
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. *[meditation]*

As much as possible, try to generate a very good motivation for receiving these teachings. Any motivation that we generate before we begin an activity will guide and direct us, so if the motivation is a good one, then the deeds that follow it will also be good.

In a sense a motivation is a thought or intention that you will engage in a deed for a particular purpose, and this motivation drives you to engage in that deed. In Tibetan terms, action or karma is called *las* which can be either an intention karma or action, or an intended karma or action, referring to a mental factor of intention or volition that motivates or directs our mind towards its object. Intention karma is a thought that motivates us to engage in verbal or bodily deeds prior to engaging in those deeds. Whereas, intended karma is a mental factor of intention that is concomitant with our mind at the time of engaging in the deeds.

Simply put, the content of this thought or intention action is a spiritual guide for us in terms of indicating the kinds of actions that are to be accepted, and those that are to be rejected. The driving thought or intention action can be beneficial and positive, or it can be harmful and negative. Whether the intended actions and deeds that follow the intention actions are good or bad is predetermined by the intention actions, whether they are good or bad.

If the thought which is the intention action says to us that we should engage in a spiritual practice, such as doing prostrations or making offerings to the Three Jewels, or the thought says to help some other being, then obviously that thought is directed towards the right kind of actions that need to be adopted. Conversely, if the thought influences one to cause harm to other beings, for example, then one has to understand and recognise that one should not engage in that action and overcome that thought. In this way, we can change our deeds, behaviours and personality by understanding and changing the volitional thought or intention that presides over our deeds.

This is what I try to practice all the time, and we have discussed it in the past many times. Essentially our spiritual practice is to look into our mind, and through controlling and disciplining our mind, we develop ourselves in terms of finding more happiness and reducing suffering.

In this context we can clearly understand the Buddhist view that all the happiness and suffering that we experience in our lives is derived from our own thoughts and our own state of mind. When we understand how all of our actions are predetermined by our state of mind, we can understand how the mind is the source of our experience of happiness and suffering.

Regarding the text we are studying, I'm assuming that all of you at least know what the six perfections are. Tonight, we begin with the perfection of patience.

THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE

(iii) How to train in the perfection of patience

The explanation of how to train in the perfection of patience has five parts:

When you look at these five headings, or outlines, you will see that they are very similar to the outlines used in the explanation of the perfection of ethical discipline. These outlines cover everything we need to understand about the meaning of patience, as well as how to practice it.

The five divisions are:

1. What patience is

This introduces the nature of patience as a mental attitude.

2. How to begin the cultivation of patience

This shows how to engage in the practice of patience or in meditating on patience. Then having understood this, it goes on to show,

3. The divisions of patience

This covers the different types of patience.

4. How to practice

This explains what you actually do at the time of engaging in the practice of patience.

5. A summary

So, you can see how the outlines in the presentation on patience are the same as those in the presentation of ethical discipline, and how they show us the essential points of this topic.

(a') What patience is

Generally, we say that patience is an ability to not be mentally disturbed or affected when receiving any harm or confronting suffering in some way. It's a state of mind that is not affected by or disturbed or annoyed when afflicted with any form of harm or suffering.

When we talk about patience, we are talking about being patient with something. So, the question is being patient with what? It means being patient with any harm that we receive from others, or when facing any adverse circumstances. For instance, being able to be patient when somebody speaks harshly, or shows you a really angry gesture.

In terms of the time of practising patience, the most important time we need to practise patience is when we are mentally unhappy and unstable, or when we face an adverse situation. If we observe our experiences, we can see that when we easily lose our temper, become angry, react and throw tantrums it is usually a time when we are not in a good mood, not up to our normal self or when we are unhappy. In those times it doesn't take much for us to be provoked and lose our temper. Therefore, if we are able to practise patience in times of doom and gloom, then we can be more appreciative of the benefits of our Dharma practice.

