
The Six Perfections

འབྲུག་གི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལ་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་ལྷན་སྐྱེད་ལྟུང་།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Try to cultivate the motivation 'I wish to achieve the complete state of enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. For this purpose, I will listen to this profound teaching and put it into practice.'

The point of practising Dharma is not just to gain knowledge for stimulating our mind, but to really transform or subdue our mind. In our approach, Dharma must serve as a means to subdue our mind; it should serve as an antidote to, or counteract, the negative or undisciplined states of mind. For example, when we talk about the practice of loving kindness and compassion, it is not good enough to simply understand what compassion is all about and how to cultivate it. What is more important is that we actually cultivate compassion, so that it actually arises within our mind stream.

So when we talk about meditating on loving kindness and compassion, we are talking about the state of loving kindness and compassion actually arising in our mind. In contrast, when we talk about meditating on the view of selflessness or emptiness, we are talking about a meditation in which we take emptiness as the object of our mind. When we meditate on love, however, we are habituating our mind with love, which means that the mind arises in the nature of love.

Usually, whenever we hear these words 'love and compassion', we say to ourselves, 'love' means wishing others to have happiness, and 'compassion' means wishing them to be free from suffering. But we should not think that this understanding is the meditation on love and compassion. It is not, because such love and compassion simply pays lip service to the notion and we don't really feel it in our heart. In fact, we would have the notion that such love and compassion is something outside of us. This kind of approach brings us no real benefit.

We need to cultivate love and compassion within ourselves, within our mind. Then, as it is said, the mind of love and compassion will become our true, priceless, inner treasure, enhancing the happiness in our lives. We will notice that when love and compassion arise within us, it will automatically make our state of mind positive, joyful and happy. And a positive, joyful state of mind also serves as a cause to enhance our physical wellbeing, thereby increasing our longevity.

When we understand the Dharma, and effectively apply it, we can truly appreciate the benefits of practising Dharma. The more effort we put into developing love and compassion, the more love and compassion will increase in our mind. The more love and compassion in our mind, the more happiness and joy we will find in our life. Since we all are seeking happiness all the time, we must create the cause, such as cultivating love and compassion.

Basically, if we wish for a result, we need to understand that we must create the cause, because the result depends on the cause. If the result were not dependent on the cause, it

should arise automatically. The mind of love and compassion is the true source of happiness and joy for ourselves and others. When the causes are created, the results will automatically happen. Hence, if we put an effort into habituating our mind with love and compassion, these qualities will naturally increase. Then, as our mind becomes habituated with them, these qualities will arise with minimum effort on our part, or when we meet with the minimum causes and conditions.

This I know from my own experience of practising cultivating love and compassion. I am sharing my experience not with any intention to praise myself, but to say that it is possible to develop love and compassion within us. In the past thirty years or so of practising love and compassion, I found that initially, it didn't arise easily. Yet I persisted with the practice and, as a result, I can now say that it arises easily, even when I observe other beings experiencing a minor suffering. This shows that mental habits do change through training our mind. If we train our mind through meditation practice, our mind will become habituated to love and compassion.

We have been talking about joyful effort, which is an essential factor for cultivating any virtue that we have not cultivated, or to increase the virtues we have already cultivated. We have learned that cultivating joyful effort really means to cultivate a genuine, sincere, heartfelt joy and interest in engaging in virtue. Therefore, we can understand how, when we have joyful effort in our practice, we are also rejoicing in our own virtue, which fulfils the practice of the branch of rejoicing within the seven branches or limbs.

As we know, rejoicing is an important cause of multiplying or increasing our virtue. Most of you have studied the seven-branch practice. But the question is, do you apply it in your practice? Practising all seven branches is essential, because if we miss one of them in our practice, we won't be able to reach the state of buddhahood. That's why the seven are called the 'branches' to achieve enlightenment. It is similar to a car that has some of its essential parts damaged or missing – it won't start.

The seven branches of the seven-limb practice – beginning with the first two branches of prostration and offering – are for accumulating merits and purifying negativities, which is how we reach complete enlightenment. The third branch is confession, which – in contrast to the branch of rejoicing in virtue – means to regret any negativities or non-virtues we have accumulated. It is very important that we feel regret or remorse about our negativities, from the depths of our heart. While the branch of rejoicing inspires us to accumulate more virtues, the branch of confession inspires us to avoid accumulating non-virtues again. It is said that through the branch of confession, half of that negativity or sin will be purified.

In Tibetan, the word *digpa*, which means 'sin', connotes something very negative or undesirable. I would interpret undesirability as referring to the result of that negative or sinful action, which is something we don't want; that's why the action is called *digpa*, or a sin. Feeling regret about negativities will naturally result in us cultivating the purifying force of promise, which is a resolution to refrain from doing that same negative action in future.

Then, there are the branches of requesting the Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma and not to pass into parinirvana. Finally, the branch of dedication is also extremely important for increasing our virtue and making it inexhaustible.

