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# The Six Perfections

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Try to establish a genuine bodhicitta motivation of wishing to achieve buddhahood to benefit all motherly sentient beings. With this motivation, we should think, 'I shall listen to the Dharma and put it into practice'.

Why do we use the term 'motherly' when we say 'to benefit all motherly sentient beings'? We refer to all other sentient beings as 'motherly' because their kindness and gratitude towards us in the past is the same as the kindness and gratitude shown to us by our mother of this life.

But simply saying 'motherly sentient beings' is not enough; we must also feel close to them in our heart, and in our mind think of all other sentient beings as if they were our own mother. This kind of recognition of all sentient beings as our mother is essential when we meditate on remembering their kindness.

In the motivation we also stated, 'wishing to achieve buddhahood to benefit all motherly sentient beings'. 'Buddha' is a Sanskrit word that the early Tibetan translators rendered as *sangye* – a word that carries a very special and profound meaning. 'Buddha' means 'awakened', in the sense of someone who has awakened from the sleep of ignorance. So the word buddha means an awakened one, and also connotes the enlightened state, in the sense of the blooming of a lotus flower. In Tibetan, the term *sangye* has two syllables: *sang-* means 'awakened' from the sleep of ignorance; whereas *-gye* connotes 'developed', which here means one who has developed all the excellent knowledge.

Therefore, when we say 'I wish to achieve the state of buddhahood' in our motivation, we are saying that we wish to achieve a state that is free of all faults and endowed with all the excellent qualities. The reason we wish to achieve the state of buddhahood is also indicated in our motivation – to benefit all sentient beings. In Tibetan, the term for buddhahood is *sangye go.pang*, where *go.pang* means status or position. So, in our motivation, we are expressing the wish to reach the status of a buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Therefore, if we include the bodhicitta motivation when we engage in any virtuous practice, it will make it very effective and a pure Dharma practice. If we don't want to waste our lives, we must practise generating bodhicitta, which will make our life truly meaningful.

## 10. HOW TO GIVE

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

(2'') The generosity which is just mental (*cont.*)

We will now continue with the commentary on the lam-rim. We stopped at the section which reads:

These ways for wise bodhisattvas to give when they have no resources are employed until they attain the first level, the level of pure wholehearted resolve, whereupon poverty in resources no longer occurs.

This is a summary of what has been said before – how bodhisattvas who are materially poor can develop the practice of giving by engaging in the practice of giving away imagined objects. Now the text points out that they need to do this *until they attain the first level*, which refers to the first bodhisattva *bhumi* or ground, *the level of pure wholehearted resolve, whereupon poverty in resources no longer occurs.*

The text then quotes *Bodhisattva Levels*. We can note here how Lama Tsongkhapa presents the teaching by citing the great ancient Indian masters to show the authenticity of the scriptural sources. At the same time, he provides his own explanation, backed up with reason and logic. It is quite amazing.

For, the *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

Thus, this is the giving of gifts for wise bodhisattvas while they have no resources ...

We can recollect how, earlier on, this section presented the bodhisattva practice of giving away mentally imagined objects, a way of giving practised by intelligent bodhisattvas. This practice is recommended for wise or intelligent bodhisattvas when they have no resources to give.

... and until they attain pure wholehearted resolve.

They engage in the practice of giving away mentally imagined objects until they attain pure wholehearted resolve, which is the first bodhisattva *bhumi* or level.

Just as bodhisattvas of pure wholehearted resolve obtain a state which transcends miserable rebirths, so also they attain inexhaustible resources in all lifetimes.

Upon reaching the first bodhisattva level, they no longer need to rely on the practice of giving away imagined objects, because they are free from bad rebirths and also from poverty. They have now gained the quality of having inexhaustible resources at all times.

What follows is a summary of what has been mentioned before.

### (d') A summary

After you have taken the bodhisattva vows, make aspirational prayers with respect to how to learn the practice of generosity on the high levels, and then train in these methods.

While bodhisattvas engage in the practice of giving within their capacity, there are some other practices of giving that are out of their reach – for example, only bodhisattvas on the high-level path or bodhisattva *bhumi* can practise giving away their body parts to others. However, as it says here, after taking the bodhisattva vows, beginner bodhisattvas can make an aspirational prayer to be able to engage in the giving practice of higher-level bodhisattvas.

