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# The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We will begin with our usual meditation.

[*Tong-len meditation*]

Try to cultivate the proper motivation by thinking that the reason why we engage in learning and practising Dharma is to benefit other sentient beings. So the motivation for listening to and practising the Dharma should be bodhicitta.

At the same time, it is also important to reflect on the fact that what we all seek is happiness, and there is a cause for happiness, and that we must create those causes of happiness. This kind of understanding reflects a true understanding of Dharma. If we develop some sort of conviction, faith and confidence in this understanding then we will naturally put it into practise.

Despite the fact that we all seek happiness, and we are always trying hard to achieve it, we are not finding that happiness. Obviously, the reason for that has to do with not creating the right causes. Therefore, we must have a clear knowledge of cause and effect with respect to achieving the happiness that we want and avoiding the suffering that we do not want. Without this knowledge, without an understanding of Dharma, then we will not find happiness or reduce suffering. In fact, our actions may run counter to what we want and do not want. So, when we talk about Dharma practice and receiving benefit from it, we need to understand that we must have a good basic knowledge of Dharma, which basically comes down to good common sense, related to how things operate in reality.

We are simply saying to ourselves that what we seek in life is happiness, and that happiness has causes. So, if we want happiness then we have to take responsibility for creating those causes. The next question is what and where are those causes? If we observe ourselves, we will find that the kind of happiness that we seek is related to our feelings about things and events, and the cause for that lies within us. On the other hand, happiness on a physical or material level is related to external factors in our lives. Therefore, if we want to experience inner peace, happiness and relaxation, then we have to recognise and acknowledge that the causes for that happiness are related to our mind and therefore lie within. So, from this perspective, it makes sense to understand the meaning of Dharma as being a means to transform or change our mind, and this is indicated by the literal meaning of the term for Dharma in Tibetan, which is *chos*.

If we follow Dharma practice, then our attention and focus should be on perfecting and purifying our mind. Indeed, in Dharma practice we need to prevent and even completely stop the mind from pursuing or wandering

off towards various objects of distraction or being overpowered by negative thoughts and mental attitudes. The point of Dharma practice is to direct, discipline and keep the mind pointed in the right direction, on virtuous and right objects, and on a right state of mind.

If we follow Dharma practice, our mental outlook and our attitude will become positive, and as a result we will feel good emotionally, and our deeds will be positive in the sense of benefiting ourselves and others. We can understand this from our own experience. Receiving benefit from the Dharma in this way is a true blessing. Strictly speaking, this true blessing doesn't come from outside beings or objects; rather it comes from inside through our own Dharma practices. So, we can say that our unfailing and completely reliable true refuge, true protection and true guide lies within ourselves. This inner refuge is the source of benefit for us in this temporal life as well as in all our future lives. It is nothing but the positive qualities within our own mind, which we can develop and achieve through practising Dharma. Initially we need to recognise this inner Dharma or the positive qualities within ourselves as a true, unfailing refuge and protection, both now and in the future. As we put that Dharma into practice, we will gain all the benefits, and truly understand and be able to attest to the value of the Dharma as an unfailing refuge object. This will further increase our conviction and faith in the Dharma which will, in turn, ensure our continuous progress along the Dharma path.

When we speak of Dharma as our unfailing refuge and friend, it doesn't necessarily refer to our long-term future such as future rebirths; rather the Dharma is our true refuge and friend in our present situation. If we practise Dharma, then in this very present moment we will find more mental peace and happiness and thereby enjoy better physical health. It is now a proven fact that enjoying a happy and peaceful state of mind automatically improves our physical health too.

Sometimes when we face hardship and difficult situations in our lives and we receive no help or support from others, or all outside things fail us, we feel totally helpless, vulnerable and lonely, and in great pain and misery. In such a challenging time, we will find that inner Dharma as an unfailing refuge and protection that we can lean on and trust. If, however, we lack the Dharma refuge, we can see that the suffering will be much greater.

