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# The Six Perfections

འཇུག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We will begin with the usual meditation for a few minutes.

[Tonglen meditation]

Now we need to come out of our meditation.

As symbolised by the Buddha's hand mudra of both giving Dharma and meditative equipoise, one of the supreme qualities of a Buddha is to be able to directly and simultaneously engage in the two truths, or the two worlds of appearance and emptiness. Sentient beings lack such an ability. Therefore, we need to come out of meditation to engage in post-meditation activities. Of course, if you want to stay in your meditative state rather than listen to the Dharma you can stay there! But as His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, we should not doze off during meditation.

We have just done the giving and taking meditation to further develop our love and compassion. We all have some sort of interest and try to engage in Dharma practice. So, we want to ensure that our practice is effective and beneficial. Our practice is effective if it helps us to counteract mental afflictions such as pride, desire, jealousy and so forth. If it is not helping us in this regard, it is not effective and not working.

If we do not pay attention to our practice, then there is even a possibility that instead of counteracting mental afflictions, our practice will become another cause for generating mental delusions within us. If this is the case, then the Tibetan saying, 'god descends as a demon', becomes true.

The meditation of giving and taking is not just a matter of reciting a prayer or sitting quietly in a meditative posture. What it actually involves is feeling the suffering and pain that all other sentient beings are undergoing, and cultivating a sense of concern, empathy or compassion for them. As a result of feeling that their suffering is unbearable to contemplate, we generate compassion, genuinely wishing others to be free from suffering. This is how, in this meditation, you mentally take on the suffering of other sentient beings, together with the causes of their suffering. Similarly, reflecting on other sentient beings from the perspective of them being deprived of happiness and joy, we need to feel true love for them, genuinely wishing them to have happiness. So, in this meditation you then mentally give happiness and the causes of happiness, i.e. virtue, to all other beings.

The benefit of cultivating love and compassion within us is an enormous. As we have learnt in the teaching, due to the force of our strong love and compassion we can generate superior intention, which is the direct cause of generating bodhicitta. We can also find that the love and compassion that we generate is the most effective means

of immediately subduing the afflicted, unruly and wild states of mind within us.

When we think about what practice we need to do, and what meditation we need to practise, we always tend to think of something outside of us, some higher practice, something we lack or don't understand. Hence, we fail to understand that our core practice should be working on developing positivity and eliminating the negativity within us, such as developing and perfecting whatever degree of love and compassion we all have. As we were saying before, the benefit of meditating on love and compassion is quite amazing. So, our spiritual practice requires us to focus inward, and recognise whatever positive quality we need to develop and whatever negativity we need to diminish. Once a monk asked his lama, 'Gen Rinpoche, what practice should I do?' The lama replied, 'Safeguard and keep your vow well.'

Last week we touched on the five sciences of knowledge, the first one of which is Buddhist knowledge, which primarily deals with mind training. This mind training is all about counteracting mental afflictions, particularly the root cause of all those afflictions, which is the deluded mind that grasps at an independent self. Ultimately, our Dharma practice is to eliminate that false view of self-grasping.

So, we must make sure that whatever practice we do helps us to minimise mental afflictions. This is very important. We certainly do not want our spiritual practice to become a cause to generate pride, for instance feeling pride in our Dharma knowledge, or animosity towards others or become attached to material goods. When we generate these afflictions, we are supporting and strengthening the force of the self-grasping that is the root of all the mental afflictions.

## (vi) How to train in the perfection of wisdom (cont.)

We will now continue with the teaching on the text. We are up to the section on the perfection of wisdom, which talks about the benefits of cultivating wisdom-knowledge. In short, whatever virtuous practice that we engage in must be supported by wisdom-knowledge. Our faith in the Dharma must also be based on wisdom-knowledge. Likewise, in order to fully develop and stabilise love and compassion for other beings, we need the strong support of wisdom-knowledge.

The last few sentences we finished with last week read:

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. With the wisdom that sees the troubles of both cyclic existence and the peace of nirvana, they accomplish ethical discipline for the sake of others' welfare, so they practice pure ethical discipline.

There is not much need to explain this further, as it is quite self-explanatory. When it says *even when they give their flesh to someone who asks for it, they are unaffected by such thoughts as pride, discouragement*, it is referring to arya bodhisattvas, or bodhisattvas on the spiritual bhumi, or on, or beyond the path of seeing. Actually, giving one's

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flesh to someone who asks for it is a profound practice of generosity or giving, it is however not recommended for those who have not attained a spiritual bhumi.

