
The Six Perfections

ལྷན་ ། རྩེག་བ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We begin with the usual meditation.

[Meditation]

Before we begin the teaching, ensure that you cultivate the proper motivation, which is very important, as it predetermines the type of actions we create. For receiving the teachings, we need to make sure our motivation is to extend benefit and happiness for all sentient beings.

We have finished the teaching on the perfection of patience, which we went through in great detail.

The next is the fifth perfection, which is the perfection of joyous effort or joyous perseverance.

The presentation of the perfection of joyous perseverance in the text begins with:

(iv) How to train in the perfection of joyous perseverance.

This section has five parts.

(a') What joyous perseverance is

Obviously, in order to learn and train ourselves in the perfection of joyous perseverance, we first need to know what joyous perseverance is. In the presentation of the topic, the text first explains the definition or the meaning of joyous perseverance. This applies to anything we are trying to learn; we begin with its definition, otherwise we may be talking about it for hours and at the end we still don't have the faintest idea of what it is we have been talking about.

The next heading is:

(b') How to begin the practice of joyous perseverance

Simply looking at the outline, we can clearly see the logical structure and sequence, and the purpose of the topic that we are studying. First the text introduces what joyous perseverance means and then it goes into the means of engaging in the practice of joyous perseverance.

The third heading is:

(c') The divisions of joyous perseverance

The text then it shows the divisions or the different types of joyous perseverance. Then it goes onto:

(d') How to practice

And finally:

(e') A summary.

We can notice here the consistency in the outline of this presentation and that of the previous chapters.

(a') What joyous perseverance is

When you have focused upon something virtuous, joyous perseverance is enthusiasm for that virtue.

This, in a nutshell, defines joyous perseverance. It is saying that joyous perseverance is focusing on a virtuous object and its mental attitude or aspect, and taking joy, delight and enthusiasm in that object of virtue.

Here we come across the term, translated as 'joyous perseverance' in English, which is called *tsongdu* in Tibetan. It refers to a specific kind of perseverance or effort or enthusiasm. As implied in the definition, joyous perseverance is a type of perseverance, which sincerely takes joy in virtue. So, it is a wholehearted, joyful and positive mental attitude towards virtue.

The generic term for active effort in Tibetan is *bay.tsol* or *dug.ru*. When we say 'put in an effort', the object or direction of our effort, can be virtuous or non-virtuous, or even neutral. We can also feel joyful or positive in that effort. Hence, the generic term 'effort' or 'perseverance' or 'active enthusiasm', and the term 'joyous perseverance' or 'joyous effort' are quite different. An effort in non-virtue or any worldly activities, or even in some neutral things, is an effort but not joyous perseverance. Likewise, we can sometimes have joyous perseverance in terms of great enthusiasm in virtue but only on a mental level, and not actually putting it into practice by making an effort. In this context, our effort is a joyous perseverance but not an active effort, or in Tibetan *bay.tsol*. Of course, there are instances which are both effort and joyous perseverance, and others which are neither.

The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

What is joyous perseverance? It is delight in virtue.

As we discussed before, essentially the object of enthusiasm or perseverance, whatever term is used, has to be something virtuous and the delight connotes the mental aspect or the attitude of perseverance or enthusiasm.

The definition of joyous perseverance is that which is directed at an object of virtue and sincerely takes delight in virtue. It is a kind of wholehearted, joyful and positive mental attitude towards virtue. The meaning of the terms laziness or slothfulness is the opposite of joyous perseverance in that it takes delight in non-virtue. I would even say, mental afflictions of desire and anger etc, belong to the type of laziness.

In terms of our practice, the implication here is that when we put an effort into our virtuous practices, we must generate joyous perseverance or joyous effort, which is to say mentally enjoying and taking delight in our practices.

The text continues:

The *Bodhisattva Levels* [a text by Asanga] explains it as a flawless state of mind that is enthusiastic about accumulating virtue and working for the welfare of living beings, together with the physical, verbal, and mental activity such a state of mind motivates.

Joyous perseverance, as indicated here, is a force which motivates, directs and drives the actions of our three doors toward virtue in a very joyous, delightful and positive way.

(b') How to begin the practice of joyous perseverance

Frequently reflect upon the benefits of joyously persevering and the faults of not doing so. When you habituate yourself to this reflection you will develop joyous perseverance.

The practical advice here is that we have to develop joyous perseverance and overcome, as much as possible, falling under the influence of laziness. The means to achieve this is by reflecting on the benefits of joyous perseverance. We need to reflect on the benefits of generating joyous perseverance over and over again, until we become very habituated to the knowledge of its benefits. When we become habituated to this knowledge, then, as we wish to gain those benefits, our reflection will lead to the development of joyous perseverance. Conversely, reflecting on the disadvantages and shortcomings of laziness leads us to the thought of abandoning laziness.

I will continue reading from the text.

As to its benefits, the *Exhortation to Wholehearted Resolve* (*Adhyasaya-samcodana-sutra*) says:

Always rely upon noble joyous perseverance,
Which clears away all suffering and darkness,
Which is the basis of freedom from miserable realms,
And which is praised by all the buddhas.

One who joyously perseveres
Has no difficulty accomplishing any project
Whether mundane or supramundane.
Who among the learned is disheartened by joyous
perseverance?

Those who set forth for the buddhas' enlightenment,
Perceive the faults of lethargy and sleepiness,
And then continually persevere with enthusiasm.
So have I advised them.

Perhaps if you read the verses you will understand their meaning.

