
The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Cultivate the right motivation as contained in the prayer of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, which we have just recited.

The first line of the refuge prayer: *To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha*, identifies the objects of refuge. This line reminds us that when we go for the refuge, there must be objects in which we take refuge. Those objects are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

The second line of the prayer is: *I go for the refuge until I achieve complete enlightenment*. This line denotes the person who goes for the refuge, the length of time he or she goes for the refuge, and the manner or the reason for taking refuge. Saying that the length of the time for which you take refuge is 'until I achieve complete enlightenment' implies that this is the refuge practice of the Mahayana or Great Vehicle. Whereas, according to the Lesser Vehicle, the duration of taking refuge is as for long as you live this life.

There are two main reasons or causes for taking refuge. The first is a sense of *fear* or fright towards cyclic existence, particularly the suffering of lower rebirth. Because you do not want to be afflicted by the suffering of samsara, you take refuge in the Three Jewels. The second cause of taking refuge is *faith*. This implies the manner or the meaning of taking refuge. So, taking refuge means whole-heartedly, completely and single-pointedly entrusting yourself with faith in the three objects of refuge as infallible objects, to end suffering existence and achieve liberation. In the line *I go for refuge*, the 'I' indicates the person who goes for refuge.

In fact, these lines that we recite to take refuge in the Three Jewels encompass the essence of the entire path and the Dharma practices we need to follow. As we said before, we should clearly recognise the reason why we seek refuge. Why do we seek help? It is to free ourselves from the suffering of cyclic existence, particularly the suffering of lower rebirths.

Now, the question is, how we do the refuge practice? Do we have those two causes of taking refuge? For example, do we have any sense of fear or concern about falling into lower rebirths? If we do, then with our refuge practice, we should not simply worry about the prospect of falling into lower rebirths, but we also need to find a way to prevent lower rebirths and motivate ourselves to follow the path of liberation. Reflecting on suffering is not just to feel fear; it also leads us to the path of ending suffering. So we take refuge in the Three Jewels to achieve liberation from suffering existence.

If we seek outside help when facing worldly problems, we have to think about many factors; it is the same when we sincerely take refuge in the Three Jewels. For example, with worldly problems, we will seek help from someone who we think can support us and who has the resources and capacity to do so. When we take refuge in Three Jewels, we seek help to achieve liberation from samsara. So, as part of our refuge practice, we need to understand the qualities of

the refuge objects in terms of them being able to lead us to the state of liberation. Just as we know that a person stuck in mud cannot rescue another person who is also stuck in mud, likewise, we cannot rely on someone who is not free from this suffering world to rescue us from this suffering world.

This touches on the meaning of the four noble truths. The first truth is the truth of suffering; once we identify this, it will give rise to the thought of avoiding suffering, the second truth. The third is the truth of the cause of suffering and knowing this will give rise to the thought of abandoning the cause of suffering – the fourth truth. The third and fourth truths – the cessation of suffering and the path to cessation – are the cause and the effect, in terms of how sentient beings are liberated from samsara. The truth of cessation is to be actualised. Realising that it can be actualised will give rise to the thought of following the path. So, the fourth truth is the truth of the path to cessation, which is to be meditated upon. It is said that this sequence of the four noble truths is in accord with the order of leading the beings along the path.

When we talk about the noble truths of cessation and the truth of the path, we are referring to the qualities of those on a high spiritual level, such as *arya* or superior beings. Strictly speaking, those inner qualities of *arya* beings are the Dharma Jewel, which is said as the actual object of refuge.

The question might then arise, how can the Dharma Jewel protect us? While it is true we don't yet possess the actual Dharma Jewel, we can still cultivate a Dharma mind and practise Dharma. Hence, it is important to relate the Dharma Jewel to whatever Dharma we practise, such as our moral practice of refraining from the ten non-virtues. For us, our Dharma practice is the true Dharma Jewel, which will serve as our actual refuge, guidance or protection. By progressing with our Dharma practice such moral ethics, we can prevent taking lower rebirths, and instead achieve higher rebirths and liberation from samsara.

The next part of the refuge prayer: *By my practice of giving and so forth* indicates the virtues or the merit we accumulate. In the next line: *May I achieve complete enlightenment in order to benefit all migrating beings*, 'in order to benefit all migrating beings' indicates the aspiration to accomplish the welfare of other beings, and 'achieve complete enlightenment' indicates the aspiration to accomplish complete enlightenment. These are the two aspirations – aimed at the two purposes of others and oneself – that define bodhicitta. The words 'may I achieve' indicates the actual bodhicitta, an awakening mind, in the form of a prayer.

So if we take time to look into the meaning of the refuge prayer, it encapsulates the entire meaning of the path to enlightenment.

