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# The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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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.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering  
Edit 2 by Mary-Lou Considine  
Edited Version*

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