What we have to understand here is that when we talk of practising patience, we are really talking in terms of patience as lying within us. Patience doesn't simply mean that when you confront some adverse condition or circumstance, such as if somebody says something mean to you or does something hurtful to you, that you externally

stay very quiet and passive while internally you are boiling with resentment and hatred. That's not being patient at all. In fact, you are more impatient because you are holding a grudge. That's why some people say that practising patience or tolerance is painful. Yes, it can be painful, but you definitely are not practising patience if you are holding onto hatred or resentment. On the other hand, I know a lot of students here who have been applying patience to their real-life situations. I have seen them finding the benefit of the practice of patience. When speaking of the benefits of patience, you don't necessarily have to talk about life stories of past great lamas. In fact, we can observe the benefits by observing the people who we know practice patience and who are good at it. There are some people that I know here who have been able to turn past objects of hatred and suffering into an object of forgiveness, love and compassion, and thereby experience joy and happiness.

By applying this practice of patience, and even trying to engage in the giving and taking meditation practice like we did at the beginning of the session, you can transform hurtful things that happened in the past which have caused you a lot of pain, into something very positive, which brings joy to your mind. Through applying such Dharma practice to our lives, we are able to transform adverse situations into favourable ones that give us joy and happiness. That is the real benefit or the blessing of the Dharma that results from our Dharma practice. Without putting the Dharma into practice, you don't receive any Dharma blessing or benefits.

On the other hand, if we lack the practice of Dharma, then whenever unavoidable things occur, for example if we get very sick or confront a very adverse situation, we would then worry too much. This worry adds more suffering to whatever hardship we are already experiencing. So, our situation will become even worse. Sometimes, the difficult situation then becomes too much for us to manage.

So, no matter what we face externally, if we are able to remain calm, strong and clear internally, then we can pass through any hurdles of life and maintain stable peace and happiness. And for safeguarding inner peace, happiness and clear thinking, there is no means more effective and beneficial than Dharma practice. Dharma practice is done within the context of each and every individual's mental continuum. Hence, when we talk here about the practice of patience, the essential point is cultivating and developing patience within our own mind.

Based on our own life experience we have to try to see the benefit that the Dharma brings to our life, and the changes that it brings to our life. Through following Dharma practice, we can expect that we will gain more excellent qualities and become a better person than we were before we met the Dharma. We should also aim to gain more excellent qualities in a year than we have now. In other words, the more we follow Dharma practice, the more spiritual qualities and realisations we will develop, and the more qualities we develop, the fewer faults we possess. In this way, we can get some idea of our ability to increase excellent qualities and decrease faults, and thereby establish the possibility of achieving the complete state of enlightenment, which is the supreme state where one is free of all flaws and faults, and perfectly completed with all the excellent qualities.

Returning to the text:

(a') What patience is

Patience is (1) disregarding harm done to you, ...

This can be understood in the sense of being not concerned about, or annoyed by the harm done to you, and not retaliating to any such harm. This is called *the patience of disregarding harm*

Then,

... (2) accepting the suffering arising in your mind-stream, ...

As it clearly says, patience means being able to voluntarily accept suffering. This will be explained in detail a bit later on. Of the three types of patience, this is the *patience of accepting suffering*.

This is very important because we perpetually undergo some form of suffering in our life due of our inability to accept or cope with suffering and difficulties. Therefore, it is very important to be able to develop a good understanding of this type of patience so we will be more able to tolerate suffering and not be completely overwhelmed by it.

The text continues:

... and (3) being certain about the teachings and firmly maintaining belief in them.

It is important to develop this patience of being certain about the teachings, and firmly maintain our belief in them. This is the *patience of definitely thinking about the Dharma*. For example, if we are studying the view of selflessness, we need to maintain our focus, interest, and enthusiasm in order to gain an understating of the subject matter. Of course, this needs a great deal of patience so that our mind doesn't waver from faith and interest in the Dharma. The patience of definitely thinking about the Dharma means an ability to firmly maintain one's faith and interest in Dharma practice.

The text continues,

There are three sets of factors incompatible with these: ...

This is talking about the three opposites of the three types of patience just listed. The detail about all this comes later on so we won't go through it now.

