
The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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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.

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