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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 of giving and taking [*tong-len meditation*].

I assume that you're taking this meditation practice seriously, with a clear recognition of its value and benefit to you. You should never underestimate the value of your meditation practice.

The end result that we seek from everything we do is happiness. Achieving happiness is why we do meditation practice – we want to achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence, or the complete state of enlightenment or buddhahood. Some may have a wish to be reborn as a human or a celestial god, but beneath that wish is the deeper goal to achieve happiness.

If you are engaging in meditation practice to seek happiness, then you have to ask, 'what is happiness?'. Generally, we can talk about two different types of happiness: inner happiness, which primarily arises from, and depends on, the mind; and outer happiness, which primarily arises from, or depends on, favourable external conditions.

External happiness and its causes and conditions are not that hard to recognise. In fact, we understand it well, and feel if we gain certain things, we will experience fun, excitement and happiness. Even less fortunate beings such as tiny ants know that external things bring satisfaction. This is evident from the fact that ants can find their way to sweet things, wherever they are: nobody needs to show them! They also know how to pass the message on to other ants about the location of the sweet food. We can also see from their reaction to any movement in their environment that ants know when they face any threat to their lives. The reason why ants are always keeping themselves busy, running here and there, is to find the external things that they recognise as a cause of happiness. Now, if we think about our own lives, perhaps our lives too reflect the life of busy ants, because we also seem to be living very busy lives, spending most of our time chasing after external things that we perceive as a source of happiness and fulfilment.

So, if we talk about happiness from the perspective of favourable external conditions, it is easy to understand. However, if we talk about happiness in terms of favourable inner conditions – such as having certain skills and education – then the causes and conditions become subtler, and not that simple. Even if we consider acquiring worldly education and skills, it may take years of hard work to gain them.

We need to ensure here that the kind of happiness we seek is inner happiness, which arises from within and has less to do with external causes and circumstances. It is more reliable and lasting than the happiness that depends on external conditions, which is unreliable, out of one's control and can change at any moment. The reason we engage in meditation practice is to understand this subtler and deeper level of happiness, for which we require knowledge and experience.

Lama Tsongkhapa stated that meditation is a practice whereby we place our mind on a virtuous object and familiarise ourselves with that object. The next question is, 'why do we meditate?'. The simple answer is that we meditate to bring the mind under our control. This is because the primary source of unhappiness or suffering in our life is our mind. Because we are always led by the mind, our situation will always reflect that mind. If the mind leads us in the wrong direction, then we will do wrong things, resulting in suffering. If we take a closer look at the type of mind that drives our everyday actions and shapes our character, we will notice that it is a form of delusion, an afflicted state of mind. In a nutshell, we are overpowered by our mind, but because our mind is overpowered by mental afflictions, we perpetually experience suffering.

Is it possible to gain control over the mind? Yes, it is possible, because we are not the mind and the mind is not us. It normally seems like the mind is the controller or the owner, and we feel as if we are controlled or owned by the mind. However, in reality, it should be the other way around. This is clear from our everyday use of the phrase, 'my mind', which sounds as if you – or the 'I' – are the controller or owner, and the mind is controlled or owned by you or the 'I'. But, this is not the case at all, for we have fallen prey to our mind. Unfortunately, the mind that overpowers and leads us is under the influence of, or intoxicated by, mental delusion or afflictions.

It is because of this force of the mental delusions that we are always rushing here and there. However, no matter what we do or accomplish, the result is not true happiness, but more suffering and restlessness. Even the good conditions we've gathered through hard work over a long time may end up as a further cause to increase and intensify misery and delusion; even these supposedly good and favourable conditions become bad and unfavourable, bringing suffering, instead of the happiness we seek. Take the example of achieving physical beauty: recognising this as the cause of more happiness and self-confidence, some people have worked hard and achieved it, but they have not become happier because they feel more pride, jealousy and competitiveness in relation to their outer image.

So, if we don't counteract the mental afflictions, no matter what we do or what we achieve, there'll be no end to our suffering, because the blame for our suffering lies with the mental afflictions. Now, when we talk about mental afflictions, we are referring to the various afflictive emotions we generate, such as attachment, anger, pride and jealousy. Attachment, as an emotion we experience, usually seems positive, harmless, or a cause of happiness. But, in reality, it serves as a perpetual cause of dissatisfaction and harm. The harm brought to us by other afflictive emotions, such as anger, pride, jealousy and competitiveness, on the other hand, is quite evident. Apart from all these afflictions, ignorance is the fundamental cause of all our faults. We know this from all the mistakes we have made, as a result of which we end up suffering and then regretting our decisions and actions – these mistakes would not have happened if we were not ignorant.

