
The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We will begin with our usual meditation on giving and taking.

As a motivation for listening to the Dharma, we should try to overcome the self-centred mind, and in its place try to cultivate an altruistic state of mind, a thought of benefitting other sentient beings. It would be wonderful if we could cultivate this intention to benefit others as a motivation for listening to Dharma.

If all of us, and I include myself here, cultivate this thought of benefitting other sentient beings as our motivation, then whatever activity we undertake will serve as a cause for the Buddhadharma to flourish and benefit other sentient beings.

(b') How to begin the cultivation of ethical discipline (cont.)

Last time we stopped at this quotation from the *Compendium of the Perfections*:

Ethical discipline is the path of special attainment,
Achieves equality with those of compassionate nature,
And has the highest nature of pure sublime wisdom.
Free of flaws, it is called the best of ornaments.
It is a pleasant fragrance throughout the three realms,
And a lotion not prohibited for a renunciate.
Even those who copy appropriate attire, if they have
ethical discipline,
Will be superior to other human beings.

This summarises the benefits of observing moral ethics. If we gain a good understanding of these benefits, then we'll be more motivated and able to experience more delight and joy in practising moral ethics.

It's very important to reflect on the benefits of practising moral ethics, which include overcoming the fear of death, and the fear of taking a bad rebirth. We can be very sure that if we practise moral ethics well, then there will be absolutely no reason for us to fear death. Indeed, we may even be joyful when that moment of death approaches.

As you know, when we face death everything fails to support us and, as we say, our only protection and refuge lies within ourselves in the form of some sort of positive energy or force. This positive energy is nothing but the virtuous actions or spiritual practices we have accumulated throughout our lifetime, which includes the practice of morality. These positive actions remain in our mental continuum in the form of a positive force or energy, and at the end of our life, as I said before, that's the only thing that can serve as our true refuge and protection.

The last two lines of the quotation say *even those who copy appropriate attire, if they have ethical discipline, will be superior to other human beings*. This metaphorically shows how if there are two people, male or female, wearing exactly the same clothes, and one observes a very good moral practice and the other one doesn't, then the one who observes good moral ethics appears more beautiful than the other person.

We continue with the commentary:

Furthermore, other benefits arise from ethical discipline: although you do not speak flattering words and do not strive with great effort and hardship, you naturally gather immediately necessary resources;

This shows how a person who practises morality does not need to work hard to gather all the necessary resources, nor do they need to cheat, bribe or deceive others. An example of using flattering words to acquire resources, or receive the same gift from others again, is saying to them soothingly, 'Remember the thing that you gave to me last time, which I found extremely useful.' By practising morality, you will not need to work so hard, and you will *naturally gather immediately necessary resources* without the need to engage in this kind of cunning and flattering speech

The text continues,

... even without threats of force all beings pay homage to you;

This is quite obviously saying that as a benefit of moral practice there is no need to use any forceful means to gain respect from others. Rather, as it says, you earn their respect and *without threats of force all beings pay homage to you*.

... there is no casual talk about the lineage of your relatives, etc.;

In addition to being respected by your relatives and close friends, even those who are unknown to you, or who you have not benefitted previously will also be kind to you.

... people who previously did not know you or help you are naturally kind to you; and deities and humans revere the dust of your footprint and carry away what they can get as an object of worship.

If we think about it, these lines about the benefit of practising moral ethics are very true. For example, we Tibetans collect the dust from the ground where His Holiness the Dalai Lama has walked, and keep it as a holy object of faith, paying homage to it. It is definitely possible for us to experience the benefit of practising moral ethics as described here. Otherwise there would be no point in talking about it.

If we reflect on these lines, we can understand the positive impact the practice of morality has, not only on the person, but also on the place where the person resides. Both are suitable objects of homage. As it says here, even the dust under the feet of the person practising morality is an object of veneration by humans and deities. In old Tibet, at the end of the great prayer festival, a lot of ordinary nomads used to rush to collect the dust from the ground where the festival was held, which they took as a holy object for taking refuge and paying homage.

