
The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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We will start with the usual meditation.

[Meditation]

Please make sure that you cultivate the bodhicitta motivation.

If you can't generate uncontrived bodhicitta, you can generate a contrived or artificial bodhicitta, which will suffice. The primary difference between contrived and uncontrived bodhicitta is that the uncontrived bodhicitta of aspiring to achieve complete enlightenment in order to alleviate the sufferings of other beings, and wishing them to have happiness, arises naturally and spontaneously. It is rooted in the strong force of love and compassion for all sentient beings that also arises spontaneously and forcefully. Whereas contrived bodhicitta arises as an effect of our effort and progress in meditation, and mental training in using instructions on how to generate bodhicitta, such as the sevenfold cause and effect method. The bodhicitta that arises from that is contingent upon the individual's effort in meditation and training, and so it is called contrived bodhicitta.

The first of the sevenfold points of generating bodhicitta is (1) contemplating and (2) recognising all sentient beings as your mother and then remembering their kindness, which is then followed by (3) cultivating a sense of wanting to repay their kindness followed by (4) cultivating the loving kindness that is a deep sense of endearment, a feeling of intimacy and closeness towards all sentient beings. From this arises (5) compassion, which aspires to alleviate the suffering of other beings, as well as love, in the sense of wishing them to have happiness. As you further develop this love and compassion, your aspiration to benefit others moves from being merely wishful thinking to a more active intention. Propelled by love and compassion, (6) you begin to think 'I will single-handedly liberate all beings from suffering and lead them to the everlasting state of happiness.' Taking up the task of personally freeing other beings and wishing them to have happiness from the depths of your heart is called 'superior intention'. This superior intention marks a highly developed degree of love and compassion and aspiration to benefit other beings. With superior intention, your aspiration to benefit others becomes so strong that you want to free all other beings from suffering and bestow everlasting happiness on them. (7) Realising that you do not have such a capacity and that the only person who is capable of doing this is a buddha, you aspire to achieve the state of buddhahood for the sake of all beings. The stronger the force of your superior intention, the stronger your aspiration and urge to achieve buddhahood will be.

Bodhicitta is a wish or aspiration to achieve buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. In the initial stage of development, bodhicitta is contrived because it is contingent upon a deliberate effort on your part. However, it will arise with less and less effort as a result of your continuous effort in sustaining and developing bodhicitta in this way. Eventually, no effort will be needed, and it will arise

spontaneously and forcefully. This is called uncontrived bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta incorporates two aspirations – the aspiration to achieve one's own goal and the aspiration to achieve the goal of other beings.

In terms of the order of cultivating these two aspirations, the aspiration to achieve the goal of other beings is cultivated prior to the aspiration to achieve one's own goal. In the sevenfold cause and effect method, all the steps that are associated with generating love and compassion relate to cultivating an altruistic thought of benefiting others, so they reflect training in an aspiration to achieve the goal of others. After superior intention arises, you generate a wish to achieve buddhahood which reflects your own ultimate goal. Therefore, the aspiration to achieve your own goal arises simultaneously with the cultivation of bodhicitta. However, when we talk about actually fulfilling these two aspirations, then we notice that the aspiration to achieve one's own goal is accomplished prior to the aspiration to achieve the goal of others.

At the moment we may not have the capacity to generate uncontrived bodhicitta. We do, however, have an opportunity to develop a contrived bodhicitta mind. I think it is extremely important that we make an effort to generate bodhicitta. You have been studying bodhicitta over many years and have heard the word 'bodhicitta' from me so frequently. You have learnt about the great many benefits of generating bodhicitta, not only in terms of benefitting others but also the benefits for yourself.

In my view, there is no more effective and powerful means of subduing your own mind than bodhicitta. You can apply all kinds of other practices but none of them will work to calm your thoughts and deeds. So, if you want to subdue or calm your mind, you must sincerely cultivate bodhicitta within your continuum.

Of course, it would be a different story if you didn't know anything about the true means of subduing your mind. In that case, you would just have to apply whatever method that you know, such as a relaxation meditation technique of simply resting the mind on a given object. However, that doesn't apply to you, as you have invested a great deal of time and effort in learning about Dharma as an effective means of subduing the mind. So, it would be very unfortunate if you don't apply this profound knowledge and, I have to say, it would make me sad.