Always rely upon noble joyous perseverance
Which clears away all suffering

You can think of the word *suffering* here in terms of immediate and long-term future suffering. The immediate or temporary suffering is that which we experience in this life, such as hunger, thirst and the suffering related to our living conditions, such as not having good shelter and so forth. As a benefit of developing joyous effort or perseverance we can eliminate these kinds of immediate suffering, and we can also eliminate the long-term future suffering related to future bad rebirths or samsara entirely. The term *suffering and darkness* in this text has the same meaning as we find in the *Garland of Birth Stories* by Aryasura which says, 'Listening is the supreme lamp dispelling the darkness of ignorance.' Similarly, joyous perseverance has the benefit of dispelling mental dullness.

Which is the basis of freedom from miserable realms,
And which is praised by all the buddhas.

This refers to the long-term benefit of being able to prevent future bad rebirths. The very fact that we have found a good human life and have also been born in a good country is the result of the virtuous practices we have done in the past. For example, taking rebirth in a

good country is the environmental result of a positive karma.

One who joyously perseveres
Has no difficulty accomplishing any project
Whether mundane or supramundane.

These lines explain how, even in worldly terms, we must make an effort to achieve our goal if we are to accomplish anything. The houses, temples, big towns and so forth that we see are the result of the effort and hard labour of the people who made these things. Likewise, taking rebirth in a pure land or a celestial mansion in a supramundane world is dependent on joyous perseverance. As a result of putting in joyous effort, all *mundane* and *supramundane projects* can be achieved.

The next lines are:

Those who set forth for the buddhas' enlightenment,
Perceive the faults of lethargy and sleepiness,
And then continually persevere with enthusiasm.
So have I advised them.

Here we are advised that after one sets one's mind to achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence, or the supreme liberation of complete enlightenment, then it is important to develop a consistent effort in one's practice on the path, both in the immediate time frame and also in the long term.

Also, the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

Joyous perseverance is supreme among virtues;
Based on it, you subsequently attain the rest.
Through it you immediately gain a supreme state of joy,
As well as the mundane and supramundane attainments.

When it says, *through it you immediately gain a supreme state of joy*, that refers to gaining the meditative state of calm abiding and, as a benefit of calm abiding, gaining the joy or bliss of the state of concentration *as well as the mundane and supramundane attainments*.

With joyous perseverance you attain the pleasures desired
in life;
Become possessed of utter purity;
Are liberated, transcending the view of the perishing
aggregates;
And reach buddhahood, the supreme enlightenment.

In these last three lines, the words *utter purity* connote the small stages of the path, and *liberated, transcending the view of the perishing aggregates* connotes the middling stages of the path, and the last one, *reach buddhahood* connotes the great stages of the path.

And also:

One who has joyous perseverance
Is not brought down
By prosperity, afflictions,
Discouragement, or petty attainments.

If we have *joyous perseverance* we won't be deprived or short of wealth or *prosperity*, nor will we be brought down by, or be under the control of the *afflictions*. With joyous effort, we will be overruling the afflictions rather than being brought down by them. *Discouragement* indicates that if we maintain joyous perseverance then we will not experience a loss of courage or distress in our practice, while *petty attainments* indicates that with joyous effort relating to cultivating virtue, we won't be content to reap a small attainment of virtue, rather we will

continuously seek the perfection or full attainment of virtue.

The *Bodhisattva Levels* as well says:

Because joyous perseverance alone, nothing else, is the principal and highest cause for the correct attainment of a bodhisattva's virtuous qualities, the *tathagatas* have pointed it out, declaring, "Joyous perseverance is what brings about the attainment of unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment."

If we read these lines slowly and then reflect on them, then we will realise that the most important thing is to apply this by trying to bring joyous perseverance into our practice, knowing how this joyous perseverance is the principal cause for achieving a bodhisattva's qualities and so forth. Thinking on this we should be motivated to bring joy into our practice.

The *Compendium of the Perfections* also states:

If you are free of fatigue and have great joyous perseverance,
There is nothing you cannot attain or accomplish.

And also:

Even all non-human beings delight in helping you;
You attain all types of meditative concentrations
And spend all periods of the day and night fruitfully.
Your collection of good qualities does not decline,
And your purposes surpassing the affairs of humankind
Flourish like the blue utpala flower.

Can you find the *utpala* flower here? I have heard that it is a flower which comes in white or red and has a very nice fragrance, which lasts for two days. We don't find them in Tibet.

As said in the previous lines, *Your collection of good qualities does not decline*, which is to say, in order to prevent our virtuous qualities from declining we must maintain joyous perseverance, and your purposes surpassing the affairs of humankind, flourish like the blue utpala flower. We have covered this.

As to the faults of not joyously persevering, the *Questions of Sagaramati Sutra* states:

The enlightenment of the lazy is exceedingly far off and distant.

Enlightenment is very far off and distant for someone who is lazy.

The lazy lack all perfections from generosity to wisdom.

With laziness there is no way we can develop all the practices of the perfections: giving, patience, joyous effort, concentration, wisdom and so forth.

The lazy do not work for others' welfare.

It is also very true that somebody who is lazy will not engage in the act of benefiting others.

And the *Mindfulness of the Excellent Teaching (Sad-dharmanusmrty-upasthana)* states as well:

Whoever has laziness -
The single basis of the afflictions -

This is to point out how laziness can act as a cause for all other kinds of affliction to increase. Laziness is almost the single cause for the arising and increase of all other afflictions.

Whoever feels some laziness
Lacks all good qualities.

This means that if you have one laziness, then you don't possess all the excellent qualities.

Thus, if you lack joyous perseverance, you come under the influence of laziness and become poor in all good qualities. Then you lose every temporary and ultimate purpose of being human.

We will stop the teaching here and we recite the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* and dedicate it for the deceased mother of Jools Gardner.

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Edited Version

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