As we read and study this text, we must also try to relate our understanding to our practice. This is very important. We have to see that this text is a spiritual instruction and a spiritual guide. We all wish for a better future, and what this is saying is that if we aspire for a better future then we have to observe the practice of moral ethics and safeguard our moral practice.

The text gives another quote from the *Compendium of Perfections*:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Even without speaking or undertaking hardship
You gather immediate necessities and service.
Without threat all the world pays homage to you;

You obtain power effortlessly and without toil.

You are among those about whom it is improper to talk casually.

Even all persons who you did not know previously,
Who have not helped you or done what you need,
Pay homage to you, a person with ethical discipline.

Excellent beings revere the dust blessed by your feet,
Touching their heads to it; deities and humans bow down to it,

Place it on the crowns of their heads, and carry away what they can get.

Therefore, one who has ethical discipline is in the supreme lineage.

Basically, this summarises the benefits of the practice of moral ethics that we have discussed. With the practice of moral ethics, all the necessary resources and wealth come to us naturally or automatically, not requiring any hard work from our own side. Similarly, we gain respect from others naturally and automatically, without imposing or forcing ourselves upon them.

In short, as it says in the last line, *therefore, one who has ethical discipline is in the supreme lineage.*

The text continues:

The wise who reflect well on these benefits and grave consequences must safeguard their ethical discipline, as the *Compendium of the Perfections* explains.

Due to a craving for their own happiness, bodhisattvas
Will not compromise ethical disciplines, which must be protected.

And also:

Because you control yourself, you experience happiness;
Because you have the ornament praised by the learned,
you safeguard ethical discipline;
As you bring to perfection all the trainings,
Rely on ethical discipline completely and without pride.

Next the text states:

Moreover, after you have cleared away your mere fear of the miserable realms and your wish for the mere excellences of deities or humans, safeguard your ethical discipline for the sake of establishing all living beings in ethical discipline.

In this sentence, the text points out the kind of motivation you should have for practising moral ethics. It's saying there's a different way to consider our motivation. One motivation for practising moral ethics is the fear of taking rebirth in a lower realm, and finding a better rebirth such as a human or a godly being. It is also to establish all *beings in ethical discipline* or establish all other sentient beings into the state of complete enlightenment.

Another way is to think of our motivation for practising moral ethics as achieving the state of complete enlightenment to benefit all beings. As a benefit of our ethical practice, we will also find a good rebirth. Although the motivation for practising moral ethics is not intended to find a better rebirth for ourselves, we accomplish all our purposes automatically. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many other lamas quite often remark that if you direct your motivation or intention to benefitting other beings, then all your own interests and purposes will be accomplished automatically along the way. So, the automatic benefit of engaging in moral practice is the excellent rebirth that we need to rely upon in order to benefit others or to achieve full enlightenment.

The text continues:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Whoever aspires to establish in pure ethical discipline
Every living being in worlds beyond measure
And relies on ethical discipline to benefit the world
Is said to bring ethical discipline to perfection.

Therefore, clear away fear of the miserable realms
And the wish for the marvels of kingdoms and high status;

Safeguard a flawless ethical discipline, and depend on
Ethical discipline because you are striving for the welfare of the world.

We can clearly see here that Tsongkhapa's text is really a word by word commentary on these quotes from The *Compendium of the Perfections*. Having explained the benefit of practising moral ethics and the shortcomings of not practising moral ethics, the text now goes to the next section.

(c') The divisions of ethical discipline

There are three divisions of ethical discipline:

1. The ethical discipline of restraint
2. The ethical discipline of gathering virtue
3. The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings.

These three types of ethical discipline include all the deeds of bodhisattvas. We can talk about bodhisattva deeds in terms of either fulfilling the welfare of either oneself or the welfare of other sentient beings. Alternatively, we can talk about bodhisattva deeds in terms of ripening one's own continuum or ripening the continuum of other beings. In a way, the first type of ethical discipline of restraint pertains to the bodhisattva deeds for fulfilling one's own welfare or ripening one's own continuum. The other two types of ethical discipline encompass the bodhisattva deeds for fulfilling the welfare of other beings or ripening the continuum of other beings.