Making progress from the small to the middling and great stages of the spiritual path all depends upon our Dharma practice, which again, is related to our mind and developing ourselves on a mental level. For example, if we want to fulfil the aspiration of the person of the small scope - which is the freedom from a bad rebirth - we need to engage in the practice of refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions. This practice will prevent bad rebirths as well as prevent suffering in this immediate life. Likewise, if we want to fulfil the aspiration of the person of the middling scope - which is the liberation from samsara - then we need to cultivate a renunciation of seeking liberation, which we do through recognising the shortcomings of cyclic existence. So again, we can see

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how our progress along the path takes place on the mental level – it is an inner progress. The aspiration of the person of the great scope is to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. The way to go about this is to infuse our minds with an altruistic mind of bodhicitta and then engage in the deeds of bodhisattvas. So all of our spiritual progress relies on purifying, enriching and perfecting our mind.

You should be now very clear about what Dharma practice means, and what you have to do. Then, if you put the Dharma into practice you will naturally gain benefits from that practice. For example, the practice of loving-kindness means cultivating in your mind and heart a feeling of love and compassion for other beings. When you cultivate this beautiful mental attitude of love and compassion, you will feel delighted and joyful because this attitude prevents mental afflictions such as attachment, aversion, jealousy, competitiveness and so on, from arising. It is these mental afflictions that are our daily source of mental and emotional suffering and misery.

I consider a positive state of mind, such as the love and compassion for others that we cultivate within ourselves, as our true friend and guide who always brings joy, peace, and happiness and supports us in times of need. If we have this then we have inner peace and happiness and reliable support from within. Then, even if externally we lack friends or favourable conditions, we do not feel sad, lonely or unhappy. On the other hand, if we lack support in the form of a positive frame of mind, then even if we are surrounded by very good external conditions, we can undergo a great deal of suffering, including a deep sense of isolation, failure and confusion and depression. Our own experience clearly shows how, if we lack a good and positive state of mind, then no matter what external conditions we have, they don't actually fill our mind and life with happiness and enjoyment. We may have a very luxurious house, expensive clothes and cars and lavish foods and drinks to enjoy; no matter what good conditions we have externally they are meaningless and do not satisfy us.

So, in this way we can appreciate the benefit of Dharma practice, because it is through Dharma practice that we are developing and enriching ourselves with this inner quality. As we were saying before, if we have this inner quality as a friend, then even if there is no-one out there to befriend us or say, 'I love you', we won't feel loneliness or despair.

Without Dharma practice, however, our mind will easily be filled with afflictive emotions, such as pride, and aversion and feeling jealous; it will be all too easy to loathe some beings and be nasty towards others. As a result of showing these kinds of negative mental attitudes, nobody will like us or want to befriend us. The result is that we suffer internally and externally and we can end up with depression or a serious mental illness. We can understand why someone can feel this way because they lack inner support, and on top of that, they feel that everything they have accomplished externally with much hardship over a great length of time has failed to benefit them.

Some people have said to me that they find my advice about how true friends lie within us very beneficial; that is something they had never thought of looking at. Similarly, others find the advice that true happiness lies within one's mind but not in the external objects very beneficial, and a life-changing experience for them. They say that they reflect on this all the time and find it very beneficial. It is out of my friendship and love for you all that I sincerely share my knowledge and experience with you. I'm not trying to show off how much I know, because in fact I don't know much. What I share with you reflects my own reflections. I always pray and reflect: May all sentient beings have happiness; may they be free from suffering and how wonderful if they have happiness and are free from suffering.'

Through reflecting and directing your attention along these lines every now and again, whenever you get a chance, you will cultivate some sort of positive mental attitude, and feelings of love and compassion for other beings. That, I would say, is a true Dharma practice, and a meditation practice as well.

We understand very well that meditation practice means to familiarise our mind with virtuous objects and virtuous ways of thinking. It doesn't matter what you do, but if it induces a positive mental attitude and positive ways of thinking, then we can definitely call that deed a meditation practice, and a Dharma practice. On the other hand, we may sit in a perfect cross-legged meditation posture with both eyes completely shut, appearing to be engaged in a perfect meditation practice, but there is a question as to whether or not we are actually meditating.

