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# The Six Perfections

འཇུག་གི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ལཱ་ལྷན་གྱི་ལྟུང་ལཱ་

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As usual, we begin with the meditation.

[*Tong-len meditation*]

So everyone, please try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation.

As a result of studying the Dharma, we have within us some Dharma knowledge, such as knowledge about bodhicitta. This knowledge of bodhicitta is like a seed of bodhicitta within us. Therefore, what we need to do in our practice is to nurture this seed so that it will develop into bodhicitta.

This seed of Dharma, or whatever knowledge we have of the Dharma, is a basis for our practice and our potential to be able to benefit other beings and avoid causing them harm.

To benefit others and avoid harming them, it is not enough just to engage in a sitting meditation and imagine 'giving and taking'. We must also put this meditation into practice in our everyday life. In our meditation practice, we know that we are training our mind in giving and taking so that other beings are free from suffering and endowed with happiness. Therefore, it is vitally important that we try to benefit others in our everyday life, to the best of our ability. For example, if we come across a being who lacks joy and happiness, then we should do our best to bring happiness to that being, in whatever way we can, with the capacity and resources we have.

Similarly, if we observe a being who is afflicted with suffering, then again, we should try to help that being overcome their problems in whatever way we can, to the best of our ability. Therefore, the aim or purpose of meditation practice is not just to simply sit in an upright posture, but to apply our meditation in our daily actions and, as much as possible, actively benefit others by bringing them happiness and solving their problems, thereby making our lives meaningful.

Initially, our sense of empathy or mental intention to help others is lacking, and we are not habituated to the practice of giving and taking, so it doesn't even occur to us to help others who are in need. Therefore, it is necessary for us to train our mind to be compassionate and kind to others through engaging in practices such as the meditation of giving and taking. We can tell from our own experience that the kinds of actions we do primarily depends on the type of mental impulses within us. If we are mentally habituated to strong compassion and love towards others, then naturally we will benefit others, unconditionally and joyfully, to the best of our ability and in whatever way we can in order to provide them with happiness or to eradicate their problems. However, if our mind lacks habituation with compassion and love towards others, then, even if there is a need to benefit others and we have the capacity and resources, we won't reach out to them.

What we are trying to say here is that, when we talk about developing love and compassion and benefitting other beings through actual deeds, we will find it very hard in the

beginning. However, if we keep engaging in meditation practice, and familiarise ourselves step by step with it by making a consistent effort, we will eventually generate and develop true love and compassion for other beings; and then acts of altruism will come about naturally.

Love and compassion doesn't mean observing the suffering of others with our own eyes. Rather, we need to feel it in our heart and reach out to them in our actions; relieving them from suffering and providing them with happiness. As mentioned before, what is important is to diligently train our mind and actions by making gradual, step-by-step progress with our practice. For example, initially we train our love through giving small objects that others are in need of and relieve them from small problems. or help them in some small way.

You have studied the practice of giving quite extensively, so it is very important that you put your knowledge into practice by cultivating and habituating your mind with the thought of giving, and trying to be generous to those in need according to your capacity and resources. Essentially, we should know that the benefit of cultivating love and compassion for ourselves and others and for society, is unbelievable in terms of enhancing peace, happiness and harmony. We can also say that all the problems and harm that people cause each other is because of the lack of care and compassion.

According to Lama Tsongkhapa, benefitting others is only possible if there is the loving kindness of wishing others to have happiness, and the compassion of wishing them to be free of suffering. Recently there was shocking coverage on TV news about the abuse of aged residents and patients by nurses and care workers. You would have seen it. When I saw it, I couldn't imagine how people could do such harmful things to those who are frail and most in need of support. These workers were paid by the government to take good care of these people. I was quite disturbed to see such inhumane treatment where the patients were being beaten or having food shoved aggressively into their mouth etc. This is a clear sign of the decadence of society and is very sad. Now again, if you look into the cause of why people do such very mean and harmful things to others, it is because of the decline of loving kindness and compassion within them.

We are up to the division of wisdom which has many parts.