(1') The ethical discipline of restraint

The *Bodhisattva Levels* says the ethical discipline of restraint is the seven types of vows of individual liberation. Thus, given that there are those who have taken vows of individual liberation and are also keeping the bodhisattva vows, the ethical discipline of restraint is either the actual vows of individual liberation for the group of either laypersons or renunciates, or it is a practice of restraint and abstention that would be associated with those actual vows.

The *ethical discipline of restraint* with respect to bodhisattvas who have taken any of the individual liberation vows, which can be either ordination vows or lay vows, refers to the actual vow of individual liberation and any vows associated with it. The text continues:

Also, given that there are those who have taken the bodhisattva vows who are unsuited to be recipients of the vows of individual liberation, ...

This refers to those bodhisattvas who do not have an individual liberation vow. For these bodhisattvas:

... the ethical discipline of restraint is the practice of restraint and abstention that gives up any deed that is wrong by nature or any deed that is wrong by prohibition that would be associated with the vows of individual liberation.

The moral ethic of restraint that they possess refers to any ethical practice of restraint or refraining from negative actions which are negative by nature or which are prohibited moral codes. For those bodhisattvas without individual liberation vows, the ethical discipline of restraint

refers to the practice of *abstention that gives up any deed that is wrong by nature or any deed that is wrong by prohibition that would be associated with the vows of individual liberation.*

(2') The ethical discipline of gathering virtue

The text states:

The ethical discipline of gathering virtue means that you focus on virtues such as the six perfections and then develop the virtues that you have not developed in your mind, do not spoil the ones that you have already developed, and increase both of these even further.

The ethical discipline of gathering virtue refers to all your acts of virtue such as engaging in the six perfections within the context of the morality of abstaining from any harmful actions. Given the definition of ethical discipline as a mental attitude of abstention, the question of whether the individual who engages in the ethical discipline of gathering virtues should actually possess the mental attitude or thought of abstention or restraint is debatable. I would say it is not necessary to have a manifest thought of abstention or restraint, however the individual's deeds must be conjoined with the force of that moral thought.

3') The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings

The text continues:

The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings means that you focus on the welfare of eleven sorts of living beings, and then accomplish their aims in this and future lives in a suitable manner and without wrongdoing. Since I have already detailed these in my *Basic Path to Awakening*, you should definitely read that over and over again.

As homework please find out about the welfare of the eleven beings as described in the Tsongkhapa's *Basic Path to Awakening*, a commentary to Asanga's chapter on Ethics in *The Complete Bodhisattva*. Denis distributed a copy of this text last year, so you should find out about the eleven beings there. One of the eleven is helping those who suffer, and another is helping those who are ignorant of the method. In terms of practice, these eleven things can be integrated into practice in relation to an individual being, in other words to benefit each individual sentient being. Alternatively, the eleven can be taken to benefit eleven separate individual beings respectively. In not explaining the eleven to you now I'm not being stingy about giving Dharma to you. I want you to find out about these eleven by yourself as homework. I think studying and thinking about the topic before class is a very effective way of learning. Then what you hear from the teacher will complement and enrich your understanding. Students learn faster and more effectively when they study in this way.

At the same time, it is also important that after listening to or studying the teaching, you follow it up by reflecting on and recollecting what you have learned. You need to go through this process not just once but over and over again. This is what it takes to make the material really sink into your mind and have some effect in terms of subduing and calming the mind.

We face all kinds of problems in our life. Some problems are related to our physical health and others are related to our mental health. In order to overcome these problems, we have to apply the right remedies in our practice. If we do not apply the remedy thoroughly, then we won't be able to overcome our problems or illnesses.

Over the coming weekend we are running an Easter course, the theme of which is cultivating the bodhicitta mind which, as you all know, is a very important part of our spiritual practice. So, it would be good for you to do the course.

