
The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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As usual, we will start with tong-len meditation. [*Tonglen meditation*]

Try to cultivate a proper motivation. If you consider any activity that you engage in to be special, then generating the right motivation prior to the activity is particularly important. Whereas, if the action is insignificant, it may not be that necessary.

What all beings wish for is happiness, and what they don't want is unhappiness. Virtue is the cause of happiness and non-virtue is the cause of unhappiness. This fact relates to ourselves and to all other beings. When we engage in the meditation of giving and taking, we imagine all sentient beings in the space in front of us. Then, with our love and the thought of giving, we wholeheartedly give away all our happiness, including the causes of happiness – which is what all sentient beings desire or wish for. And with our compassion and the thought of taking, we imagine taking upon ourselves all the suffering, together with the causes of suffering, of all living beings.

Hence, we can understand how profound this meditation of giving and taking is, in which we generate and increase the genuine thought of wishing all beings to have happiness and to be free from suffering. Indeed, it is said that this is a cause for us to accumulate enormous merit.

However, we can't just leave it there; we should also follow up on this meditation by taking upon ourselves the responsibility of freeing all beings from suffering and placing them in a state of happiness. Therefore, after cultivating and developing love and compassion, we should also cultivate what we call a sense of universal responsibility, that 'I will free all beings from suffering and cause them to have happiness'. This is called the *superior intention* of taking the welfare of all sentient beings upon oneself.

Then, as we think over how to accomplish the welfare of all beings, we will realise that we must achieve complete enlightenment, the state of buddhahood – this is the only way by which we can truly accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings. In this way, we end up generating an altruistic mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, which is an aspiration to achieve buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings.

In this meditation of giving and taking and cultivating bodhicitta, we are resolving to give all beings all the things they want, and to free them from all the things they do not want. It is important that we try to live up to this resolution by integrating the bodhisattva deeds into our everyday life. This means applying the practice of giving and taking to those we live with, befriend and interact with, in our everyday life. As a result, we will be

adding genuine love and compassion to our relationships, as well as making others happy and helping them overcome difficulties in their lives.

In addition to benefiting those around us, we ourselves will directly benefit from practising love and compassion. We can see that, as a benefit of such a practice, we will appear pleasant and admirable in the eyes of those close to us, such as family, friends, and work colleagues. In fact, everyone, regardless of whether they are believers or non-believers, will greatly appreciate and admire anyone who practises giving and taking through showing love and compassion for others. Therefore, it is good to remember the profound and beneficial effect that such a practice has on ourselves and others. It is no doubt the most effective cause to build, strengthen and develop beneficial relationships with others.

As the great Lama Tsongkhapa advises, it is important that we put this teaching into practice according to our own capacity. Even though we may be learning about very advanced stages of spiritual practice, when it comes to our own practice, we should begin from where we are, and with whatever is most relevant for us, according to our ability. As we just said, in our everyday life, we must try to practise being a very caring, kind and gentle person with whomever we interact or meet. For example, when communicating with others, we must try to use gentle and pleasant words or gestures, knowing that even a few pleasant words or a little bit of pleasantness in our body language can be a cause to bring happiness in the minds of others.

At a practical level, there is no way we can match the deeds of a bodhisattva, but this doesn't really matter right now. What matters most to us is applying those practices we are capable of, even though they may be very simple and basic. In other words, we can only make progress on the path through practice.

We begin by implementing those practices that are within our reach, then move on to the next level, and so on. If we put aside the practices that we can do, and instead try or pretend to practise something that is too high or too advanced for our level, we will never progress along the path.

We will continue with the text from the heading:

(b") Stopping both dislike for harmdoers' attainments and delight in their troubles

Before we go into detail, think about what this heading tells us. What does 'stopping dislike for harmdoers' attainments' mean? It relates to the hate or dislike we feel when we witness the success or goodness of a harmdoer or someone we dislike. But what good and benefit is there in disliking their success and attainments? By disliking their success, do we really vanquish or harm them? Does this attitude bring more profit, joy or happiness to us?