In brief it says here:

... for the first, hostility;

If we lack the first patience, the patience of disregarding harm done to you, then we will be easily provoked by any harm that we receive from others. We will usually become angry or lose our temper, and animosity will naturally arise.

Next:

... for the second, hostility and loss of courage;

When we face a certain degree of suffering to the point that we are unable to accept personal loss or the suffering becomes intolerable, then we will become very frustrated, feel deeply hurt, disturbed and annoyed. At the same time, we become very angry and feel hostile.

As well as this, as the text says, our mind becomes filled with these unpleasant thoughts and unhappiness, so we also feel depressed and lose our mental spirit and courage. The text uses the Tibetan term *Sro shi.ba* which can be literally translated as dying of spirit or passion, meaning loss of courage.

Continuing:

... and for the third, disbelief and dislike.

Those of you who have been studying the Dharma will know how, if you lack interest or motivation in learning, then you will not be able to develop faith in your learning and in your practice, and then you may completely lose

interest in your practice. There are many cases where people start following the Dharma and then completely give it up.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama quite often comments that the best way to tackle problems is to fully engage in the method for solving problems, and the best thing that he has learned from difficulties is that accepting the difficulties is the most effective means of overcoming difficulties.

The text continues:

Perfecting patience means that you simply complete your conditioning to a state of mind wherein you have stopped your anger and the like. It is not contingent upon all living beings becoming free from undisciplined conduct because you would not be able to bring this about, and because you accomplish your purpose just by disciplining your own mind.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Undisciplined persons are as limitless as space;
You could never overcome them.

If you conquer the single mental state of anger
It is like vanquishing all your enemies.

Where could you get enough leather
To cover the entire surface of the earth?
Wearing just the leather of your sandals
Is like covering all the earth.

We have already discussed these lines in the past and if you just read them, they are quite self-explanatory. In the first two lines Shantideva is explaining how to defeat the true enemy. If we target the external object of harm as our true enemy, instead of recognising that the true enemy lies within us in the form of anger or hatred, then, as it says here, as *undisciplined persons are as limitless as space; you could never overcome them*. If we see an external object or harm as our enemy, and try to win them over, then we will never be able to win because the number of such external enemies *are*, as it says here *as limitless as space*.

If, however, you conquer the single mental state of anger, it is like vanquishing all your enemies. If we recognise that our true enemy is our anger or the hostile mental attitude within us, then defeating it is equivalent to defeating all enemies. In other words, if we conquer our true enemy, our inner enemy such as anger, then there will be no more enemies.

We can observe this from our own experience. Someone who is very short-tempered and who becomes very angry very easily will upset many other people and will be viewed by a lot of people as an enemy. Whereas someone who practises patience, who is very tolerant and patient with things and people, actually draws people closer to them and so they don't have any enemies.

The lines beginning Shantideva's second verse, *where could you get enough leather to cover the entire surface of the earth* is an analogy showing how we need to defeat the inner enemy of anger in order to defeat all enemies. It is saying here that if we were to walk across to the other side of ground covered by thorns, it would be rather stupid to try *to cover the entire surface of the earth with leather to protect every being as you could not get enough leather to cover the earth's surface*. *Wearing just the leather of your sandals to cover your own feet* is the equivalent of covering the whole ground with leather. Likewise, conquering the anger within us is equal to conquering all enemies.

The quote from Shantideva continues:

Similarly, I cannot change
External things, but when
I can change my state of mind,

Why do I need to change anything else?

It is a waste of time trying to get rid of all undesirable things, because there is no end to them. However, as it says, *I can change*. If you *can change* your own *state of mind*, then there's no need for you to do anything to change the external circumstances, because once you have completely subdued your own state of mind, you have accomplished your purpose and there is no need to make any changes because there is no more any unfavourable situation or object to confront.

The text continues:

(b') How to begin the cultivation of patience

Although there are many ways to cultivate patience, to begin I will explain the meditation on the benefits of patience and the faults of not being patient.