## (c') The divisions of wisdom

The presentation of wisdom has three parts:

1. Wisdom that knows the ultimate
2. Wisdom that knows the conventional
3. Wisdom that knows how to act for the welfare of living beings

The first two are part of the basic structure of the whole Buddhist teaching in terms of the two bases, the two paths and the two fruits. The first two wisdoms refer to the two bases, which relates to the two truths – ultimate truth and conventional truth. The two paths refer to skilful method and wisdom. Finally, the two fruits are the rupakaya or form body and dharmakaya or wisdom truth body of a fully enlightened being.

## (1') Wisdom that knows the ultimate

Wisdom that knows the ultimate cognizes the reality of selflessness, either by means of a concept or in a direct manner.

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This talks about the wisdom that realises ultimate truth. There are two types: one realises emptiness conceptually through the medium of a mental image, and the other cognises ultimate truth directly.

The wisdom of ultimate truth which is within the continuum of an ordinary being cognises it conceptually or through the medium of a mental image, whereas the wisdom of ultimate truth which is within the continuum of a superior or arya being is the direct wisdom of ultimate truth.

### (2') Wisdom that knows the conventional

Wisdom that knows the conventional is wisdom that is proficient at the five topics of knowledge. The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* says:

Without making effort at the five topics of knowledge,  
Even supreme noble beings do not reach omniscience.  
So they must strive for these so as to refute others,  
To care for others, and to know everything.

We have covered the five types of knowledge in previous teachings. They are:

The topics are distinguished by the different sorts of purposes for pursuing them. To refute those who do not believe in the teaching, you pursue knowledge of grammar and logic.

The first two sciences are grammar or sound and logic. Beside the purpose mentioned here, the specific benefit of becoming very proficient in the sciences of sound or grammar and logic is that one will never be confused about the meaning of words, which helps with understanding the meaning of sounds and words.

The text continues:

To help those who do believe, you pursue knowledge of the arts and medicine.

Next are the two kinds of knowledge:

To achieve knowledge of all for yourself, you pursue Buddhist knowledge.

The fifth is the sign of knowledge concerning Buddhist philosophy and spirituality. As the text says:

But to attain buddhahood, there are no such distinctions between them; you must pursue all the topics of knowledge.

### (3') Wisdom that knows how to act for the welfare of living beings

Wisdom that knows how to act for the welfare of living beings knows the way to accomplish blamelessly the welfare of beings in their present and future lives.

This talks about the wisdom of accomplishing the welfare of other beings by benefiting them in this and future lives, in such a way that you don't cause them to create any non-virtues or negative actions along the way.

### (d') How to practice

When you develop the three types of wisdom, you do so in association with the six supremacies and all six perfections. The generosity of wisdom is establishing others in wisdom after you have stabilized yourself in it. The remaining perfections are as presented before.

Next is the summary.

### (e') A summary

Even if you have the wisdom that perceives emptiness, it does not become a bodhisattva deed without the spirit of

enlightenment, so steadily increase the spirit of enlightenment—the basis of the bodhisattva deeds.

Here the text emphasises that the wisdom of emptiness needs to be supported or complemented by bodhicitta. As it says, *even if you have the wisdom that perceives emptiness, it does not become a bodhisattva deed*. Whether or not your deeds will become bodhisattva deeds depends on the bodhicitta mind. This is very true, because if we consider the practices of shravakas (or hearers) and pratyekabuddhas (or solitary realisers), they have also gained the direct realisation of emptiness and engage in the practices of generosity, moral ethics and so forth. However, because they lack bodhicitta, their deeds are not bodhisattva deeds.

Therefore, as the text says, *steadily increase the spirit of enlightenment which is the basis of the bodhisattva deeds*. As mentioned at the beginning of this talk, when we consider our own practice of bodhicitta, then what we have at the moment is the seed of the bodhicitta mind which we have acquired through gaining some understanding about bodhicitta and trying to cultivate it. What is now required is to really focus on and understand how important it is to nurture that seed of bodhicitta within us. By infusing our mind with bodhicitta or the knowledge seed of it, then whatever practices or actions we do will resemble the bodhisattva deeds. Then it says:

Next, aspire to the wisdom of those at high levels and then train your mind in it.

