practice of what to adopt and what to reject. If we relate this to the law of karma, it means to practise virtue and abandon non-virtue. Therefore, losing mindfulness is like opening ourselves to the danger of forgetting our virtuous practice and committing non-virtues, or staining our continuum – in particular, through the transgression of our vows, or the *pollution of infractions and faults that occur when mindfulness lapses*.

This, in turn, depends on having made karma and its effects central to their practice and then sustaining that approach.

This sentence points out to us how karma should be the central, core practice when we talk about what to adopt and

what to abandon. When we relate this to our own practice, we can feel how much of a gap there is between theory and practice. Normally, when we think of spiritual practice, we hardly ever think about the ethical practice of karma. This may be because we lack the time for Dharma practice because we are overly preoccupied with worldly work; or it may be because in whatever practice we may do, we don't really pay attention to the real practice, as advised here... *karma and its effects central to their practice and then sustaining that approach*.

Those who fail to develop the awareness that these points are profound instructions...

This refers to the ethical practice of karma.

... sever the root of the good qualities ensuing from the practice that delights the learned, the sacred foundation of the path.

This points out why ethical practice is so important. It is the *sacred foundation of the path* and something that *delights the learned* – we are talking here about one's lama or gurus, and how, of all the offerings we could make, the offering of our practice is the one that pleases the gurus most. Therefore the text is emphasising the importance of ethical practice.

We must understand that if we do not put ethics into practice, then whatever else we do that we assume to be a practice – such as sitting in an upright meditation posture – is not something that will truly please our guru. When we meet the guru and offer the *kagtag*, we think that it is also going to please the guru, but that is not necessarily the case. As it says here, the thing that will really please the guru is ethical practice: the understanding of what to adopt and what to abandon in our life.

Those who fail to develop the awareness that these points are profound instructions sever the root of the good qualities ensuing from the practice that delights the learned, the sacred foundation of the path.

Question: Well, why is it necessary to look with fear upon even minor misbehavior, and not let it continue but immediately stop it?

This implies that we should not undermine the benefit of abandoning non-virtue; no matter how small it is, non-virtue must be abandoned. Similarly, we should not undermine the benefit of accumulating virtue; no matter how small it is, virtue must be accumulated.

The sutras elaborate this point about not undermining the importance of accumulating or abandoning even a small virtue or non-virtue with the examples – how a tiny spark can destroy a mountain of grass and how drop after drop of water can eventually fill a big container. This is also true in terms of saving money. We have to start saving dollar by dollar and eventually we will have two hundred or three hundred dollars. It is important for us to apply this advice to our practice of overcoming every negativity or non-virtue – even if it is tiny, we should try to avoid it. Whereas, no matter how tiny the virtue is, we must try to accumulate it.

The text continues:

Reply: Take the example of a poisoned arrow that makes a tiny surface wound. Before long, the poison from this wound will spread throughout the entire body. You must operate on the wound and remove the poison. Similarly, even when wrong behavior does not make anything more than a small wound in the mind, if you ignore it, it will quickly pervade your mind so that it becomes large. Therefore, from the start you must prevent wrongdoing

before it takes place and, if it does happen, you must discontinue it immediately.

The advice here is in accord with the first of the four general characteristics of karma – that karma is definite. The next characteristic is that karma increases. That is why it emphasises here that we should not underestimate any action, even if it seems insignificant. In fact, it is said that with karma as an inner object – more so than what you see in the external world – a small cause can yield a huge result. So a small karma can be a cause for a huge result.

The last line above says, *therefore from the start you must prevent wrongdoing*. It is best if we avoid wrongdoing from the beginning. If we do happen to create any wrong action, even if it is very small, we cannot just leave it, but rather should apply the remedy. As clearly explained here, using the analogy of a wound caused by a poisoned arrow, it is important to remove the poison as soon as possible; otherwise, later on, it will spread to the whole body.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Just as poison spreads throughout the body,
Carried by the blood,
So a fault pervades the mind
If it finds an opportunity.

Question: Well, how do those who want victory over the afflictions apply mindfulness and vigilance?

If we consider ourselves to be Dharma practitioners then, as it says here, our goal should be to gain victory over the mental afflictions, which are the enemies of our practice. We gain victory over these enemies by applying mindfulness and vigilance, as was practised by Katyayana, one of the principal disciples of the Buddha.

Reply: You must concentrate, just as *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

A practitioner must be as concentrated
As someone carrying a pot full of mustard oil

The Tibetan term translated here as ‘mustard oil’ is *nyung-ma*, which is a kind of turnip.

Here’s the story of Katyayana. Once a remote king invited Arya Katyayana to his town to teach. The king greeted Katyayana with some grand street entertainment, but when he asked Katyayana, ‘How was it?’ the reply was, ‘Sorry I didn’t notice.’ The king was disappointed and puzzled, wondering how anyone could not notice such a festive welcome.

Later on, the king heard that monks practise mindfulness of their vows to prevent external distraction. So to test whether the mind directed to just one object will lose awareness of other objects, the king instructed a man to carry a basket full of turnips (translated here as a pot of mustard oil) on his head and walk the same street where the entertainment was happening. A guardsman – whose task it was to strike the man if he dropped any turnips from the basket – followed him. Of course, the man concentrated on his task well, so he didn’t notice the street entertainment. This led the king to believe in the power of mindfulness and meditation.

A practitioner must be as concentrated
As someone carrying a pot full of mustard oil
Who is fearful when a swordsman before him
Threatens to kill him if he spills a drop.

The meaning of this verse relates to the level of intensity required, in terms of maintaining your mindfulness. As it says here:

Understand this from the scriptural statement with respect to the border region in the story of Katyayana.

This analogy shows how we should apply or maintain mindfulness.

While you are concentrating, if in general you should behave wrongly or in particular you should experience the causes of laziness – such as sleepiness, etc. – then you must not assent to them but must confront and avert them.

So even if you apply mindfulness in your practice with great care, it is still possible that you will face obstacles like laziness or sleepiness. If any such interference occurs in your practice *then you must not assent to it but must confront and avert*. In other words, you must try to overcome it immediately.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Thus, if a snake came onto your lap,
You would hastily stand up.
Just so, if sleepiness and indolence come,
Quickly avert them.

Furthermore, do not merely discontinue faults, but actively feel displeasure at their having occurred.

This clearly indicates the importance of *immediately* overcoming any interference to one’s practice, in the form of sleepiness or laziness. You wouldn’t just sit and do nothing if a venomous snake came towards you. You would immediately feel scared, and act to either stop the snake or run away. Similarly, the text is emphasising here the importance of overcoming that interference, of getting rid of it immediately, and then to *actively feel displeasure at their having occurred*. You want to act immediately to overcome that interference. Not only should you apply a remedy to overcome it, but at the same time, you need to have a feeling of displeasure, a sense of dislike, at being under the influence of defilements or laziness. This is why you should feel displeasure.

Then:

Contemplate as follows, “Because I proceeded in this way in the past as well, I have been wandering in cyclic existence up to now. In particular, it is especially blameworthy that I have taken the bodhisattva vows and yet continue with things that are incompatible with the vows’ precepts.”

This line shows why you have to remove this obstacle or fault in your practice.

Become inspired to henceforth restrain yourself, thinking, “From now on I shall make sure that this fault never occurs.”

To prevent sleepiness or other defilements occurring again in our practice, we need to apply the four forces to remedy negativities, including the force of resolution – being determined to not allowing such faults to occur again.

We will continue:

Frequently employ both these attitudes. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

Whenever a fault occurs,
I shall reproach myself and long ponder,
“By all means I will do whatever it takes
So that this shall never happen again.”

Strive at any deep causes that give rise to the continuous, powerful mindfulness that is the root of this practice.

This talks about striving to create the favourable causes that enable us to maintain this continuous and powerful

mindfulness which, as it says, is the root of this practice. Then the text says:

Rely on such activities as keeping the company of excellent teachers and excellent companions, and broad learning, which are the causes of this powerful mindfulness.

This should be obvious to us, because the kind of mindfulness we are trying to practise here is that of always remembering virtuous objects: an important feature of this mindfulness is not forgetting virtuous objects. Therefore, to support our mindfulness, we should rely on *such activities as keeping the company of excellent teachers and excellent companions and broad learning, which are the causes of this powerful mindfulness.*

In this vein *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

“In any of these situations
I will practice mindfulness.”
With this motive aspire to meet teachers
And engage in appropriate activities.

The text then says:

In summary, you must study and discern well what bodhisattva training requires you to adopt and to cast aside, and then joyously persevere at continuously being mindful in all your conduct of what you have understood about what to adopt and what to cast aside. Hence, it is extremely important not to err about that at which you are to persevere.

This is about the benefit of learning, which is said to be ‘an opener of our wisdom eye’ or enlightening our mind to know precisely what we should do, and what we should not do. In other words, the benefit of learning is the very clear sense of discrimination that we will develop through learning. Then we should joyously persevere.

So we should direct our mindfulness to the things we should be mindful of – that is, what to adopt and what to reject – having gained that knowledge from our learning. We then have to apply joyful effort and enthusiasm to this mindfulness, which helps us keep our practice of virtue very alive, very present. The text is saying that if our effort is not directed at this, then whatever effort we make will be directed at the wrong purpose and our effort will be futile. As it says here, we should *joyously persevere at continuously being mindful in all your conduct* – throughout all our actions, we should direct all our effort and mindfulness at what should be adopted and what should be cast aside.

We will do the Twenty-one Tara Prayers for Jessie’s father who has been sick. He lives near Kumbum, which is the birthplace of Lama Tsongkhapa in Tibet. I saw a photo of him with the late Panchen Lama too. I think he is very fortunate to have met the Panchen Lama.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

འདྲེན་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

1 October 2019

As usual we begin with a short meditation. [*Tong-len meditation*]

Now, please try to establish the right motivation.

2' The method of developing joyous perseverance (c'') Based on the elimination of unfavorable conditions and the accumulation of favorable conditions, being intent on joyously persevering (cont.)

We stopped last time at this paragraph:

In summary, you must study and discern well what bodhisattva training requires you to adopt and to cast aside, and then joyously persevere at continuously being mindful in all your conduct of what you have understood about what to adopt and what to cast aside. Hence, it is extremely important not to err about that at which you are to persevere.

If we want to bring about true peace and happiness within us, we must direct our mind towards thinking over the meaning of this paragraph and then put it into practice. Then we can really achieve the true happiness and peace that we seek. As it clearly states, we should have a clear understanding of what to accept and what to reject in terms of both our Dharma practice and everyday life. In terms of our Dharma practice, we have to direct our joyful effort towards cultivating a virtuous state of mind through mindfulness. There is no question that what we seek is true happiness and the only way to achieve this is to cultivate a virtuous state of mind.

When the text refers to *being continuously mindful*, it's talking about how to make stable progress in our practice through cultivating, retaining and increasing a virtuous positive state of mind by continuously applying mindfulness. What is mindfulness? It is not forgetting the object of the mind, which has the function of non-distraction. Here it is a state of mind that enables us to remember a virtuous object thereby allowing us to familiarise ourselves with virtue.

We should also focus on that last line, which says, *hence, it is extremely important not to err about that at which you are to persevere*. This emphasises knowing exactly where we should be directing our energy and joyful effort. We all consider ourselves to be Dharma practitioners and we all follow meditation practices. Just like everything else that we do in our life, the goal of our Dharma and meditation practice is also to achieve happiness and to avoid suffering. So finding happiness is our goal in following the Dharma; in fact, it is the goal of all spiritual practitioners.

For example, those who follow the hearer (shravaka) and the solitary realiser (pratyekabuddha) path, aspire for the happiness of liberation from cyclic existence. Whereas those on the Mahayana path aspire for the all-knowing state of enlightenment. Similarly, spiritual practitioners on the small stage of the path aspire for the happiness of a higher rebirth. Therefore, if we aspire to achieve human happiness, we must be born as a human being and to achieve the

happiness of liberation we must achieve the state of liberation.

So, what are the causes and the conditions for a human rebirth? Well, the main cause for human rebirth is refraining from the ten non-virtues and practising the ten virtues. Therefore, we have to practise mindfulness and introspection, which is the key to living an ethical life thereby fulfilling our aspiration to continuously find a human life, and reach the awakened state of Buddhahood in order to benefit all motherly sentient beings.

Applying mindfulness and introspection means being fully aware of right and wrong actions, what to do and what not to do. This means, for example, being aware of the fact that killing and stealing are extremely negative actions. It also means being aware that if we happen to commit any non-virtuous action, we should purify it by applying a remedial force.

This is how we need to see the benefit of maintaining mindfulness and introspection in our spiritual practice.

In terms of our spiritual goal, I don't know about you but if it is to achieve the state of liberation, then I can say that this is something that I won't be able to achieve in this life. So, if we are not able to achieve the state of liberation in this current life, then we must come back with a human life of leisure and endowment again and again until we achieve that state of liberation. That's the reason the first topic of meditation in the lamrim treatise is on the rarity and meaning of the human life of leisure and endowment.

We must learn the Dharma and we must also put it into practice. In the end it is the progress we make in our practice that will lead us to achieve our spiritual goal. When we practice, we will gain a sense of achieving our goal and living life meaningfully. We frequently hear 'extract the essence of the precious human life and don't waste it'. We should remember this at all times.

What does taking the essence of a human life mean? First of all, we need to recognise and acknowledge the fact that we are so fortunate to have found this human life of leisure and endowment. We are fortunate because in addition to this precious human life we are surrounded by favourable external and internal conditions. Externally, we have met with all the favourable conditions such as a perfect teacher and the Mahayana teachings, and internally we have found a human life of leisure and endowment and possess a mind endowed with discriminating wisdom. Therefore, we must make the best use of this favourable condition and not waste it.

How do we make this life meaningful? We must practise the Dharma because the Dharma brings us true happiness both now and in future. It is said that if, through practising the Dharma we create all the necessary causes and conditions to obtain such a human life of leisure and endowment again, then we have rendered this life meaningful, at least at a basic level.

(d'') How to use joyous perseverance to make the mind and body serviceable

To continue with the text:

The method for using joyous perseverance to make the mind and body serviceable is the power of mastery. Santideva sets forth in the chapter on conscientiousness [in his *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*] the necessity of learning the bodhisattva trainings; the extremely grave consequences if you do not train in these once you have

pledged to do so; how to regard the afflictions as the enemy; and the ways to generate the courage that looks upon the hardship of battling the afflictions as an ornament rather than as a burden. Meditate on these before taking up the task of training in the bodhisattva deeds. Thus stopping all the inhibitions that prevent you from using your body and mind for virtuous activity, rise gladly to that task.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

In order to have strength for everything
Before engaging in any activity
I will recall the advice on conscientiousness
And then gladly rise to the task.

If you read these lines slowly and contemplate their meaning, you should be able to understand them. Essentially, they explain why we need to achieve the state of mental and physical pliancy, which we studied earlier under the topic of calm abiding. The benefit of achieving both mental and physical pliancy is that they overcome mental and physical states of unserviceability, which prevents our mind and body from engaging in virtue. Then the text raises a question:

Question: What form will the joyous perseverance produced by such efforts take?

Gaining this state of serviceability of mind and body will not only make our practice easy, but it will also be very effective and powerful. The text continues:

Reply: Just as wind drives a piece of cotton to and fro, a joyful energy, enthused for virtue, controls your body and mind.

To illustrate the meaning of the previous lines, the text uses an analogy of how the wind can easily move a piece of soft cotton. Likewise, we need to gain the ability to easily direct or engage our mind and body in virtuous practices. This in turn makes our efforts to practise very effective.

The text continues:

When you act along with this energy, joyous perseverance is well-established. Once you produce this, you will easily achieve all the collections.

Here, the text is talking about a very special kind of joyful effort, one that is infused with the mental and physical pliancy that allows us to mentally and physically engage in virtue naturally and easily. It is also implying that if we make an effort, we can accomplish anything. As it says, *once you produce this, you will easily achieve all the collections.*

Here, the term 'collections' refers to the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. As you study you must reflect upon the meaning of any terms you come across. For example, when you hear the word 'accumulation' you should immediately remember there are two accumulations, as well as further details about them. The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Just like cotton under the power
Of a wind that blows to and fro
So I will be driven by enthusiasm;
In this way I will accomplish all.

Although such tasks are difficult, it is wrong to give them up.

The advice here is that we should not lose our courage or give up by thinking or saying that a task is too difficult.

Rather, as the glorious Matrceta's *Praise in One Hundred and Fifty Verses* says, you must make effort:

"The sublime state, difficult to reach,

Is not attained without hardship."

Knowing this, you intensified your joyous perseverance
Without concern for yourself.