When bodhisattvas do this, as it says here, *they are unaffected by such thoughts as pride, discouragement etc., as though they were taking a cutting from a medicinal plant.* They don't feel any pride about such an extraordinary act of generosity. At the same time, they don't lose their spirit and courage because of any hardship associated with giving the flesh from their body.

As the text clearly says, they can maintain such a high degree of practice *because their wisdom makes reality manifest.* Here *wisdom* refers to their direct realisation of ultimate truth or emptiness. *With the wisdom that sees the troubles of both cyclic existence and the peace of nirvana, they accomplish ethical discipline for the sake of others' welfare* clearly implies that the virtue of this great wisdom of emptiness that they possess also helps them to show the altruistic mental attitude of benefiting others. Because of that wisdom, they also see the faults of samsara as well as the peace of self-liberation.

As the text says, *they accomplish ethical discipline for the sake of others' welfare, so they practise pure ethical discipline.* In other words, their wisdom-knowledge also helps bodhisattvas to develop and practise *pure ethical discipline.*

Then the text continues:

Through wisdom they know the faults of impatience and the merits of patience, and they then discipline their minds so they are not overpowered by suffering and others' misperceptions of them.

This touches on the benefits of wisdom in terms of perfecting the practice of patience. As we all know, it requires a great degree of spirit and courage to be able to tolerate adverse situations or hardship and suffering. Likewise, we have to practise patience with those who cause us harm. The text is saying that due to their wisdom-knowledge, bodhisattvas have a full and thorough understanding of all the benefits of patience and the shortcomings of anger and impatience. As the text says, *through wisdom they know the faults of impatience and the merits of patience, and they then discipline their minds so they are not overpowered by suffering and others' misperceptions of them.* So the wisdom that they develop acts as a remedy to unruly, undisciplined states of mind as well as all misconceptions and discursive thoughts.

Then:

With wisdom they understand well everything at which they joyously persevere, so their perseverance brings great success on the path.

This is clearly saying that when you have a thorough and full understanding of a topic it is easier to put that understanding into practice. In other words, wisdom-knowledge also supports joyful effort.

The text then continues:

And through wisdom based on reasoning they accomplish the supreme delight and bliss of the meditative stabilization that is fixed upon the meaning of reality.

This touches on the benefit of wisdom in terms of achieving the final goal of the perfection of concentration.

Sometimes we get very frustrated with our practice and give it up because we are not able to achieve our goal, or because we are confused with how to practise and so forth. This is all because we lack enough knowledge, and because of that we are unable to maintain a consistent effort in our practice.

As a summary there are these quotes:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Once bodhisattvas have opened the clear eye of wisdom,  
Even when they give their own flesh without a thought,  
They never feel high or low about it,  
As if they were cutting a medicinal plant.

And also:

Intelligent ones do not practice ethical discipline for their own aims;  
They see the flaws in the prison of cyclic existence  
And aspire to release the entire world from it.  
So of course they do not practice it for mundane aims.

And also:

Injury done to the wise is not harmful  
Because they possess the good quality of patience ...

We have already discussed the first of these verses.

*Injury done to the wise* refers to injury done to bodhisattvas with their intelligence and wisdom-knowledge. As we said before because of their knowledge of the benefits of the practice of patience and the shortcomings of not practising patience bodhisattvas practise patience even towards those who harm them.

So:

Like the best of very tame elephants  
Who are patient with many different tasks.  
Perseverance by itself ends in exhaustion;  
If aided by its ally, wisdom, it achieves great purposes.

Again, this emphasises the importance of wisdom-knowledge in sustaining and developing joyful effort and successfully completing whatever practice one begins. A very well tamed and very strong elephant has the capacity to accomplish great tasks. Likewise, if we develop joyful effort, then we will be able to achieve whatever we want to achieve. However, in order to sustain our joyful effort until we achieve our goal, we also need the support of this wisdom-knowledge. Although this is in reference to our spiritual practice, we also have to understand that it also applies to mundane activities as well. The message here is that we have to utilise our own intelligence and knowledge as much as possible.

Another quote reads:

And also:

How could the supreme delight and bliss of such meditative stabilizations  
Be established in the minds of crude people who rely  
Upon reasoning that has led them to a wrong path  
That is polluted by the great fault of accumulated errors?

