
The Six Perfections

འབྲུག་གི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ལྷན་སྐྱེད་ཀྱི་ལཱ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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As usual, we will begin with a short meditation. [*Tonglen meditation*]

It would be good to try to do at least some meditation regularly. To meditate properly, you should first have a good understanding of the practice - you need to gain what we call the wisdom arising from contemplating the subject matter. With wisdom based on contemplation, the subject matter you meditate on is fully established in your mind, by your own knowledge, based on your own reasoning.

However, to gain such a wisdom arising from contemplation, you have to first gain the wisdom arising from listening to the Dharma through studying. Even if the meditation you engage in is a very simple one, you still need to have some understanding of it.

The topics of our meditation should be based on teachings as taught by the Buddha. Therefore, we must first study the Dharma well to gain the wisdom based on listening to the Dharma. Without the wisdom arising from listening, we cannot produce the wisdom arising from contemplation, and without that, we cannot produce the wisdom arising from meditation. Therefore, it is very important to combine all three - listening, contemplating and meditating - in our practice.

The wisdom arising from listening is just based on information we have gathered from other people or scriptures; it does not give us a firm ground on which to make steady progress in our practice. In other words, the faith in the Dharma of a person who merely possesses such knowledge can be easily shaken.

Hence, it is crucial that we contemplate and critically examine and analyse the knowledge we gain from listening, and thereby make that knowledge our own. Then, when we engage in meditation practice, we can make good progress.

We will benefit from studying and practising the Dharma if we know it well and do it effectively. It is said, 'being peaceful and (self) controlled is the sign of learning; a decrease of mental afflictions is the sign of meditation.' As a measurement or sign of studying the Dharma, our continuum should be pacified and controlled, and the sign of meditation should be a decrease in our mental afflictions.

(3") Developing the power of joy

We've finished the section 'developing the power of steadfastness'. Now we move to the next topic, which is 'developing the power of joy'.

The text continues:

You develop the power of joy after the power of aspiration, an intense yearning, produces a joyous perseverance not previously present, and you have achieved the power of steadfastness (also called the power of pride) which causes the perseverance that has already developed to be irreversible. The power of joy means that when you first engage in an activity, you do it joyfully, and once you have

engaged, you have a sense of being insatiable in that you do not want to discontinue the activity.

Here again we find a profound instruction from Lama Tsongkhapa's own experience relating to how to sustain and develop joyful effort. What is clearly explained here is how, through cultivating the power of aspiration, we can generate the joyful effort we have not yet generated. Then, through cultivating the power of steadfastness or pride, we can maintain the joyful effort we have already generated. Regarding the power of steadfastness, we have already learned about the different types of pride, which really refer to types of courage. By cultivating such courage, we will be able to increase whatever joyful effort we have generated.

Regarding the power of joy, the text says that *the power of joy means that when you first engage in an activity, right from the very beginning, you do it joyfully, and once you have engaged, you have a sense of being insatiable.* The implication is that you enjoy the virtuous activity so much that, no matter how much you do it, you want to do it more; as it says here, you feel insatiable and *you do not want to discontinue the activity.*

The last sentence - *the power of joy means that when you first engage in an activity, you do it joyfully, and once you have engaged, you have a sense of being insatiable in that you do not want to discontinue the activity* - summarises the meaning of the power of joy. The text then further explains the meaning of the power of joy:

With respect to how you develop this sense of insatiability, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

Like those who want the pleasure that results from play,
Bodhisattvas are passionate
About any activity they have to do.
Insatiable, they take joy in their work.

This verse from Shantideva's text shows us the insatiable joy that bodhisattvas take while engaging in practice. The verse refers to *any activity they have to do*, meaning virtuous activities, which may be listening to or contemplating the Dharma, meditating on bodhicitta, and so forth. So, you take tremendous joy in doing your practice. Your joy is so great you have a sense of insatiability in that you continuously want to engage in that practice.