The text is also implying that we, too, can make prayers to be able to do advanced practices that we cannot do right now, for example, by praying 'May I be able to engage in such a profound practice of giving'. When we aspire or pray, we are also acknowledging and admiring those who possess such qualities. So, we can at least prevent ourselves from feeling jealous about these qualities. On the other hand, if we are unable to admire and rejoice in the good qualities of other beings, instead of venerating others for their qualities, we will envy them and feel jealous.

The text continues:

Understand and learn what is permitted and prohibited with respect to the methods of making gifts that you can engage in right away, as explained above.

As mentioned earlier, you need to be very clear about what is permitted and what is not permitted, and then act accordingly. So, when the text says *understand and learn what is permitted and prohibited*, it is referring to what has already been said – what is and is not appropriate practice, from the point of view of the time, the object, and the purpose of giving. It was mentioned before, for example, that giving objects such as weapons to harm others is prohibited.

Next:

In particular, you must rely on the remedies to stinginess with respect to your body, resources, and roots of virtue.

With reference to the practice of giving our body, resources and virtues, it is very important that we avoid stinginess. Any benefit from giving with stinginess would be insignificant and weak. Whenever we practise giving, we must ensure that the practice is not tainted with stinginess and directed at counteracting miserliness.

Then:

After you strive to steadily increase your generosity, you must cultivate joy for this practice and generate a feeling of sorrow for not having earlier trained your mind in that way.

This implies that we should feel regret if we feel we haven't done this practice in the past when we should have. But, while we should feel remorse for not having done the practice in the past, we should also rejoice in the practice of generosity that we have done. Taking delight or rejoicing in our practice will multiply the benefits of that practice, just as making aspirational prayers will make the benefits of our practice inexhaustible. Therefore, we should rejoice in our practice with the same degree of joy as a beggar finding a lump of gold!

For, as it says in the *Questions of Subahu Sutra*, once you do this, you will be able to complete the perfection of generosity with little difficulty in another lifetime ...

This line is an inspiration for us to engage in the bodhisattva's practice. The fact that we find the practice difficult or have little interest in doing it indicates our lack of familiarity or habituation to the practice. As said in Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, 'There is nothing whatsoever that is not made easier through acquaintance' – whether we find something easy or difficult depends on how familiar we are with it. If we find the practice too hard or uninteresting, this is an indication that we have not familiarised ourselves with the practice in the past. If we don't familiarise ourselves with it now, we will face the same problem in the future. Hence, this line is to inspire us to exert effort and engage in the practice.

... whereas if you give all this up and set it aside, not only in this life will you be continually tainted by very grave faults, but in other lives as well you will not want to engage in giving, and it will therefore become extremely difficult to enter into the bodhisattva deeds.

So, in order to be motivated to engage in the practice, we should reflect on the shortcomings of not engaging in the practice right now: for instance, even in the future, you will not engage in giving and therefore find it difficult to enter into the levels of the bodhisattva deeds.

Furthermore, the *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

The spirit of enlightenment is the root of such generosity,  
So do not give up this motive to make such gifts.  
The Conqueror said, "In the world the supreme form of giving  
Is the wish to give accompanied by the spirit of enlightenment."

Thus, being mindful of the spirit of enlightenment—the basis of the bodhisattva deeds—...

The basis of the bodhisattva deeds is the bodhicitta mind or the spirit of enlightenment. When it says *being mindful*, it is suggesting that we should remind ourselves of the bodhicitta mind by cultivating it as frequently as possible. If we can't cultivate actual bodhicitta, we should simply cultivate it in the form of an aspirational prayer, by saying aloud or wishing: 'May all beings be free from suffering and achieve happiness. May I be a cause to free them from suffering and place them into the state of happiness. May I be able to single-handedly free them from suffering and place them into the state of happiness.'

... cultivating it, aspiring to enlightenment, and making aspirational prayers to become enlightened form the root of all giving and the supreme kind of giving, so work hard at these. This is the excellent key point that sums up the meaning of the *Questions of Subahu Sutra*.

