

The Six Perfections

ཅུ་ཤུ་ཤེས་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

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We will do our usual giving and taking meditation.

[Meditation]

Try to begin with the proper motivation. We need to cultivate whatever understanding of the proper motivation we have, and put that understanding into practice.

The reason why we follow the Dharma or meditation practice is to train our mind to be more kind-hearted and more wholesome. So, as we engage in this training, it is important that right at the beginning we make an effort to generate a positive and very good state of mind as part of our motivation.

I have mentioned in past teachings that there should be a difference between people who have knowledge of the Dharma, and people who don't have knowledge of the Dharma, in terms of how you live your life, and in particular, the way you manage any adverse or difficult situations. It is very important that those with knowledge of the Dharma and mind training apply it in their lives, otherwise having that Dharma knowledge will make no difference. Let's say you confront a situation where someone is annoying and harming you. With the application of Dharma knowledge you can prevent feelings of anger or wanting to retaliate, and thereby feel empathy and love for the perpetrator while maintaining your peace and sanity. One effective way to handle the situation in a more positive and holistic way is to view the perpetrator as being separate from their actions.

As Dharma practitioners we need to prepare ourselves not only in managing afflictive emotions such as anger as they arise, but also preventing them from arising in the first place. On the other hand, those who lack Dharma knowledge do not contemplate overcoming afflictive emotions, and when they face adverse situations, they won't consider tolerating that so they generate hatred and react negatively towards the perpetrator. The fact is that if we let anger control us, then we lose our peace and happiness and will also cause harm to others. Alternatively, if we overcome anger and cultivate loving kindness, we can maintain inner peace and happiness and be in a position to prevent any harmful actions. This is what the Buddha meant when he said in the *Dhammapada*, 'One truly is the protector of oneself; who else could the protector be? With oneself fully controlled, one gains a mastery that is hard to gain.' If you utilise your understanding and knowledge of the right approach then you can prevent any adverse or unfavourable situations from disturbing your mind.

(b'') Gathering the forces of the favourable conditions

(1'') Developing the power of aspiration (cont.)

At the last teaching we stopped at this sentence in the text:

Furthermore, you consider karma and its effects in general, and in particular, the causality underlying the benefits of the bodhisattva deeds and the faults of violating them.

Following this quotation, the text refers back to an earlier quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*.

It then states how to develop aspiration:

Its root, in turn, is constant meditation
On karma's fruitional effects.

This means that the way to develop aspiration is to meditate on how pleasant and unpleasant effects arise from virtuous and non-virtuous karma respectively.

This means that the way to develop aspiration primarily refers to conviction faith in *how pleasant and unpleasant effects arise from virtuous and non-virtuous karma respectively*. Here we find an instruction on the importance of applying the fundamental Buddhist practice of the law of karma. In order to feel motivated to put this into practice, we need to generate and develop a conviction faith in the law of karma which is that the result of good karma is pleasant and desirable, whereas the result of evil or non-virtuous actions is unpleasant or undesirable. Cultivating this conviction faith in the pleasant and unpleasant effect of virtuous and non-virtuous actions respectively is the very core of our practice.

The result of virtuous actions is pleasant and desirable to us, so we need to understand that we must adopt virtuous actions. On the other hand, we must abandon non-virtuous actions because their results are unpleasant and undesirable. We can think of the pleasant or unpleasant result of karma in terms of a ripening or an environmental result. Therefore, here the emphasis is on cultivating and developing two types of conviction faith relating to the pleasant effects of virtuous actions and the unpleasant effects of evil or non-virtuous actions, and as a result, deciding to adopt virtuous actions and abandon non-virtuous actions.

The text continues:

Furthermore, you consider karma and its effects in general, and in particular, the causality underlying the benefits of the bodhisattva deeds and the faults of violating them.

Furthermore, you consider karma and its effects in general relates to the presentation of karma in general as expounded in the small stages of the path. The four general characteristics of karma are:

- Karma is definite
- Karma increases
- We cannot meet with a result of karma that we have not created
- The karma we create isn't exhausted.

This is emphasising that we should cultivate conviction faith in these four characteristics of karma in order to feel motivated to engage in practice with joyful effort.

For example, karma is certain or definite refers to the certainty that virtuous actions produce the result of happiness. If we cultivate a genuine strong faith in that, it will affect our actions and our practice. Simply cultivating such faith alone can be an effective cause to deter us from evil actions and lead us to create positive actions through positive thoughts and deeds. We can only reap the benefits of the Dharma by putting it into practice.