The text continues:

So strive with an attitude like that of children who engage in play without being satiated.

As this example clearly explains, we should engage in virtue as joyfully as when children immerse themselves in play and can never have enough of it.

The text continues:

That is, you must be just as insatiable about what causes pleasurable results as you are about the results themselves.

Further, here Lama Tsongkhapa points out that, just as we should be insatiable about the pleasurable results of our actions, so too should we be insatiable about what causes these pleasurable results.

The text continues:

For, if ordinary persons strive even when they are uncertain whether they will obtain a pleasant result, what need is there to speak about activities, which are certain to bear pleasurable results?

To show why we should be motivated to put continuous effort into virtuous activities, the analogy is used here of how ordinary people, like business people, or farmers, put tremendous effort into what they're doing, even though

there's no guarantee of achieving the anticipated result. Yet we see them putting great effort into their endeavours.

As it says here, *what need is there to speak about activities which are certain to bear pleasurable results?* The words *what need is there to speak about activities* refer to virtuous activities; we need to understand that when we engage in virtuous practice, there is no doubt that this will bring happiness. There's no question about that. If we engage in any kind of virtuous action conjoined with a bodhicitta mind, or thought of renunciation, there is no doubt the benefit will be enormous. The short-term benefit is finding a good rebirth, and the long-term benefit is achieving the everlasting state of happiness of liberation, or even the omniscient state of buddhahood.

As we think about the fact that virtuous practice will definitely bring us the result of happiness, and observe how ordinary people direct tremendous effort into something that is not guaranteed to achieve their desired result, we can be inspired to generate joyful effort in virtuous practice and clearly see the reason and worth of not saying to ourselves, 'that is enough virtue.' In relation to this:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Even though they work for the sake of happiness,
It is uncertain whether happiness will come.
But as for those whose work itself is happiness,
How can they be happy unless they work?

The text continues:

This is also the reason why being satiated is wrong.

Here, it says that being satiated or contented with our virtuous practice is wrong – it is wrong to feel that it is enough to do a bit of practice. Rather we should not be contented with our practice. As it says here:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

If I am never satiated by sensual desires,
Which are like honey on a razor's edge,
How could I be satiated with merit,
Whose fruition is happiness and peace?

So, while we should not be satiated with virtuous practice, we should be satisfied with sensual pleasures. As it says here:

Develop an attitude of being insatiable, thinking,
"Indulging in sensual pleasures is like licking honey off the sharp blade of a razor; it is the source of a little sweetness, but it slices up the tongue.

The analogy here compares sensual pleasure to the sweet taste of honey on the sharp blade of a razor. If you try to lick honey smeared on the sharp edge of a razor just to experience its sweetness, you will end up cutting your tongue, and you will suffer greatly. This analogy shows how we inflict great suffering and pain on ourselves as a result of our attachment to, and indulgence in, short-lived sensual pleasures.

The text continues:

If I cannot get enough of this experience, which gives me great suffering for the sake of just a slight, temporary pleasure, what sense could there be in feeling that I have had enough of the collections of merit and sublime wisdom, which give flawless, infinite happiness, both immediate and long-term?"

Here, we find a really valuable subject to contemplate and meditate on. Our situation is quite different to what is instructed here. The text advises that we should engage in

virtuous practice, and then explains why – because the long- and short-term benefit we derive from such practice is enormous. So, not only should we engage in virtuous practice, but we have good reason to engage in such practice with joy, with an insatiable desire for virtue, because of the great benefit we derive from it.

Yet we are attracted to sensual pleasures, such as the pleasure of the five sense objects – form, sound, smell, taste and touch. We go after and are never contented with sensual pleasures, even though such pleasure is short-lived, and the suffering we experience for the sake of it is great. This is very important to meditate upon and recognise. Our meditation practice should enable us to throw light on the reality, the truth, of what's truly beneficial or harmful for us, in both the short- and long-term. Our practice must transform us from inside. In this way, we can become true Dharma practitioners, not just externally, but from inside.