This is saying that in order to engage in the practice of patience, we first need to reflect on the benefits of patience, and then reflect on the faults of anger. In this way, as we become more aware of the benefits of patience then we will be inspired and motivated to engage in the practice of patience, and as well as developing a greater understanding of the faults and shortcomings of anger, we will be then more motivated to challenge and counteract anger when it arises.

I will just read the next part of the text as it is quite self-explanatory.

The benefits are set forth in the *Bodhisattva Levels*:

Initially, bodhisattvas consider the benefits of patience. They think, "Persons who have patience will not have many enemies later on and will not have many separations from those to whom they are close. They will have much happiness and contentment. They will have no regret at the time of death, and upon the disintegration of their bodies they will also be reborn among the deities in the happy realms of high status." By looking at such benefits, they too are patient. They engage others in upholding patience, and they also praise patience. When they see patient persons, they are delighted and full of joy.

The text continues:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

It is said, "Patience is the best approach
For dealing with the inclination to disregard others'
welfare";

This is saying that patience acts like armour to safeguard our benevolent thoughts of benefitting other sentient beings.

Patience against the fault of anger protects
All that is excellent in this world.

As it says, patience is the source of all the possible excellent qualities that are achievable in this life and in future lives. It protects all these excellent qualities or goodness from harm caused by anger and hatred.

Patience is the best ornament of the powerful,
The greatest strength for those who practice asceticism,
And a stream of water on the wildfire of malice.
Patience clears away much harm in this and future
lives.
The arrows of undisciplined people's words
Are dulled by a superior being's armour of patience;

Through the armour of patience, the arrows of the harm that you receive from others (such as harsh speech) are all transformed into attractive flowers.

These unruly people then give pleasant flowers of praise
Which become attractive garlands of fame.

And also:

Patience is also the craftsman that creates a buddha's
embodiment of form,
Adorned with the beautiful signs of good qualities.

This indicates that as a result of the practice of patience, we
can find a very pleasant body in this life in a short period of
time, and ultimately find the excellent bodies of a
saṃbhogakaya and nirmanakaya buddha fully endowed
with all the major and minor marks of a buddha,

Lama Tsongkhapa explains the meaning of the previous
verses as follows:

Thus, Aryasura praises patience by way of its many
benefits: it stops you from turning away from others'
welfare on account of living beings' misperceptions; it
protects you from anger, the enemy that destroys many
roots of virtue;

As this clearly indicates, whenever anger arises, it has the
capacity to extinguish our virtues. However, we can protect
our virtues with the practice of patience.

... it is a captivating ornament because it endures the harm
of those of little power;

This line conveys quite a powerful meaning. Normally we
lack patience when we are harmed by a weaker living being.
For example, if a tiny mosquito lands on our hand, we won't
tolerate it and without a second thought we will just slap
and kill it. Whereas if we are bullied by a very strong
person, we will be very scared and won't have a word to say
or the guts to express our anger.

As it says here, if we develop practice of patience, then we'll
extend our practice even to those weaker beings or those
with little power who bring harm to us.

... it is the excellent strength of ascetics who are tormented
by the afflictions; it is a stream of water that extinguishes
the wildfire of malice; it is armor that cannot be pierced by
the arrows of undisciplined persons' misperceptions; it is
the skilled artisan who creates a fine form of golden color
that captivates the eyes and minds of beings.

This relates to the meaning of the above quotations.

Furthermore, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says: in this
way through the various ways the practice of patience is
highly commended, or highly praised.

Continuing with the text:

Furthermore, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Whoever works hard and overcomes anger
Is happy in this and future lives.

In the next paragraph you can see the great Tsongkhapa's
profound explanation of these two lines.

When you rely on patience continually, you do not spoil
your joyful attitude, so you are always happy even in this
life.

With the words *whoever works hard and overcomes anger* is
happy, he's talking about how the practice of patience can
ensure happiness in this life and in future lives.

Moreover, patience stops miserable rebirths in future lives,
gives special rebirths in happy realms, and ultimately
bestows certain goodness, so you are utterly happy in this
and future lives.

Meditate on these benefits until you gain a strong, firm
certainty about the cause-and-effect relationship wherein
benefits such as these arise from patience.

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Edited Version*

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