This is quite self explanatory. In order to achieve *the sublime state*, the state of buddhahood, we have to overcome all hardships by continuously making an effort. As the text says, it is *difficult to reach* this sublime state. *Knowing this, you intensified your joyous perseverance without concern for yourself.* These two lines recollect the life of the Lord Buddha and all the hardships and sacrifices that he made in order to reach the full state of supreme enlightenment.

(d') How to practice

You must practice any kind of joyous perseverance in association with the six supremacies and all six perfections. The generosity of joyous perseverance is establishing others in joyous perseverance after you have stabilized yourself therein. The remaining perfections are in accord with the earlier explanation.

Just as with the other perfections, you can also incorporate all of the six perfections into the perfection of joyful effort, for example, giving joyful effort. This means that just as you develop joyful effort, you also cause or inspire others to practice joyful effort too.

The text then says, *the remaining perfections are in accord with the earlier explanation.* Here we have the *six supremacies* and so forth, which we've already covered in our discussion of the preceding perfections. These also apply to the perfection of joyful effort.

(e') A summary

The recollection and cultivation of the spirit of enlightenment-the basis of the bodhisattva deeds-inspires you to train in order to set all living beings in joyous perseverance. So steadily increase this spirit, and then aspire to and train in the methods of joyous perseverance for those at high levels. Also, strive as you are able at the methods of learning joyous perseverance for a beginning bodhisattva. In particular, effectively stop the various forms of discouragement, ...

This relates to the various forms of laziness, like the laziness of procrastination, and the laziness of indulging in inferior activities, and so forth.

... these being uniquely subject to elimination by joyous perseverance. Mentally put on the armor of joyous perseverance that is enthusiastic about the following: the goal of enlightenment, the aim of accomplishing the happiness and eliminating the suffering of all living beings, the very long period of time, the limitless collections, and the immeasurable hardships.

Here the text talks about the necessity of putting on the armour of joyous perseverance in order to achieve *the goal of enlightenment*, and *the aim of accomplishing the happiness and eliminating the suffering of all living beings*, which takes a *very long period of time*. This indicates that you need to put on the joyful armour of enthusiasm because the journey to supreme enlightenment takes a very long period of time, *limitless collections*, and *immeasurable hardships*.

The text continues:

Strive at this attitude because, as the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* says, just by generating the powerful surge of such a resolve, you accumulate a great wave of merit. If you do not do this, you fail to secure your Mahayana lineage, and you are also continually stained by much wrongdoing.

Next:

Then, in other lives as well, you will find it very difficult to learn the bodhisattva deeds. Also, after you have become aware of such things, even if you do not practice perfectly, motivate yourself in that direction.

Here, the text acknowledges our lack of ability, by saying *after you have become aware of such things*, i.e. understood what has been just said here, *even if you do not practice perfectly, motivate yourself in that direction*. Don't give up but try to direct our interest in the same direction. So, it's saying that even if you are not, for whatever reason, able to really practise perfectly, or practise precisely as instructed, then at least motivate yourself in that direction.

The text continues:

If you then joyously persevere to the extent that you are able, then, as the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* says, you will quickly complete the perfection of joyous perseverance in future lives, without suffering and with little difficulty.

Even if you are not able to fully and precisely put into practice what is said here, you should still try your best. The benefit is that whatever effort you make now will serve as a cause to make your practice easier in the future.

THE PERFECTION OF MEDITATIVE STABILIZATION

(v) How to train in the perfection of meditative stabilization

The explanation of how to train in the perfection of meditative stabilization has five parts:

1. What meditative stabilization is
2. How to begin the cultivation of meditative stabilization
3. The divisions of meditative stabilization
4. How to practice
5. A summary

a) What meditative stabilization is

Meditative stabilization is a virtuous, one-pointed state of mind that stays fixed on its object of meditation without distraction to other things.

This explanation of meditative stabilisation is in accordance with that given in the *Bodhisattva Levels*.

The *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

It is the one-pointed state of mind-stabilized on virtue, and either mundane or supramundane-of bodhisattvas who have first studied and reflected on the bodhisattvas' scriptural collections. Whether it is oriented toward meditative serenity, toward insight, or toward both as the path that conjoins them, understand that this one-pointed state of mind is the bodhisattvas' meditative stabilization.

Meditative stabilisation refers to a single-pointed state of mind that is not affected by any distractions or mental agitation. The *Bodhisattva Levels* describe such a single-pointed state concentration as *meditative serenity* or calm abiding, or special *insight*, or a state which is the union of calm abiding and special insight.

Meditating well depends on how well you can contemplate the topics you choose. How well you contemplate depends on how well you understand the topics through listening or studying the scriptures. The *Bodhisattva Levels* clearly states the necessity of combining all three, - listening, contemplating, and meditating - not just one to the exclusion of others. This is, in fact, one of the unique instructions of the Kadampa masters. The more knowledge you have through listening, the more there is for you to

contemplate, and the more there is for you to contemplate, the more there is for you to meditate on.

When the *Bodhisattva Levels* states *whether it is oriented toward meditative serenity, toward insight, or toward both as the path that conjoins them*, it is talking about both serenity, which is calm abiding and special insight. Obviously, the union of calm abiding and special insight is different to the union of method and wisdom.

What makes special insight special or superior to calm abiding is that in addition to the bliss of pliancy being experienced through the force of the single-pointed concentration, the special insight in the bliss of pliancy arises through the force of the wisdom analysing the object of the meditation as well. We'll stop here with these words:

And *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* also says:

Having thus generated joyous perseverance,
Set your mind in meditative concentration....

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

8 October 2019

Cultivate the right motivation as contained in the prayer of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, which we have just recited.

The first line of the refuge prayer: *To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha*, identifies the objects of refuge. This line reminds us that when we go for the refuge, there must be objects in which we take refuge. Those objects are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

The second line of the prayer is: *I go for the refuge until I achieve complete enlightenment*. This line denotes the person who goes for the refuge, the length of time he or she goes for the refuge, and the manner or the reason for taking refuge. Saying that the length of the time for which you take refuge is 'until I achieve complete enlightenment' implies that this is the refuge practice of the Mahayana or Great Vehicle. Whereas, according to the Lesser Vehicle, the duration of taking refuge is as for long as you live this life.

There are two main reasons or causes for taking refuge. The first is a sense of *fear* or fright towards cyclic existence, particularly the suffering of lower rebirth. Because you do not want to be afflicted by the suffering of samsara, you take refuge in the Three Jewels. The second cause of taking refuge is *faith*. This implies the manner or the meaning of taking refuge. So, taking refuge means whole-heartedly, completely and single-pointedly entrusting yourself with faith in the three objects of refuge as infallible objects, to end suffering existence and achieve liberation. In the line *I go for refuge*, the 'I' indicates the person who goes for refuge.

In fact, these lines that we recite to take refuge in the Three Jewels encompass the essence of the entire path and the Dharma practices we need to follow. As we said before, we should clearly recognise the reason why we seek refuge. Why do we seek help? It is to free ourselves from the suffering of cyclic existence, particularly the suffering of lower rebirths.

Now, the question is, how we do the refuge practice? Do we have those two causes of taking refuge? For example, do we have any sense of fear or concern about falling into lower rebirths? If we do, then with our refuge practice, we should not simply worry about the prospect of falling into lower rebirths, but we also need to find a way to prevent lower rebirths and motivate ourselves to follow the path of liberation. Reflecting on suffering is not just to feel fear; it also leads us to the path of ending suffering. So we take refuge in the Three Jewels to achieve liberation from suffering existence.

If we seek outside help when facing worldly problems, we have to think about many factors; it is the same when we sincerely take refuge in the Three Jewels. For example, with worldly problems, we will seek help from someone who we think can support us and who has the resources and capacity to do so. When we take refuge in Three Jewels, we seek help to achieve liberation from samsara. So, as part of our refuge practice, we need to understand the qualities of

the refuge objects in terms of them being able to lead us to the state of liberation. Just as we know that a person stuck in mud cannot rescue another person who is also stuck in mud, likewise, we cannot rely on someone who is not free from this suffering world to rescue us from this suffering world.

This touches on the meaning of the four noble truths. The first truth is the truth of suffering; once we identify this, it will give rise to the thought of avoiding suffering, the second truth. The third is the truth of the cause of suffering and knowing this will give rise to the thought of abandoning the cause of suffering – the fourth truth. The third and fourth truths – the cessation of suffering and the path to cessation – are the cause and the effect, in terms of how sentient beings are liberated from samsara. The truth of cessation is to be actualised. Realising that it can be actualised will give rise to the thought of following the path. So, the fourth truth is the truth of the path to cessation, which is to be meditated upon. It is said that this sequence of the four noble truths is in accord with the order of leading the beings along the path.

When we talk about the noble truths of cessation and the truth of the path, we are referring to the qualities of those on a high spiritual level, such as *arya* or superior beings. Strictly speaking, those inner qualities of *arya* beings are the Dharma Jewel, which is said as the actual object of refuge.

The question might then arise, how can the Dharma Jewel protect us? While it is true we don't yet possess the actual Dharma Jewel, we can still cultivate a Dharma mind and practise Dharma. Hence, it is important to relate the Dharma Jewel to whatever Dharma we practise, such as our moral practice of refraining from the ten non-virtues. For us, our Dharma practice is the true Dharma Jewel, which will serve as our actual refuge, guidance or protection. By progressing with our Dharma practice such moral ethics, we can prevent taking lower rebirths, and instead achieve higher rebirths and liberation from samsara.

The next part of the refuge prayer: *By my practice of giving and so forth* indicates the virtues or the merit we accumulate. In the next line: *May I achieve complete enlightenment in order to benefit all migrating beings*, 'in order to benefit all migrating beings' indicates the aspiration to accomplish the welfare of other beings, and 'achieve complete enlightenment' indicates the aspiration to accomplish complete enlightenment. These are the two aspirations – aimed at the two purposes of others and oneself – that define bodhicitta. The words 'may I achieve' indicates the actual bodhicitta, an awakening mind, in the form of a prayer.

So if we take time to look into the meaning of the refuge prayer, it encapsulates the entire meaning of the path to enlightenment.

THE PERFECTIONS OF MEDITATIVE STABILIZATION AND WISDOM

Last week, we began with the first heading and its sub-headings:

(v) How to train in the perfection of meditative stabilization

- (a') What meditative stabilization is
- (b') How to begin the cultivation of meditative stabilization
- (c') The divisions of meditative stabilization
- (d') How to practice
- (e') A summary

We covered a bit of the first sub-heading which is:

(a') What meditative stabilization is

Meditative stabilisation is a virtuous, one-pointed state of mind that stays fixed on its object of meditation without being distracted by other objects.

We also finished the quote from *Bodhisattva Levels*, which says:

The *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

It is the one-pointed state of mind - stabilized on virtue, and either mundane or supramundane - of bodhisattvas who have first studied and reflected on the bodhisattvas' scriptural collections. Whether it is oriented toward meditative serenity, toward insight, or toward both as the path that conjoins them, understand that this one-pointed state of mind is the bodhisattvas' meditative stabilization.

And *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* also says:

Having thus generated joyous perseverance,

Set your mind in meditative concentration ...

We will continue from here.

(b') How to begin the cultivation of meditative stabilization

Think over the benefits of cultivating meditative stabilization and the faults of not cultivating it. I will explain this in the meditative serenity section.

Regarding the explanation of calm abiding, the text says, *meditative serenity* will be presented in great detail further on. We will have to study this well - it is really difficult to get a full understanding of meditation without carefully studying the detailed explanations of calm abiding. Regarding the types of meditative concentration, the text continues:

(c') The divisions of meditative stabilization

In line with the above citation [from the *Bodhisattva Levels*], if you subdivide meditative stabilization according to nature, there are two kinds: mundane and supramundane; and if you do so according to orientation, there are three kinds [oriented toward serenity, toward insight, or toward both conjoined]. If you subdivide it according to function, there are three types: meditative stabilization that stabilizes the body and mind in bliss within the present life, meditative stabilization that achieves good qualities, and meditative stabilization that carries out the welfare of living beings. The first, meditative stabilization that stabilizes the body and mind in bliss within the present life, is all meditative stabilizations that generate mental and physical pliancy when you enter them with equipoise. The second, meditative stabilization that achieves good qualities, is all meditative stabilizations which accomplish good qualities shared with *shravakas* - the superknowledges, liberations, totalities, masteries, etc. The third, meditative stabilization that carries out the welfare of living beings, is meditative stabilization that accomplishes the eleven activities for others' welfare.

The eleven ways of accomplishing the benefit of other beings has been discussed in the past.

(d') How to practice

Whenever you practice any virtuous meditative stabilization, you do so in association with the six supremacies and all six perfections. The generosity of meditative stabilization is maintaining meditative stabilization yourself and then establishing others in it. Understand the other perfections from the earlier explanation.

We also learned this in relation to the preceding four perfections - we should understand how all the *six supremacies and six perfections* can also be included within the perfection of concentration, such as the generosity of concentration, etc.

(e') A summary

The recollection and cultivation of the spirit of enlightenment - the basis of the bodhisattva deeds - ...

The summary of the perfection of concentration as presented here is similar to the presentation of the summaries of the preceding perfections. The summary emphasises the importance of remembering and continuously developing bodhicitta, the spirit of enlightenment, because bodhicitta is the basis and driving force to achieve the perfect state of meditative concentration within oneself, and cause other beings to actualise the same state within their mindstreams.

...is what inspires you to train in order to set all living beings in uncontaminated meditative stabilization. After you have increased the stability of this spirit, aspire to the high meditative stabilizations and train in these.

After you have increased the stability of this spirit - the 'spirit' refers to bodhicitta. In terms of our own practice, this applies to whatever degree or type of bodhicitta we may have cultivated; we should try to steadily increase it. In other words, we must direct our attention to our own level of spiritual practice and make an effort to stabilise and develop that. As we progress on our level, we aspire and train to achieve higher levels of meditative stabilization. So, while our main focus is on developing whatever level of practice or qualities we have achieved, we should also aspire or pray to accomplish all the other higher qualities we have not yet achieved. Even if you are not able to fully develop meditative stabilisation, you must still regularly train in one-pointed concentration, to whatever extent you can.

Even if you are unable to fully develop the meditative stabilizations, you must strive to train from time to time in one-pointed concentration to whatever extent you are able. For, if you do not do so, you will be continually stained with the fault of breaking the precepts, and in other lives as well you will find it most difficult to learn the trainings for entering the many doors of the bodhisattvas' meditative stabilizations.

It is clearly saying here that if we completely neglect to do meditation - which here specifically refers to cultivating single-pointed concentration - then we are staining ourselves with the fault of breaking the precepts. This would not only disadvantage us now, but also in our future lives we would find it more difficult to cultivate meditative stabilisation.

The text continues:

Whereas if you never give up your effort, even in this life your mind will become steadily less distracted, making your accumulations of virtue very powerful.

Again, it is important to remember and reflect upon this line so that we can understand the benefit of cultivating single-pointed meditative concentration. As it is said here, the benefits of doing single-pointed meditation include lessening mental distractions and afflictions, as well as *making your accumulations of virtue very powerful*. This emphasises the benefit of cultivating meditative

stabilisation, in terms of making whatever practice we do more effective and more powerful.

In future lives, as the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* says, you will have physical and mental bliss and a joyful mind, thereby easily completing the perfection of meditative stabilization.

I will not elaborate further here as I will be explaining this at length in the meditative serenity section.

(vi) How to train in the perfection of wisdom

How to train in the perfection of wisdom has five parts:

- (a') What wisdom is
- (b') How to begin the generation of wisdom
- (c') The divisions of wisdom
- (d') How to practice
- (e') A summary

(a') What wisdom is

In general, wisdom is what thoroughly discerns the ontological status of the object under analysis,...

So wisdom is the mind that discriminates or discerns the object of investigation. The text continues:

...but in this context wisdom refers to proficiency in the five topics of knowledge and the like.

The *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

Know that the bodhisattvas' wisdom is the thorough analysis of phenomena that engages or has engaged all of what is to be known and that operates through focusing on the five topics of knowledge – Buddhist knowledge, grammar, logic, technical arts, and medicine.

Here, *wisdom* specifically refers to the five topics of knowledge or the five sciences of knowledge. The first one, it says here, is Buddhist knowledge, which in Tibetan is *nang.don rigpa* – literally inner knowledge, which is really the Buddhist science of mind and philosophy. This includes all the topics relating to mind training. 'Inner' here can specifically indicate the Buddhist final view of selflessness as a remedy to self-grasping.

Next is grammar or language which in Tibetan is *dra rig.pa* – literally the science of sound – then logic, which in Tibetan is *ten.tsig rigpa*, which teaches the principles of reasoning and logic as a structured way of knowing things through analysing or investigating them. In logic, we use syllogisms as a form of language to analyse and establish what is factual and what is false. For example, 'a vase lacks true existence because it is a dependent-arising' is a syllogistic statement that logically establishes the thesis. The fourth topic is technical arts or fine arts and crafts, in Tibetan *zo rigpa*, and the fifth topic is the science of medicine, in Tibetan *sowa rigpa*, literally the science of healing.

