
The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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As usual we will do some meditation first.

[Tonglen meditation]

We should all begin with the right motivation, so that when we either listen to or give a teaching, it serves the purpose of the Dharma.

Last week, we talked about the benefits of patience and the benefits of engaging in meditation practice. Essentially, the main benefit of meditation is that it enables us to calm our mind when it is disturbed and unstable – by relying on our practice, we know what to do when our mind is disturbed and agitated. However, if we lack an understanding of meditation practice, that is another story. In that case, when we are confronted with an agitated and disturbed state of mind, we will be completely ignorant and confused about what to do. We might turn to some other method, such as taking medication.

For our practice to be beneficial, it is not enough to simply know about meditation. Rather, we need to put our knowledge into practice. For example, when our mind is agitated or disturbed, we need to apply our understanding of meditation into practice – that is, to overcome or prevent that agitated state of mind, we need to direct our mental attention to a virtuous object. When we apply that knowledge, we can see how, the moment our mind rests in that object of meditation, we will really begin to feel our mind relax. Therefore, this knowledge gives us a positive motivation to engage in meditation practice. As the term ‘meditation’ [*gom* = to familiarise] implies, we need to apply the practice of meditation every time we are faced with a very agitated or disturbed mind. By doing this, we will become more familiar with the practice, and it will get easier over time.

Each one of us who follows a meditation practice must recognise the benefit of doing so. We must see how following such a practice enables us to achieve what we want and avoid what we do not want. Therefore, when we talk about gaining the benefits of meditation practice, as I said before, it is not enough to simply listen to Dharma or teach it to others. Rather, for an individual to really gain benefit, he or she must practise meditation and integrate their Dharma knowledge into everyday life.

As to learning about meditation practice, it is more important to utilise your rational, intelligent mind, and analyse what you know and what you have learned about the Dharma, rather than just listening to someone talk or reading a text. Through this process of utilising your power of discriminating wisdom or intelligence, the understanding that you develop is much firmer, more reliable and more definitive. On the other hand, if your understanding merely depends on someone’s hearsay or what you’ve heard from others, your understanding is not that stable.

Meditation practice has real benefits to offer us, not just as individuals, but to families and to society at large. For

example, if you look closely at our affluent, materialistic and materially developed society, the kinds of problems and difficulties people experience are primarily related to their minds being agitated, disturbed or confused. If we consider the most effective means or tools we have for overcoming emotional or mental problems, it is really meditation practice.

Of course, if the problems we face are more to do with our physical health, then meditation is not that relevant. For example, if somebody is undergoing a terminal illness, simply telling that person to meditate is not going to cure the illness and delay the death. Similarly, if you advise people who are starving to do meditation practice, that will not overcome their hunger, nor will their appetite be appeased. The exception here is advanced meditators who have gained a high state of meditative concentration: they are less dependent on physical needs, such as food, that we normally depend on to sustain our health and wellbeing. So, if our problem is related to our physical condition, it is a separate issue. But when it is related to our mind, we can see that the most effective means to solve the problem is really meditation practice, which focuses on changing our mind.

I have given a lot of thought to the matter of how our problems in life can be reduced and overcome by simply training our mind; I also have a great deal of knowledge and personal experience about this matter. What really helps us overcome our mental unhappiness or problems? To manage our problems, we need to find within ourselves our own support system, or what we call an ‘inner friend’. I can categorically say, from my own experience, that if you find that inner friend within yourself then, regardless of whether you are alone or with others, you will always be assured of inner peace and happiness. It can also safeguard you from outer causes of harm and disturbance, such as when someone provokes you. When you have the advantage of this inner friend, your mind cannot be harmed. This inner friend can serve as a shield to protect your mental peace and happiness from any adversary.

Speaking of outer problems or difficulties, I could say that I have been through a lot of that kind of hardship. So, when I talk about the benefit and effectiveness of meditation practice, I am not just saying it because I have clairvoyant power! Rather, the things I say here are derived from my own life experiences. If you observe your own life, you can see how, most of the time, your problems are creations or projections of your own mind. When we recognise and understand this, we will then understand that to overcome the problem, we need to change our way of thinking.

In fact, meditation practice is really about training our mind and changing our mental attitude or outlook. Through this process of training, controlling and disciplining our mind, we will be able to cultivate and develop a positive state of mind that serves as a stable source of inner peace, happiness and strength, whatever we face in life. Whether the situation is favourable or not, or whether our circumstances are difficult or easy, we can internally maintain a stable and lasting peace and happiness because of the positive mental outlook we have cultivated within us.

