

Homework Answers

Teaching: 30 October 2018

1. Why do we need the practice of generosity?

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.

2. 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'. What is the remedy to this and how does it work?

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.

3. a) What does the practice of patience imply?

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.

b) What does abandoning living beings mean?

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.

4. What is the method to increase virtues?

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.

5. 'We may ask the question, isn't the perfection of wisdom is enough to clear away or abandon all obscurations? If not, then what sort of obscuration does the perfection of meditative stabilisation clear away?' What is the answer to this query?

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 is 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.