Now, the science of grammar here – language or vocalisation – includes everything related to language or vocal sound, such as mastering the skill of interpreting different languages, including animal languages. When birds vocalise, they are communicating. At Sera Monastery, there was a monk who was expert in this. Once he heard the communication between two crows from a long distance. He heard one crow saying: 'I saw a frog', while the other one replied: 'It was a dead one'! So all animals communicate in their own language, but only people who have mastered the science of sound can properly interpret their communication.

The science of sound also includes proficiency in poetry, composition and writing. Our medium of language is

limited to only a few languages and various words, terms and sentence structures that we are familiar with.

The text continues:

Here, the wisdom that "engages" ...

It then refers to the bodhisattva levels or *bhumis* in relation to the two types of wisdom:

... refers to wisdom prior to attaining the bodhisattva levels; wisdom that "has engaged" refers to wisdom after attaining such levels.

(b') How to begin the generation of wisdom

The way to begin the generation of wisdom is to contemplate the benefits of generating wisdom and the faults of not generating it ...

It is important, as much as possible, that we understand the benefits of generating wisdom so that we will be motivated and inspired to generate wisdom.

Since I will explain the benefits and faults of having or lacking the wisdom of reality – selflessness – in the insight section, I will not elaborate on it here. But I will discuss the remaining types of wisdom a little.

Wisdom here specifically refers to the wisdom of selflessness. It will be explained under the chapter on special insight. This also refers to the main object of meditative concentration, which is selflessness or emptiness.

We will continue the reading:

With respect to indicating wisdom's benefits, wisdom is the root of all good qualities for this and future lives. As the protector Nagarjuna's *Hundred Verses on Wisdom* (Prajna-sataka) says:

Wisdom is the root of all good qualities,
Seen and not yet seen.
To achieve both of these,
Embrace wisdom.
The great source for what you seek
And for liberation is knowledge.
So, esteeming it from the start,
Adhere to wisdom, the great mother.

In the quote, *wisdom is the root of all good qualities, seen and not yet seen*, 'seen' refers to those qualities we can see ourselves within this life, and 'not yet seen' are those qualities that are not apparent to us in this life, but will be in a following, future life. This is how we can understand it.

The great source for what you seek
And for liberation is knowledge.

From one angle, we can interpret these two lines as saying that wisdom is the great source of the four excellences, namely Dharma, wealth, pleasure and liberation – in Tibetan, *cho*, *nor*, *doi* and *tarpa*, respectively. These four excellences and abundances serve as very favourable conditions for us to progress along the path. His Holiness Dalai Lama put these four into two sets of cause and effect: wealth is a cause for pleasure, which refers to the five sensual pleasures; whereas the Dharma is a cause for the state of liberation.

So, esteeming it from the start,
Adhere to wisdom, the great mother.

Normally, wisdom is likened to the mother and method to the father. The wisdom of emptiness is referred as the great mother that gives birth to the enlightenment of all Three Vehicles. This can also refer to the traditional view in patriarchal societies that the race or caste of a child can only

be that of its father, for example, a king or a Brahmin; whereas a mother could have children from any race. So wisdom is like the mother in producing all three types of enlightenment of the Three Vehicles.

The text continues:

As the *Verse Summary of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* states, wisdom functions like an eye for the other five perfections – generosity, etc:

When the other perfections are completed by wisdom,
They acquire their eye and fulfill their name,
Just as a painting may be complete except for the eyes,
But until the eyes are drawn, no wage is obtained.

This is saying that the other perfections – giving and so forth – become ‘perfections’ by virtue of wisdom. It’s as if, without wisdom, the other five perfections are blind or incomplete. Each of the other five only becomes qualified as a perfection when it is conjoined with wisdom.

The text continues with further explanations of how wisdom glorifies all the others perfections:

How wisdom is necessary for other good qualities is illustrated by the example of a special piece of jewelry made of fine gold that becomes even more breathtaking when adorned with a precious emerald. Likewise, if the gold ornament of the five perfections from generosity to meditative stabilization is adorned with wisdom, which is able to distinguish right from wrong, they become more magnificent, because wisdom makes them much purer. It is similar to the way that the mental consciousness, by distinguishing the merits and faults in the objects of the five sensory faculties (the visual faculty, etc.), causes you to engage in what is to be adopted or reject what is to be cast aside.

Here, the text compares the other five perfections to the five sense consciousnesses. In the same way that the five senses can only perceive their respective objects, likewise the other five perfections lack the ability to discriminate *the merits and faults in the objects*. However, wisdom, like a mental consciousness, has the attribute of discriminating between what is to be adopted or rejected.

This is what the glorious Aryasura’s *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

The merits of generosity and so forth
Are more powerful with wisdom as their lord,
Just as an array of fine gold jewelry
Shines more brightly when inset with jewels.

It is this wisdom that renders vast
The capacity for virtue in the purpose of each one,
Just as the mind’s additional power clearly displays
The respective objects of the sensory faculties.

The explanation of this was just given.

The text continues:

Similarly, wisdom is also crucial for other faculties such as faith and so on.

There are five powers or spiritual faculties – faith, joyful effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. The text is saying here that, of these five powers, wisdom is the main one.

When wisdom is present as lord, your generosity, faith, etc. understand well the merit of virtue and the faults of stinginess and so forth, so you become skilled at eliminating the afflictions and increasing good qualities.

It is saying here that the fact one is able to eliminate faults such as stinginess through the practice of generosity is due to the power of wisdom. In fact, without the wisdom that enables one to recognise the benefits of giving and the shortcomings of stinginess, we wouldn’t even engage in the practice of giving. Therefore, wisdom is an important factor for developing each of the other five perfections, and because of it one *becomes skilled at eliminating the afflictions and increasing good qualities*.

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Among the various faculties of faith and so on,
Wisdom is chief, as the mind is to the sensory faculties.
With wisdom as lord, you know what is a fault and what merit,
So you are skilled in the method of eliminating afflictions.

Even in our own lives, the main reason why we sometimes get so confused about what to do and why our mind gets so deluded is our lack of wisdom and of not being able to fully utilise the wisdom within us. As I always say, the more knowledge or wisdom we have, the more we are able to rely on ourselves and not be easily misled or deceived by others.

We will read just a few more lines and will stop there.

Bodhisattvas depend on wisdom to purify the other five perfections - generosity, etc. Even when they give their flesh to someone who asks for it, they are unaffected by such thoughts as pride, discouragement, etc. It is as though they were taking a cutting from a medicinal plant. This is because their wisdom makes reality manifest.

So, reflect more on the benefits of developing wisdom on the one hand, and on the other, the disadvantages or shortcomings of not having wisdom.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

ཉལ། །ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

15 October 2019

We will begin with the usual meditation for a few minutes.

[Tonglen meditation]

Now we need to come out of our meditation.

As symbolised by the Buddha's hand mudra of both giving Dharma and meditative equipoise, one of the supreme qualities of a Buddha is to be able to directly and simultaneously engage in the two truths, or the two worlds of appearance and emptiness. Sentient beings lack such an ability. Therefore, we need to come out of meditation to engage in post-meditation activities. Of course, if you want to stay in your meditative state rather than listen to the Dharma you can stay there! But as His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, we should not doze off during meditation.

We have just done the giving and taking meditation to further develop our love and compassion. We all have some sort of interest and try to engage in Dharma practice. So, we want to ensure that our practice is effective and beneficial. Our practice is effective if it helps us to counteract mental afflictions such as pride, desire, jealousy and so forth. If it is not helping us in this regard, it is not effective and not working.

If we do not pay attention to our practice, then there is even a possibility that instead of counteracting mental afflictions, our practice will become another cause for generating mental delusions within us. If this is the case, then the Tibetan saying, 'god descends as a demon', becomes true.

The meditation of giving and taking is not just a matter of reciting a prayer or sitting quietly in a meditative posture. What it actually involves is feeling the suffering and pain that all other sentient beings are undergoing, and cultivating a sense of concern, empathy or compassion for them. As a result of feeling that their suffering is unbearable to contemplate, we generate compassion, genuinely wishing others to be free from suffering. This is how, in this meditation, you mentally take on the suffering of other sentient beings, together with the causes of their suffering. Similarly, reflecting on other sentient beings from the perspective of them being deprived of happiness and joy, we need to feel true love for them, genuinely wishing them to have happiness. So, in this meditation you then mentally give happiness and the causes of happiness, i.e. virtue, to all other beings.

The benefit of cultivating love and compassion within us is an enormous. As we have learnt in the teaching, due to the force of our strong love and compassion we can generate superior intention, which is the direct cause of generating bodhicitta. We can also find that the love and compassion that we generate is the most effective means

of immediately subduing the afflicted, unruly and wild states of mind within us.

When we think about what practice we need to do, and what meditation we need to practise, we always tend to think of something outside of us, some higher practice, something we lack or don't understand. Hence, we fail to understand that our core practice should be working on developing positivity and eliminating the negativity within us, such as developing and perfecting whatever degree of love and compassion we all have. As we were saying before, the benefit of meditating on love and compassion is quite amazing. So, our spiritual practice requires us to focus inward, and recognise whatever positive quality we need to develop and whatever negativity we need to diminish. Once a monk asked his lama, 'Gen Rinpoche, what practice should I do?' The lama replied, 'Safeguard and keep your vow well.'

Last week we touched on the five sciences of knowledge, the first one of which is Buddhist knowledge, which primarily deals with mind training. This mind training is all about counteracting mental afflictions, particularly the root cause of all those afflictions, which is the deluded mind that grasps at an independent self. Ultimately, our Dharma practice is to eliminate that false view of self-grasping.

So, we must make sure that whatever practice we do helps us to minimise mental afflictions. This is very important. We certainly do not want our spiritual practice to become a cause to generate pride, for instance feeling pride in our Dharma knowledge, or animosity towards others or become attached to material goods. When we generate these afflictions, we are supporting and strengthening the force of the self-grasping that is the root of all the mental afflictions.

(vi) How to train in the perfection of wisdom (cont.)

We will now continue with the teaching on the text. We are up to the section on the perfection of wisdom, which talks about the benefits of cultivating wisdom-knowledge. In short, whatever virtuous practice that we engage in must be supported by wisdom-knowledge. Our faith in the Dharma must also be based on wisdom-knowledge. Likewise, in order to fully develop and stabilise love and compassion for other beings, we need the strong support of wisdom-knowledge.

The last few sentences we finished with last week read:

Bodhisattvas depend on wisdom to purify the other five perfections – generosity, etc. Even when they give their flesh to someone who asks for it, they are unaffected by such thoughts as pride, discouragement, etc. It is as though they were taking a cutting from a medicinal plant. This is because their wisdom makes reality manifest. With the wisdom that sees the troubles of both cyclic existence and the peace of nirvana, they accomplish ethical discipline for the sake of others' welfare, so they practice pure ethical discipline.

There is not much need to explain this further, as it is quite self-explanatory. When it says *even when they give their flesh to someone who asks for it, they are unaffected by such thoughts as pride, discouragement*, it is referring to arya bodhisattvas, or bodhisattvas on the spiritual bhumi, or on, or beyond the path of seeing. Actually, giving one's

flesh to someone who asks for it is a profound practice of generosity or giving, it is however not recommended for those who have not attained a spiritual bhumi.

When bodhisattvas do this, as it says here, *they are unaffected by such thoughts as pride, discouragement etc., as though they were taking a cutting from a medicinal plant.* They don't feel any pride about such an extraordinary act of generosity. At the same time, they don't lose their spirit and courage because of any hardship associated with giving the flesh from their body.

As the text clearly says, they can maintain such a high degree of practice *because their wisdom makes reality manifest.* Here *wisdom* refers to their direct realisation of ultimate truth or emptiness. *With the wisdom that sees the troubles of both cyclic existence and the peace of nirvana, they accomplish ethical discipline for the sake of others' welfare* clearly implies that the virtue of this great wisdom of emptiness that they possess also helps them to show the altruistic mental attitude of benefiting others. Because of that wisdom, they also see the faults of samsara as well as the peace of self-liberation.

As the text says, *they accomplish ethical discipline for the sake of others' welfare, so they practise pure ethical discipline.* In other words, their wisdom-knowledge also helps bodhisattvas to develop and practise *pure ethical discipline.*

Then the text continues:

Through wisdom they know the faults of impatience and the merits of patience, and they then discipline their minds so they are not overpowered by suffering and others' misperceptions of them.

This touches on the benefits of wisdom in terms of perfecting the practice of patience. As we all know, it requires a great degree of spirit and courage to be able to tolerate adverse situations or hardship and suffering. Likewise, we have to practise patience with those who cause us harm. The text is saying that due to their wisdom-knowledge, bodhisattvas have a full and thorough understanding of all the benefits of patience and the shortcomings of anger and impatience. As the text says, *through wisdom they know the faults of impatience and the merits of patience, and they then discipline their minds so they are not overpowered by suffering and others' misperceptions of them.* So the wisdom that they develop acts as a remedy to unruly, undisciplined states of mind as well as all misconceptions and discursive thoughts.

Then:

With wisdom they understand well everything at which they joyously persevere, so their perseverance brings great success on the path.

This is clearly saying that when you have a thorough and full understanding of a topic it is easier to put that understanding into practice. In other words, wisdom-knowledge also supports joyful effort.

The text then continues:

And through wisdom based on reasoning they accomplish the supreme delight and bliss of the meditative stabilization that is fixed upon the meaning of reality.

This touches on the benefit of wisdom in terms of achieving the final goal of the perfection of concentration.

Sometimes we get very frustrated with our practice and give it up because we are not able to achieve our goal, or because we are confused with how to practise and so forth. This is all because we lack enough knowledge, and because of that we are unable to maintain a consistent effort in our practice.

As a summary there are these quotes:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Once bodhisattvas have opened the clear eye of wisdom,
Even when they give their own flesh without a thought,
They never feel high or low about it,
As if they were cutting a medicinal plant.

And also:

Intelligent ones do not practice ethical discipline for their own aims;
They see the flaws in the prison of cyclic existence
And aspire to release the entire world from it.
So of course they do not practice it for mundane aims.

And also:

Injury done to the wise is not harmful
Because they possess the good quality of patience ...

We have already discussed the first of these verses.

Injury done to the wise refers to injury done to bodhisattvas with their intelligence and wisdom-knowledge. As we said before because of their knowledge of the benefits of the practice of patience and the shortcomings of not practising patience bodhisattvas practise patience even towards those who harm them.

So:

Like the best of very tame elephants
Who are patient with many different tasks.
Perseverance by itself ends in exhaustion;
If aided by its ally, wisdom, it achieves great purposes.

Again, this emphasises the importance of wisdom-knowledge in sustaining and developing joyful effort and successfully completing whatever practice one begins. A very well tamed and very strong elephant has the capacity to accomplish great tasks. Likewise, if we develop joyful effort, then we will be able to achieve whatever we want to achieve. However, in order to sustain our joyful effort until we achieve our goal, we also need the support of this wisdom-knowledge. Although this is in reference to our spiritual practice, we also have to understand that it also applies to mundane activities as well. The message here is that we have to utilise our own intelligence and knowledge as much as possible.

Another quote reads:

And also:

How could the supreme delight and bliss of such meditative stabilizations
Be established in the minds of crude people who rely
Upon reasoning that has led them to a wrong path
That is polluted by the great fault of accumulated errors?

Then the text continues:

Two good qualities which may appear to be mutually exclusive prove to be non-contradictory for those who have wisdom.

We will come back to this later. How can there be two things that seem mutually contradictory to those who are ignorant and who lack knowledge, but not contradictory when seen by someone with wisdom-knowledge?

When bodhisattvas have become universal monarchs with authority over the entire world, they still do not fall under the control of sensory objects. This is the power of having wisdom as a royal minister. Similarly, the bodhisattvas' love that views living beings with affection is intense, but it is not mixed with even a trace of attachment; although they have a long-lasting and very forceful compassion that cannot bear for living beings to suffer, they do not have the laziness of being overcome with distress and thereby lacking ...

Here, *wisdom* specifically refers to the wisdom of selflessness or emptiness. Because of their wisdom-knowledge, bodhisattvas are able to develop and maintain a very pure love and compassion that is never affected or polluted by desire or attachment.

Whereas in our case, sometimes our initial love turns into lust and desire. Because of our lack of the wisdom of selflessness we easily grasp at things in the way that they appear to our mind. For example, if a thing appears to our mind as being very attractive, then we mentally grasp at that thing as having that intrinsic quality of attractiveness. Thus, we easily generate attachment to things that appear to be pleasant and attractive and aversion to what appears to be unpleasant and unattractive.