Otherwise, if we don't overcome whatever confusion we may have about what really brings benefit or harm to us in the long-run, we will willingly and deliberately engage in things that give us only short-term pleasure, but immense suffering in the long-run.

If we observe our own experience, we will notice that we have a narrow view of reality, because we only see and are attracted to things that directly appeal to us. We remain blind to the longer-term effect of things, as if there were no long-term effect at all. We crave sensual pleasures for the joy they bring us right now, in the immediate timeframe. However, this joy does not last long, and we don't think of the future outcome of indulging in that object, as if that future outcome did not exist or matter to us. However, when we recognise the long-term effect of sensual pleasures, we will be able to direct our mind more towards virtuous activities, which bring more benefit to us in the long-run.

The text continues:

Thus, in order to bring to completion the virtuous activities in which you have engaged, enter them as a sun-scorched elephant enters a pleasing lotus pond at noon. Train in this attitude until you produce it.

Here, it clearly says we must contemplate what has been said and familiarise ourselves with this point about the benefit of engaging in virtuous practice and the shortcomings of engaging in worldly activities. As part of our practice, we must really contemplate this, over and over again, to the point where we always feel ready to engage in virtuous practice. Here, the analogy used is that of an elephant that has been experiencing scorching heat on a hot day; at noon, when the elephant sees a pond, it will go and submerge itself in the water. We should contemplate this until the enthusiastic desire or wish to engage in virtue arises naturally.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

Thus, in order to finish the work,
I shall enter into it just as
An elephant, scorched by the midday sun,
Comes upon a pond and plunges in.

Now, we've finished the section on 'developing the power of joy', which we understand as the practice of cultivating such joy in virtue that our wish to engage in virtue becomes insatiable.

(4") The power of relinquishment

If you become physically or mentally fatigued from your perseverance, you must rest for a while. Otherwise, you will

become exhausted and very disheartened, thereby later preventing your joyous perseverance.

Here, the text talks about the need for our mind and body to rest, especially when we engage in practice for a long period of time, whether that is meditation practice, or a retreat. We must understand that if we feel mentally or physically tired, it's important for us to take a break or rest. We must acknowledge the fact that, right now, at this moment, we have some mental and physical limitations or impediments to our practice, because our mind and body are not as serviceable as they could be. On both the mental and physical levels we have not overcome negativities known in Tibetan as *lus* or *sems-kyi gNed ngan.len*. Therefore, it is important that we take a rest when we get tired in our practice.

The text says, *otherwise, you will become exhausted and very disheartened, thereby later preventing your joyous perseverance*. We know this from our own experience: if we push ourselves too hard in our practice, we can sometimes experience mental stress or tension; we may even physically experience tension, in the form of an acute pain in the back, and so forth. Such pain could then discourage us from engaging in practice, and we may even lose interest in the practice. Therefore, it's important to take a break and have a rest.

However:

Immediately after you have rested, persevere again, and when you have completely finished your earlier activity, do not let this satisfy you.

When it says, *immediately after you have rested, persevere again*, it is advising that we should, however, go back to the practice immediately after resting. In our case, we tend to feel a sense of contentment, coupled with a sense of accomplishment, after engaging in a practice for a while, and say to ourselves 'that's enough', and then not go back to the practice. The text says we should not do that, but rather we should continuously carry on with our practice.

Really, we should be taking what is being said here as advice for our practice. The text says, *immediately after you have rested, persevere again, and when you have completely finished your earlier activity, do not let this satisfy you*. In reality, if we check how we go about our practice, we will note that we have not even finished what we've already started, yet we think we have finished, and satisfy ourselves with our incomplete practice then move on to the next one. The text is saying that, even if you accomplish what you have already started, you should not be satisfied with that, but should strive to achieve even more with your practice.