The text also touches on the bodhisattva deeds in terms of the six perfections of giving, morality and so forth, and the faults of violating these six, such as miserliness, immorality and so forth. In saying *causality underlying the benefits of the bodhisattva deeds and the faults of violating them*, the text is referring to the benefit of the six perfections followed by the faults or shortcomings of the opposite to each of those six perfections.

Next the text states:

Understand these from the relevant sections of this text.

Once you aspire to the Mahayana, you enter its door through a commitment to clear away all faults and achieve all good qualities for yourself and others.

Here, the words *once you aspire to Mahayana* indicate the generation of the bodhicitta mind which has two aspirations: the aspiration to achieve supreme enlightenment and the aspiration to achieve the welfare of other beings. Once you generate this bodhicitta then *you enter its door* which refers to entering the door of the Great Vehicle or the Mahayana. Then *through commitment to clear away all faults and achieve all good qualities* – referring to the cultivation of the aspirational bodhicitta mind – you commit yourself to achieving enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings.

We continue with the text:

You must exhort yourself, thinking, “I will have to meditate for many eons to purify myself of every single fault along with its latent propensity and to develop every single good quality to the fullest extent. Yet since I have not even a fraction of the joyous perseverance needed to clear away faults or accomplish good qualities, I have pointlessly wasted my leisure.”

Here we reflect on what it takes to achieve enlightenment. Initially you generate the bodhicitta mind through which you enter the Mahayana door and then commit yourself to achieving complete enlightenment, the state where you *clear away all faults* and achieve *all good qualities* for yourself and others. With the bodhicitta mind, you must have the motivation and courage to say, “*I will have to meditate for many eons to purify myself of every single fault along with its latent propensity.*” The indication here is that it is not enough just to abandon all the mental delusions, such as desire, but the latencies of all such delusions have to be abandoned as well. Even though an arhat or foe destroyer of the Lesser Vehicle has abandoned afflictive obscurations, they have not abandoned the latencies of those afflictive obscurations, i.e. they have not abandoned the subtle form of false or dualistic appearance.

You need *to purify [ourselves] of every single fault along with its latent propensity and to develop every single good quality to the fullest extent. Yet since I have not even a fraction of the joyous perseverance needed to clear away faults or accomplish good qualities, I have pointlessly wasted my leisure.* As indicated here, as you gain a full and complete understanding of what it takes to achieve complete enlightenment, and then consider where you are and your capability in terms of the path to enlightenment, there is a good chance that you will become discouraged. This is because you realise that you have not removed even a single fault or achieved a single excellent quality. When you think about this, and the amount of merit needed to achieve the major and minor signs of a buddha, the amount needed to achieve even a single hair of a buddha is enormous. With an understanding of the stages of the path and how little one has progressed on the path, a sense of discouragement may arise.

The text continues with this quote:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

I will destroy the immeasurable
Faults of myself and others.
To destroy each fault
Will take an ocean of eons.

But if I cannot see in myself even a fraction
Of the effort needed to terminate a fault,
I am a source of measureless suffering.
Why does my heart not break?

I will accomplish numerous
Good qualities for myself and others.
To cultivate each good quality
Requires an ocean of eons,

But I have never conditioned myself
To even a mere fraction of a good quality.
Somehow I have obtained this life –
It is appalling to waste it.

(2”) Developing the power of steadfastness

Having generated joyful effort through the power of aspiration, we need to cultivate the power of steadfastness in order to maintain our effort until we successfully achieve our goal.

As the text says:

Developing the power of steadfastness means that you bring to conclusion, without turning back, anything at which you joyously persevere. First, do not try to do everything; examine the situation carefully. If you see that you can do it, you engage in it; whereas if you cannot do it, you do not engage in it.

This relates to how to bring steadfastness to our effort. As indicated here, whatever the task that we commence, whether it is spiritual or worldly, if we are steadfast, we will never give it up until we complete it. The first piece of the advice is *do not try to do everything; examine the situation carefully.* This is clearly saying that we should not jump into taking on tasks. Before we commence a task, we should carefully examine if we have the ability to accomplish that task. If we lack the ability, then, as the text is saying, it is better not to begin it in the first place. However, *if you see that you can do it, you engage in it.* If you have confidence that you can achieve the task, then you engage in it.