There are spiritual realisations or wisdom which we have not yet gained, or which are too advanced or high for us at the moment. However, we can practise and train ourselves in them by way of mentally wishing and aspiring for them.

From this moment you must strive to produce the three types of wisdom—the method for completing the peerless, great collection of sublime wisdom—and you must study.

This is emphasising how important this wisdom is.

For, if you do not do this, you contradict the principal precept and will then be destroyed by faults and infractions; in future lives as well you will not take pleasure in broad learning.

That is to say, if you do not focus on cultivating and developing this wisdom then there is the danger of transgressing or breaking your spiritual precepts. This might happen, because one of the doors of downfall is the lack of knowledge. We need to be aware of the shortcomings of not cultivating or not gaining wisdom, which include committing infractions.

Consequently, you will be unable to learn the bodhisattva trainings.

This talks about the shortcomings of not gaining wisdom in this life and in future lives.

Whereas, if in this life you strive at the methods of developing wisdom, you prevent the infraction of not training in the six perfections as promised; then in other lives as well, as the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* says, you will easily be able to complete the perfection of wisdom.

We also need to reflect on the benefit of cultivating wisdom.

Nowadays, from among the six perfections—the center post of both the sutra and tantra paths— ...

Here we can clearly see the significance of the six perfections on our spiritual path, in both sutra and tantra. As it says, *the six perfections are the centre post of both sutra and tantra paths*.

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... there exist in slight measure the stages of the practice of meditative stabilization, but the stages of the practice of the other five perfections have disappeared.

As it says here, there is a decline in terms of the explanation of the stages of the practice of the other five perfections. However, in relation to the perfection of meditative stabilisation, as said here, *there exist in slight measure the stages of the practice of meditative stabilisation.*

Therefore, I have explained the key points of their practice in abbreviated form and a little of the method for generating certain knowledge of them. Below, I will teach at length two topics that come from the classic texts: the stages of how to practice insight-wisdom that observes the real nature and the diversity of phenomena-and the stages of the practice of meditative serenity, which is meditative stabilization.

All bodhisattvas who will attain buddhahood do so in reliance upon the six perfections. The *Bodhisattva Levels* says this emphatically at the conclusion of its discussions of each of the six perfections. Hence, these six perfections are to be known as the one path traveled by bodhisattvas of the past, present, and future. And because these six are the great ocean of all virtues, they are the perfect summary of the key points of practice. The *Bodhisattva Levels* states:

Bodhisattvas who attain unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment by these six perfections are called a great river, a great ocean of virtues; generosity and so forth are the most precious causes of all excellent things for all living beings.

Accordingly, there is nothing comparable to the perfections' immeasurable completion of the collections of merit and sublime wisdom and their fruit of unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment.

This is pointing out how the six perfections include practices necessary for accumulating merit and wisdom. Of the six, the first four are primarily for the collection of merit, and last two are for the collection of sublime wisdom.

However, the perfection of concentration can be categorised either way. Sometimes it is included on the method side or for the accumulation of merit, but sometimes it is included on the wisdom side or as a means of accumulating wisdom.

Then the text says, *the collection of merit and sublime wisdom and their fruit of unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment.* Here, 'their fruit' is the fruit of the six perfections, which encompasses all the collections of merit and wisdom. The result is unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment which resembles or perfectly accords with its cause, the six perfections.

Now we move onto the next chapter.

## **HELPING OTHERS TO MATURE: THE FOUR WAYS TO GATHER DISCIPLES**

The six perfections are primarily the method for ripening or maturing one's own continuum, whereas the four ways of gathering disciples are for ripening the continuum of other beings. Having said that, when we look into the six perfections, we can say that the four ways are also included in the six perfections, the first of which – generosity – is the first of the four ways to gather disciples; pleasant speech is also included within the perfection of giving. The next two ways of gathering can be included in the perfection of moral ethics. Nevertheless, the four ways to gather disciples have the very specific purpose of ripening the continuum of other beings so that they follow the virtuous path.

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