THE PERFECTIONS OF MEDITATIVE STABILIZATION AND WISDOM

Last week, we began with the first heading and its sub-headings:

(v) How to train in the perfection of meditative stabilization

- (a') What meditative stabilization is
- (b') How to begin the cultivation of meditative stabilization
- (c') The divisions of meditative stabilization
- (d') How to practice
- (e') A summary

We covered a bit of the first sub-heading which is:

(a') What meditative stabilization is

Meditative stabilisation is a virtuous, one-pointed state of mind that stays fixed on its object of meditation without being distracted by other objects.

We also finished the quote from *Bodhisattva Levels*, which says:

The *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

It is the one-pointed state of mind - stabilized on virtue, and either mundane or supramundane - of bodhisattvas who have first studied and reflected on the bodhisattvas' scriptural collections. Whether it is oriented toward meditative serenity, toward insight, or toward both as the path that conjoins them, understand that this one-pointed state of mind is the bodhisattvas' meditative stabilization.

And *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* also says:

Having thus generated joyous perseverance,
Set your mind in meditative concentration ...

We will continue from here.

(b') How to begin the cultivation of meditative stabilization

Think over the benefits of cultivating meditative stabilization and the faults of not cultivating it. I will explain this in the meditative serenity section.

Regarding the explanation of calm abiding, the text says, *meditative serenity* will be presented in great detail further on. We will have to study this well - it is really difficult to get a full understanding of meditation without carefully studying the detailed explanations of calm abiding. Regarding the types of meditative concentration, the text continues:

(c') The divisions of meditative stabilization

In line with the above citation [from the *Bodhisattva Levels*], if you subdivide meditative stabilization according to nature, there are two kinds: mundane and supramundane; and if you do so according to orientation, there are three kinds [oriented toward serenity, toward insight, or toward both conjoined]. If you subdivide it according to function, there are three types: meditative stabilization that stabilizes the body and mind in bliss within the present life, meditative stabilization that achieves good qualities, and meditative stabilization that carries out the welfare of living beings. The first, meditative stabilization that stabilizes the body and mind in bliss within the present life, is all meditative stabilizations that generate mental and physical pliancy when you enter them with equipoise. The second, meditative stabilization that achieves good qualities, is all meditative stabilizations which accomplish good qualities shared with *shravakas* - the superknowledges, liberations, totalities, masteries, etc. The third, meditative stabilization that carries out the welfare of living beings, is meditative stabilization that accomplishes the eleven activities for others' welfare.

The eleven ways of accomplishing the benefit of other beings has been discussed in the past.

(d') How to practice

Whenever you practice any virtuous meditative stabilization, you do so in association with the six supremacies and all six perfections. The generosity of meditative stabilization is maintaining meditative stabilization yourself and then establishing others in it. Understand the other perfections from the earlier explanation.

We also learned this in relation to the preceding four perfections - we should understand how all the *six supremacies and six perfections* can also be included within the perfection of concentration, such as the generosity of concentration, etc.

(e') A summary

The recollection and cultivation of the spirit of enlightenment - the basis of the bodhisattva deeds - ...

The summary of the perfection of concentration as presented here is similar to the presentation of the summaries of the preceding perfections. The summary emphasises the importance of remembering and continuously developing bodhicitta, the spirit of enlightenment, because bodhicitta is the basis and driving force to achieve the perfect state of meditative concentration within oneself, and cause other beings to actualise the same state within their mindstreams.

...is what inspires you to train in order to set all living beings in uncontaminated meditative stabilization. After you have increased the stability of this spirit, aspire to the high meditative stabilizations and train in these.

After you have increased the stability of this spirit - the 'spirit' refers to bodhicitta. In terms of our own practice, this applies to whatever degree or type of bodhicitta we may have cultivated; we should try to steadily increase it. In other words, we must direct our attention to our own level of spiritual practice and make an effort to stabilise and develop that. As we progress on our level, we aspire and train to achieve higher levels of meditative stabilization. So, while our main focus is on developing whatever level of practice or qualities we have achieved, we should also aspire or pray to accomplish all the other higher qualities we have not yet achieved. Even if you are not able to fully develop meditative stabilisation, you must still regularly train in one-pointed concentration, to whatever extent you can.

Even if you are unable to fully develop the meditative stabilizations, you must strive to train from time to time in one-pointed concentration to whatever extent you are able. For, if you do not do so, you will be continually stained with the fault of breaking the precepts, and in other lives as well you will find it most difficult to learn the trainings for entering the many doors of the bodhisattvas' meditative stabilizations.

