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# The Six Perfections

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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.

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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-samgrahani), 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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Edited Version*

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