Loving-kindness is one of the causes in the sevenfold cause and effect method for generating bodhicitta. Loving-kindness is a very general English term and requires some further clarification here, where it is considered as a cause for generating compassion. Hence, it listed before compassion. Generally speaking, we understand love or loving kindness to be a mental attitude of wishing others to have happiness.

From this perspective, the relationship between loving kindness and compassion is not one of cause and effect. Hence, there is no definitive order in the way they arise or whether one necessarily precedes the other. However, in the context of the sevenfold cause and effect method, as I mentioned earlier, loving kindness specifically refers to a sense of endearment, intimacy, closeness, and affectionate love that you feel towards others, which, in this technique, is a necessary cause for cultivating compassion. We find out

about such contextual meanings and fine distinctions in the major scriptures of the early masters.

It doesn't matter if we don't gain any realisations straight away as a result of whatever effort we put into Dharma in this life. However, it will at least leave a good imprint in our continuum. As an effect of that, we can be sure that in our future lives we will definitely and continuously meet with a perfect Mahayana spiritual guru and under their guidance, we will progress to the perfect state of complete enlightenment. It is most unlikely and extremely difficult for us to achieve full enlightenment within this life. Although the secret mantra shows a quick path to enlightenment in a single lifetime, in practice it is extremely difficult. Therefore, our best chance to achieve complete enlightenment is by depending upon a gradual progression along the path through a series of many subsequent rebirths. That is why I am saying that it is very important that we focus our spiritual practice on what is within our reach, and directly related to our current situation. Then you will find studying Dharma and putting it into practice in whatever way you can will be more effective and beneficial now and in the long term.

We will now continue with the teaching.

(b') How to begin the development of generosity

We left off at this point last week, but we'll read it again:

Previously, recalling my commitment to emulate him, I gave away my body, every resource, and all my virtue to all living beings. If I am still attached to resources, I am behaving just like an elephant, oppressed by the sun, who goes into the water and bathes and then, back on dry land, rolls in the dirt. Then again, after it sees that it is covered in dirt, it goes back into the water and does the same thing over again." The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

Recalling the superior deeds of the sages,
Strive at them and reflect on your commitment;
Understand the following excellent thoughts
In order to clear away your attachment to things:
I gave away my body to all beings;
Then I relinquished the virtue of this gift.
My being attached to external objects
Is senseless, like an elephant's bathing.

The clarification to make here is that *I gave away my body* may literally sound OK. However, if we take, *I relinquished the virtue* literally it may sound like we are relinquishing virtue. Of course, this doesn't mean giving up on Dharma or virtues. Rather it means giving Dharma or virtues to others.

The text continues:

If you are able to generate intense delight as you contemplate the many benefits of giving things away and great fear as you reflect on the faults of tightfistedness, you will naturally produce a generous attitude.

We need to take this as Lama Tsongkhapa's spiritual experience. He is saying here that if you contemplate the benefit of the practice of giving, the thought of giving will arise spontaneously and forcefully – *it will naturally produce a generous attitude*.

Then:

Accordingly, generate the thought of giving away everything to others at the conclusion of cultivating love and compassion, or at the conclusion of reflecting on the life stories of the Conqueror, his children, and so forth.

This emphasises that the purpose of cultivating love and compassion for other beings is to increase the thought of

giving or, in other words, to be able to engage in the practice of giving. As well, *reflecting on the life stories of the Conqueror, and his children* (such as bodhisattvas) is also to increase the practice of giving.

The text continues :

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states how this is done:

I will give away without a sense of loss
My body and my resources
As well as all my virtue from the past, present, and future
For the welfare of all living beings.

So the objects to be given are one's *body*, one's *resources* or possessions and all one's *virtues*. Here, *without a sense of loss* implies no sense of stinginess, attachment or miserliness – one gives to others wholeheartedly. The benefit of developing the thought or intention of giving lies in counteracting attachment to things and stinginess with sharing them.

The text continues:

You focus on three things – your body, your resources, and your roots of virtue – and mentally give them away to all living beings.

These lines indicate the meditation of giving and taking, which we have been doing. In this meditation, you mentally give away all your belongings to other beings, who receive them and experience virtue in their mind as a result.

Then:

If you stop the craving that conceives everything to be your personal property and then repeatedly condition yourself to the attitude of giving it all away to others, you will be called a bodhisattva.

We need to reflect on the meaning of this line in the context of our own inner continuum. Although it says here, *stop the craving ... condition yourself to the attitude of giving it all away to others, you will be called a bodhisattva*, we remain strongly attached to craving for all our possessions thinking, 'These are my possessions.'

