
The Six Perfections

ལྷན་ཁྲིམས་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབས་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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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]

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