The key to cultivating a positive state of mind and overcoming negative states of mind is to be more aware of our thoughts and deeds. Most importantly, by understanding that our mental attitude is the source of all our actions, we need to be more responsible for the kinds of thoughts we generate. If we cultivate positive mental

attitudes – such as a good heart, loving kindness and compassion – we can definitely be a happier person, whatever we are doing, whether we are at the workplace, at home, or anywhere. At the same time, we can have a positive influence on other people around us, in terms of making them feel good and happy. So, this would naturally improve our relationships with them.

Therefore, our practice is to recognise that the true source of our happiness and suffering lies within us. Whenever we confront a problem, experience suffering, or cause others to suffer, we should try to recognise the cause within us. We should try to relate the cause to our inner mental delusions or afflictions. We should observe and recognise the mental afflictions within us as the source of all the troubles in our life, to the point where we can actually point our finger at them and put the blame on them. You can begin conversing with the mental afflictions, blame them for all your problems and mistakes, tell them off, scold them, even cite my name and say to them that Geshe Doga said they are the perpetrators, the trouble-makers, and the evil ones.

Indeed, we can trace the cause of every negative action we commit back to the mental afflictions – even when we utter a few harsh words or make a slightly unpleasant gesture or facial expression. The mental afflictions harm and destroy our life and cause us to harm and destroy the lives of other beings. Because of these mental afflictions, some parents always argue and fight over almost every issue, making their lives stressful and miserable. Their unending arguments not only destroy their relationship, but also affect the whole family, including relatives and particularly their children. Later on, when the children grow up and marry, they are likely to also end up living lives like their parents, arguing and being nasty to their partner. The main source of such conflict is the mental afflictions within us.

On the other hand, if we put an effort into cultivating and developing positive states of mind, such as love and compassion, we will find more peace and happiness in our personal life, and have a positive impact on our family, relatives, friends, and others. As I always say, the people who are most often directly impacted by our thoughts and actions are our own loved ones; the good and bad outcomes of our thoughts and actions affect those closer to us, which is another reason why we should cultivate positive mental attitudes and overcome negative states of mind within us.

We have all become very close and good friends over a long time. As friends, we share with each other those things we find to be beneficial, and those which are harmful. From my perspective, the most important thing is for us to realise that we must cultivate a positive mental attitude, and the best, most beneficial mental attitude is love and compassion for other living beings. I commend it as a priceless thing – it's benefit to oneself and to others is just incredible.

Relating to meditation practice, I say to people that the purpose of meditation is to free our mind from the bondage of mental affliction. We should always ensure that we feel fully relaxed and not feel any tension in our practice. Do not rush into practice or expect to see an immediate outcome. If we meditate with a relaxed mind and body, we will gradually see our practice benefiting us.

It is best that we initially aim our meditation to counteract any negative state of mind or mental affliction that inflicts suffering and harm upon us at the moment. For example, it could be a strong or compelling emotion of attachment, or aversion, that affects our normal life activities and functioning. Since the shortcomings of these afflictions are

easy to recognise, we will be more motivated to counteract them, and our practice will yield immediate benefits.

In other words, it is unrealistic for us as beginners to target our meditation at counteracting the mental afflictions at the level of the root cause. The point is that, as long as we perceive things as good or bad by boxing them into two categories – desirable and undesirable, or pleasant and unpleasant – we will continuously generate mental afflictions of some sort, such as attachment or aversion. Although they all are mental afflictions and harmful to us, not all of them necessarily disturb us by causing pain and inflicting harm on us at the present moment.

So, I am saying that we first need to get rid of those afflictions that are more aggressive and compelling, and which affect us right now, and then try to get rid of the next most pressing type of afflictions, and so on.

Now we turn to the text.

### How to give

#### 3)) Things to be given

(b')) Detailed explanation of the things which are and are not to be given

(2')) Detailed explanation about outer things which are and are not to be given

(a')) How not to give outer things (cont.)

(3')) Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of the person (cont.)

We will continue from the end of page 134:

Also, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says, "Do not give up something exalted for something lesser," ...

So, *do not give up something exalted for something lesser*, is a quote from the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*. One should not forsake or give up the greater purpose for some lesser or inferior purpose. Here, the text is talking about instances of where it would not be appropriate to give certain things to others as part of the practice of generosity.

... so it is not that there is merely no fault in not giving it away.

The way to refuse to give is to avoid using harsh language, such as saying, "I am not giving it to you." Rather, communicate with skill-in-means and then send the person off.