I have been emphasising over and over again to you that when you read the lam-rim, you should read slowly, and contemplate the meaning of every single word and sentence, relating each to your own thoughts and deeds. You will find this method of reading very effective in calming your mind and enhancing your inner peace and happiness. Our minds don't have to always be occupied with the usual objects of distraction. We know from our own experience that this only brings us inner disturbance, chaos and turbulence. We need to break the usual habit of allowing our mind to restlessly wander after various objects. We will find reading the lam-rim text and contemplating its meaning to be very rewarding and effective in calming our mind.

The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

"All these things are yours;
I have no pride that they are mine."
Someone who has this amazing thought repeatedly
And emulates the qualities of the perfect Buddha
Is called a bodhisattva – so said
The inconceivable Buddha, the supreme being.

At present, as your determination has not matured and is weak, you do not actually give away flesh, etc., though you have already mentally given your body to all beings.

As I mentioned earlier, it is important to read each sentence and then pause to reflect on its meaning in the context of your own practice. This is saying that at the moment, our

practice of giving may only be on a mental level as we are not in a position to actually give away things to others. So, you might wonder about the point of doing that.

The text then offers the answer:

According to the *Compendium of Trainings*, however, if you do not train in the thought of giving away your body and life, you will not become accustomed to it and so will remain incapable of giving away your body and life. Therefore, from now on cultivate this thought.

It is said only those on the bodhisattva *bhumi* level can actually give away their body or lives to benefit other beings. Having said that, there are some ordinary people in the community who donate body parts such as a kidney to others. That's a worthy cause. Generally speaking, before we can engage in giving away our body and indeed our lives, we need to train and habituate our mind with the thought of giving. When the thought of giving is sufficiently developed, the actual act of giving will naturally take place. That is what the text is saying here.

We need to understand, contemplate and meditate on the Dharma. In this way, we will receive its true blessing. That blessing is not going to come from outside of us; it comes from our own Dharma knowledge and practice. Then the text continues:

If you use food, clothes, shelter and so on that you have sincerely given away to all beings, and you do so with craving for your personal welfare, forgetting the thought, "I will use them for others' welfare," then you commit a major infraction.

There are different layers of meaning here. On one level this responds to doubts or questions concerning offerings to the Triple Gem. Some people have asked me what you do with the food and drink you have offered to the Triple Gem. As clearly stipulated here, if you take those offerings *with craving for your personal welfare*, then you commit a major infraction, that is, an afflictive infraction or downfall. Therefore, the advice is to use the offerings with a motivation to benefit other beings, *I will use them for others' welfare*.

Here we are talking about consuming things that we have wholeheartedly dedicated or given to others. Having forgotten about the fact that these things have been given to others, it is saying here that if you utilise those things with craving for your personal welfare or satisfaction, you commit a major infraction, or an afflictive downfall (Tib: *Nyon.mongs-pai ITung.ba*). However, if you utilise those things, not out of craving for personal welfare, but either because you forget to include all beings in your intention, or because you utilise those things for a particular living being out of attachment, then you will be committing a minor infraction, a non-afflictive downfall (Tib.: *Nyon.mongs ma.yin.pai ITung.ba*). The text states:

When you have no craving but forget to apply the idea of focusing on all living beings, or if you use those resources for a particular living being out of attachment, you commit a minor infraction.

When it says *if you use those resources for a particular living being out of attachment* the indication is that you use those resource for the sake of another living being out of attachment.

It continues:

With regard to the material goods that you have turned over to others, the *Compendium of Trainings* states that when you use them for your own welfare fully cognizant of their

being the property of others, you are stealing, and if the total value is enough, you commit a cardinal transgression of the vows of individual liberation.

This refers to whether or not the act of stealing is qualified as an act of a cardinal transgression, which in Tibetan is *pham.pa* or transgression of any root vows of an ordained person. Some argue about the occurrence of the transgression or *pham.pa*. As the text says:

In response to this, some say that since you have turned over your food, etc., to all living beings, it is impossible for the total value of any one being's portion to be enough, so you cannot commit a cardinal transgression. Others say this is not correct because you have turned over your belongings as a whole to each being individually. Others argue that even though you have mentally surrendered them to others, they do not take personal possession of them, so there is no cardinal transgression.

The intended meaning of the *Compendium of Trainings* is then summarised.