In reality, nothing exists objectively, inherently or independently. Things exist by depending on other things. From this perspective we can understand things are not the way they appear to our mind – they are like an illusion. For bodhisattvas however, the *love that views living beings with affection is intense, but it is not mixed with even a trace of attachment* because they have the wisdom of emptiness.

... although they have a long-lasting and very forceful compassion that cannot bear for living beings to suffer, they do not have the laziness of being overcome with distress and thereby lacking enthusiasm for virtue; they have immeasurable joy, ...

Again, the implication is that because of the support of their wisdom-knowledge, bodhisattvas never become distressed and discouraged while engaging in their compassionate deeds of benefiting other beings. Every opportunity to benefit and please other beings simply brings them more joy. Compassion is a mental attitude that observes and truly feels the pain, suffering and misery of other sentient beings, and truly wishes for them to be free from suffering. It takes a great deal of courage and understanding to be able to put this into practice. I know that some find it too hard to meditate on compassion, saying it stresses them out and makes them feel sad and miserable. As the text says they are *overcome with distress thereby lacking enthusiasm for virtue*. However, this doesn't happen to bodhisattvas with the wisdom of emptiness.

We face a lot of obstacles in our Dharma practice such as becoming bored, losing interest or finding it too hard. All these, I would say, are an indication of some form of laziness or in other words a lack of joyful effort.

However, if we have enough wisdom-knowledge, then we will know the benefits of our practice and there will be no shortage of joyful effort and nothing to distract us from our practice. Then the text continues:

... they have immeasurable joy, but their minds are free of instability which would distract them from their focus;

Bodhisattvas are able to develop *immeasurable joy* in their practice because of their wisdom-knowledge. However, that joy doesn't cause excitement or mental distraction. In our case, we are easily excited by moments of passing joy; with even some small degree of success we easily generate pride and become excited. The text also says that the minds of bodhisattvas *are free of instability which would distract them from their focus*. They have a perfect focus because neither hardship nor joy in their deeds of benefitting other beings can distract their minds from their deeds.

Then:

... and they are continually possessed of great impartiality, but they do not neglect for even a moment the welfare of all living beings.

The Tibetan word *tang.nyom* translated here as 'impartiality' can also be rendered as 'equanimity'. Bodhisattvas *continually possess impartiality or equanimity, but they do not neglect for even a moment the welfare of all living beings*. The implication is that they always possess this great state of equanimity yet at the same time, they are always able to engage in the bodhisattva deeds of benefiting other sentient beings. This is also because of their wisdom-knowledge. Then:

Wisdom does all this, because it is what removes the impediments to achieving a balanced strength in these good qualities [or deeds].

Thus the *Compendium of the Perfections* states:¹

Even bodhisattvas possessed of great kingdoms,
Who have sensory objects similar to divine substances²,
Remain uncorrupted in their very nature.³
This is the power of having the virtue of wisdom as their minister.

Their love, inseparable from helping others,
Is utterly free of stain from attachment.
Their compassion, unable to bear for others to suffer,
Never succumbs to laziness due to the burden of distress.

Possessed of supreme joy, they do not waver from the real.
Their great impartiality never neglects the welfare of beings.
Great wisdom removes all that would counteract
These good qualities, and so it beautifies them.

Matrceta's *Praise in Honor of One Worthy of Honor (Varnarhavarṇastotra)* also says:

Without rejecting the real nature,
You are also in accord with the conventional.

Thus, you do not have to forsake the real nature that gives great certainty that there is not even an atom of what your cognitive processes apprehend as signs of true existence. And you are also in accord with and do not contradict the

¹ This quotation has been previously discussed.

² This refers to the heavenly sensory pleasures such as beautiful visual forms, sounds, smells etc.

³ Their mind is not stained by that nature.

conventional that gives deep certainty that effects arise from their respective internal and external causes and conditions.

This is one of the hardest parts of the teaching, which is understanding the lack of contradiction between the ultimate truth of emptiness, and the conventional truth of cause and effect. The text says that without giving up the ultimate truth of emptiness, you can posit the truth of cause and effect. As Lama Tsongkhapa put it: the meaning of emptiness is dependent origination, and the meaning of dependent origination is emptiness, and there is no contradiction there. In fact, they complement each other. In other words, saying that things lack inherent existence establishes the infallible truth of cause and effect. Similarly, the truth of cause and effect establishes the view of emptiness. However, to ordinary beings the view of emptiness and the view of cause and effect in everyday life are mutually exclusive or contradictory. They fail to understand the meaning of the conventional world of cause and effect when they delve into the truth of emptiness, and *vice versa*.

As the text says: *you are also in accord with and do not contradict the conventional that gives deep certainty that effects arise from their respective internal and external causes and conditions*. This understanding is possible within the understanding of the truth of emptiness, or how things lack inherent existence. As the text says:

For others these appear to totally exclude each other, but for those who have wisdom, there is compatibility and a lack of contradiction.

The *Praise in Honor of One Worthy of Honor* states:

Regarding your proscriptions and prohibitions,
Some of your word is definitive
While some of it is not,
But between these, there is no contradiction.

The two facts – that there are many dissimilarities in proscriptions and prohibitions between higher and lower vehicles and between sutra and tantra, and that these are all the practices of a single person– ...

Essentially when you look at the Buddha's teachings and the commentaries by later masters in terms of the teachings of the *higher or the lower vehicles* or *sutra and tantra* there seem to be many instances where something is both prohibited and approved. Likewise, the discourses on the two truths – conventional and ultimate truth – may also seem contradictory. In actuality, there is absolutely no contradiction there. All these diverse teachings reflect what a person needs to practise to reach complete enlightenment. However, they:

... are contradictory for those who are confused and lack the power of intelligence to seek the intended meaning of the innumerable scriptures.

Those who lack knowledge, who are ignorant and who lack wisdom, see contradiction in the scriptures and do not understand their intended meaning.

Yet through wisdom the learned know that these are not mutually exclusive.

There are limitless things that the unwise see as contradictory and the wise see as lacking contradiction-the presentations of the two truths and the many prescriptions in one scripture that are prohibitions in others and vice versa.

To say that wisdom distinguishes the non-contradictory, intended meaning behind them is the peerless praise of wisdom.

This is emphasising that those who possess the right kind of wisdom do not see any contradiction in the diversity of the teachings that the Buddha has given. The kind of wisdom that they possess is called the supreme or *peerless wisdom*.

Then the text says:

In short, all good qualities come from wisdom. The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

How wondrous that such excellent things come from wisdom
That is like a mother who loves her child.

The ten powers of the sugata, most excellent of strengths;
All superior activities, without parallel;
And all other collections of virtues in their entirety
Arise based on such wisdom as their cause.

The arts and the best treasures in all worlds;
The variety of sacred learning that is like an eye;
Protections, awarenesses, mantras, and so on;
The different attributes of the teachings that set these forth;

The multitude of enumerations; and the doors to liberation;
All such types of service to the world
That display the great power of the conqueror's children,
All arise from the power of wisdom.

We will leave tonight's teaching here.

Next the text will talk about the benefit of wisdom and following that the faults of not having wisdom.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

འདྲེན་ཐོག་གི་ཆོས་སྲི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

22 October 2019

As usual we begin with a short meditation, and with a proper motivation. [*Tonglen meditation*]

There's tremendous benefit in learning about meditation practice and engaging in it regularly. Meditation practice helps us to achieve mental happiness. As we all seek lasting happiness, that's the kind of happiness we need. So, it is important that we understand that meditation practice is an effective means to enhance mental happiness. Then, we will really appreciate its benefits and will be motivated to put it into practice.

We've heard a lot about the benefit of meditation practice in subduing the mind and making the mind more manageable, workable or serviceable. What does subduing or controlling the mind mean? Effectively, it means not letting the mind be overpowered by mental delusions or afflictions.

So, subduing the mind means eliminating mental afflictions. Once mental afflictions are overcome, we will have subdued our mind and gained control over it. We can understand this in the context of everyday life: when our mind is overpowered by mental afflictions, we go through unhappiness, pain and suffering. On the other hand, when our mind is free of mental afflictions and filled with calmness and happiness, we will find ourselves to be truly in a good and happy mood.

Obviously, if our mind is filled with too many external distractions and discursive thoughts, we can't have a calm and happy mind, because there is just no room at that time for happiness to occupy our mind. So, the only way we can find or enhance mental happiness is by getting rid of those discursive thoughts and creating a space for peace and happiness in our mind.

We need to understand that inner happiness is essential for our general wellbeing. For example, some people are used to occupying their minds with various disturbing thoughts. If they go on like this for a long time and don't find any mental rest, it could have a serious impact on their life. They might end up feeling frustrated, confused and even depressed.

So, through utilising our wisdom-knowledge, we can understand the benefits of practising meditation, such as in recognising those states of mind that are beneficial and those that are harmful, purifying negativities and defilements, and bringing positive changes in our mental continuum.

Generally, our valuation of things as being either good or bad is based on external objects, or something obvious to our perception. But, through wisdom, we can also observe things within our mind. Just as with external objects, we can recognise within us forces that are positive or negative. Once we identify and recognise these, our task is to enhance the positive forces and habituate ourselves with them and develop a positive state of mind.

It is said that if we think of the various mental traits, we will note that positive traits can be developed inexhaustibly. This

means that if we put in the effort, any positive quality within our mind can be infinitely developed.

However, there's a limit to the development and training of our body. As we age, our body decays and loses strength. We also know that, no matter how physically fit or agile an athlete can be, there is always a limit to what she or he can do. For example, if you are attempting a high jump, there's a limit to how high you can jump. But when it comes to acquiring and developing mental qualities and knowledge, even if we start at a late age – for example, after we turn sixty – we can still achieve a lot. We know of many people who have gone back to study at a late age and have been very successful in completing their courses. This is good news for us – when it comes to enhancing our inner values and qualities, we have more time, space and scope to strive for them.

Initially, it's important to recognise the need to shift our focus from looking outward to inward, in terms of knowing what's of value or of no value. Our usual focus is just looking outward – the things that we desire or believe to be the source of happiness, for example, are securing a good job and saving plenty of money. And when we talk about 'excellent qualities', we usually think of them in terms of external objects or visible qualities – such as a good external education, skills and living conditions. But while these things are good to have, we are saying here that these alone are not enough; we also need to cultivate good internal qualities. So we must initially direct our focus inward, specifically to our mind, and recognise the positive and negative forces within the mind.

Simply knowing what is good and bad from an external perspective is not a difficult task; anyone can do it. We can talk about education in terms of worldly or secular education, and spiritual or Dharma education. Of course, both are important and beneficial; we need both to go hand-in-hand in our lives. Worldly education mainly focuses on achieving external success, in terms of gaining qualifications, securing a well-paid job, and so on.

But, as I said before, external success alone is not enough for us to secure happiness and live a meaningful life. Worldly education and success must be complemented by spiritual progress. If we lose sight of spiritual practice and inner values, it's highly possible that our worldly success may even add to our problems, rather than solving them and bringing us more happiness and satisfaction.

When we undermine our inner values, what can happen is that the more external success and progress we make in life, the more our mental afflictions and defilements – such as pride, jealousy, competitiveness, and despising or belittling others – will increase. And the more mental afflictions we have in our mind, the more stress, tension, conflict and suffering we will experience in our life. The outcome will be that, in the end, whatever external progress we make due to our exertion and efforts will not bring us the happiness we seek, and our life will become meaningless.

So, we also need to make progress in terms of spiritual knowledge and practice. When we engage in spiritual practice, our goal is to counteract the mental defilements, such as pride, hatred and jealousy. Because these are the main enemy or obstacles to our spiritual practice, we need to recognise them as such, and direct our practice towards counteracting them. The more progress a spiritual practitioner makes in their practice, the more happiness they will find.

So, while we need to recognise the benefit of worldly education and success, at the same time, we need to understand the importance of integrating spiritual practice in our life. In short, we must try to do well both in our worldly and spiritual ventures.

Of course, when we engage in Dharma practice, it's important that our motivation is not corrupted – for example, learning Dharma to become famous, or to receive gifts, admiration or praise from others. If we do this, even though we may think we are engaging in Dharma practice, the 'Dharma' we practise will become a poison for us. Mental afflictions such as jealousy and pride make no discrimination in terms of whom they afflict; regardless of whether they are believers or non-believers, those who generate these afflictions in their mind, will lose their peace and happiness and will suffer.

The great Indian Buddhist master, Vasubandhu, said that we should not teach Dharma out of any of the mental afflictions, and that we should teach it perfectly in accord with the meaning of the sutras and commentaries. So, when teaching Dharma, we should not be biased in terms of highly esteeming our own view and holding animosity towards the views of others. That would be going against our Dharma practice.

(vi) How to train in the perfection of wisdom (cont.)

We will continue with the text:

The faults of not having wisdom ...

This specifically refers to the wisdom of emptiness. When the text says, *the faults of not having wisdom*, it sounds like there are beings who do not have wisdom. But there are no such beings. All beings possess some degree of wisdom. So the statement *the faults of not having wisdom* refers to those who possess so little knowledge, it's as if their little knowledge is equivalent to not having wisdom.

The faults of not having wisdom are as follows. Without wisdom, generosity and the other perfections are as if blind.

We came across the same point previously. Of the six perfections, the perfection of wisdom is considered to be like an eye, without which the other five perfections are blind, without a guide. Therefore, when we talk about making progress in the practice of giving, for example, technically that comes down to the *thought* of giving; this is defined as the meaning of giving. But developing the thought of giving depends on knowing the benefits of practising giving on the one hand – that is, finding wealth in the future, etc. – and the shortcomings of stinginess on the other. It is wisdom that enables us to know the benefits of giving and the shortcomings of stinginess.

So, to motivate ourselves in the practice of giving, we can see how the development of this practice very much depends on increasing our wisdom.

Similarly, we can understand the significant role of wisdom when we engage in and develop the other perfections of moral ethics, patience, joyful effort and meditative concentration. Developing all five perfections depends on developing wisdom.

For example, we can look at the perfection of joyful effort; by definition, this is the thought that takes joy or delight in engaging in virtuous practice. However, cultivating a positive inspiration to engage in practice depends on our understanding of the practice we are doing.

Likewise, if we are engaging in meditation, we need to have the wisdom to be able to recognise all the challenges we may face, and understand how to overcome all these challenges in order to make progress. Therefore again, it's obvious that this depends on wisdom-knowledge.

The text continues:

The Verse Summary of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines states:

How could billions of blind people without a guide,
Who do not know the way, enter the city?

The analogy here is of a blind person who, in order to get to the correct destination, must depend on a guide. Without a guide, the blind person could not even see what is right in front of them, let alone the way to get to a distant city or town.

Once these five perfections lack wisdom, they are blind;

This refers to how, without wisdom, the other five perfections are like the blind person.

As they lack a guide, they cannot reach enlightenment.

The text continues:

Consequently, generosity and the other perfections do not become pure, and you do not find the correct view.

The implication here is that how even generosity, without the support of wisdom, may end up as a cause for rebirth in cyclic existence. When it says, *do not become pure*, that's what it means, *and you do not find the correct view*.

The Compendium of the Perfections states:

If those intent upon the final fruit are without wisdom,
Their generosity does not purify them. The Buddha said,
"Giving for others' sake is supreme generosity."
Other kinds of giving serve only to increase one's wealth.

This clearly shows the benefit of wisdom. For example, engaging in the practice of giving without wisdom doesn't yield much of a result. As it says here, *other kinds of giving serve only to increase one's wealth* – so this type of giving only brings a small benefit. This is like depositing your money in a savings account; the only profit you will make is the interest, which will be hardly anything. On the other hand, if you invested the money in a different financial venture, you could make a lot more profit. Similarly, if we direct our practice of giving towards the cause of achieving enlightenment then, as it says here, such a practice becomes *supreme generosity*.

The text continues:

And also:

Ethical discipline does not become pure
Unless wisdom's light dispels the darkness.
Ethical discipline without wisdom usually
Becomes sullied by afflictions through faulty
understanding.

As mentioned before, wisdom in the context of the practice of giving is important; but it's also important in the practice of ethical discipline. Without it, we cannot develop a good ethical practice. The text says *unless wisdom's light dispels the darkness* – wisdom's light enables us to see the benefit of practising ethical discipline, and the downfall of not practising ethics, and so forth. Without wisdom, our mind would be darkened by ignorance and delusion. Therefore, we wouldn't be able to engage in pure ethical discipline.

The text continues:

And also:

If your mind is muddled by the fault of erring intelligence,
You have no interest in keeping the virtue of patience,
You maintain a dislike for weighing merit and fault,
And are like an unworthy king who becomes famous.