As I have said before, putting Dharma into practice is what matters most, and our everyday actions can be integrated into our Dharma practice. For example, whenever we drink a cup of tea or eat any food, we can integrate that into our Dharma practice, such as the seven-limb practice of making offerings to noble beings. Here, we should remember what to think of – that, having made the offering to the enlightened beings, we have pleased them and caused uncontaminated bliss to arise. By feeling positive and rejoicing in the practice of offering, we integrate the branch of rejoicing. We can also integrate our everyday eating and drinking into the practice of giving, by thinking we are feeding all the bacteria and microorganisms that live in our body. At the end, we can dedicate any virtue we have accumulated through these practices to sustain our lives, so that we will cause the Dharma to flourish and benefit all sentient beings.

Khunu Lama Rinpoche said in his text *Jewel Lamp: A Praise of Bodhicitta*:

When you walk, walk with bodhicitta.
When you sit, sit with bodhicitta.
When you stand, stand with bodhicitta.
When you sleep, sleep with bodhicitta.
When you look, look with bodhicitta.
When you eat, eat with bodhicitta.
When you speak, speak with bodhicitta.
When you think, think with bodhicitta.

This beautiful passage showing the benefit of bodhicitta indicates how we can integrate all our actions of sleeping, sitting, standing and walking with our bodhicitta practice.

So, not practising Dharma is our main drawback; it is not as if we don't have the opportunity, or lack Dharma knowledge. Many of us make the seven-bowls water offering daily, which represents the seven-branch or seven-limb practice. Rather than doing it as just a ritual, we should remember that the main purpose of the offering is to reflect on the meaning of the seven branches and integrate them with our everyday practice. In this way, we engage in the practice of accumulating merits and purifying negativities on a daily basis.

It is by integrating Dharma with our daily activities, even something as ordinary as eating food or drinking tea, that we cultivate and maintain a positive state of mind. It is the same when we go to sleep. As we all know, sleeping is really for resting or rejuvenating our body. However, we should not just simply sleep to rest our body, but think that the purpose of resting is to serve the Dharma and all sentient beings. As we practise Dharma, we will notice our mind being calmed and subdued, and as a result we will find a stable and lasting state of peace and happiness.

[Geshe-la continues teaching from the Six Perfections chapter on joyous perseverance or joyful effort]

(2") Employing the methods to eliminate the incompatible factors (cont.)

(c) Stopping discouragement or self-contempt

It is not enough just to delight in the sublime teaching after you have stopped your procrastination and your attachment to ignoble activities; you must train as a Mahayana practitioner. Therefore, if you become discouraged, thinking, "Someone like me is unable to practice that," you must eliminate this discouragement. Stopping discouragement or self-contempt has three parts:

1. Stopping discouragement about the goal
2. Stopping discouragement about the means to attain the goal
3. Stopping discouragement because wherever you are is a place to practice

(1) Stopping discouragement about the goal

Qualm: If the goal is buddhahood – the total elimination of all faults and the total completion of all good qualities – then, since it is extremely difficult for me to accomplish even a few good qualities or to remove even a few faults, how could someone like me be capable of attaining such a result?

Reply: If such a sense of discouragement manifests, it is a very great fault because it constitutes giving up the spirit of enlightenment. Even if such a thought does not fully manifest, you must stop it at its incipient stage.

With respect to the lines *If the goal is Buddhahood – the total elimination of all faults and the total completion of all good qualities* a question may arise in the mind of someone with a very good background knowledge of what constitutes the perfect state of buddhahood or enlightenment. They already know that buddhahood means the total elimination of all faults and being endowed with all the excellent qualities. So this qualm about achieving this state may arise in the mind of such a person. As it is saying here, they may realise that, in the light of their own situation, even gaining a single quality or to eliminate a single fault is extremely difficult let alone achieving the infinite qualities or eliminating all faults. Such a person might get discouraged by thinking, 'how it is possible for someone like me to achieve the state of buddhahood?'

It is said that if one has already cultivated the bodhicitta mind, and becomes discouraged by thinking, 'I won't be able to achieve the state of enlightenment', there is a danger of losing that bodhicitta mind. So, how do we overcome this low self-esteem or sense of discouragement? It says here:

Reply: If such a sense of discouragement manifests, it is a very great fault because it constitutes giving up the spirit of enlightenment. Even if such a thought does not fully manifest, you must stop it at its incipient stage.

As a remedy, or to counteract discouragement, we need to reflect on something to uplift or lighten up our low self-esteem and bring positive thoughts and inner joy. This reflection is similar to counteracting mental sinking in the calm abiding meditation. The text continues:

How to stop it? Encourage yourself with this thought: "The Bhagavan – the authoritative person who speaks what is true and correct, never what is false or erroneous – said that even flies, etc. will attain enlightenment..."