On the other hand, when we see our enemies fail and go downhill, somehow it makes us feel good and happy; we like to see that happen. This is so wrong. So we need to consider whether or not there is a real benefit of holding this attitude of resenting harmdoers' attainments and delighting in their downfalls.

We can see here, just in the outlines and headings of his writing – and indeed in every sentence throughout the lam-rim teachings – how the great Tsongkhapa makes very profound statements about finding happiness and eliminating suffering. However, to fully understand the meaning and derive benefit from them, we need to think over these statements with good concentration and discriminating wisdom.

Here, the teaching is simply saying that we should not feel jealous of others' success and good achievements. We all know that when we feel jealous, we lose our own happiness and feel bad. Therefore, this teaching motivates and helps us overcome such suffering in our life.

When it says here that we should stop dislike for harmdoers' attainments, the text is conveying to us a very beneficial practice: that we should not feel dislike for or hate harmdoers' attainments because, if we do feel such resentment, the result will be mental pain and suffering for us. Alternatively, if we take delight or rejoice in harmdoers' attainments, the effect will be mental joy and happiness for us.

Likewise, if we 'delight in their troubles', in harmdoers' downfalls, the result is that we prevent love and compassion from arising within us. It is wrong to hold such an attitude.

The presentation continues:

Contemplate as follows, "After I have generated the spirit of enlightenment for the sake of accomplishing all living beings' benefit and happiness, I get angry at harmdoers when they obtain happiness on their own. After I have said that I want all beings to become buddhas, I get unhappy when harmdoers get even minimal prosperity or honor. This is extremely contradictory."

The meaning of this is quite self-explanatory. It is saying we must try to overcome the thought of disliking others' success by thinking of how contradictory it is that, on the one hand, we think of cultivating bodhicitta or the altruistic mind of enlightenment – a resolve to benefit others – then, on the other hand, we dislike or hate other beings' attainments and successes. We should rather think of their attainment of happiness on their own as if they have completed half of our task of benefiting them. So, we only have to attend to the other half. This gives us a good reason to rejoice and take delight in their attainments and happiness.

The commentary continues:

You must eliminate your jealousy regarding any sort of attainment by other persons and delight in it from the depths of your heart. Otherwise your spirit of enlightenment and the achievement of the welfare and happiness of beings are nothing but words.

Earlier, we engaged in the meditation of giving and taking, which essentially is based on a loving and caring thought and the bodhicitta mind to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all beings. Giving and taking meditation is done with the spirit of the bodhicitta mind, whereby we mentally give away all our happiness and take the suffering of all beings upon ourselves. The text is saying here that if we always allow jealousy to arise in

response to others' happiness, then all our practices will be nothing but words.

The commentary continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Since you want all beings to be happy,
You have generated the spirit of enlightenment.
Then, when beings find happiness themselves,
Why do you get angry with them?

If you wish to attain for living beings' welfare
Buddhahood, which is worshipped in the three worlds,
Why are you tormented when you see
Their most paltry gain or honor?

When a relative finds sustenance
For those whom you should nurture –
Objects of your care and generosity –
Instead of being pleased, are you angry again?

If you do not wish even that for beings,
How can you wish them enlightenment?
Where is the spirit of enlightenment
In someone who gets angry at others' attainments?

Whether your enemy gets something from someone
Or it remains in the benefactor's house
It is never yours, so why be angry –
Whether it is given or not?

This is a direct quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*. So, to understand this in more detail, you should refer to any commentaries on that text.

Even your mere malicious thoughts that delight in your enemies' troubles or that wish for their destruction do not harm your enemy; they lead only to your own suffering. Yet, if such malice were to harm them, you should stop it completely, reflecting on the drawback that this would bring ruin to yourself and others.