We often hear that first we should cultivate bodhicitta mind, and then, driven by that *bodhi* mind, engage in the deeds of a bodhisattva. We all consider ourselves to be followers of Mahayana Buddhism. Therefore, our core practice should be learning about and cultivating the bodhicitta mind. The spiritual benefits of bodhicitta practice are enormous. Even spending a short time trying to study bodhicitta will purify many negativities and accumulate much merit.

So, you must seize any opportunity to study and practise bodhicitta. Thinking of your situation from the point of view of your physical and mental health, as well as other external and internal life circumstances, you recognise your situation as being very conducive for practising Dharma. So you must make the best use of it. If you use your time for spiritual practice, you can be assured that your future rebirth will be a good one, better even than your current life.

Of course, I understand a lot of you have heard the teachings on the bodhicitta mind many times. However, you should study and reflect on it again and again, further developing and deepening your Dharma knowledge. For as long as our knowledge is not perfected, it needs to be further developed. Therefore, I encourage you to make the best use of your time and do the Easter Course if you can. There is no better way of using our time than studying the profound topic of the bodhicitta mind.

However, actually cultivating the bodhicitta mind is a tough call. Even a genuine thought of altruism or benefitting other beings is not easy. Let alone all sentient beings, or for that matter all human beings, or even of all people of faith, having such an altruistic thought is extremely rare. This is because most sentient beings have the mental attitude which is engrained with self-centredness. However, having said this, even if we spend a little time directing our mind towards bodhicitta, it's worthwhile and the benefit is enormous in terms of increasing our collection of merit and purifying negativities.

I am not teaching over the Easter weekend this year, so I want to say a few words to encourage you to utilise your time as much as possible for Dharma and spiritual practice. Whenever you study Dharma, reflect on its meaning such as by thinking about the bodhicitta mind. As a benefit of reflecting on a Dharma topic, you will find more calmness and happiness within your mind.

If you don't do any Dharma practice, and actively pursue worldly affairs then you are wasting your life and there will be no end to suffering as you go around and around the wheel of suffering. I meet some people who don't consider themselves to be spiritual believers. They come to seek my advice on how to solve their problems. They say they have plenty of money, a good job and all the rest, but they are confused and unhappy. They are not happy with their job, but they don't want to quit their job, saying they won't be happy not having anything to do. In a way they tell me their version of samsara, which is going around and around the vicious and perpetual cycle of suffering.

Essentially, the cause of their problems lies in the mental level, because most of the problems we experience are related to our mental and emotional wellbeing. As we all know, if we are not happy, or if we are extremely confused

and disturbed, then this can take a toll on our physical health.

On the other hand, if we improve our mental hygiene, then this can not only bring more meaning to our life in terms of more happiness, but it also helps to improve the hygiene of our body too.

I understand that people have different needs in their lives. If you have children or a family, you have to give time to them, but at the same time it's also important to recognise the importance of your own mental and physical wellbeing too. Taking all of this into account, find the time for learning Dharma. And even if you have already learnt it, it is still worthwhile to learn it again, and think about it over and over again. In this way your understanding will become deeper and more extensive.

Of course, as well as studying we also need to put Dharma into practice. Cultivating the bodhicitta mind depends on how much effort you put into your practice. If you put in enough effort, then it is possible that you can generate bodhicitta to the point where by simply hearing the term 'bodhicitta', your eyes will fill with tears and the hairs on your body will stand on end. If we could develop bodhicitta to that level, that would be most wonderful.

From time to time it's also good to think about what sort of person you were before you met the Dharma, and what sort of person you are now. In what way has the Dharma changed you as a person? Our mental attitude and way of thinking might have changed drastically due to the influence of Dharma. Our mental attitude might be a lot more positive, wholesome and loving now than it was before we met the Dharma. I would say the difference between then and now might be like the difference between the earth and the sky. Sometimes, you need to think like this to feel more positive about yourself and more motivated to follow Dharma practice.

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