
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 (Abhidharmakosa)* states that from giving charity with your own hands you get a vast amount of resources. The *Treasury of Knowledge Auto-commentary (Abhidharmakosa-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.

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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.

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