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

We have been discussing the subject of developing patience, which is essential for us to cope with life’s challenges and maintain a stable sense of peace and happiness. When we look at our own life, we continually face inevitable

difficulties or unfavourable situations. If we are unable to tolerate or be patient with these, we will worry about them and become emotionally handicapped by them. Worrying, becoming agitated, and stressing out do not help us when we face difficult situations; rather, this attitude further adds to the problems we are already facing.

That's why the text here emphasises the importance of developing patience towards the harm we receive from others – particularly the patience of accepting suffering and hardship. When we accept hardship, we will be able to remain on top of a problem, rather than falling victim to mental pressure and suffering. In this way, hardship will not really become a hardship for us, because we know how to manage it. The tremendous benefit of practising patience is that we can maintain a calm, relaxed and joyful mind, which is even more necessary when we face adverse situations.

We can also note here that our mind is trainable, in the sense that if we train our mind, it has the ability to change in the way that we want. If you want your mind to change to a positive mental attitude, you can change it: you can train your mind to develop into that positive state.

Regarding our discussion of patience, last week we talked about the benefit of the practice of patience. We need to understand and reflect on these benefits: 'If I practise patience, what are the benefits?' You should make a list of the benefits of practising patience, then reflect on every single item on that list. This meditation will then inspire or motivate us to practise patience.

The text also talks in detail about the shortcomings or faults of anger. It is important to understand this well, so that you will be motivated and inspired to counteract anger. The text presents the visible and invisible faults of anger. Having a good knowledge and awareness of the faults or shortcomings of anger makes a significant difference when we need to counteract anger. Whenever anger arises, this awareness makes you more vigilant. It makes you think, 'I should not be completely overpowered by anger. I should not simply fall as prey to anger, or else anger will greatly harm me.'

As we learn about the faults of anger, we will understand how important and essential the practice of patience is. Indeed, it is one of the most important practices, the essence of Dharma practice. The text says anger is one of the main obstacles for bodhisattvas in engaging in the deeds of benefiting other sentient beings. This is why the text goes into specific detail about how to counteract anger. In comparison with other mental afflictions, anger is very powerful in disturbing our mind and causing us to damage things. The mental affliction of desire or attachment, on the other hand, is a force that attracts or pulls us towards others. Although it is not lasting, desire does attract or bring people together.

I don't have personal experience of this, but you may have. When you first develop a relationship with another person, desire or attachment may be the force that attracts you towards that person. So, desire can connect us with others so that we form a relationship with them and bring benefit to each other. Whereas there is no such benefit to oneself and others from anger. Rather, anger is a destructive force that wrecks things and doesn't have any positive outcome. For example, it wrecks our relationship and is a cause of separation. It is therefore important that you recognise the faults of anger within the context of your own life experience.

As I said before, desire or attachment is a force of attraction that brings people closer together. So there can be some positive outcome, in terms of extending benefit to others and forming a relationship with them. But I always say that, for such a relationship to be long lasting we must add love and compassion to it. Cultivating love and compassion is an essential ingredient for making our relationship meaningful, truly beneficial and satisfying. If we look at the nature or meaning of love and compassion, it is a genuine sense of affection, care and concern for others. We usually express love and compassion when the person we love is in despair or in need of help or support from others. At such a time, if we show our love and support, the other person will highly appreciate us. We must always be aware that everyone seeks happiness and does not want any unhappiness.

However, desire or attachment is based on the perception of the object as being beautiful and a cause of satisfaction for us. So, in the long run, what will benefit you most in having a healthy relationship with others is love and compassion. Sometimes, people say that after their breakup, their relationship may have become more meaningful, with each partner offering more mutual benefit and help. A healthy relationship is based on trust and mutual benefit, and this in turn depends on each having a shared feeling of true love and compassion.

Again, the reason why all this is important is that we all seek happiness in our lives. Therefore, working on developing love and compassion is an important cause for finding happiness.

As part of studying the practice of patience, we have to study the meaning of patience. Earlier, we talked about the faults of anger. First, we need to ask, what does anger mean and how do we define it? Anger is one of the six root mental afflictions and it arises in dependence upon any of the three factors: unwanted suffering, the causes of suffering, and sentient beings. As a mental factor observing any of these three, anger is a malicious thought that wants to harm its object.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama once told the story of his car mechanic in Tibet who was lying under the car to fix it, and accidentally hit his head on the car's underside. He got so angry at the car, he started banging his head as a way to take revenge on it. Of course, the result was a bigger headache! *[laughter]* This example clearly shows how our mind becomes confused and loses its rational thinking when overpowered by anger.