Again, the text shows the need for wisdom in developing the practice of patience as well.

And also:

For adepts, wisdom is lauded as foremost;
Nothing else is as subtle or profound.
Without wisdom, you do not head straight for the mental path
That is unclouded by the defects of desire.

So, for adepts, wisdom is lauded as foremost – here, referring to the wisdom of emptiness – and nothing else is as subtle – there’s nothing more subtle or profound than this wisdom. Then, without wisdom, you do not head straight for the mental path, that is unclouded by the defects of desire – in other words, you won’t be able to achieve the perfect state of mind of an enlightened being.

The text continues:

And also:

Without maintaining joyous perseverance in wisdom’s ways,
Your view will not become pure.

Here, the “king who becomes famous” refers to an unworthy king for whom fame occurs once, but then declines.

Here, Lama Tsongkhapa illustrates how, without wisdom, your practice of the other perfections would become like that of an unworthy king.

The text continues:

You do not repel the darkness of delusion’s confusion as long as wisdom’s great light does not shine, but when it does, you cast away the darkness, so you must make an effort to generate wisdom with whatever capacity and strength you have.

The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

Like the dawning of the sun’s great light,
The enormous power of wisdom’s light arises
And the concealing darkness in beings’ minds
Is completely dispelled, only its name left behind.

Earlier, I was talking about how our mind is filled with discursive thoughts due to ignorance and delusions; these completely overshadow our mind, to the point where there’s no room for happiness or wisdom to arise. However, when wisdom, like the dawning of the sun’s great light, enters our mind, all this darkness is gone, completely dispelled, only its name left behind.

The text continues:

And also:

Therefore, with all the power at your disposal,
Work hard at the methods for producing such wisdom.

The advice here is that we must try to relate these instructions to ourselves – to see how our mind is filled with the darkness of ignorance, and that the only difference between our mind and the mind of the Buddha is that the Buddha’s mind has given rise to wisdom. It is saying here that if we strive and put an effort into developing wisdom, we can also develop this wisdom, and through that, be able to clear away ignorance.

The text continues:

What are the causes of confusion? ...

This relates to what was just mentioned about clearing away confusion or delusions in our mind to pave the way for wisdom to arise. So *what are the causes of confusion?*

... They are relying on bad friends; ...

There’s no real need to explain this. What is required here is that we focus on each of the causes mentioned, and think about whether they are true. So *relying on bad friends* is considered one of the causes, as well as *laziness; indolence; oversleeping*; etc.

They are relying on bad friends; laziness; indolence; oversleeping; taking no pleasure in analysis and discernment; lack of interest in the vast variety of phenomena; the pride of thinking “I know” when you do not; the major wrong views; ...

Generating *wrong views* can also impede our cultivation of wisdom.

... and being discouraged and thinking, ...

This refers to putting oneself down, and feeling discouragement or low self-esteem, thinking:

... “Someone like me cannot do this,” and thus not taking pleasure in relying upon the learned.

These are all causes of confusion. As a summary, there’s a quote from the *Compendium of the Perfections*.

The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

Laziness, indolence, and reliance upon bad friends,
Being governed by sleep, no feeling for discernment,
No interest in the Sage’s most sublime wisdom,
Inquiring under the influence of false pride,

Lacking the faith to rely upon learned persons
Due to attachment to self from feelings of inadequacy,
The great poison of false concepts which are wrong views
These are the causes of confusion.

The text continues:

Therefore, as the *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

Serve and venerate a guru worthy of trust,
And study to achieve wisdom.

We need to focus on every word of this teaching: for example, when it says, *worthy of trust*, the implication is that you must not follow someone who is unworthy or unqualified. *And study to achieve wisdom* means that after relying on such gurus who are worthy of trust, one must study well, and develop an understanding of the Dharma.

The text continues:

Once you rely on a learned person, you must study in accord with your capacity, for if you do not, you will not produce the wisdom that arises from study and the wisdom that arises from reflection, ...

In Lama Tsongkhapa’s writings, we find this emphasis of combining study, contemplation and meditation together in an orderly manner over and over again. Cultivating the wisdom arising from meditation depends on cultivating the wisdom arising from contemplation, and this in turn depends on the wisdom arising from studying. The three must go hand-in-hand, in the sense that the focus of the three is the same. In our practice, we must contemplate what we study, and meditate on what we contemplate. So, initially, studying the Dharma well, and gaining the wisdom or understanding of the Dharma is vitally important for effective contemplation and meditation, and for further deepening and developing our wisdom.

... whereupon you will not know what to meditate upon.

Again the glorious Aryasura says:

Little study is like blindness – you do not know how to meditate.

Without study, what could there be to reflect upon?

Therefore, from the cause of making an effort to study

You meditate in accord with reflection and thereby gain vast wisdom.

The venerable Maitreya also says in the *Sublime Continuum*:

The conceptualizations of the three spheres
Are asserted to be cognitive obscurations,
While conceptualizations such as stinginess and the like
Are asserted to be afflictive obscurations.

Solely wisdom is the cause
Of their elimination, nothing else,
So wisdom is supreme. Study is its basis,
So study is supreme.

These verses emphasise how important it is to study the Dharma well, because the knowledge you gain through study lays the foundation for contemplation and meditation, which is necessary for deepening and increasing our wisdom, and thereby dispelling all ignorance and obscurations.

The first verse above from the *Sublime Continuum* is one of the main sources used in presenting the two types of obscurations – the obstructions to an omniscient mind, and afflictive obscurations – in the Mahamudra teachings.

When we take the meaning of the above verse literally, in terms of defining the two obscurations, it accords well with the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka view, but does not accord with the Prasangika-Madhyamaka view. However, the *Sublime Continuum* presents the teaching in accordance with the Prasangika view. It is said that, although the master Asanga was recognised as the founder of the Mind Only (Cittamatin) school, the commentary he wrote on the *Sublime Continuum* shows that he truly was a proponent of the Prasangika-Madhyamaka school. His Holiness the Dalai Lama interprets the above verse by saying that, even though the text uses the words *conceptualizations of the three spheres*, the implication is that it is the latency or tendency of *the conceptualization of the three spheres* that is an obstruction to omniscient mind or cognitive obscuration. Then *conceptualizations such as stinginess and the like are asserted to be afflictive obscurations*.

The words *solely wisdom is the cause of their elimination, nothing else* emphasise wisdom as the main remedy to both obscurations. *So wisdom is supreme. Study is its basis*. Having emphasised wisdom, the text then says that, in order to gain wisdom, it is necessary for us to study it well. Therefore, as it emphasises, studying is also supreme.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

འཇུག་ཐོབ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

29 October 2019

We will begin with the usual meditation.

[meditation]

Try to cultivate your motivation for receiving the teaching. The best motivation is to generate the bodhicitta mind; however, if you are not able to generate the bodhicitta mind simply think that listening to this Dharma teaching is to benefit other beings.

Prior to undertaking any activity, it is very beneficial to keep our focus on the intention of whatever activity we undertake. Whatever activity we do, whether it is in accord with a bodhisattva's deeds or not, depends on our motivation. If our motivation when we engage in activities like eating, sleeping, walking or sitting is to benefit other beings, then these activities will be positive and resemble bodhisattva deeds. It is good to get used to that habit of giving a bit of thought to our motivation ahead of undertaking any action. Normally we just go ahead with whatever we have to do, without any thought about why we are engaging in those actions. As a result, the consequences of our actions are rendered meaningless. Hence, correcting our motivation or intention makes a huge difference to the efficacy of our actions.

If we are able to ensure that whatever action we do is aimed at benefiting other beings, we are automatically avoiding causing harm to others. In other words, our actions will bring happiness and no harm to others. Just as we admire and revere those who are always very caring and who benefit others and never harm them, others will also admire and like us if we follow their example in loving and caring for other beings.

(b') How to begin the generation of wisdom

At the end of last week's teaching, we stopped at this quote from Maitreya:

The venerable Maitreya also says in the *Sublime Continuum*:

The conceptualizations of the three spheres
Are asserted to be cognitive obscurations,
While conceptualizations such as stinginess and the like
Are asserted to be afflictive obscurations.

As we noted last week, when we take the line mentioning the two types of obscurations – the cognitive obstructions to the omniscient mind and the afflictive obscurations – literally, then it accords with the view of Svatantrika-Madhyamaka school in which *cognitive obscurations* refers to the conception of a self in the context of truly existent self of phenomena. *While conceptualisations such as stinginess and the like* refers to the conception of the substantially existent self in the sense of self-sufficiency and mental afflictions as afflictive obscurations. According to the Svatantrika-Madhyamikas the conception of the self of a person is an afflictive obscuration and the conception of a truly existent self of phenomena is a cognitive obscuration and an obstruction to omniscience. However, according to Prasangika-Madhyamaka school cognitive obscurations or obstructions to omniscience are not identified with any

types of conception. Rather, they point to the latency left by self-grasping or the conception of an inherent self. So when it says, conceptualisations of three spheres are asserted to the cognitive obscurations, we have to interpret that as referring to the latency of the conception of the self. Next:

Solely wisdom is the cause
Of their elimination, nothing else
So wisdom is supreme.

As clearly indicated here, the antidote that counteracts and uproots both types of obscurations, is *solely wisdom*. Only wisdom is the cause of their elimination. Since only wisdom has the capacity to uproot and eliminate both types of obscurations, *wisdom is supreme*. And on the basis of that:

Study is its basis,
So study is supreme.

Gaining such wisdom is dependent on wisdom itself, so *studying* this wisdom is both *supreme* and wisdom in itself. Studying or listening to the Dharma is really the supreme cause to gain wisdom. We can also interpret *study is supreme* to mean that studying is the supreme cause giving rise to wisdom.

The text continues:

And Santideva's *Compendium of the Trainings in Verse (Siksha-samuccaya-karika)* says:

Be forbearing and then study;
Stay in a forest, and then
Persevere at meditative equipoise.

This passage from the *Compendium of the Trainings* contains very important spiritual advice; it emphasises the importance of carefully studying the Dharma. To emphasise this the verse says, *Be forbearing and then study*. We need to try to overcome hardship and feeling weary, which requires great diligence and effort. So we should study well.

The advice is to *stay in a forest and then persevere at meditative equipoise*. When you are equipped through your study, go to a forest or place of solitude and deepen your understanding by engaging in meditation practice. This is very important because quite often we undermine our intention to gain a sound understanding and knowledge through studying. For example, sometimes without preparing well, people go to do a meditation retreat, and when they start, they don't know what to practice and then have to seek help from others about what they should meditate on. Or they intend to accumulate mantras, but they are not sure which mantra they should be accumulating.

We find here some very clear and structured advice on how we should go about our spiritual practice. The advice here makes good sense. It says that we should initially gain a good knowledge of the Dharma through studying it well. The next stage is contemplating and analysing what we have learnt. Since we have gained a degree of knowledge, we naturally have enough Dharma points to contemplate. Through contemplating and analysing, our knowledge becomes much deeper and more thorough. And after that we meditate to fully habituate ourselves with what we have contemplated. Since we have gained a definitive ascertainment of the Dharma through contemplation, we will know the subject of our meditation.

Then the text continues

His auto-commentary [*Compendium of Trainings*] to this says:

With impatience, you become disheartened and cannot forbear, so your perseverance at study, etc., declines.

This is emphasising that we should have enough patience to accept any hardship and difficulties we face in learning and studying the Dharma. If we lack the patience to overcome all the challenges that we face in our study then, as it says, we will easily lose our motivation and therefore won't be able to achieve any results.

Without study, you do not have the means for either meditative stabilization or for clearing away afflictions. Therefore, without becoming disheartened, study.

As discussed earlier, if we lack enough Dharma knowledge gained through studying and listening to the Dharma, then we lack knowledge about meditation itself as well as how to apply the remedies for overcoming mental afflictions. Essentially the text is also saying that without a background of good knowledge of the Dharma you won't be able to contemplate and meditate effectively.

And the *Questions of Narayana Formula (Narayana-pariprcchadharani)* also says:

Just so, child of good lineage, if you study, wisdom will come. If you are possessed of wisdom, the afflictions will be stilled. Once you have no afflictions, demons do not have a chance with you.

Again, this is saying that wisdom arises from listening to and studying the Dharma, and with this wisdom we will be able to overcome the mental delusions or afflictions. Then, having overcome the mental delusions there will be no more interferences. Here the text is referring to the four types of demons or evil forces (*maras*) of delusion, aggregates, the lord of death, and the godly son.

Sometimes people complain that they receive harm from this or that, but these harms are nothing other than the mental delusions that lie within them.

Scripture and reasoning establish the following: Those who wish to properly practice the teaching need a broad study of the stainless scriptures and their commentaries, the unexcelled cause that gives rise to the wisdom which thoroughly distinguishes phenomena, which is the sacred life-force of the path.

Here, the *study of the stainless scriptures* refers to the sutras or words of the Buddha while *their commentaries* refers to the *shastra* or treatises on the sutras by the later masters. The text is saying that the knowledge that you can gain through learning the Dharma is the *sacred life-force of the path*, which refers to the knowledge and wisdom that you produce through listening to and studying the Dharma.

However, not achieving wisdom while thinking that a broad study is necessary to develop it is simply the fault of your not being convinced that you need the analytical meditation of discerning wisdom when the time comes for practice, and of having the mistaken conviction that thinks that analytical meditation is not necessary. Therefore, those of you who want what is best for yourselves should eliminate such a mistaken conviction as though getting rid of poison.

Knowledge can be gained through relying on the authentic scriptures as well as through applying one's own discriminating wisdom. The text is saying that it is a great mistake to think that it is not necessary to gain such knowledge in order to practice the Dharma or to meditate.

Nal-jor-ba-chen-bo said:

Jo-wo-pa (Jo-bo-ba), when it comes to accomplishing the state of omniscient enlightenment, whether you show off or conceal that you studied only a handbook, you cannot get anywhere without reading a yak's load of books.

What it is saying here is that it is not sufficient to study a small number of books that you can carry in your hand; you need to study a load of books that would require a yak to carry.

Pu-chung-wa (Phu-chung-ba) placed an opened sacred text beside his pillow and said:

We must learn the texts, so even though you do not get a chance to read them, make a wish to read them all. If someone said that you should practice the teaching without understanding it, how would you do it?

The Kadampa master Pu-chang-wa always kept an open book next to his pillow to make it easily accessible to read whenever he could. *Make a wish to them all, if someone said that you should practice the teaching without understanding it, how would you do it?* Having a text nearby makes it easy to be able to refer to. Many great lamas keep important texts next to them, some of them opened. The late Geshe Ngawang Dhargye always had the *Eight Thousand Lines Sutra* placed open next to him. Then, every time he got an opportunity, he would read a few pages, and in this way, he read the sutra over two hundred times.

Then the text continues:

Bo-do-wa said three times to a monk of Jen-nga-wa (sPyan-sngaba) who was escorting him a short distance, "You are enjoying yourself too much." He then continued:

You rely upon my teacher who is like the sky covering the earth...

This implies the enormity of the excellent qualities that are possessed by Bo-dowa's teacher.

... so do not salivate over other teachers. Since you do not have to read the root texts and their commentaries and mark their corresponding passages, you do not have a lot of work. You are happy because you do not think about cause and effect, while you work at certain activities by means of certain tantric practices. And you can be satisfied with these many things?

Sha-ra-wa said:

Until you become a buddha, your studies are not finished. They are finished when you are a buddha.

Ga-ma-pa (Ka-ma-ba) said:

Some say, "When you practice the teachings, what need is there of knowledge," and they degenerate. This idea is a real danger for those of us who have studied little. Others say, "If you really try you do not need knowledge." This is very dangerous. If you are making a big effort at the teaching, knowledge is required; since it is not completed in this brief lifetime, we must resolve, "I will study continually through many lifetimes without interrupting the succession of lives having leisure and opportunity." Some think that meditators do not need to study, only those who explain the teachings do. But those who explain the teachings and do not study merely run the risk of sinning, while it is precisely the meditator who must study to avoid straying from the path.

These lines also emphasise the importance of learning and studying the Dharma. When we think about it, we either need to learn or there is no need to learn about the path – there is no third option – and we fit into the category of those who need to learn.

As the text says, *I will study continually through many lifetimes without interrupting the succession of lives having leisure and opportunity*. This says that if we don't finish learning in this life, we need to continue it in a future life or until we

achieve our final goal. Therefore, we need to ensure that we uninterruptedly find a suitable life to continue our learning, such as a human life of leisure and endowment.