A meditation practice that leaves some sort of positive impact on our mind is a true Dharma practice, and the benefits of Dharma practice flow to us now and in future, in this life and future lives. How does the Dharma practice benefit us in future lives? Well, we know when we leave this life we have to leave everything behind, such as our wealth and friends and also our bodies, but our mind stays with us, along with whatever imprints have been left on it by our actions.

This means that whatever qualities we develop within our mind through Dharma practice and meditation goes with us to our future lives along with our mind. From this perspective, we can understand how our Dharma practice benefits us, not only in this life but also in future lives. So, it is important that we practise Dharma every day, by taking a bit of time to reflect on the meaning of the Dharma. Even if the duration of our practice is short, at least during that time if our mind is directed towards reflecting on the meaning of Dharma, it won't be carried away by the usual distracting thoughts.

There are many familiar sayings we hear quite often such as 'happiness results from the tamed or calm state of mind', 'Dharma is the actual object of refuge' and 'you are your own master and protector'. All these resonate with the meaning of Dharma in terms of their description of the way the Dharma transforms or brings changes to our mind. So Dharma practice is very important.

The implication is that whenever we engage in Dharma practice, we direct our focus onto our mind. For the same reason, whenever we engage in a meditation practice,

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our first task is to check our mind. Before we fix our mind on the main meditation object, we need to empty our mind of distracting and chattering thoughts. The most effective way to remove these distracting thoughts is by doing a bit of breathing meditation, wherein you simply direct the mental attention onto the incoming and outgoing breath. Then, when our mind is fully settled within ourselves through this breathing technique, we can then begin the main meditation. As much as possible, always try to ensure that your Dharma practice and meditation is directed at your mind, minimising mental afflictions, weakening the force of mental afflictions, and reducing your habituation with them.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama quite often comments that these conceptualising thoughts that we generate all the time are one of the main sources of our suffering and fear. Although there is no real cause to worry or be scared, our thoughts project or perceive things in that way and as a result we suffer. His Holiness recalls that one of his attendants warned him not to go into a particular dark room, which he said was haunted. 'He said this to me so I wouldn't wander off everywhere, and his warning worked because I was too frightened to go into that room.' As we can see here, the truth is that there is no scary thing in that dark room, but it appears like there is when our mind projects that there is something scary there. Likewise, people can sometimes be strongly affected by comments made by other people. For example, some normal people think they are mentally unstable or losing their memory just because of such comments made by others.

Sometimes we mentally create, or project causes of suffering and then, because of that, undergo totally unnecessary suffering. In the study of mind and awareness, the mind is categorised into two: mistaken and unmistaken states of mind. Accordingly, if we recognise a mistaken state of mind as a mistaken mind, then that mind cannot harm us.

Let me share a story with you. A long time ago when I used to live in Kopan monastery, we had there a female doctor from America. At one time a number of geshe started to cough a lot, and this doctor recommended acupuncture treatment for everyone. I refused the acupuncture treatment because I was not convinced it would help. The other geshe, however, had the treatment. Later, one of them confessed to me that the treatment hadn't worked for him. He then continued to explain to me that how during the treatment he was asked to rest for an hour, and as his condition got worse, he was prescribed some medicine. As the side effect of that medicine, he said he began to feel as if he was flying and seeing flowers in space. He said he even began to see some heads poking through the windows making noises. Nevertheless, he said, he didn't believe all these actually existed - he saw the hallucinations for what they were. Because of his ability to recognise these mistaken thoughts as mistaken, this whole experience of false appearances didn't cause fear or suffering.

Last year we left off at the point where the text says,

Also, as you sort through the material goods for charity, give the better first and give away completely all the goods presented for charity.

Next week we will continue from the subsequent heading, Things to Give

I must say that I am very happy to see all of us gathered here together tonight. Since our gathering is a gathering of spiritual friends, it benefits all of us. Having said that, it is also important that when we get together, we all make our best effort to make our time most meaningful and beneficial. When bad friends get together, they do bad things, but ours is a gathering of good friends so we expect a good outcome.

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