Here it talks about *malicious thoughts that delight in your enemies' troubles*. When we see our enemies fail, we take pleasure in it. We also wish them to lose and go downhill, and we hold malice and ill-thought towards them. It says here that, to overcome this, we need to consider whether taking joy in their downfall and wishing them to fail actually harms them, in the sense of defeating an enemy, or not. Of course, it doesn't defeat them. Instead, if we let such an ill-mind and malicious thoughts arise, we suffer and become unhappy as a result. As it also says here, *yet if such malice were to harm them* – even if we did hold malicious thoughts and did something to them, the result would not only be harm to them, but also harm to ourselves. So, thinking about the detrimental consequences of causing any harm to others, both for ourselves and others, we should try to overcome such thoughts.

The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

When my enemies are unhappy,
What am I pleased about?
My wishes alone
Will cause them no harm.

Even if I should effect their suffering with my wish,
What could I be pleased about?
If I say I will be satisfied,
What could be more ruinous?

Here it is saying that, usually, when we challenge or cause harm to our enemies, it gives us satisfaction and pleasure; we have a sense of accomplishment and achievement from being able to make them unhappy and harm them. These verses are saying that having such an attitude simply reflects our deep-seated anger and hatred towards them.

The text continues with the next verse from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*.

Once I am caught by the terrible, sharp hook
Cast by the fishermen, the afflictions,
I will surely be cooked by the hell-guardians
In a kettle for the beings of hell.

This analogy explains the shortcomings of mental afflictions, such as strong anger and hatred.

The text continues:

You will be unhappy if you view as absolutely undesirable the obstacles to what you and your friends want, movement in directions you do not want, and the prosperity of your enemies. If this unhappiness increases, you become hostile. If you stop your absolute dislike of these three things, you prevent unhappiness. Once you do this, you will not feel hostile. Thus, dispel your absolute dislike of these by using the reasonings previously taught. Take many approaches to stop your anger, because it is a very great fault.

The content of the above lines is quite self-explanatory. The point being made here is about the causes and conditions that give rise to, and increase, anger and hatred – such as our intolerance towards harm done to ourselves or our ‘side’, or our intolerance towards the happiness and prosperity of our enemies. Hence, we are advised to counteract anger and hatred in whatever way we can, through applying various ways and means.

The text continues:

These instructions – the lines of reasoning of the conquerors and their children presented above – provide the techniques for defeating your greatest enemy, anger. They involve arguing with your own afflictions and looking within yourself.

Referring to all the things we mentioned earlier – such as the shortcomings of anger, and the benefits of patience – the text is saying here that we need to turn our mental focus and attention inward, and defeat anger and gain patience.

When you analyze well with discerning wisdom and stop anger with many lines of reasoning, you prevent many different types of anger, and you become patient in many ways. Since this is an experience engendered by penetrating understanding that uses flawless reasoning to get at the meaning of correct scriptures, it leaves an extremely stable latent propensity.

Those who reject meditative analysis with discerning wisdom are those who reject the whole of the great undertaking of bodhisattva deeds such as these. Understand that such rejection is the worst hindrance to using a life of leisure for the benefit of yourself and others. Get rid of it as you would poison.

Here and in many other texts, we will note that Lama Tsongkhapa emphasises developing discriminating wisdom more than developing single-pointed concentration. Indeed, of the two types of meditation – stabilising and analytical – the latter is more effective and

important for beginners in establishing a firm ground or basis on the path. Having said this, it is also crucial that we employ both analytical wisdom and single-pointed concentration together in our meditation.

If, instead of focusing on developing wisdom, we only focus on developing single-pointed concentration or a state of relaxation, the text warns here that we need to *understand that such rejection is the worst hindrance to using a life of leisure for the benefit of yourself and others. Get rid of it as you would poison.* You would have heard about how some godly beings, such as the long-lived gods, can remain in single-pointed concentration for as long as they want, yet at the end of their lives, they are subject to falling into lower rebirths. This clearly shows the drawback of concentration without wisdom.

Therefore, as indicated here, the union of calm abiding (*shamatha*) and superior insight (*vipasyana*) is crucial in our meditation because the mind is not only able to focus in a perfect state of single-pointed concentration, but at the same time is able to discern and penetrate reality with analysing wisdom. Further, in conjunction with single-pointed concentration, when that wisdom deeply and finely analyses the truth, the bliss of pliancy will arise as a result. It is said that this bliss of pliancy resulting from the force of wisdom analysing the truth also maintains a perfect single-pointed state of concentration.