In a way, this also indicates how we should progress in our spiritual practice, stage by stage.

The text continues:

You must joyously persevere at other, higher activities.

This explains why we should not stop after we have accomplished the first level of our practice. Next:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

When my strength declines,
I shall leave the task so I can do it later.
When it is really done, I shall set it aside,
Seeking the next task and the next.

This summarises what has already been explained.

The text continues:

The next task is important, because if you consider each earlier good quality sufficient, this will be a big obstacle to the attainment of many higher attributes.

'The next task' refers to what was mentioned earlier – after you take a rest, you should not be satisfied with what you have initially accomplished, but rather, after accomplishing the first quality, you should go on to accomplish the 'next task'. This is important, because if you consider each earlier good quality sufficient – if, instead, you satisfy yourself with whatever you have achieved earlier – this will be a big obstacle to the attainment of many higher attributes. In other words, you won't achieve any more or greater qualities.

In a lot of cases, whatever we think we have achieved this year, last year, or even the previous year, we remain at the same level, or with little increase in our knowledge and our qualities. So it's important that we keep working on our practice.

The text continues:

The above presentation shows how to joyously persevere.

This shows us the manner in which we should generate or maintain joyful effort. Next:

Do not overexert yourself. You must avoid both being overly intense and being overly relaxed, so make your effort continuous like a river.

This is saying that what is required is consistency in our practice and maintaining joyful effort. We should not get overly enthusiastic and overly exert ourselves, then suddenly lose interest and even feel depressed. The text is saying our effort should be like the flow of a river – we should try to maintain a steady effort, and neither push ourselves too hard nor be too relaxed, but practise in a balanced way. This indicates the importance of having a relaxed approach to our practice.

Next, there is a quote from the glorious Matrceta, or Asvaghosa (or Aryasura), one of the other names for this master:

The glorious Matrceta's *Praise in One Hundred and Fifty Verses* states:

In order to make yourself more exalted
You never overexerted or relaxed too much.
Thus your good qualities are indistinguishable
By former and later phases.

Bo-do-wa also said:

The scouts of Se-mo-dru-wa (Se-mo-dru-ba), for instance, never get there. But the scouts of Chang-wa (Byang-ba) take their time at the start and pursue the robbers until they reach them. Likewise, practice at a measured pace that you can sustain. For example, a louse proceeds at a modest pace but never stops, so it soon arrives; whereas a flea takes great successive leaps and then stops, so it never gets there.

A while ago, I used the example of a race between a louse and a flea. What it's saying here is that our effort should be consistent, and we should proceed like the louse, never stopping; we should not be like a flea, which takes a few jumps and then stops.

If you maintain consistency in your joyful effort, you will achieve success in whatever goal you pursue. But if, instead of being consistent, you make sporadic efforts, you won't achieve your goal.

**(c'') Based on the elimination of unfavorable conditions
and the accumulation of favorable conditions, being intent
on joyously persevering**

After you have thus identified the three conditions unfavorable to joyous perseverance, you attend to their remedies. You generate three powers: the power of aspiration which is the favorable condition for weakening those as-yet unweakened unfavorable conditions, the power of steadfastness which is the cause of not turning back once you have started, and the power of joy which never wants to discontinue the activity once you have engaged in it. Through the power of relinquishment you become adept at how to joyously persevere. At this point you must develop the power of being intent on joyous perseverance, so I will explain this.

As it says, *at this point you must develop the power of being intent on joyous perseverance* – so what follows after this is the explanation of how to apply joyful effort in our practice. We will continue with that next week. We'll just read this for now:

As to how you are to act when you joyously persevere at eliminating what is to be eliminated, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

As a seasoned warrior approaches
A sword-fight with an enemy,
I shall parry the blows of the afflictions
And strongly strike the afflictions, my enemies.

Using the example of a great experienced warrior in the battlefield vanquishing an enemy, we should be like that warrior in combating the enemies of the mental afflictions.

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