If you doubt that you are able to achieve that task then, as suggested here, *if you cannot do it, you do not engage in it.* The text then elaborates on why it is better not to begin a task if we think that we cannot achieve it.

You should not even start in the first place things you will do for a while and then discard.

As the text clearly says, if we start some task that we are not able to achieve then we *will give up in the middle.* Essentially the reason is:

The reason is that if you become habituated to giving up in the middle what you have committed yourself to do, then through this conditioning you will in other lives again abandon your commitment to the training, etc.

Rather than acquiring the habit of starting something and then giving up before you complete it, it is better not to start that task in the first place. Quite often we do things simply because someone else is doing them. We want to do the same thing, but don’t give much thought to whether we can, in fact, do it. For example, we take too many commitments in our practice and later we are not able to keep up with them.

If you start something without thoroughly examining the task in advance, you may give it up in the middle and not complete the task. That’s why the text is saying it is wiser not to engage in a task that you think you cannot accomplish, in order to prevent the habit of stopping tasks

in the middle and not completing them. Otherwise, we become habituated *through conditioning* and then *you will in other lives again abandon your commitment to the training*. As the text clearly states, not completing tasks will not only prevent us from achieving our set goal in the immediate time frame or in this life, but this habit of giving up in the middle of a task will also have an impact on our future lives as well.

Consequently, your sin will increase in that life, and in subsequent lives the suffering that is the effect of this sin will increase. Furthermore, you will not accomplish other virtues because you will be thinking of carrying out your earlier commitment; there will be an inferior result because you turned away from your earlier commitment; and your earlier commitment itself will not be fulfilled because you did not follow through.

Essentially this is indicating that if we fall into this habit of not completing whatever task we start, not only will we fail to achieve the task we started, but it will also be an obstacle to undertaking other tasks as well.

The text continues:

In sum, committing yourself to do something but leaving it unfinished is a hindrance to your accomplishment of other projects, and the conditioning also destabilizes your commitment to the vows you have taken. In this vein, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

First I examine the endeavor
And then undertake it or not.
If unable, it is best not to undertake it,
But once begun, I will not turn back.

Otherwise I will be conditioned to this [starting and then stopping] in other lives
And my sin and suffering will increase.
Also, other actions and their results
Will be poor and unaccomplished.

Therefore, if you want to complete what you have committed yourself to do, cultivate three types of pride.

The three types of pride are explained in the following quote:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

You should have pride in three areas:
Action, ability, and afflictions.

The three types of pride are pride about action, ability and afflictions. Here the term 'pride' is not used in the sense of pride being an affliction or delusion. It is used in the sense of generating spirit or courage and determination. Next, we look into the meaning of each of these types of pride.

Pride about action means that no matter who else may be your companion as you practice the path, you do not count on them but accomplish it yourself alone.

This clearly states that pride about action is a form of mental spirit and courage that we need in our spiritual practice. We need the kind of courage that says, 'I can do it all by myself and don't need help from others.' As the text says:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

"I alone shall do it."

Also Nagarjuna's *Friendly Letter (Suhrl-lekha)* says:

Liberation depends on oneself;
It never occurs through the help of others.

To be more specific, in order to reach the state of liberation we have to make an effort; if we do not make effort, then we won't reach the state of liberation. Our liberation is

dependent on ourselves alone and no one else. Therefore, we need to say, 'I must make effort to achieve liberation, and I won't rely on others to give me that.'

Then:

The thought, "I alone shall achieve this without having any expectation of others," is similar to pride, so it is given the name "pride about action."

As mentioned earlier, 'pride' in the context of pride about action, is not the pride that is a type of mental delusion. Here it is the kind of spirit and courage that we need to generate as we engage in spiritual practice, which provides an impetus to maintain steadfastness in our practice.

Next:

Pride about ability means that you accomplish your own and others' welfare, thinking: "Since living beings are under the power of afflictions, they are unable to achieve even their own welfare, much less the welfare of others. I am able to accomplish the welfare of both myself and others."

Pride about ability indicates that you have confidence in your ability which, you are saying, no other beings possess. They cannot even benefit themselves due to the power of their mental afflictions let alone working to benefit others. However, as says here, *I am able to accomplish the welfare of both myself and others*. With this you are generating pride in your ability.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

The beings of this world, subject to the afflictions,
Cannot achieve their own welfare.
They are not as able as I am,
So I shall do it for them.

