
The Six Perfections

འདྲེན་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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2 July 2019

As usual we will do the giving and taking meditation.

Meditation

There's no need to mention that we need to have the right motivation for receiving the teaching. The motivation should be bodhicitta, which is an aspiration to achieve enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. Essentially bodhicitta is a pure intention to benefit all beings and fulfil their wishes.

Hence, whenever we generate bodhicitta as a motivation for listening to the teachings or undertaking any activities, we are resolving to extend benefit and happiness to other beings. Everyone, believers and non-believers alike, recognises the excellent, admirable qualities of this thought of giving benefit and happiness to others. We should also understand that when we cultivate this marvellous wonderful thought within us, not only do we give peace and happiness to other beings, but we will also experience tremendous peace and happiness ourselves. We know this from our own experience, and also because it is common sense. We all admire and acknowledge the worthiness of this thought of altruism.

We praise this altruistic thought, but when we look into our own mind and check, 'Do I have this thought within me? Are my daily actions driven by it?' we'll find that most probably we don't have that thought of altruism. Rather we have a self-centred mind and everything we do is driven by that. Then, rather than that thought of altruism, we generate its opposite, i.e. thoughts of causing harm and trouble for others. In following Dharma practice, we must understand that our main goal is to eradicate negative states of mind and cultivate positive states of mind. This really is the essence of Dharma practice. If our practices have no effect in subduing our mind and cultivating positive or virtuous states of mind, then either we are not practising the Dharma, or we are not practising properly.

The main purpose of practising the Dharma is to bring about positive changes from within - to bring about peace and happiness within ourselves. Although there are some occasions where we rely on and seek help from others, we all have to take personal responsibility for bringing about that personal peace and happiness. What is that responsibility? It is to achieve what we want to achieve, which is happiness, and to avoid what we want to avoid, which is suffering. We follow Dharma practice to fulfil that responsibility. Although we talk a lot about benefiting other sentient beings, how can we benefit others if we can't take care of our own mental and physical health?

So, we need to ensure that whatever we do is beneficial for our own wellbeing too. As to the point of view of benefitting ourselves, one of the things that matters most is our own state of mind. That's why I was saying before that cultivating a mind of altruism, loving kindness and a good heart will automatically bring us the peace and happiness we seek. Indeed, altruism is the remedy to a lot of the problems we experience, which mainly result from generating negative mental attitudes. So, if we hold a

positive state of mind within ourselves, we will no longer experience those unnecessary problems, and we will find more happiness from within, which in turn supports our physical health too. In this way, we are in a good position to benefit other beings.

Normally, when we talk about helping others or contributing to the community, we primarily think in terms of material aid, such as giving away money. But in fact we can benefit others and society far more effectively by cultivating and sharing a positive state of mind, such as a good heart and loving kindness towards others. Then whatever actions we do will be truly beneficial to others, as well as to ourselves.

I hope I am not boring you because I feel that I often sound like I am telling you my own life story, and you are hearing the same thing again and again.

We know that those who live in the third world or in poor countries undergo suffering mainly because of not having shelter, clothes, food and drink. Every day they struggle to overcome that suffering. It is amazing to see how some Christian practitioners dedicate their lives to eliminating poverty in the third world, giving charity to those impoverished people. We could say that as living conditions get better in the third world people there will find more happiness and satisfaction.

On the other hand, in the developed world people undergo suffering that is mainly related to their mental and emotional wellbeing. There is no real problem of shortages of food, clothing or shelter. As the cause of the problem is related to mental health, people need to make an effort to bring a change within their own mind to remedy the problem. For example, cultivating loving kindness and a good heart is very effective in getting rid of mental illnesses and bringing lasting happiness and joy within us.

Usually we identify happiness with external objects. We seek the seeming pleasure of experiencing beautiful forms, pleasant sounds and tactile sensations and so on. In other words, our experience of happiness is contingent upon the contact of our sensory faculties with their respective objects. For example, many people identify happiness with money. So, when they have no money, they feel they are bereft of happiness. Likewise, people feel they can't be happy and there is no meaning to their life unless they gain whatever external or material object they are seeking. If, after gaining their sought-after object, they lose it, they feel empty.