Then the text continues:

Two good qualities which may appear to be mutually exclusive prove to be non-contradictory for those who have wisdom.

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We will come back to this later. How can there be two things that seem mutually contradictory to those who are ignorant and who lack knowledge, but not contradictory when seen by someone with wisdom-knowledge?

When bodhisattvas have become universal monarchs with authority over the entire world, they still do not fall under the control of sensory objects. This is the power of having wisdom as a royal minister. Similarly, the bodhisattvas' love that views living beings with affection is intense, but it is not mixed with even a trace of attachment; although they have a long-lasting and very forceful compassion that cannot bear for living beings to suffer, they do not have the laziness of being overcome with distress and thereby lacking ...

Here, *wisdom* specifically refers to the wisdom of selflessness or emptiness. Because of their wisdom-knowledge, bodhisattvas are able to develop and maintain a very pure love and compassion that is never affected or polluted by desire or attachment.

Whereas in our case, sometimes our initial love turns into lust and desire. Because of our lack of the wisdom of selflessness we easily grasp at things in the way that they appear to our mind. For example, if a thing appears to our mind as being very attractive, then we mentally grasp at that thing as having that intrinsic quality of attractiveness. Thus, we easily generate attachment to things that appear to be pleasant and attractive and aversion to what appears to be unpleasant and unattractive.

In reality, nothing exists objectively, inherently or independently. Things exist by depending on other things. From this perspective we can understand things are not the way they appear to our mind – they are like an illusion. For bodhisattvas however, the *love that views living beings with affection is intense, but it is not mixed with even a trace of attachment* because they have the wisdom of emptiness.

... although they have a long-lasting and very forceful compassion that cannot bear for living beings to suffer, they do not have the laziness of being overcome with distress and thereby lacking enthusiasm for virtue; they have immeasurable joy, ...

Again, the implication is that because of the support of their wisdom-knowledge, bodhisattvas never become distressed and discouraged while engaging in their compassionate deeds of benefiting other beings. Every opportunity to benefit and please other beings simply brings them more joy. Compassion is a mental attitude that observes and truly feels the pain, suffering and misery of other sentient beings, and truly wishes for them to be free from suffering. It takes a great deal of courage and understanding to be able to put this into practice. I know that some find it too hard to meditate on compassion, saying it stresses them out and makes them feel sad and miserable. As the text says they are *overcome with distress thereby lacking enthusiasm for virtue*. However, this doesn't happen to bodhisattvas with the wisdom of emptiness.

We face a lot of obstacles in our Dharma practice such as becoming bored, losing interest or finding it too hard. All these, I would say, are an indication of some form of laziness or in other words a lack of joyful effort.

However, if we have enough wisdom-knowledge, then we will know the benefits of our practice and there will be no shortage of joyful effort and nothing to distract us from our practice. Then the text continues:

... they have immeasurable joy, but their minds are free of instability which would distract them from their focus;

Bodhisattvas are able to develop *immeasurable joy* in their practice because of their wisdom-knowledge. However, that joy doesn't cause excitement or mental distraction. In our case, we are easily excited by moments of passing joy; with even some small degree of success we easily generate pride and become excited. The text also says that the minds of bodhisattvas *are free of instability which would distract them from their focus*. They have a perfect focus because neither hardship nor joy in their deeds of benefitting other beings can distract their minds from their deeds.

Then:

... and they are continually possessed of great impartiality, but they do not neglect for even a moment the welfare of all living beings.

The Tibetan word *tang.nyom* translated here as 'impartiality' can also be rendered as 'equanimity'. Bodhisattvas *continually possess impartiality or equanimity, but they do not neglect for even a moment the welfare of all living beings*. The implication is that they always possess this great state of equanimity yet at the same time, they are always able to engage in the bodhisattva deeds of benefiting other sentient beings. This is also because of their wisdom-knowledge. Then:

Wisdom does all this, because it is what removes the impediments to achieving a balanced strength in these good qualities [or deeds].

Thus the *Compendium of the Perfections* states:<sup>1</sup>

Even bodhisattvas possessed of great kingdoms,  
Who have sensory objects similar to divine substances<sup>2</sup>,  
Remain uncorrupted in their very nature.<sup>3</sup>  
This is the power of having the virtue of wisdom as their minister.

