
The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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We shall begin with our usual Giving and Taking meditation.

[*tong-len meditation*]

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

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

(2) The motivation for giving

The motivation for giving has two sections:

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

(a') What kind of motivation is required

Your motivation should have three attributes:

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

Let me first read the three attributes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The text continues:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

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

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

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

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

The text continues:

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

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

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

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

The text continues:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The text continues.

Candrakirti says:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(b') What kind of motivation must be eliminated

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

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

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

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

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

The text continues:

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

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

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

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

The third attribute:

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

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

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

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

... you are filled with faith ...

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

and then have no regret after giving;

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

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

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

Then the fifth:

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

This is a literal translation. The text continues:

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

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

The sixth:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The text continues:

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

This is self-explanatory.

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

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

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

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

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

The text continues:

(3)) How to give

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

This section has two parts:

1. How not to give

The manner which is negative is to be eliminated.

2. How to give

A manner which is positive is to be adopted.

These points are self-explanatory.

(a')) How not to give

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

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

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

The text continues:

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

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

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