The text then says, *some think that meditators do not need to study, only those who explain the teachings do.* This happens. We hear of people saying that it is not necessary to study in order to engage in meditation practice; they think studying is only necessary if you are giving teachings to others. This gives rise to the notion that the intention of those who study and learn the Dharma is to teach to others. Then, through not actually putting the Dharma into practice they risk creating sinful actions. The text warns against this by saying, *those who explain the teaching and do not study merely run the risk of sinning. It is precisely the meditator who must study to avoid straying from the path* indicates how, without the knowledge of the Dharma, you won't know what to practice and could easily follow the perverted path.

The text continues:

Thus you must be convinced that wisdom and the study that causes it are indispensable for proper practice. Moreover, unless you reach certainty about the need for analytical meditation when you practice, you will have a very hard time getting anywhere.

Even some well-regarded scholars of the scriptural collections claim, "Understand study to be either a mere preliminary to practice or to be a background support-like mountains at the back of a valley-but not the actual instructions. For this reason, you need practice to quickly attain buddhahood and study to benefit the Buddha's teaching." This is contradictory nonsense. There are just two kinds of teaching: teaching as scripture and teaching that has been put into practice; the former makes known the procedures for practice, and the latter is assimilating the practice after you have understood the procedures. Therefore, doing the practice without error is the best way to uphold the teaching. Moreover, unerringly upholding the teaching in the sense of practice depends upon an unerring understanding of scriptural teaching.

Therefore, it is not right to forget what you have studied at the time of practice, for you must first know many teachings and then put their very meaning into practice when the time comes to do so. Even if you do not understand the teachings from the outset, do not be discouraged, but strive to study them in accord with your mental capacity, as much as feasible, whether that be a little or a lot. Do not make study and practice into separate things. Rather, the very thing that you practice must be exactly what you first study and reflect upon. Beginning bodhisattvas must depend with certainty on a single procedure of the path - a practice that is not biased toward one side but is complete in all aspects of the path. When their mental capacity is small, they engage in conditioning themselves to just this process of study followed by practice. If their mental capacity is great or, though at first small, has become greater through conditioning, they steadily expand upon the very stage of the path they know, proceeding in connection with all the scriptures and their stainless commentaries. There is no need for them to pursue something else to study besides these. If their mental capacity is great or, though at first small, has become greater through conditioning, they steadily expand upon the very stage of the path they know, proceeding in connection with all the scriptures and their stainless commentaries. There is no need for them to pursue something else to study besides these.

Therefore if instructions are accurate and complete, then, although summarized, all of the key points of the sutra and tantra paths and the paths of the higher and lower vehicles

must be covered; once they have been explained at length, you must be able go through all the teachings. Until you reach something like this, it is possible to feel delight about just some portion of your practice, but it is impossible to become certain about the key points of practice for the complete corpus of the teachings.

Consequently, rely upon excellent teachers and companions. Make a foundation of pure ethical discipline to which you commit yourself. Listen again and again to the instructions, do four sessions of meditation, and then sustain the object of meditation and its subjective aspects. After you have made fervent supplications to the deities and gurus, strive at all the causes of engaging from many perspectives in accumulating the collections and purifying obscurations. If you do this, you will become profoundly certain that the good qualities in your mind will steadily improve. If you do this, you will become profoundly certain that the good qualities in your mind will steadily improve.

After that the text explains the indication of progress in following this practice. It says:

As the former excellent beings said:

Make all the teachings you have previously heard completely clear in your mind. You must reflect upon them again and again, evaluate them, and deliberate on them. When you have let yourself forget the teachings, there is nothing gained by learning to stabilize your attention on one object of meditation. The best meditators are the best teachers. Mediocre meditators become mediocre teachers.

Again, this is emphasising that in your meditation you focus on what you have contemplated or what you have studied. Then your meditation deepens and increases your understanding. In summary, *the best meditators are the best teachers. Mediocre meditators become mediocre teachers.*

Finally:

You need knowledge of the teaching and commensurate meditation that both proceed to ever greater levels together.

Once you gain a firm certainty from such reflection, you do not pay heed when bad friends say, "All thoughts, virtuous and non-virtuous, are conceptualizations and are therefore to be eliminated," but rather think, "The teachings do not say this nor do my teachers assert it." Otherwise, if you are a person who possesses a little faith but no wisdom, you are like the leading edge of water running downhill - you go anywhere you are led, taking anything said to be true, wanting to cry when you see others crying, wanting to laugh when you see others laugh.

We will now recite the *King of Prayers* and dedicate it to Bernii's mother who passed away last week. Many of you know that Bernii has been giving a lot to the centre through her voluntary work for the centre. She is also a very long-term student and a part of the publication team. She is very intelligent, loving and kind-hearted person.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
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Edited Version*

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The Six Perfections

འདྲེན་གྱི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལ་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་ལུགས་ལྟོས་ལྟོས་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

5 November 2019

As usual, we begin with the meditation.

[*Tong-len meditation*]

So everyone, please try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation.

As a result of studying the Dharma, we have within us some Dharma knowledge, such as knowledge about bodhicitta. This knowledge of bodhicitta is like a seed of bodhicitta within us. Therefore, what we need to do in our practice is to nurture this seed so that it will develop into bodhicitta.

This seed of Dharma, or whatever knowledge we have of the Dharma, is a basis for our practice and our potential to be able to benefit other beings and avoid causing them harm.

To benefit others and avoid harming them, it is not enough just to engage in a sitting meditation and imagine 'giving and taking'. We must also put this meditation into practice in our everyday life. In our meditation practice, we know that we are training our mind in giving and taking so that other beings are free from suffering and endowed with happiness. Therefore, it is vitally important that we try to benefit others in our everyday life, to the best of our ability. For example, if we come across a being who lacks joy and happiness, then we should do our best to bring happiness to that being, in whatever way we can, with the capacity and resources we have.

Similarly, if we observe a being who is afflicted with suffering, then again, we should try to help that being overcome their problems in whatever way we can, to the best of our ability. Therefore, the aim or purpose of meditation practice is not just to simply sit in an upright posture, but to apply our meditation in our daily actions and, as much as possible, actively benefit others by bringing them happiness and solving their problems, thereby making our lives meaningful.

Initially, our sense of empathy or mental intention to help others is lacking, and we are not habituated to the practice of giving and taking, so it doesn't even occur to us to help others who are in need. Therefore, it is necessary for us to train our mind to be compassionate and kind to others through engaging in practices such as the meditation of giving and taking. We can tell from our own experience that the kinds of actions we do primarily depends on the type of mental impulses within us. If we are mentally habituated to strong compassion and love towards others, then naturally we will benefit others, unconditionally and joyfully, to the best of our ability and in whatever way we can in order to provide them with happiness or to eradicate their problems. However, if our mind lacks habituation with compassion and love towards others, then, even if there is a need to benefit others and we have the capacity and resources, we won't reach out to them.

What we are trying to say here is that, when we talk about developing love and compassion and benefitting other beings through actual deeds, we will find it very hard in the

beginning. However, if we keep engaging in meditation practice, and familiarise ourselves step by step with it by making a consistent effort, we will eventually generate and develop true love and compassion for other beings; and then acts of altruism will come about naturally.

Love and compassion doesn't mean observing the suffering of others with our own eyes. Rather, we need to feel it in our heart and reach out to them in our actions; relieving them from suffering and providing them with happiness. As mentioned before, what is important is to diligently train our mind and actions by making gradual, step-by-step progress with our practice. For example, initially we train our love through giving small objects that others are in need of and relieve them from small problems. or help them in some small way.

You have studied the practice of giving quite extensively, so it is very important that you put your knowledge into practice by cultivating and habituating your mind with the thought of giving, and trying to be generous to those in need according to your capacity and resources. Essentially, we should know that the benefit of cultivating love and compassion for ourselves and others and for society, is unbelievable in terms of enhancing peace, happiness and harmony. We can also say that all the problems and harm that people cause each other is because of the lack of care and compassion.

According to Lama Tsongkhapa, benefitting others is only possible if there is the loving kindness of wishing others to have happiness, and the compassion of wishing them to be free of suffering. Recently there was shocking coverage on TV news about the abuse of aged residents and patients by nurses and care workers. You would have seen it. When I saw it, I couldn't imagine how people could do such harmful things to those who are frail and most in need of support. These workers were paid by the government to take good care of these people. I was quite disturbed to see such inhumane treatment where the patients were being beaten or having food shoved aggressively into their mouth etc. This is a clear sign of the decadence of society and is very sad. Now again, if you look into the cause of why people do such very mean and harmful things to others, it is because of the decline of loving kindness and compassion within them.

We are up to the division of wisdom which has many parts.

(c') The divisions of wisdom

The presentation of wisdom has three parts:

1. Wisdom that knows the ultimate
2. Wisdom that knows the conventional
3. Wisdom that knows how to act for the welfare of living beings

The first two are part of the basic structure of the whole Buddhist teaching in terms of the two bases, the two paths and the two fruits. The first two wisdoms refer to the two bases, which relates to the two truths – ultimate truth and conventional truth. The two paths refer to skilful method and wisdom. Finally, the two fruits are the rupakaya or form body and dharmakaya or wisdom truth body of a fully enlightened being.

(1') Wisdom that knows the ultimate

Wisdom that knows the ultimate cognizes the reality of selflessness, either by means of a concept or in a direct manner.

This talks about the wisdom that realises ultimate truth. There are two types: one realises emptiness conceptually through the medium of a mental image, and the other cognises ultimate truth directly.

The wisdom of ultimate truth which is within the continuum of an ordinary being cognises it conceptually or through the medium of a mental image, whereas the wisdom of ultimate truth which is within the continuum of a superior or arya being is the direct wisdom of ultimate truth.

(2') Wisdom that knows the conventional

Wisdom that knows the conventional is wisdom that is proficient at the five topics of knowledge. The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* says:

Without making effort at the five topics of knowledge,
Even supreme noble beings do not reach omniscience.
So they must strive for these so as to refute others,
To care for others, and to know everything.

We have covered the five types of knowledge in previous teachings. They are:

The topics are distinguished by the different sorts of purposes for pursuing them. To refute those who do not believe in the teaching, you pursue knowledge of grammar and logic.

The first two sciences are grammar or sound and logic. Beside the purpose mentioned here, the specific benefit of becoming very proficient in the sciences of sound or grammar and logic is that one will never be confused about the meaning of words, which helps with understanding the meaning of sounds and words.

The text continues:

To help those who do believe, you pursue knowledge of the arts and medicine.

Next are the two kinds of knowledge:

To achieve knowledge of all for yourself, you pursue Buddhist knowledge.

The fifth is the sign of knowledge concerning Buddhist philosophy and spirituality. As the text says:

But to attain buddhahood, there are no such distinctions between them; you must pursue all the topics of knowledge.

(3') Wisdom that knows how to act for the welfare of living beings

Wisdom that knows how to act for the welfare of living beings knows the way to accomplish blamelessly the welfare of beings in their present and future lives.

This talks about the wisdom of accomplishing the welfare of other beings by benefiting them in this and future lives, in such a way that you don't cause them to create any non-virtues or negative actions along the way.

(d') How to practice

When you develop the three types of wisdom, you do so in association with the six supremacies and all six perfections. The generosity of wisdom is establishing others in wisdom after you have stabilized yourself in it. The remaining perfections are as presented before.

Next is the summary.

(e') A summary

Even if you have the wisdom that perceives emptiness, it does not become a bodhisattva deed without the spirit of

enlightenment, so steadily increase the spirit of enlightenment—the basis of the bodhisattva deeds.

Here the text emphasises that the wisdom of emptiness needs to be supported or complemented by bodhicitta. As it says, *even if you have the wisdom that perceives emptiness, it does not become a bodhisattva deed*. Whether or not your deeds will become bodhisattva deeds depends on the bodhicitta mind. This is very true, because if we consider the practices of shravakas (or hearers) and pratyekabuddhas (or solitary realisers), they have also gained the direct realisation of emptiness and engage in the practices of generosity, moral ethics and so forth. However, because they lack bodhicitta, their deeds are not bodhisattva deeds.

Therefore, as the text says, *steadily increase the spirit of enlightenment which is the basis of the bodhisattva deeds*. As mentioned at the beginning of this talk, when we consider our own practice of bodhicitta, then what we have at the moment is the seed of the bodhicitta mind which we have acquired through gaining some understanding about bodhicitta and trying to cultivate it. What is now required is to really focus on and understand how important it is to nurture that seed of bodhicitta within us. By infusing our mind with bodhicitta or the knowledge seed of it, then whatever practices or actions we do will resemble the bodhisattva deeds. Then it says:

Next, aspire to the wisdom of those at high levels and then train your mind in it.

There are spiritual realisations or wisdom which we have not yet gained, or which are too advanced or high for us at the moment. However, we can practise and train ourselves in them by way of mentally wishing and aspiring for them.

From this moment you must strive to produce the three types of wisdom—the method for completing the peerless, great collection of sublime wisdom—and you must study.

This is emphasising how important this wisdom is.

For, if you do not do this, you contradict the principal precept and will then be destroyed by faults and infractions; in future lives as well you will not take pleasure in broad learning.

That is to say, if you do not focus on cultivating and developing this wisdom then there is the danger of transgressing or breaking your spiritual precepts. This might happen, because one of the doors of downfall is the lack of knowledge. We need to be aware of the shortcomings of not cultivating or not gaining wisdom, which include committing infractions.

Consequently, you will be unable to learn the bodhisattva trainings.

This talks about the shortcomings of not gaining wisdom in this life and in future lives.

Whereas, if in this life you strive at the methods of developing wisdom, you prevent the infraction of not training in the six perfections as promised; then in other lives as well, as the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* says, you will easily be able to complete the perfection of wisdom.

We also need to reflect on the benefit of cultivating wisdom.

Nowadays, from among the six perfections—the center post of both the sutra and tantra paths— ...

Here we can clearly see the significance of the six perfections on our spiritual path, in both sutra and tantra. As it says, *the six perfections are the centre post of both sutra and tantra paths*.

... there exist in slight measure the stages of the practice of meditative stabilization, but the stages of the practice of the other five perfections have disappeared.

As it says here, there is a decline in terms of the explanation of the stages of the practice of the other five perfections. However, in relation to the perfection of meditative stabilisation, as said here, *there exist in slight measure the stages of the practice of meditative stabilisation*.

Therefore, I have explained the key points of their practice in abbreviated form and a little of the method for generating certain knowledge of them. Below, I will teach at length two topics that come from the classic texts: the stages of how to practice insight-wisdom that observes the real nature and the diversity of phenomena-and the stages of the practice of meditative serenity, which is meditative stabilization.

All bodhisattvas who will attain buddhahood do so in reliance upon the six perfections. The *Bodhisattva Levels* says this emphatically at the conclusion of its discussions of each of the six perfections. Hence, these six perfections are to be known as the one path traveled by bodhisattvas of the past, present, and future. And because these six are the great ocean of all virtues, they are the perfect summary of the key points of practice. The *Bodhisattva Levels* states:

Bodhisattvas who attain unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment by these six perfections are called a great river, a great ocean of virtues; generosity and so forth are the most precious causes of all excellent things for all living beings.

Accordingly, there is nothing comparable to the perfections' immeasurable completion of the collections of merit and sublime wisdom and their fruit of unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment.

This is pointing out how the six perfections include practices necessary for accumulating merit and wisdom. Of the six, the first four are primarily for the collection of merit, and last two are for the collection of sublime wisdom.

However, the perfection of concentration can be categorised either way. Sometimes it is included on the method side or for the accumulation of merit, but sometimes it is included on the wisdom side or as a means of accumulating wisdom.

Then the text says, *the collection of merit and sublime wisdom and their fruit of unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment*. Here, 'their fruit' is the fruit of the six perfections, which encompasses all the collections of merit and wisdom. The result is unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment which resembles or perfectly accords with its cause, the six perfections.

Now we move onto the next chapter.

HELPING OTHERS TO MATURE: THE FOUR WAYS TO GATHER DISCIPLES

The six perfections are primarily the method for ripening or maturing one's own continuum, whereas the four ways of gathering disciples are for ripening the continuum of other beings. Having said that, when we look into the six perfections, we can say that the four ways are also included in the six perfections, the first of which – generosity – is the first of the four ways to gather disciples; pleasant speech is also included within the perfection of giving. The next two ways of gathering can be included in the perfection of moral ethics. Nevertheless, the four ways to gather disciples have the very specific purpose of ripening the continuum of other beings so that they follow the virtuous path.

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This explains how the fourth way of gathering disciples is consistent with the purpose, which is to put into practice what you teach to others. My intention in reading this text is so that you will also read and reflect on its meaning, to understand how what Lama Tsongkhapa instructs here is directly related to you. You will *either engage in it anew*, or if it's something that you've already heard or are already practising, then this helps to stabilise and give you more confidence in your practice.

The text then summarises this section:

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* says:

Know the ways to gather disciples to be four:
A method to give benefit, involving others in
Comprehending the teachings, involving them in
Engaging, and likewise involving yourself.