Their love, inseparable from helping others,  
Is utterly free of stain from attachment.  
Their compassion, unable to bear for others to suffer,  
Never succumbs to laziness due to the burden of distress.

Possessed of supreme joy, they do not waver from the real.  
Their great impartiality never neglects the welfare of beings.  
Great wisdom removes all that would counteract  
These good qualities, and so it beautifies them.

Matrceta's *Praise in Honor of One Worthy of Honor (Varnarhavarṇastotra)* also says:

Without rejecting the real nature,  
You are also in accord with the conventional.

Thus, you do not have to forsake the real nature that gives great certainty that there is not even an atom of what your cognitive processes apprehend as signs of true existence. And you are also in accord with and do not contradict the

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation has been previously discussed.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the heavenly sensory pleasures such as beautiful visual forms, sounds, smells etc.

<sup>3</sup> Their mind is not stained by that nature.

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conventional that gives deep certainty that effects arise from their respective internal and external causes and conditions.

This is one of the hardest parts of the teaching, which is understanding the lack of contradiction between the ultimate truth of emptiness, and the conventional truth of cause and effect. The text says that without giving up the ultimate truth of emptiness, you can posit the truth of cause and effect. As Lama Tsongkhapa put it: the meaning of emptiness is dependent origination, and the meaning of dependent origination is emptiness, and there is no contradiction there. In fact, they complement each other. In other words, saying that things lack inherent existence establishes the infallible truth of cause and effect. Similarly, the truth of cause and effect establishes the view of emptiness. However, to ordinary beings the view of emptiness and the view of cause and effect in everyday life are mutually exclusive or contradictory. They fail to understand the meaning of the conventional world of cause and effect when they delve into the truth of emptiness, and *vice versa*.

As the text says: *you are also in accord with and do not contradict the conventional that gives deep certainty that effects arise from their respective internal and external causes and conditions*. This understanding is possible within the understanding of the truth of emptiness, or how things lack inherent existence. As the text says:

For others these appear to totally exclude each other, but for those who have wisdom, there is compatibility and a lack of contradiction.

The *Praise in Honor of One Worthy of Honor* states:

Regarding your proscriptions and prohibitions,  
Some of your word is definitive  
While some of it is not,  
But between these, there is no contradiction.

The two facts – that there are many dissimilarities in proscriptions and prohibitions between higher and lower vehicles and between sutra and tantra, and that these are all the practices of a single person– ...

Essentially when you look at the Buddha's teachings and the commentaries by later masters in terms of the teachings of the *higher or the lower vehicles* or *sutra and tantra* there seem to be many instances where something is both prohibited and approved. Likewise, the discourses on the two truths – conventional and ultimate truth – may also seem contradictory. In actuality, there is absolutely no contradiction there. All these diverse teachings reflect what a person needs to practise to reach complete enlightenment. However, they:

... are contradictory for those who are confused and lack the power of intelligence to seek the intended meaning of the innumerable scriptures.

Those who lack knowledge, who are ignorant and who lack wisdom, see contradiction in the scriptures and do not understand their intended meaning.

Yet through wisdom the learned know that these are not mutually exclusive.

There are limitless things that the unwise see as contradictory and the wise see as lacking contradiction-the presentations of the two truths and the many prescriptions in one scripture that are prohibitions in others and vice versa.

To say that wisdom distinguishes the non-contradictory, intended meaning behind them is the peerless praise of wisdom.

This is emphasising that those who possess the right kind of wisdom do not see any contradiction in the diversity of the teachings that the Buddha has given. The kind of wisdom that they possess is called the supreme or *peerless wisdom*.

Then the text says:

In short, all good qualities come from wisdom. The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

How wondrous that such excellent things come from wisdom  
That is like a mother who loves her child.

The ten powers of the sugata, most excellent of strengths;  
All superior activities, without parallel;  
And all other collections of virtues in their entirety  
Arise based on such wisdom as their cause.

The arts and the best treasures in all worlds;  
The variety of sacred learning that is like an eye;  
Protections, awarenesses, mantras, and so on;  
The different attributes of the teachings that set these forth;

The multitude of enumerations; and the doors to liberation;  
All such types of service to the world  
That display the great power of the conqueror's children,  
All arise from the power of wisdom.

We will leave tonight's teaching here.

Next the text will talk about the benefit of wisdom and following that the faults of not having wisdom.

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