Lama Tsongkhapa is clearly highlighting here the supreme kind of giving, or the root of all giving – the bodhicitta mind. He is also emphasising that your aspiration to achieve enlightenment is the supreme prayer. Here, *the root of all giving* refers to the spirit of enlightenment or bodhicitta; *the supreme kind of giving* refers to aspirational prayers, such as dedicating your virtuous practice towards achieving complete enlightenment. So here we can also understand why Shantideva's dedication chapter in *Bodhicharyavatara* is regarded as the chapter presenting the perfection of giving.

The difference between prayer and dedication is that a dedication is contingent upon a substance or object, such as a virtuous practice we've done, to be dedicated towards complete enlightenment, and so forth. Whereas, prayer is not contingent upon, or requires any dedicated substance. We can pray, 'May all beings achieve the state of buddhahood'. This prayer is wishing for others to be free from suffering and to find everlasting happiness. In fact, this kind of aspirational prayer is known as 'the supreme form of giving'.

## 11: THE PERFECTION OF ETHICAL DISCIPLINE

We will now move on to the next chapter.

Lama Tsongkhapa elaborates on this topic of ethical discipline under the five main headings:

- (a') What ethical discipline is: What does ethical discipline or the practice of morality mean?
- (b') How to begin the cultivation of ethical discipline: Having understood the meaning of ethical discipline, you will then want to apply it in practice. To do this, you need to know how to practice. Hence, the second heading is how to begin cultivating ethical discipline.
- (c') The divisions of ethical discipline
- (d') How to practice
- (e') A summary

### (a') What ethical discipline is

Ethical discipline is an attitude of abstention that turns your mind away from harming others and from the sources of

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such harm. Therefore, you bring about the perfection of ethical discipline by progressively increasing your habituation to this attitude until you reach completion.

The term moral ethics generally implies a sense of refraining from harmful actions. Here, however, the term has a more specific meaning: *ethical discipline is an attitude of abstention that turns your mind away from harming others and from the sources of such harm.*

Here, *harming others* refers to physical or verbal harm. In terms of the ten non-virtuous actions, there are seven physically harmful actions – three of the body, which are killing, stealing and adultery; and four of speech, which are lying, slander, harsh speech and idle gossip. The *sources of such harm* refers to the intention, or impulse, to harm others, referring to the three non-virtuous actions of mind – covetousness, ill-will and wrong views.

*Therefore, you bring about the perfection of ethical discipline by progressively increasing your habituation to this attitude until you reach completion.* Here, it is important to understand the meaning of ethical discipline or morality within the context of our own mental continuum. We make progress in the practice of ethical discipline by habituating our mind to a sense of restraining from harming other beings.

The text continues:

However, it is not the case that you bring the perfection of ethical discipline to completion in the external world by establishing beings in a state free of all harm. Otherwise, since there are still living beings who are not free from harm, the conquerors who visited in the past would absurdly not have completed the perfection of their ethical discipline and would therefore also not be able to guide these beings to freedom from harm.

If we understand the bodhisattva's progress in the practice of ethical discipline on the basis of how much they have reduced or eliminated harm and suffering in the external world, then we will reach the absurd conclusion that the past buddhas have not achieved the perfection of ethical discipline and also have failed in guiding all other beings to achieve liberation from suffering.

Hence, in the context of the perfection of ethical discipline, whether all living beings in the external world are freed or not freed from harm makes no difference; the practice of ethical discipline is simply habituating your own mind with the attitude of abstention, which turns it away from thoughts of harming these beings.

So, it is good to repeat this line and think about it, over and over again, until its meaning sinks into your mind. We will then clearly understand the point made here with respect to the meaning of ethical discipline. Then the text continues:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

Where can beings such as fish be sent  
Where they will not be killed?  
So it is said that by attaining an attitude of abstention  
You perfect ethical discipline.

I encourage you all to read this lam-rim text by Lama Tsongkhapa. It is profound in its meaning and also carries great blessings. You will find that simply reading the text and directing your mind to its meaning will be very effective in calming your mind and enhancing peace and happiness within you.

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