Along the same lines is another story from the late Senior Tutor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche. His story was in relation to a short-tempered Chinese painter, who once had a tantrum and threw a very expensive Chinese bowl and broke it. Afterwards, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche saw him holding the broken bowl in his hands looking worried!

In Tibetan, anger is called *khong-khro* which, in its initial stage, is just a hostile or malicious thought. However, if we allow ourselves to become habituated with it, this thought will continue to grow, until it reaches the stage where we are ready to take aggressive and violent action, such as being ready to hit someone with a stick. At this point, it has become *khro.ba* (Tibetan), which is a more intensified state of anger, like hatred or belligerence. This is the difference between *khong-khro* or anger, and *khro.ba* or hatred.

We will pick up the text from where we left it last time:

With respect to the faults of anger, the invisible faults are as follows. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Any good deeds, such as
Generosity and worshipping the sugatas,
You have collected over a thousand eons
Are all destroyed in one moment of anger.

This quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* where it says *any good deeds such as generosity and worshipping the sugatas* shows how the virtue you accumulate through the practices of generosity, moral ethics and so forth *collected over a thousand eons can all be destroyed in one moment of anger*. This shows the destructiveness of anger in terms of destroying virtue.

The text continues:

Aryasura formulated this exactly as it is presented in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*. The *Play of Manjusri Sutra (Manjusri-vikridita-sutra)* mentions the destruction of virtue accumulated over a hundred eons, and also Candrakirti's *Commentary on the "Middle Way"* says that virtue accumulated over a hundred eons of conditioning to the perfections of generosity and ethical discipline is destroyed even by the generation of just a momentary angry thought.

Concerning who or what the recipient of such destructive anger must be, some say that it must be bodhisattvas, while others assert that it is recipients in general. The former accords with the statement in the *Commentary on the "Middle Way"*.

Therefore, a moment's anger toward a conquerors' child
Destroys the virtue arising from generosity and ethical
discipline
Accumulated over a hundred eons.

With respect to the person who gets angry, Candrakirti's *Explanation of the "Middle Way" Commentary* says that if anger even by bodhisattvas destroys their roots of virtue, it goes without saying that the anger of non-bodhisattvas toward bodhisattvas does. Regardless of whether the recipient of the anger is ascertained to be a bodhisattva or whether the perceived faults that cause the anger are real, the destruction of virtue is said nonetheless to be just as explained above [i.e., the virtue accumulated over a hundred eons is lost].

In general, for there to be destruction of the roots of virtue it is not required that the anger be toward bodhisattvas. *The Compendium of Trainings* states:

The text of the Arya-sarvastivadins also says: The Bhagavan said, "Monks, consider a monk who makes a full prostration to a stupa that contains a buddha's hair and nails and who has an attitude of faith."

"So be it, Revered One."

"Monks, this monk will experience reigns as a universal monarch a thousand times the number of grains of sand eighty-four-thousand leagues under the ground his prostrate body covers - down to the disk of gold that supports the earth."

Then the venerable Upali, who was located off to the side from where the Bhagavan was seated, bowed with hands joined respectfully and asked, "The Bhagavan has said that this monk's roots of virtue are so great. O Bhagavan, how are those roots of virtue used up, diminished, erased, and extinguished?"

"Upali, when such a sin as malice is done to fellow practitioners, it is like a wound or maiming. I cannot see its full impact. Upali, this diminishes, erases, and extinguishes those great roots of virtue. Therefore, Upali, if you would not feel malice toward a burned stump, what need to

mention feeling that way toward a body with consciousness?"

If you read this text, you can quite clearly understand it. We find here the benefit of, for example, performing prostrations, in terms of the amount of merit you accumulate, which is many more times the number of sand particles in the ground deep beneath you when you fully stretch your body, enabling you to accumulate the merit of taking rebirth as a universal king, and so forth. Essentially this indicates the enormous merit we accumulate from engaging in the practice of prostrations. Of course, here the issue is not just the enormity of that merit, but how it can be lost by a moment of anger.

You can understand these quotations by reading them; the text raises some critical points, which we will discuss next week.

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Edited Version*

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