Then the text continues:

Furthermore, practice while thinking, "If these beings strive at lowly activities without interruption, why should I not perform the actions that will achieve the perfect effect?"

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

If others perform lowly actions,
How can I be idle?

However, when you achieve these two prides [about action and ability], you should not do so with self-conceit, out of contempt for others. Rather, regard others with compassion, and do not mix in any pride.

Again, the text is clarifying how pride about action and ability is different from the deluded form of pride, because it is not a mental attitude of pride or arrogance where the self is viewed as above all others. *You should not do with self-conceit*, indicates that normally pride means looking down on or belittling others. An example to illustrate a person with pride is someone on the top of the hill who sees himself above all others, who are below them. However, the word 'pride' here doesn't have that deluded sense of self-importance. *Rather regard others with compassion and do not mix in any [deluded] pride*.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

I do not do it out of pride,
I should have no pride.

Thinking, "Others are not capable; I am able," again resembles pride, so it is labelled "pride."

Next, the third type of pride is introduced.

Pride about afflictions means that with contempt for the afflictions on all occasions, you think, "I shall be victorious over these; they shall never defeat me." It means being

steadfast after you have generated the courageous thought to destroy the incompatible factors.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

I shall conquer all;
Nothing shall defeat me.
I, a child of the Victorious Lion,
Shall continue to have this pride.

Otherwise, if you lose courage, even a small incompatible factor will harm you.

This clearly refers to showing courage in combating the afflictions. If you cultivate such courage you will not fall under the influence of mental afflictions; rather you will be on top of them at all times. So we can see how it is very important to have this kind of courage because it strengthens the force of our ability to counteract the mental afflictions for which we need to have a strong opponent force. Developing that courage is what cultivating pride about afflictions is all about. As the text says, *if you lose courage about the afflictions then even a small incompatible factor will harm you.*

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Even a crow acts like a garuda
When it finds a dying snake.
If I am feeble,
Even a slight shortcoming will harm me.

According to this example, when a crow, which is an ordinary bird, sees a dying snake, it will act like a *garuda*. Likewise, if we are weak and lack spirit and courage then even a minor downfall in our practice can cause us great harm.

How can one who gives up, discouraged,
Find freedom from destitution?

Can you reach your goal if you simply remain discouraged and give up whatever you have studied in the past? Does this help you to reach your goal? Of course not!

Sha-ra-wa said:

The happiness of those who cast aside the teaching does not exceed their happiness before doing so. Consider the fact that if you give up the teaching in this lifetime, you must hereafter undergo endless suffering.

Sharawa is raising this question: if we give up or don't follow the teachings or the Dharma will we find more happiness? Of course, not. Sharawa continues:

If you make no effort, the afflictions will not look upon you with compassion.

Earlier the text talked about the necessity of having this courageous mind in order to combat the mental afflictions. If we give up our practice because we hope that the mental afflictions will show us compassion and mercy, then, we are wrong, because the afflictions will never show us compassion. Furthermore:

Also, the remedy will not say, "You are unable to cultivate me, so I will complete the task for you." Even the buddhas and bodhisattvas will not be able to protect you.

We have a saying that if we don't have the ring of faith in the Dharma then the hook of the compassion of all the buddhas cannot hold us up. Again, the text is saying that without making an effort from our own side and maintaining a good motivation and high spirit in our practice, then even the buddhas and bodhisattvas will not be able to protect us.

In conclusion:

If you apply the aforementioned three prides, even great incompatible factors cannot block you, so you must generate these three kinds of pride. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Against one who strives with pride
Even great obstacles will be in trouble.
So with a steadfast mind
I will overcome my shortcomings.

Otherwise, if practitioners are defeated by their shortcomings, their desire to conquer the afflictions of the three realms will be an embarrassment among the learned. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

If I am defeated by shortcomings,
My desire to conquer the three realms is a joke.

It is called "pride about afflictions" because you have contempt for the afflictions and then want to destroy them.

Some commentators to *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* explain this pride about afflictions differently, but I think the above explanation accords with the text.

Thus, stop expecting something from others and put on the armour of doing it alone. That is, be confident and think, "Unlike me, others cannot do it. I can do it." When you practice with this perspective, you are sure that you will defeat the afflictions – that they will never defeat you – and you consider that it would be a mistake to abandon your commitment after a while. Train yourself until your mind is steadfast in the desire to finish everything to which you have committed yourself after you have carefully examined whether you can do it.

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Edited Version*

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