The 'bhagavan' here refers to a fully awakened one, who is called in Tibetan *kyebu tsema* – an authoritative or valid person. *Kyebu* means person, and *tsema* means valid cogniser, which is a type of mind that is incontrovertible or infallible with respect to its object. Here, the bhagavan Buddha is called an authoritative or valid person because a buddha is an infallible or fully reliable person who only speaks *what is true and correct*. For example, Buddha taught the four noble truths, laying down the instruction of what to adopt and what to abandon, and so forth. Everything the Buddha has taught is valid and infallible and aligned with reality. Hence, the Buddha is a valid person. Lama Tsong Khapa says here that the Buddha had said *even flies, etc. will attain enlightenment*. So, since Buddha has said that even flies can attain enlightenment, why can't I? You need to think:

“...That being so, why should I not attain it – so long as I do not give up persevering – in as much as human birth...”

So, you say to yourself, ‘I have been born as a human being, and as a human being I am able to communicate and cognise the meaning of life.’ Of course, when it says you are able to communicate and understand the meaning of life, it is not in the same context as saying, ‘here is your food, you eat it’ i.e. understanding that your purpose is to eat that food. Rather, the purpose or meaning referred to here is the state of liberation and omniscience – enlightenment. You think about how, if Buddha has said that a fly can achieve enlightenment, then you can say to yourself, ‘I am a human being, I can do it’, and in this way uplift your mind and diminish discouragement.

“...human birth gives me an excellent basis and I have the mental capacity to analyze what to adopt and what to cast aside?”

As well as being born as a human being, you also have the gift of a good sense of discernment, or the intelligence to know the difference between what is right and what is wrong. This is how we dispel discouragement or sinking in our mind: by reflecting on something very positive that brings joy to the mind.

However, just as we don’t want our mind to feel so low that we lose our spirit and interest in our practice and become discouraged, we also don’t want our mind to feel so high or uplifted that it will be inflated with pride and arrogance. We need to cultivate the right level of mental attitude, not making us feel too low or too high.

Continuing with the text:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

“How could I attain enlightenment?”

I shall not indulge in such discouragement,
For the truth-declaring Tathagata
Has spoken this truth:

“Even flies, mosquitoes,
Bees, and worms will attain
Unsurpassed enlightenment, so hard to attain,
Once they generate the power of perseverance.”

Why should someone like me –
Born into the human race, recognizing benefit and harm –
Not attain enlightenment,
As long as I do not give up the bodhisattva deeds?

The two lines *Why should someone like me, Born into the human race, recognizing benefit and harm* are points we need to seriously reflect on. Being born as a human, do we really recognise the difference between what will benefit us or harm us? Unfortunately, we might be confused about the two, and think of benefit as harmful, and of harm as beneficial.

Furthermore, stop your discouragement with this thought: “In the past there were former buddhas, now there are living buddhas, and in the future there will also be those who reach buddhahood. It is not the case that just one person who has already become a buddha accomplishes the path. Rather, those just like myself, gradually progressing upward, have become buddhas and will become buddhas.”

To inspire us, we must think that past buddhas became buddhas, not because they were already buddhas and then became buddhas, but rather, once upon a time, they were exactly like us. It says here, *it is not the case that one person who has already become a buddha accomplishes the path, Rather those just like myself...* Buddhas in the past were just like us;

each was an ordinary person, filled with all the negativities and faults.

However, the line, *just like myself, gradually progressing upwards*, indicates how all the buddhas reached the state of enlightenment through following the stages of the path to enlightenment or the lamrim. Beginning with the practice of relying on the spiritual guru, they then meditated on the precious human rebirth – recognising its rarity, meaning and transient nature – then on the sufferings of lower rebirth. Following this, they reflected on the law of cause and effect, the four noble truths, and the faults of cyclic existence, cultivating renunciation. This is followed by cultivating bodhicitta, through the sixfold causes and effect – from recognising all beings as having been our mother, to compassion, to superior intention, culminating in the bodhicitta mind. They then engaged in the six perfections and finally reached the state of enlightenment.

In this way – even though once upon a time they were exactly like us, completely afflicted with all negativities – all the buddhas progressed, stage by stage, to complete enlightenment. So, we must think that we too will reach complete enlightenment by practising according to our current capacity, such as initially working on counteracting a specific fault or cultivating a specific excellent quality. We can at least understand the possibility of achieving the same state of complete enlightenment that all the buddhas have achieved.

The text then says:

The bodhisattva thinks as follows: “All the tathagatas, arhats, perfect buddhas who have attained, who are attaining, and who will attain complete enlightenment have, are, and will attain complete enlightenment through this kind of method, this kind of path, this kind of joyous perseverance.” Thus, it is not the case that all these tathagatas are just one person who has already become a tathagata attaining complete enlightenment...

...Rather, I too shall reach total perfection in utterly unsurpassed, perfect, and complete enlightenment. With joyous perseverance in common with all living beings and joyous perseverance focused upon all living beings, I too shall seek and strive for enlightenment.

This indicates the truth of cause and effect – that, if we are to achieve the state of enlightenment, we must recognise that it doesn’t arise without causes and conditions. Here, the text is showing us that we all can achieve enlightenment, for we all have the buddha or tathagata nature or potential.

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Edited Version*

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