In short, the implication here is that we should not reject analytical wisdom and simply direct our focus to single-pointed concentration. Rather, we should engage in the union of both single-pointed concentration and analytical wisdom, or the union of calm abiding and superior insight.

(2') Developing the patience of accepting suffering

Developing the patience of accepting suffering has three parts:

1. The reason you must definitely accept suffering
2. The way to develop acceptance
3. A detailed explanation from the viewpoint of the bases

Again we can see here how the outline follows a logical progression, for example, immediately after the presentation of *the reason you must definitely accept suffering is the way to developing the acceptance.*

The text then goes into detail under each of those headings.

(a'') The reason you must definitely accept suffering

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

The causes of happiness sometimes occur,
Whereas the causes of suffering occur frequently.

As you continually experience whatever suffering is appropriate to you, you absolutely must know how to bring it into the path. Otherwise, as the *Compendium of Trainings* says, you either generate hostility or you become discouraged about cultivating the path, either circumstance interfering with applying yourself to virtue.

When we talk about the practice of accepting suffering as a type of practice of patience, broadly speaking, it is applicable to almost all situations. Whereas, when we talk about the other two types of patience – the patience of disregarding harm or of non-retaliation, and the

patience of thinking of the Dharma - they are applicable only to specific situations and circumstances.

As it clearly says in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, 'the causes of happiness sometimes occur' – the reason we need to accept suffering is that if we think about it, the causes of happiness are few, whereas the causes of suffering are many. So we must know how to transform adverse situations into favourable ones. We are not necessarily talking about turning the experience of suffering itself into the path – rather, of making it a favourable condition for us on the path.

This technique of transforming adversity or a suffering situation into a favourable one is very important. Without this capacity, *as the Compendium of Trainings says, you either generate hostility ...* which is referring to how, whenever you confront adversity or something undesirable or unwanted, you begin to feel hatred or dislike or ... *you become discouraged about cultivating the path, either circumstance interfering with applying yourself to virtue.*

Moreover, some sufferings will be caused by others, and some will be produced by your former karma, whether or not you strive at the path.

This is talking about the causes and conditions that result in the various kinds of suffering we experience – how certain things arise, regardless of whether we are following the path or not, and due to those causes and conditions, suffering arises.

Some, as will be explained below, occur when you engage in virtuous activity but do not occur when you are not so engaged.

This specifies how some instances of suffering don't arise in a normal day, but arise when one engages in virtuous practice.

For the time being, you cannot dispel the sufferings definitely produced by the power of former karma and immediate conditions. You must accept them when they arise, because (1) if you do not do this, in addition to the basic suffering, you have the suffering of worry that is produced by your own thoughts, and then the suffering becomes very difficult for you to bear; ...

This clearly implies how certain sufferings are inevitable, we cannot stop them. On top of that, if we worry about suffering, or feel unhappy about the experience of suffering, we will be adding more suffering to the suffering we already have.

... (2) if you accept the suffering, you let the basic suffering be and do not stop it, but you never have the suffering of worry that creates discontentment when you focus on the basic suffering; (3) since you are using a method to bring even basic sufferings into the path, you greatly lessen your suffering, so you can bear it. Therefore, it is very crucial that you generate the patience that accepts suffering.

Essentially, it is saying here that we should try to stop worrying about suffering.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that accepting suffering is the most effective means of eliminating it. His Holiness further said that he learned his most important lessons during the most difficult parts of his life. We can understand here that there is a positive side to the suffering and hardship we experience in our lives.

We will do the 'Twenty-one Tara Praises' for Ingrid for her quick recovery. It is said in the sutras if a person has enough merit, then all his or her wishes will be fulfilled. So, we will recite this prayer to increase merits for Ingrid, so that she will recover from illness, live long and find happiness.

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