The real question is this: Do material objects satisfy us of their own accord? No, they don't because satisfaction arises with contentment of the mind. If the mind is not contented, then no matter how much or what we possess we cannot be happy. Although there is an abundance of wealth and material comfort in the developed world, people live very unsatisfied and frustrated lives. This is because they are not mentally contented and are always looking for more and better goods. People always think that if I make good money, I will be happy; if I could have this, I would be happy; or if I win that person as my friend, I will be happy. However, if our mind remains unchecked and unsubdued external objects bring no satisfaction and happiness. In order to be happy and at rest, we need to prevent and reduce the mind of desire. Without controlling desire, we cannot be happy and satisfied, even if we possess a lot and live a very comfortable life. Likewise, feeling jealous of the possessions of others, wanting to compete with others or feeling pride can also be a cause for unhappiness and restlessness, despite being surrounded by good external conditions. So, it is

important to recognise the fact that filling our mind with states of mind like desire, anger, jealousy and pride and so on is suffering, and being free from such minds or having a state of mind lacking desire, anger, jealousy, pride and so on is happiness. If we don't recognise this difference, then we simply become prey to those miserable states of mind.

Does jealousy bring you joy or not? People who understand that jealousy is not beneficial and is in fact very harmful, because it destroys peace and happiness, will think of getting rid of it. Those who lack that knowledge won't think of overcoming jealousy and will have to put up with the suffering it causes. As a way of releasing the pain of jealousy they knowingly or unknowingly start criticising and denigrating others. Then things will go from bad to worse. At other times people lose their peace and happiness simply by seeing the goodness of other people, and then get tense and want to compete with them. Again, what use is this? With minds filled with mental afflictions we won't find peace and happiness, no matter how rich we are or how much wealth we possess.

In the third world and other poverty-stricken countries, people are subject to very poor living conditions. Every day they suffer and struggle to find food, drink, clothes and a roof over their heads. Their suffering is obviously related to poor material conditions. As it is not so much related to their mind, because they can be immediately contented and happy as soon as they meet their material needs, such as finding food and drink. We often see families enjoying the time they spend together having meals together and so on, even though they are very poor. So, from one angle, people in poorer countries are living more contented and happier lives than those in wealthier countries.

In summary, if we cultivate love and compassion, we can diminish mental afflictions and thereby enhance peace and happiness. And love and compassion underpin the essence of Dharma practice.

You would have heard of this advice from Geshe Chengawa, one of the most prominent Kadampa masters renowned for his mind generation of bodhicitta. He said, 'In general, if you were to condense all the teachings - all three baskets and the two vehicles - they can be embodied in two: refraining from harming others and helping others. Forbearance is critical to putting these two into practice, for without forbearance you will retaliate when others inflict harm upon you, and you will not turn away from causing harm when this happens. Without this forbearance there is no helping others. So, to succeed in your Dharma practice, forbearance is essential.' Essentially Geshe Chengawa was saying that even though the corpus of teachings is very extensive it can be condensed into the three baskets of teachings, or two vehicles, and practising them can be condensed into either refraining from causing harm to others or benefitting them. Furthermore, the practice of patience is indispensable to putting this advice into practice. If you have patience, then you will be able to make consistent progress. Without patience, then whenever you face adversity or receive harm from others, you will lose your temper and retaliate. If you continually hold onto a sense of retaliation, then you will never be able to prevent harmful actions.

2') Developing the patience of accepting suffering (a'') The reason you must definitely accept suffering (cont.)

Last week we stopped at this line:

Therefore, it is very crucial that you generate the patience that accepts suffering.

Here we need to have some idea of what this patience of acceptance means. It means being able to tolerate any harm you receive from others, or any adversity you face, so that they don't disturb or provoke your mind. We also learn how the patience of accepting suffering is very important, because if we lack it, then we will just be adding more suffering to the suffering we already experience. Our inability to tolerate suffering and difficulties, mentally worrying about them and being disturbed by them, just adds more suffering to the initial problem.

(b'') The way to develop acceptance

The way to develop acceptance has two parts:

1. Rejecting the idea that when suffering occurs it is absolutely unpleasant
2. Showing that it is appropriate to accept suffering

(1'') Rejecting the idea that when suffering occurs it is absolutely unpleasant

This section talks about the importance of overcoming the thought that suffering and hardship is always very negative and harmful. If we hold that view, then whenever we confront hardship, we mentally view it as bad and begin to hate it, which then gives way to anger. As the text says:

If you can remedy a situation wherein suffering occurs, you do not need to feel that it is unpleasant. If you cannot remedy it, it is not helpful to find it unpleasant, so there is no need for, or effectiveness to, your displeasure; there is even a disadvantage.

This particular piece of advice is widely known and applied; many people have found it very useful because it helped them to transform their negative and pessimistic perspective of hardship or adverse situations into something positive and optimistic. The advice here is that whenever we face or confront certain difficulties pertaining to our physical or mental and emotional health, then rather than simply worrying about it, we should be directing our mind to thinking about whether there is a remedy. Is there any remedy to overcome that difficulty or hardship? For example, if it is a health issue that you face, then you have to ask what you can do by focusing on treating the illness that you have. Fortunately, these days when it comes to physical health, we have very good resources such as good hospitals, doctors and nurses. This is something we enjoy as humans, although animals don't.