It is clearly saying here that if we completely neglect to do meditation - which here specifically refers to cultivating single-pointed concentration - then we are staining ourselves with the fault of breaking the precepts. This would not only disadvantage us now, but also in our future lives we would find it more difficult to cultivate meditative stabilisation.

The text continues:

Whereas if you never give up your effort, even in this life your mind will become steadily less distracted, making your accumulations of virtue very powerful.

Again, it is important to remember and reflect upon this line so that we can understand the benefit of cultivating single-pointed meditative concentration. As it is said here, the benefits of doing single-pointed meditation include lessening mental distractions and afflictions, as well as *making your accumulations of virtue very powerful*. This emphasises the benefit of cultivating meditative

stabilisation, in terms of making whatever practice we do more effective and more powerful.

In future lives, as the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* says, you will have physical and mental bliss and a joyful mind, thereby easily completing the perfection of meditative stabilization.

I will not elaborate further here as I will be explaining this at length in the meditative serenity section.

(vi) How to train in the perfection of wisdom

How to train in the perfection of wisdom has five parts:

- (a') What wisdom is
- (b') How to begin the generation of wisdom
- (c') The divisions of wisdom
- (d') How to practice
- (e') A summary

(a') What wisdom is

In general, wisdom is what thoroughly discerns the ontological status of the object under analysis,...

So wisdom is the mind that discriminates or discerns the object of investigation. The text continues:

...but in this context wisdom refers to proficiency in the five topics of knowledge and the like.

The *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

Know that the bodhisattvas' wisdom is the thorough analysis of phenomena that engages or has engaged all of what is to be known and that operates through focusing on the five topics of knowledge – Buddhist knowledge, grammar, logic, technical arts, and medicine.

Here, *wisdom* specifically refers to the five topics of knowledge or the five sciences of knowledge. The first one, it says here, is Buddhist knowledge, which in Tibetan is *nang.don rigpa* – literally inner knowledge, which is really the Buddhist science of mind and philosophy. This includes all the topics relating to mind training. 'Inner' here can specifically indicate the Buddhist final view of selflessness as a remedy to self-grasping.

Next is grammar or language which in Tibetan is *dra rig.pa* – literally the science of sound – then logic, which in Tibetan is *ten.tsig rigpa*, which teaches the principles of reasoning and logic as a structured way of knowing things through analysing or investigating them. In logic, we use syllogisms as a form of language to analyse and establish what is factual and what is false. For example, 'a vase lacks true existence because it is a dependent-arising' is a syllogistic statement that logically establishes the thesis. The fourth topic is technical arts or fine arts and crafts, in Tibetan *zo rigpa*, and the fifth topic is the science of medicine, in Tibetan *sowa rigpa*, literally the science of healing.

Now, the science of grammar here – language or vocalisation – includes everything related to language or vocal sound, such as mastering the skill of interpreting different languages, including animal languages. When birds vocalise, they are communicating. At Sera Monastery, there was a monk who was expert in this. Once he heard the communication between two crows from a long distance. He heard one crow saying: 'I saw a frog', while the other one replied: 'It was a dead one'! So all animals communicate in their own language, but only people who have mastered the science of sound can properly interpret their communication.

The science of sound also includes proficiency in poetry, composition and writing. Our medium of language is

limited to only a few languages and various words, terms and sentence structures that we are familiar with.

The text continues:

Here, the wisdom that "engages" ...

It then refers to the bodhisattva levels or *bhumis* in relation to the two types of wisdom:

... refers to wisdom prior to attaining the bodhisattva levels; wisdom that "has engaged" refers to wisdom after attaining such levels.

(b') How to begin the generation of wisdom

The way to begin the generation of wisdom is to contemplate the benefits of generating wisdom and the faults of not generating it ...

It is important, as much as possible, that we understand the benefits of generating wisdom so that we will be motivated and inspired to generate wisdom.

Since I will explain the benefits and faults of having or lacking the wisdom of reality – selflessness – in the insight section, I will not elaborate on it here. But I will discuss the remaining types of wisdom a little.

Wisdom here specifically refers to the wisdom of selflessness. It will be explained under the chapter on special insight. This also refers to the main object of meditative concentration, which is selflessness or emptiness.

We will continue the reading:

With respect to indicating wisdom's benefits, wisdom is the root of all good qualities for this and future lives. As the protector Nagarjuna's *Hundred Verses on Wisdom* (Prajna-sataka) says:

Wisdom is the root of all good qualities,
Seen and not yet seen.
To achieve both of these,
Embrace wisdom.
The great source for what you seek
And for liberation is knowledge.
So, esteeming it from the start,
Adhere to wisdom, the great mother.