(iii) Their functions

This explains the function of each of the four means of gathering disciples. The text begins with a question.

Question: What do these four ways to gather disciples do for the disciples?

Reply: Generosity makes them fit vessels to hear the teaching, for it makes them happy with the person who explains it.

This clearly indicates how the practice of generosity is particularly effective in bringing people closer to you or winning their hearts and minds.

Pleasant speech makes them take interest in the teaching that is to be given, because it gives them a detailed understanding of the aims and dispels their doubts. Working at the aims makes them practice in accord with what they have been taught. Consistency of behavior makes those who have engaged in the teachings not reject them but practice for a long time.

Then there's a summary of the function of each of the four:

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* says:

By the first they become vessels;
By the second they take interest;
By the third they practice;
By the fourth they train.

(iv) The need for those who gather a following to rely on them

Because the buddhas have declared these four ways to gather disciples to be what achieves all the aims of all disciples and to be the superb method, those gathering a following must rely on them. The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

Those involved in gathering a following
Rely on this means;
It is praised as the superb method,
Achieving all aims for all.

This part of the text is repeating what the Buddha said.

(v) A somewhat elaborate explanation

There are two types of pleasant speech. The first, pleasant speech associated with worldly customs, means that you first assume a clear expression free of anger, give a smile, and then please living beings in worldly ways, such as inquiring after their health, etc.

Here the text indicates the benefits of observing the worldly customs of good manners as part of practising pleasant speech – showing a pleasant expression when meeting people, such as smiling and making friendly and welcoming

conversation. The worldly custom of asking people, 'How are you?' and things like that accord with the practice of pleasant speech that we need to put into practice.

The text continues:

The second type, pleasant speech associated with presenting the perfect teaching, means that you instruct living beings in the teaching for their benefit and happiness, beginning with teachings on developing faith, ethical discipline, study, generosity, and wisdom.

In these lines *for their benefit and happiness* indicates that our motivation for giving teachings is to benefit others with happiness; it should not be stained by any wrong thoughts such as wanting to become famous and so forth. Then the teachings that you give to others should help them to develop faith in the Three Jewels, and apply ethical practices (such as the ten virtues), learn about the three baskets of teaching, and develop the discriminating wisdom of knowing right from wrong, and so forth.

For those of you who give introductory teachings on Monday nights, I advise that before the teaching night, you might spend an hour considering the kind of motivation you will have in teaching the Dharma to others and reflecting on what you're going to teach. You will find going through this kind of rehearsal very beneficial.

The text continues with this advice:

The avenues of pleasant speech are as follows. To an enemy who would kill you, you say helpful words without a fault in your heart. With the very dull-witted, you willingly rise to the challenge, tirelessly giving talks on the teaching and causing them to adhere to virtue.

It says here that we should be very patient in giving teachings, especially to those who are very slow in learning. We should not undermine them or give up teaching them because you find that they're too slow, or that they never learn anything. Rather you should *tirelessly give talks on the teaching thus causing them to adhere to virtue*.

Next the text says:

To devious beings who deceive their masters, abbots, etc., and engage in wrongdoing, you speak pleasantly with helpful words and without anger, teaching even the most difficult persons. In order that persons whose minds have not matured may eliminate obscurity and be reborn in happy realms, you give discourses to them on preliminary practices-generosity and ethical discipline.

This refers to those whose inner continuum is not fully ripened. You teach them the preliminary practices such as generosity and ethical discipline in order to help them to find a good rebirth.

To persons whose minds have matured, who are rid of obscurity and possessed of a joyful frame of mind, you reveal the foremost and perfect teaching of the four noble truths. You encourage householders and renunciates who are careless to be conscientious, and to those who have doubts you speak elaborately and explain the teaching to them to dispel their doubts. Working at the aims is twofold: bringing the immature to maturity and liberating the matured. It is also presented in three parts as follows. (1) *Involving persons in taking up the aims of this life* is causing them to employ means consistent with the teaching to acquire, to protect, and to increase their resources.

The point being made here is that you teach others according to their interest, mental capacity and predisposition. Even helping others to gather material goods

or protect their wealth rightfully, and not through stealing and so forth is not necessarily on contrary to the way of the Dharma. Secondly:

(2) *Involving persons in taking up the purpose of future lives* means to establish persons in the life of a renunciate who lives as a mendicant after they have rid themselves of possessions. Although this is certain to bring happiness in future lives, it is not certain to do so in this life.

Here, the text mentions the benefit of living a life of a *mendicant* – an ascetic practitioner who owns little and is attached to nothing and who lives a very contented and free life. As a renunciate we are supposed to live like an ascetic, carrying a begging bowl for receiving food from others. You'll find the details about how a renunciate should live in the *Vajra Cutter Sutra*.

In my younger days I used to dream about spending the rest of my life as a mendicant. Even though mendicants hardly own anything, and never settle in one place I was quite attracted to living as a wandering practitioner which I thought was a very contented and peaceful life. However, my life didn't end up like that.

In fact, these days renunciates enjoy a life of comfort in terms of abundant food, and the luxury of a place to live, and so forth.

Thirdly:

(3) *Involving persons in taking up the aims of both this and future lives* means to cause householders and renunciates to take up freedom from mundane and supramundane attachment, for this generates mental and physical pliancy in the present life, ...

This shows us that even though renunciates (and others too) do not own anything externally, the way they live is very suitable for generating mental and physical pliancy.

... and the attainment of a purified deity and nirvana in the future.

Work at the aims even when it is very difficult. It is difficult to induce those who have not previously accumulated roots of virtue to take up virtue.

It is difficult to encourage those who have not accumulated the roots of virtue to put the teaching into practice.

It is difficult to work at the aims with respect to those who have magnificent resources² because they live in a situation where there are so many grounds for being unconscientious.

The text is saying that those who are materially rich and obsessed with wealth are filled with so many distracting thoughts that it's very difficult to get them to put the teaching into practice.

And it is difficult to work at the aims with respect to those who are indoctrinated with the views of non-Buddhist philosophers because they are hostile to the teaching and, because of their foolishness, do not understand reasoning.

With respect to the stages of working at the aims, you first cause those with childlike intelligence to follow easy personal instructions. Then, when their understanding has reached a middling level, you have them follow intermediate personal instructions. Finally, when their wisdom has greatly expanded, you have them follow the profound teaching and subtle personal instructions.

This clearly indicates the importance of teaching others according to their mental capacity. If their mental capacity is

very small, then you teach to suit that mental capacity, just as you teach to suit those of the middling capacity and those of great capacity. After explaining the importance of giving instructions according to the mental capacity of the listeners, the text continues:

Consistency of behavior means that you maintain practices equal to or superior to those in which you establish others.

This refers to the fourth means of gathering disciples which is to behave in a manner consistent with your purpose. In other words, you should practise what you teach to others. Your practice should be either equal to those you teach, or, as it says in the text, superior to them.

The text continues:

Accordingly, even though in whatever you do you must first focus on the welfare of living beings and not lose your resolve for others' welfare, you must discipline yourself in conjunction with these pursuits.

This is saying that your intention should always be to benefit others, helping them to subdue their continuums. It is important that this is always your motivation for giving teachings to others. And, of course, you should be practising the teaching yourself.

Lama Tsongkhapa always emphasises that without subduing your own mind, there's no way that you can help others to subdue their continuum. Therefore, you must first subdue your own mind. So, it makes a sense that you must put what you teach to others into practise before you teach it to others.

... in conjunction with these pursuits. Triratnadasa's *Praise of Infinite Qualities* says:

Some who are undisciplined use reasonable words, but
Contradict these words, so they are called "unable to help
others to discipline themselves."

Knowing this, you placed all living beings in your heart,
And strove to discipline yourself wherever you had
lacked discipline before.

The four ways to gather disciples also comprise two categories: gathering disciples via material things and gathering disciples through the teaching. Giving material things is the first of the four ways to gather disciples. The remaining three of the four ways are included in the second, gathering disciples through the teaching.

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² Meaning an abundance of wealth and possessions.

The Six Perfections

འཇུག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

19 November 2019

We will begin with the usual meditation.

[*Tonglen Meditation*]

Next, we will recite the prayer, *Praise to Dependent Arising*.

Today marks the Buddhist festival called Descending from Heaven. A week after giving birth to the Lord Buddha, his mother passed away and took rebirth in one of the lands of gods. So, some time after he achieved enlightenment, as a way to repay the kindness of his mother, the Buddha went to the land of the gods to teach the Dharma to his mother and the gods there. Accordingly, the Buddha taught the Dharma and today is the day that marks his descent from heaven to Earth. There is also a sutra called *Meeting of the Father and Son Sutra*, which records the Buddha's deeds to repay his father.

As we recite this *Praise to Dependent Arising* we should fervently pray, 'May we never be parted from the holy teaching, or from the Buddha.' Right now, we are so blessed and fortunate that we have met with the Buddha's teaching, and also had contact with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who we can say truly represents the Lord Buddha. Thus, meeting His Holiness the Dalai Lama is like meeting the Lord Buddha himself.

His Holiness is a bodhisattva and a bodhisattva is also regarded as a son of a buddha. Just as the son of a king is the heir to the king, a bodhisattva is one of the Buddha's heirs. Hence, we have a wonderful opportunity to accumulate great benefit in this life. We should also make a strong and fervent prayer that we never be separated from the Buddha and his noble teaching, and that we never stray from the Dharma path.

The most important thing for us is that we always have contact with the Buddha's teachings in the future. Some students have expressed their concern about whether or not they will meet me in future. I said to them that meeting me is not important; what is important is that they meet the Buddha's Dharma. I also said, 'Keep praying. You never know, we may meet again in a future life.' Caryn Clarke once said to me that she was not really frightened about death, but what really concerned her was whether she would meet me again in the future. Hearing from her that she was not frightened about death was, I thought, not only a confident statement, but also very much showed the sign of a good practitioner. I was quite impressed when she said that.

Indeed, when you think of death, it passes very quickly; the duration of death is just a matter of breathing out and then not breathing in. So, we should be more worried about what happens after death. Death is not the end of our life; rather we then go onto the next destination. But

we have no control over where we go. This is something we need to think about now, in order to ensure that we go to where we would like to go.

Some religions, like Christianity, accept the fact that our body ends with death. However, they believe in something they call 'the soul', which goes to the next life. Depending on how you live your life, it either goes to heaven or to hell. So even Christians talk about a future life. Compared to Buddhism, their explanation of a future destination is quite simple.

We will start the prayer now.

[*Recitation of Praise to Dependent Arising*]

Try to cultivate the proper motivation as we continue with the teaching.

(b) Training in the four ways to gather disciples that help others to mature

(iv) A somewhat elaborate explanation (cont.)

We will continue with the text:

Moreover, these four ways to gather disciples are the way all the bodhisattvas of the three times work for the welfare of others, so it is the single path to travel.

This is quite self-explanatory, and is, of course, referring to the four means of gathering followers. *Moreover, these four ways to gather disciples are the way all the bodhisattvas of the three times work for the welfare of others* refers to what is practised by all the bodhisattvas of the three times – past, present and future. Therefore, *it is a single path to travel*.

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

All those who have gathered disciples,
Are gathering, or will gather them
Do so in this way; therefore, this is the path
For the maturation of living beings.

This passage from the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* summarises the way bodhisattvas help the maturation of the continuum of all other living beings through these four means of gathering the followers. With regard to gathering beings, those beings who need to be matured include those who have gathered disciples. This includes all those who the bodhisattvas have already gathered or attracted, and those who the bodhisattvas are presently gathering or will gather in the future. It directs us to *do so in this way*.

We have previously discussed what the four means of gathering are – generosity, pleasant speech, practising the purpose and accordance or conforming with the purpose. It is through these four skilful means of gathering that the bodhisattvas benefit other beings in terms of maturing or ripening their continuum with virtue.

Then the text continues:

In general, then, though the bodhisattva deeds are limitless, the six perfections and the four ways to gather disciples are their best summation.

This is saying that even though the deeds of the bodhisattvas are very vast, if we have to condense them then the best way to do that is to divide them into two, which are, as it says, *the six perfections and the four ways to gather disciples*. These two sets of practices of the

bodhisattvas' deeds condense all of the vast deeds of bodhisattvas.

The text continues:

For, bodhisattvas have just two tasks, the maturation of causal collections for their own buddhahood and the maturation of the mind-streams of living beings; they accomplish both of these through the perfections and the ways to gather disciples.

This explains the reason we can condense all of the bodhisattvas' deeds into the deeds of the six perfections and the four ways of gathering. It says here that the bodhisattvas' deeds have two purposes: the purpose for self or for themselves and the purpose aimed at benefitting others. Then the text shows here how these two purposes are accomplished. For instance, the six perfections primarily accomplish the bodhisattvas' purpose for themselves and the four means of gathering accomplish the purpose of achieving the welfare of other beings or benefitting others.

Thus the *Bodhisattva Levels* also says:

The perfections bring to complete maturation the buddha qualities you will have yourself. The ways to gather disciples bring all living beings to complete maturation. In sum, know these to be the active expression of a bodhisattva's virtuous qualities.

This passage from the *Bodhisattva Levels* summarises what has already been explained, showing how the bodhisattvas' purpose is to achieve their ultimate goal of complete enlightenment, which they are able to achieve through the six perfections; while the bodhisattva deeds for fulfilling the purposes of other beings is to show them how to achieve their own enlightenment. Again, the bodhisattvas are able to fulfil that through these four means of gathering. Through that, they are able to mature or ripen other beings so that they are able to reach complete enlightenment.

The text continues:

Therefore, I have set forth in this section these two categories of practice. If you want to know them in more detail, look in the *Bodhisattva Levels*.

With respect to the way these practices are done during and after meditative equipoise, the Great Elder says:

The deeds of bodhisattvas are
The magnificent six perfections and so forth.
The yogi arisen from meditative equipoise
Resolutely accomplishes the path of accumulation.

The text continues:

Beginning bodhisattvas who have taken the vows of the conquerors' children and are on the path of accumulation practice only the six perfections, whether in meditative equipoise or subsequent to it. They sustain some of the perfections in meditative equipoise and others in the post-equipose state. Some aspects of meditative serenity (which is meditative stabilization) and some aspects of insight (which is the perfection of wisdom) are cultivated in meditative equipoise, whereas some other aspects of meditative stabilization and wisdom are sustained in the post-equipose state, along with the first three perfections.

The first three perfections are the perfections of generosity, moral ethics and patience.

Joyous perseverance occurs in both the meditative equipoise and post-equipose states, while one type of patience—certain aspects of the patience of certitude about the profound teachings—also occurs in meditative equipoise.

Essentially, if we think of the bodhisattvas' deeds in terms of timeframes there is the time of meditative equipoise and there is the post-meditation period. The text talks about where the six perfections are emphasised relative to these timeframes. We note here that in the post-meditation period there is an emphasis on engaging in the deeds of the first three perfections, which are generosity, moral ethics and patience. You can clearly see the reason: it is vitally important for bodhisattvas to accumulate a great amount of merit, which they do mainly through practising giving and ethics and so forth. Whereas the last two perfections of concentration and wisdom are primarily practised in a deep meditative state, that is, during the meditation period. However, as it clearly says here, some aspects of both concentration and wisdom must also be practised and applied even in the post-meditation period.

We can also see how both concentration and wisdom are important in whatever practices we do. If we practise generosity or we engage in simple single-pointed meditation, it is very important to depend on concentration and especially the wisdom-knowledge that is essential for all practices. In fact, without wisdom-knowledge, it is very difficult to make any progress in terms of cultivating and developing virtues.

Then the text continues:

The Great Elder says:

During periods after rising from meditative equipoise¹,
Cultivate the view that all things
Are like a magician's illusions, as in the eight similes.
Thereby emphasize in post-meditative thought
Purification and the training in method.
During periods of meditative equipoise
Continually condition yourself to
Serenity and insight in equal measure.

If we look into the meaning of the passage by the Great Elder, there are two stanzas, which give us some instructions on what we should do when we are in deep meditative equipoise on emptiness. Then it talks about what practice we should do when we arise from that meditative equipoise and engage in various deeds subsequent to that meditative equipoise.

It says, *during periods after arising from meditative equipoise cultivate the view that all things are like a magician's illusion, as in the eight similes, thereby emphasize in post-meditative thought*. That shows how, when we arise from deep meditative equipoise and engage in the world and move into the post-meditational period of engaging in diverse activities, our mind becomes engaged with various objects. It is saying here that these objects may appear to our mind as if they all exist truly or inherently from their own side.