You incur a cardinal transgression (given that the total value requirement has been met) when you sincerely turn your food, etc., over to a human being, and this person knows it and takes possession, whereupon you, fully cognizant of their being another's property, appropriate them for your own use. Therefore, the positions stated by the others are wrong.

Here, Lama Tsongkhapa clarifies what is mentioned in the *Compendium of Trainings*, with respect to the occurrence of a cardinal transgression or *pham.pa*. Just as the consummation of a non-virtuous act such as killing is dependent upon meeting certain factors in the stages of committing the act, whether or not the act of stealing is considered as a cardinal transgression (Tib: *pham.pa*) is also dependent on certain factors.

As Lama Tsongkhapa clarifies it, *when you sincerely turn your food, etc., over to a human being*, the recipient is a human being who knows or is aware of the object being given, and who then takes ownership of that object. In this kind of scenario, if you make use of the object for your own purpose with the recognition that the object has been given to the recipient, then it said *given that the total value requirement has been met*, the act will be considered as a cardinal transgression or *pham.pa*. Then the text continues:

There is no fault in using some living beings' resources if you think, while using them, "I do this for their welfare." The *Compendium of Trainings* states:

There is no fault in using things if you think, "I am taking care of my body which is owned by others with these resources that are owned by others." Slaves have no material goods of their own with which to survive.

Here is a different scenario. It says here that it's fine to use things that have been dedicated or wholeheartedly given to others if the reason for using them is to benefit others. Sometimes people give things away to others, and then, later on, they decide to use those things by saying to other people they are doing so for their benefit. That seems to be acceptable, doesn't it?

From one aspect we can take what is being said here as an instruction for our everyday life. It shows us what kind of motivation we should have before acquiring things and while utilising things. For instance, in cultivating the thought or intention of giving, then our motivation for utilising things should be to benefit others. It continues:

You may think, "I incur a fault because, after I have turned over these belongings to living beings, I use them without their permission," but there is no fault. The *Compendium of Trainings* says:

A servant who labors hard on a master's behalf might use the master's belongings without permission when the master's mind is unclear due to illness and so forth, but incurs no fault.

Here the emphasis is on your motivation. If your motivation is to protect the interest of other beings, then it can be permissible to use the belongings of others. For example, a slave's act of utilising the master's belongings to save his master's life is not morally a wrong action. Similarly, as part of practising the bodhisattva deeds we should ensure that our motivation in utilising things is to benefit other beings, and that it is not stained with attachment to, or craving for, the objects you have given to others.

We are reading this profound text and going over its meaning together. In fact, you can read it and learn by yourself. This text provides the key points of Dharma practice and everything you need to know about your Dharma practice. As I have been saying, it is very important you read the text thoroughly and slowly. As you read, think and meditate over its meaning, you will find this way of learning very effective for your practice and also for enhancing a calm, clear mind of wisdom.

In essence, we must put our knowledge of Dharma into practice and integrate it into our everyday activities. For example, whenever we drink or eat something, we should recite the OM AH HUNG mantra three times and reflect upon the meaning of the mantra. The three syllables of the mantra can be explained together or individually.

To explain the meaning of the whole mantra, the three rounds of the recitation implies the purification, transformation and inexhaustibility of the offering objects. The first recitation of the mantra purifies the offering objects of all bad smells, appearance, colour, taste etc.; the second recitation transforms the objects into uncontaminated nectar and; the third recitation makes the objects inexhaustible.

As to the meaning of the mantra in terms of each individual syllable, then, the OM represents the seed syllable of the holy body which is associated with Vairochana Buddha; AH represents the seed syllable of the holy speech associated with Amitabha Buddha; and the HUNG represents the seed syllable of the holy or omniscient mind associated with Akshobhya Buddha.

Accordingly, you should think of this meaning of the mantra as you recite it, either when actually making an offering, or blessing an inner offering in a ritual. As we have discussed earlier, we need to ensure our motivation for eating and drinking is primarily to sustain a long and healthy life in order to practise Dharma, helping it to flourish and to benefit other sentient beings. As to the food or drink going into our body, think of giving it to the countless bacteria whose survival inside us depends on it. As a result of receiving food and drink you imagine that these bacteria experience uncontaminated bliss. You then pray: At the moment I am benefiting them only through material aid; may I soon be able to benefit them by giving Dharma teachings.

Next week we will have a teaching break so you can have a discussion session.

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Edited Version*

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