In the quote, *wisdom is the root of all good qualities, seen and not yet seen*, 'seen' refers to those qualities we can see ourselves within this life, and 'not yet seen' are those qualities that are not apparent to us in this life, but will be in a following, future life. This is how we can understand it.

The great source for what you seek
And for liberation is knowledge.

From one angle, we can interpret these two lines as saying that wisdom is the great source of the four excellences, namely Dharma, wealth, pleasure and liberation – in Tibetan, *cho*, *nor*, *doi* and *tarpa*, respectively. These four excellences and abundances serve as very favourable conditions for us to progress along the path. His Holiness Dalai Lama put these four into two sets of cause and effect: wealth is a cause for pleasure, which refers to the five sensual pleasures; whereas the Dharma is a cause for the state of liberation.

So, esteeming it from the start,
Adhere to wisdom, the great mother.

Normally, wisdom is likened to the mother and method to the father. The wisdom of emptiness is referred as the great mother that gives birth to the enlightenment of all Three Vehicles. This can also refer to the traditional view in patriarchal societies that the race or caste of a child can only

be that of its father, for example, a king or a Brahmin; whereas a mother could have children from any race. So wisdom is like the mother in producing all three types of enlightenment of the Three Vehicles.

The text continues:

As the *Verse Summary of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* states, wisdom functions like an eye for the other five perfections – generosity, etc:

When the other perfections are completed by wisdom,
They acquire their eye and fulfill their name,
Just as a painting may be complete except for the eyes,
But until the eyes are drawn, no wage is obtained.

This is saying that the other perfections – giving and so forth – become ‘perfections’ by virtue of wisdom. It’s as if, without wisdom, the other five perfections are blind or incomplete. Each of the other five only becomes qualified as a perfection when it is conjoined with wisdom.

The text continues with further explanations of how wisdom glorifies all the others perfections:

How wisdom is necessary for other good qualities is illustrated by the example of a special piece of jewelry made of fine gold that becomes even more breathtaking when adorned with a precious emerald. Likewise, if the gold ornament of the five perfections from generosity to meditative stabilization is adorned with wisdom, which is able to distinguish right from wrong, they become more magnificent, because wisdom makes them much purer. It is similar to the way that the mental consciousness, by distinguishing the merits and faults in the objects of the five sensory faculties (the visual faculty, etc.), causes you to engage in what is to be adopted or reject what is to be cast aside.

Here, the text compares the other five perfections to the five sense consciousnesses. In the same way that the five senses can only perceive their respective objects, likewise the other five perfections lack the ability to discriminate *the merits and faults in the objects*. However, wisdom, like a mental consciousness, has the attribute of discriminating between what is to be adopted or rejected.

This is what the glorious Aryasura’s *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

The merits of generosity and so forth
Are more powerful with wisdom as their lord,
Just as an array of fine gold jewelry
Shines more brightly when inset with jewels.

It is this wisdom that renders vast
The capacity for virtue in the purpose of each one,
Just as the mind’s additional power clearly displays
The respective objects of the sensory faculties.

The explanation of this was just given.

The text continues:

Similarly, wisdom is also crucial for other faculties such as faith and so on.

There are five powers or spiritual faculties – faith, joyful effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. The text is saying here that, of these five powers, wisdom is the main one.

When wisdom is present as lord, your generosity, faith, etc. understand well the merit of virtue and the faults of stinginess and so forth, so you become skilled at eliminating the afflictions and increasing good qualities.

It is saying here that the fact one is able to eliminate faults such as stinginess through the practice of generosity is due to the power of wisdom. In fact, without the wisdom that enables one to recognise the benefits of giving and the shortcomings of stinginess, we wouldn’t even engage in the practice of giving. Therefore, wisdom is an important factor for developing each of the other five perfections, and because of it one *becomes skilled at eliminating the afflictions and increasing good qualities*.

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Among the various faculties of faith and so on,
Wisdom is chief, as the mind is to the sensory faculties.
With wisdom as lord, you know what is a fault and what merit,
So you are skilled in the method of eliminating afflictions.

Even in our own lives, the main reason why we sometimes get so confused about what to do and why our mind gets so deluded is our lack of wisdom and of not being able to fully utilise the wisdom within us. As I always say, the more knowledge or wisdom we have, the more we are able to rely on ourselves and not be easily misled or deceived by others.

We will read just a few more lines and will stop there.

Bodhisattvas depend on wisdom to purify the other five perfections - generosity, etc. Even when they give their flesh to someone who asks for it, they are unaffected by such thoughts as pride, discouragement, etc. It is as though they were taking a cutting from a medicinal plant. This is because their wisdom makes reality manifest.

So, reflect more on the benefits of developing wisdom on the one hand, and on the other, the disadvantages or shortcomings of not having wisdom.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering
Edited Version*

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