This implies the importance of not undermining the person requesting the thing. Although you cannot fulfil that person's request, you have to be very careful in how you communicate with that person as to why you cannot give. Your communication must be wise and skilful, so that you don't show disregard or disrespect to that person, and the person will fully understand why you cannot give.

Skill-in-means is as follows. From the first, bodhisattvas turn over with pure intention all their belongings to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions.

The suggestion here is that you may want to imply that one of the reasons you cannot give is because you are not the actual owner of the thing the recipient is asking for, so it is inappropriate for you to actually give it away. Indeed, bodhisattvas view everything they have as belonging to buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The text continues:

This is like, for example, the way that fully ordained monks keep religious robes and the like which they have mentally earmarked for their abbot or master. Because the monks have transferred their robes in this

way, even though they accumulate belongings, they are called “bodhisattvas living in the noble family” and infinitely increase merit.

*Bodhisattvas living in the noble family and infinitely increase merit* means that, although bodhisattvas don’t give certain things and instead use these possessions themselves, they infinitely increase merit by their deeds. Why? Because they have pure minds. On the contrary, when we use our possessions and don’t give them to others, we simply increase our mental afflictions and our merit decreases. This is because we cling to our possessions. Bodhisattvas do not have such clinging, for they do not see their things as their personal possessions: they see them as belonging to others.

In relation to this, His Holiness the Dalai Lama always admires the way the Christian belief in Almighty God as a creator of all things inspires them to practise charity and contentment and live a very simple life dedicated to serving the community.

The bodhisattvas, then, hold their belongings in trust, as it were, for the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

If someone asks for something, and if the belonging is suitable to be given to this person, then bodhisattvas give it, thinking, “I have no belonging that the buddhas and bodhisattvas have not given away to all living beings.”

So we’ll just go to:

... let the person know the situation, saying with soothing words, “My good person, this belongs to someone else. It is not something that I can give to you.” Or else, the bodhisattvas might give the monetary equivalent of two or three times the price of the book to someone to whom they have refused a text. In any case, the person who asks for it will think with regard to the bodhisattva, “It is not craving that keeps this person from giving me the text; it is not in this person’s power to give it.” This kind of activity is the generosity of the wise.

#### **(4”) Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of material things**

Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of material things is, for example, such gifts as your parents; food and drink that have bugs; a child, wife, servant, etc. whom you have not told or, even if told, does not want to be given away; or a child or wife who are persons of the sort who have become accustomed to comfort. Though it is said that you should not give your child, wife, etc. into servitude, I have included them here among “material things” because the gift of material things is the form of generosity that is emphasized the most.

The *Bodhisattva Levels’ Compendium of Determinations* says that even if you do not satisfy a request for your three kinds of religious robes and any extra belongings [robes] other than those which the Buddha has permitted renunciates to own, you incur no fault if you do not have a stingy attitude toward them, and if they are requisite to your cultivation of virtue. Thus it says:

If renunciates bodhisattvas give away extra belongings—robes other than their three kinds of religious robes—that are permitted by the Buddha, are resources for their bodies, and are conducive to maintaining their comfort, and do so after they have looked carefully at the persons who want them and ask for them, they do not incur a misdeed. Even if they do not give them away, they incur no misdeed at all as long as

their not giving is for the purpose of their cultivation of virtue and they do not have attachment to them.

The *Bodhisattva Vows of Liberation* says:

Sariputra, if bodhisattvas give away their three kinds of religious robes, treating the one who asks for them as more important than themselves, they are not relying on few desires.

Hence, if renunciates bodhisattvas give away their three kinds of religious robes, they incur a transgression.

We will stop here.

Just before this teaching I spent half an hour reading and reflecting on the section we have covered today. I have found it extremely beneficial and began to realise the profundity of the bodhisattva practices. I encourage everyone to read the text and think about its meaning as much as possible. You will gain a lot of knowledge from simply reading it. Even coming across a term like ‘intelligent giving’, which we covered in tonight’s teaching, has a profound effect on my practice. Intelligent giving is a form of not giving, so how is this possible? We find from this text that, with the right skill-in-practice, we may even need to keep things instead of giving them to others; furthermore, using and enjoying things ourselves may become a source of increasing merit. Of course, the key here is not having any attachment to the goods but having a clear sense of good purpose behind possessing and enjoying things.

I encourage everyone to read the text. If you keep your mind busy with reading the text, it has no time for mischief and worry about other things! Whereas if you don’t look after the mind or preoccupy it with something virtuous, it will slip away and bring you trouble.

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