What the text is saying is that when you consider what you can do to overcome a problem, then you can find the remedy and see an end to the problem. This gives you hope and helps to eliminate unhappiness. However, if there is no remedy, then why should we worry because worrying will add more suffering and be of no use. This advice is very educational and very enlightening because when we think like this, it makes us feel we are on top of the suffering; otherwise we fall under the pressure of suffering. Without that kind of perspective, the suffering and hardships of life can completely control us. Then we will lose all hope and experience despair.

As the text states:

If you are very impatient, a slight suffering is extremely difficult to bear, whereas if you minimize your impatience, you can endure great suffering.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

If there is a remedy,
Why be displeased?
If there is no remedy,
What is the use of being displeased?

I shall not be impatient with
Heat, cold, wind, and rain,
Illness, bondage, beatings, and so on;
If I am, the harm increases.

(2") Showing that it is appropriate to accept suffering

Showing that it is appropriate to accept suffering has three parts:

1. Reflecting on the good qualities of suffering
2. Reflecting on the advantages of bearing suffering's hardships
3. How it is not difficult to bear suffering if you gradually grow accustomed to it, starting with the small

(a) Reflecting on the good qualities of suffering

Suffering has five good qualities: (1) *The good quality of spurring you on to liberation.* This is because if you had no suffering, you would not develop the determination to be free of it.

The first positive quality of suffering is that it gives us an opportunity to cultivate renunciation. Renunciation refers to your desire to leave cyclic existence or the suffering of this worldly existence. It is saying here that the experience of suffering stimulates a sense of renunciation, a sense of wanting to emerge from suffering. So, with renunciation we begin to strive for the state of liberation. Therefore, the quality of suffering is that it causes renunciation.

(2) *The good quality of dispelling arrogance.* This is because when suffering strikes you, it reduces your sense of superiority.

This is again very true. Suffering causes a reduction in pride. For example, people who are normally very arrogant lose their pride when they face severe hardship; under adverse circumstances they may even look low and weak physically.

(3) *The good quality of causing you to shun sin.* This is because when you experience very painful feelings, they arise from non-virtue, so if you do not want these effects, you must avoid their causes.

When we experience suffering or any hardship, we do not want it and we have a strong wish to be free from it. So, the suffering situation can motivate us to look into the causes of suffering and make an effort to avoid suffering in the future. Essentially, suffering teaches us about the law of karma, for it shows us that sinful and negative actions are the cause of suffering, and if we do not want suffering, we must avoid non-virtues or sinful actions.

(4) *The good quality of causing you to like cultivating virtue.* This is because when you are tormented with suffering, you desire happiness, and once you want it, you must cultivate the virtue that causes it.

It is also a paradox that we recognise the value of happiness in the experience of suffering. It is when we face suffering or problems that our desire for life's happiness and joy becomes more apparent. Therefore, the experience of suffering can lead us to live life more skilfully and wisely and recognise accumulating virtues as a cause of the

happiness and joy we seek. In this way, suffering can inspire us to engage in virtuous actions.

The text continues:

(5) *The good quality of producing compassion for those who wander in cyclic existence.* This is because after you have assessed your own situation, you think, "Other beings suffer like this." From these five and what they indicate, recognize other good qualities on your own and then repeatedly train your mind to think, "This suffering is a condition that I want."

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Since without suffering there is no determination to be free,
You, mind, stay fixed!

And also:

Furthermore, the good qualities of suffering are that you
Dispel arrogance with disenchantment,
Develop compassion for the beings of cyclic existence,
Carefully avoid sin, and delight in virtue.

This fifth quality of suffering is that suffering helps us to gain a better understanding of the suffering of other beings and thereby have more compassion for them. Based on our own experience of suffering, we have a better understanding of what beings are also experiencing. Therefore, we can easily feel empathy for those who are suffering. It is said that just as contemplating one's own suffering can instil a sense of renunciation and a wish to achieve liberation, contemplating the suffering of other beings can instil compassion, a wish to free them from suffering.

When Lama Tsongkhapa says *From these five and what they indicate, recognize other good qualities on your own* he is referring to the good qualities of suffering and hardship. Then he encourages us to *repeatedly train your mind to think, "This suffering is a condition that I want."* Through this we generate a positive mental outlook in relation to suffering and hardship.

In essence, we understand here the value of implementing the patience of the acceptance of suffering. Without it, then instead of finding peace, we will easily generate anger and hatred and harmful thoughts. As a result of holding such ill thoughts towards other beings, we will find no end to misery and suffering in our lives. So, the whole point is that if we want to be able to maintain a very happy and joyful state of mind, we must integrate the patience of the acceptance of suffering into our lives.

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