Therefore, *cultivate the view that all things are like a magician's illusion*, which is to say, even though things

¹ This refers to arising from the deep meditative equipoise that is penetrating emptiness.

appear to our mind as truly existing, they don't exist that way in reality; hence we should see them like a magician's illusion. It also says *as in the eight similes* which indicates that there are other similes which can also be used to understand how things appear during the post-meditation period. So, even though things appear as truly existent, this appearance doesn't accord with the way things exist in reality.

The text also says, *thereby emphasise in post-meditative thought purification and the training in method*. Here 'purification' means getting rid of grasping at things in the way they appear to our mind in that post-meditation period, i.e. appearing to have true existence. It is saying here that we need to engage in *purification* to stop grasping at this inherently existent self, even though things appear in that way to our mind.

The text then talks about *training in the method*. It clearly shows here that in the post-meditative period, our primary focus is on enhancing the method aspects of the practice. Then *during the period of meditative equipoise continually condition yourself to serenity and insight in equal measure*. Other common terms we use are 'calm abiding' and 'special insight'. The necessity for, and importance of the union or combination of both calm abiding and special insight is as you will find in many other texts.

We can see here how Lama Tsongkhapa has given us a very detailed explanation of what we should do, guiding us in terms of when we go into deep meditation, as well as when we come out of that meditation and engage in post-meditation activities. The explanation indicates that this is not something he made up himself. He used authentic sources – the early Buddhist classic texts of the great masters – to elaborate on the subject matter.

This has been an explanation of the practices of bodhisattvas. Many of you have learned about the view of emptiness, and even if you don't fully understand the whole idea, at least, every now and then, you should try to apply this in your practice. When we perceive various things, they give our mind the notion of true or inherent existence. They appear to our mind like that, so at least try to see that they don't reflect the ultimate mode of existence, that this is not the way things exist, and that things do not exist objectively in that way. The text is saying that it will be very beneficial if you try to stop grasping, or at least try to decrease the force of your grasping at things as being truly existent. Then, even if we don't gain the realisation of emptiness right now, any meditation on emptiness that we do now will leave a good impression in our mind, which will help us to easily and quickly gain the true realisation of the wisdom of emptiness in the future.

The text emphasises that we have to apply what is instructed here. When we engage in the meditation on emptiness, we need to utilise all our knowledge of emptiness. To understand how things lack inherent existence, we maintain our focus on the emptiness of things. At the same time, it emphasises here that when we arise from our meditation practice things may appear to our mind as having inherent existence, and it is important to recognise and understand that this is not the

ultimate mode of existence; that this is not the way they actually exist.

In this way we will find benefit in the post-meditation period, in terms of effectively counteracting mental delusions and preventing them from arising. And if any delusions do arise, the meditation on emptiness has the benefit of weakening the force of that delusion. In this way we can really taste the benefit of meditating on emptiness while we are sitting in meditation, as well as in our everyday life.

Sometimes, when we sit in meditation we find ourselves feeling very peaceful and calm. But after we finish the meditation we completely forget all about our practice and easily lose our self-control and lose our temper. So there is a tremendous benefit from this meditation on emptiness. As we read in the *Praise to Dependent Arising, For you, emptiness seen as dependent arising does not render as contradictory emptiness of self-nature and ability to function*. Even though everything lacks inherent or true existence, all the nominal functioning of things becomes tenable. It also refers to *the wondrous teachers, wondrous refuge, wondrous speakers, wondrous saviours*. Here Tsongkhapa praises the way the Buddha taught this profound view, showing the ultimate mode of existence, while at the same time, making sense of things conventionally.

Now we continue with the text:

When bodhisattvas whose minds are untrained in such marvelous but difficult deeds hear of them, they feel distressed. Although they are unable to practice such things at first, they come to understand them and then to intimately familiarize themselves with them as objects of aspiration. Later they engage in them spontaneously without any strain. Thus, familiarization is of the greatest importance, for if these bodhisattvas recognized their inability to actually engage in such deeds and then gave up on even the familiarization conducive to training the mind in them, they would greatly delay reaching the pure path.

This shows the importance of progressing stage-by-stage. Initially one engages in practice that is conducive and in accord with one's own level and mental capacity. Then, as one continues this practice and habituates oneself with it, the practice which was initially very hard becomes very natural and very easy. The bottom line here is that it is important to engage in practice and not to lose heart by saying, 'It's too hard'. One must practise even if it is hard. At the very least, practise in accordance with your capability – practise something that you can do.

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The Six Perfections

འབྲུག་གི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

26 November 2019

We will begin with our usual meditation.

[Meditation]

As usual we now cultivate the bodhicitta mind.

Last Sunday, we did a course on cultivating bodhicitta through the method of exchanging self with others. So, those of you who did the course should apply this method to give rise to bodhicitta.

At the course I forgot to mention the meaning of 'exchanging' in the context of applying the method of exchanging the self with others. But you should be able to find out about it by yourselves.

With the 'giving and taking' meditation we are habituating our mind with the thought of giving and taking. For example, with regard to giving, we imagine giving our body, possession and virtues to other sentient beings.

Of course, we should not leave the meditation of giving simply at the thought of giving. We must try to translate this thought into deeds of giving of our body, possessions and virtues, and in this way we engage in benefitting other beings. Having said that, we should not give any objects that we are not ready to give away, such as our body. Great bodhisattvas can give their bodies if they see it as being beneficial for others. We, however, should engage in the practice of giving as best as we can according to our own capacity, and not give anything that we should not be giving.

As part of giving, we must avoid holding any harmful thoughts towards others and committing harmful deeds, otherwise we defeat the purpose of giving, which is to benefit others. So, our main practice is to benefit others as much and as best as possible. This is indeed the essential element of our Dharma practice, and it is grounded on feeling love, compassion and a sense of endearment towards others, as well as a recognition of their kindness for us.

Therefore, we need to train and habituate our mind to feel close to others, and to cherish them with a loving mental attitude. When we see other sentient beings, we should think that they are our mothers and, as such, are incredibly kind and affectionate to us like a mother loves her only son. We should also think that by depending on them, we can accumulate all the virtues to achieve the perfect state of buddhahood. Therefore, we should think that these sentient beings are truly a field of spiritual merit as they provide us with an opportunity to accumulate merit. Having recognised them as a field of merit, we see them with the eyes of a loving mind and with deep regard and respect. Viewing sentient beings in such a loving and very respectful way over and over again is a true cause to please and delight all the buddhas.

Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* says,

(Pleasing living beings) delights the Tathagatas
And perfectly accomplishes my own purpose as well.

In addition, it dispels the pain and misery of the universe,

Therefore I should always practise it.

In Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* we also find advice on how to speak with other sentient beings. It says,

When talking I should speak from my heart and on what is relevant.

Making the meaning, clear and the speech pleasing.

I should not speak out of desire or hatred

But in gentle tones and in moderation.

When we see other sentient beings, we should acknowledge their kindness because we depend on them to achieve the state of buddhahood. Shantideva goes so far as to say that we pay homage to the Buddha because we see the Buddha as a cause to achieve the state of buddhahood, the state of enlightenment. In the same way, when we practise generosity, moral ethics and so forth, we are really depending on others to be able to practise the six perfections that serve as a cause for us to achieve enlightenment. As Shantideva states:

There is no doubt that those with the nature of compassion

Regard all these beings (to be the same) as themselves.

Furthermore, those who see (this Buddha-nature) as the nature of sentient beings see the Buddha themselves;

Why then do I not respect (sentient beings)?

If merely a benevolent intention

Excels veneration of the buddhas

Then what need is there to mention striving to make

All beings, without exception, happy.

Shantideva reminds us that when we look at other sentient beings, we should recognise their kindness in giving us the opportunity to be able to achieve enlightenment. Therefore, we should view them with love, and a deep sense of respect.

When beholding someone with my eyes,

Thinking 'I shall fully awaken

Through depending on this being'

I should look at that person with love and an open heart.

You should memorise these verses, include them in your daily practice and reflect on their meaning.

One of the students who did the Sunday course gave very positive feedback about the group discussion, saying it was very helpful for their practice, and that at the discussion people were speaking from their heart and sharing their knowledge based on their personal experience. I was pleased to hear that.

This verse from the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* shows how to counteract anger and your reaction to a person who annoys you.

Thus, since patient acceptance is produced

In dependence upon a hateful mind,

That person should be worthy of veneration just like the sacred Dharma

Because he is a cause of patience.

If you can recollect that verse, say it to yourself and reflect on it, you will find it very effective in preventing anger.

(b) Training in the four ways to gather disciples that help others to mature

(iv) A somewhat elaborate explanation (cont.)

We now return to the text. In the previous teaching, we stopped at this paragraph:

When bodhisattvas whose minds are untrained in such marvelous but difficult deeds hear of them, they feel distressed. Although they are unable to practice such things at first, they come to understand them and then to intimately familiarize themselves with them as objects of aspiration. Later they engage in them spontaneously without any strain. Thus, familiarization is of the greatest importance, for if these bodhisattvas recognized their inability to actually engage in such deeds and then gave up on even the familiarization conducive to training the mind in them, they would greatly delay reaching the pure path.

Then the text gives this quote:

The Praise of Infinite Qualities says:

Deeds that hurt the worldly even to hear about
And that even you did not undertake for a long time
You accustomed yourself to, so in time they became
spontaneous.
Thus, it is difficult to develop good qualities without
familiarization

In this verse from the *Praise of Infinite Qualities*, we find the advice that if we become familiar with something then it will arise spontaneously. However, we must make an effort if we are to achieve that force of familiarity. If we stop making any effort by thinking it is too hard because of our lack of familiarity, then we will never become familiar with it. As the text says, *Deeds that hurt the worldly even to hear about and that even you didn't undertake for a long time, you accustomed yourself to, so in time they become spontaneous*. In worldly terms, some actions might initially be very hard to do, but if you make a strenuous consistent effort to accomplish those actions then eventually they will become easy. Then, as *you accustom yourself* to those actions, *in time they become spontaneous*.

When the Buddha was on the path of learning, he had to engage in many practices, and even he had to initially put a great deal of effort into possessing excellent qualities and getting rid of any faults. So, excellent qualities don't arise easily and require a great deal of effort to attain. Then, in the end, when you reach the state of enlightenment, all the excellent qualities arise spontaneously and effortlessly, and you are completely free of all the faults. So the text is advising us not to feel discouraged if we find our practice very hard and difficult. It is saying that through making a consistent effort we can definitely achieve our desired goal in terms of developing all the excellent qualities and eliminating all the faults. However, if we lose our courage and simply give up, then we won't achieve anything.

We would note that negative forces are very strong within us now while positive forces are very weak. So if we are to generate a positive state of mind or engage in a positive action we need to make a robust effort in our thoughts and deeds. Even if we are able to do something positive, we are unable to sustain it. So, with respect to the positive side we need to familiarise ourselves with positive states of mind over and over again, otherwise we can't achieve anything or, if we achieve something we will easily lose it.

On the other hand, negative forces are very strong within us. Therefore, negative thoughts arise very easily and engaging in negative deeds needs no effort on our part. We are already habituated with the negative side, and there is certainly no need to habituate ourselves with it further. For

example, we generate desirous attachment, hatred etc. and these negative emotions destroy our inner peace and joy and compel us to engage in destructive actions. We can observe how these negative emotions arise very easily without any effort – the slightest external condition is enough for them to arise.

Positive states of mind, however, such as the mind of non-attachment of not being attracted to sensual things, or the mind of non-hatred of not holding any hostile or ill feeling towards others are positive emotions, because they bring us peace and happiness. But these positive states of mind don't arise easily. Therefore, we need to make an effort to cultivate them and habituate ourselves with them over and over again in order to sustain these positive thoughts and deeds. Otherwise we can easily lose or forget about them.

The text continues:

Those who have taken the bodhisattva vows have no choice but to learn the bodhisattva deeds. But even those who have not adopted the engaged spirit of enlightenment through its ritual strive to inculcate a desire to learn the deeds, thus increasing the force of their enthusiasm for learning them. Then, when they take the vows, their vows will be extremely stable, so make an effort to do this.

From among the stages of the path for persons of great capacity, this concludes the explanation of the stages of the path for training in the aspirational spirit of enlightenment and for learning the deeds of the conquerors' children in general.

Even as ordinary beings, we can recognise how our experience of pain and pleasure primarily derives from our changing mental attitudes. You don't have to be particularly intelligent to see that. If we observe and examine our experiences, we can see that the reason we feel so much stress, anxiety and misery and bottle it up is mainly because of a certain pattern of thoughts. We can then understand that if we don't remedy these disturbing thoughts, then we will end up with serious mental illnesses and not be able to cope. At the same time, we can also understand that if we have a stable positive state of mind, we will have a stable experience of peace and happiness and a positive outlook on life regardless of external circumstances. Therefore, it is very important that we aim our meditation practice at bringing about a positive change within our mind in terms of extinguishing the negative states of mind and enhancing the positive states of mind. In this way, our meditation helps us to find more happiness and overcome suffering in our life.

Benefiting self and others through the six perfections

With the six perfections, we can accomplish both our own purpose and the purpose of other beings in terms of accomplishing all the excellences, such as an excellent life, excellent living conditions and excellent companions. These excellences are the cause of a happy, marvellous and fulfilling life.

We want to live a marvellous life, not only in this life but also in all future lifetimes. Hence, we need to ensure we keep continuously creating the causes and conditions for this, life after life. Engaging in the six perfection fulfils all our needs now and in the future.

Generosity brings an abundance of wealth and good conditions. We should acknowledge our past generosity for all the wealth and good resources we have now, and through it, whatever joy and support we receive. In the same way, to have the same good fortune of wealth and

resources in our future lives, we must remember to keep practising generosity in this life.

Realising that there's no point in possessing an abundance of wealth and good resources unless we have found an excellent form of life to enjoy it, we understand that we need to adhere to the practice of moral ethics which is the primary cause to find a good rebirth.

Then, we also want to be surrounded by excellent companions and the primary cause for that is the practice of patience. We know that as social beings, having other people as our friends or a close relationship with them is an important cause for wellbeing and happiness. Needless to say, if we want to benefit other beings, they have to come to us, connect with us and trust us. For example, bodhisattvas are able to benefit infinite numbers of beings because they have a skill to attract other beings.

Next, we need to rely on joyful effort to ensure that whatever tasks we undertake are fully completed. The perfections of concentration and discriminating wisdom are the main means to subdue our mind, protect it from the influence of mental afflictions and develop true knowledge.

As I frequently remark, if our mind is under the dominance of mental afflictions, then whatever we accomplish in our lives brings us no inner peace and satisfaction. So, we need to cultivate meditative concentration to stabilise and calm down mental afflictions and disturbing thoughts, and then uproot them through developing discriminating wisdom. Cultivating wisdom knowledge is also important in terms of overcoming confusion, and knowing what to accept and what to reject, and accordingly moving along with our lives.

The best way to make this special life meaningful is through benefitting other beings. So, first we need to win their friendship and trust. Therefore, it is said, the most effective practice of benefitting others is giving or generosity. However, there is no point of giving if we harm them or if we don't refrain from harming them through our thoughts and deeds. Hence, in addition to the practice of giving, we must also practise morality, which is refraining from any acts of harmfulness.

Even though we offer other beings benefits and support, they may not view it that way or appreciate us – they may even become angry with us and harm us. What do we need to do in this situation? We need to practise patience, particularly the patience of accepting hardship and harm from others.

The first three of the six perfections – giving, moral ethics and patience – are primarily the means to benefit other sentient beings.

Now, in terms of achieving our own purpose, we need to gain wisdom, because ultimately we wish to achieve the bliss of liberation, which depends on gaining the insight of wisdom.

To actualise this wisdom, we must have a state of mind which is completely calm and stabilised. What brings about such a state of calm-mind is single-pointed meditative concentration, which enables us to get rid of all the agitated states of mind and rest the mind on any given object effortlessly for as long as we wish to stay there. Therefore, meditative concentration and discriminating wisdom are the primary causes to achieve our own purpose.

In short, all the activities that are aimed at accomplishing our purpose and the purpose of others require continuous

effort, day in and day out from our side. Therefore, the practice of joyful effort is essential for accomplishing the purposes of both others and ourselves or, in other words, to fulfil the two aspirations to achieve our welfare and the welfare of others. We must understand that the practice of the six perfections is the main cause for achieving the state of buddhahood. In terms of the causal order, we first achieve our goal, which is the state of buddhahood, and after that we achieve the goal of other beings in the sense of benefitting them perfectly.

Next week we have a teaching break and you have a discussion on the four means of gathering disciples.

We will now recite Samantabhadra's prayer, the *King of Prayers*. This is to dedicate all the virtues we have accumulated in the past, that we are accumulating now or will accumulate in the future for the sake of the flourishing of the Buddha's teaching and for the benefit of all living beings.

Finally, we will recite the Twenty-one Tara Praises for Llysse's mother who is unwell.

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