
The Six Perfections

ལྷན་པོ་གྲོ་བུ་ལ་བསྐྱབས་ཀྱི་ལུས་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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16 July 2019

We will begin with our usual meditation followed by the Tara Praises. [*Tonglen meditation*]

(c) How it is not difficult to bear suffering if you gradually grow accustomed to it, starting with the small (cont.)

We will continue with the text, which reads:

If you initially develop a significant degree of courage, even great suffering becomes helpful. It is just like the case of warriors entering a battle and using the sight of their own blood to increase their boldness. If right from the start you belittle yourself, saying, "I have never heard of such a thing, and even if I had heard of it, I could never do something like that," then even a small suffering becomes a cause for you to turn back from the path.

Here, we find inspiring advice regarding the question of how much we can tolerate any difficulty, hardship or suffering we experience. These lines are saying that it depends on our spirit, courage and determination. We will talk more about this in the next chapter on the perfection of joyous effort.

Here, the analogy of warriors going into battle is used to illustrate mental spirit or courage in the face of hardship. Rather than losing their courage, some warriors become even more determined to combat their enemy the moment they see any kind of injury, such as their own blood. Similarly, if we consider ourselves as Dharma practitioners, we are engaged in a battle against the enemy of our mental delusions or the afflictions within us. Our approach should be such that the stronger or greater the enemy appears to be, the more courage and determination we should muster in fighting it.

On the other hand, if we fail to show such inner courage, especially if we undermine ourselves in the face of such difficulty by simply saying to ourselves: 'It is too hard, too painful' and so on, then we may easily give up the fight. In that case, as it says here, you won't be able to tolerate even minor difficulties and problems in life.

The text continues:

It is just like the case of cowards who see others' blood and, fainting, fall unconscious.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Some, seeing their own blood,
Become more intrepid.
Some, seeing others' blood,
Fall unconscious.

This comes from the mind's fortitude
Or from its timidity.

In following Dharma practice, if we lack patience, then as soon as we face some adversity – even something very small – we will easily give up our practice and make all kinds of excuses for ourselves. I normally say that the way two people, who may be equally fit and physically strong, cope when facing the same circumstances, can be different. One person may cope very well without any mental stress and

unhappiness, whereas the other, despite being in the exact same situation, may mentally experience more stress and unhappiness. So, we can clearly see that sometimes the way adversity affects us doesn't always depend on the external conditions, or even the condition of our physical body. Rather, it has much to do with our way of thinking and mental courage, and how we inwardly cope with the situation – this determines whether the situation causes mental stress and unhappiness.

Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Way of Life* also uses the analogy of warriors who become more inspired when they see their own injuries caused by an enemy. However, when others see such injuries – even a tiny bit of blood – they will immediately lose courage and collapse to the ground, fainting. If we look for the main cause of why some people show courage in that difficult situation, while others completely lose their courage, it isn't to do with external causes, because both can physically enjoy the same health and strength and confront the same circumstance. Therefore, the different responses are clearly to do with different mental dispositions, spirit and courage.

The strength of our mental spirit and determination is important for achieving both the goals of our Dharma practice and those of our worldly ventures. We learn here about the importance of maintaining a positive mental outlook, self-courage and determination. Whatever goals we wish to achieve, we must maintain strong inner courage, and the willpower and determination to face any hardship to reach our goals. In my case, I have to apply this teaching to Dharma practice because I don't have any worldly affairs to worry about. But you must apply this advice for a successful worldly life, even if you are not all that serious about Dharma practice. You can't afford to be laid-back, always relaxing and enjoying yourself, while at the same time wanting to accomplish many things. So really, this advice is very important and relevant.

The reality is that in whatever work you do – even if you go to work for one day – you must be prepared to face some hardships or undesirable conditions. To be productive and to enjoy the work you do in that one day, you have to maintain a level of good, positive motivation and courage. Without that, you will easily lose interest in going to work. This advice also applies to school students. For example, they can't say to themselves, 'I am not going to school because I am hungry'. If their motivation is weak, they will easily miss going to school and fall behind in their learning.

So the message here is the importance of developing and maintaining our positive spirit, courage and determination. Then, whatever work or activity we do, even if it is worldly, we will not only be able to overcome any hardship or difficulty we face, but overcome it with great ease. With inner courage and determination, you handle the situation with a pleasant and positive state of mind, and this can be a cause for you to feel positive about what you are doing. If we lack that positive spirit, determination and courage, then we will always be complaining about even the very small problems we face.

In relation to the analogy of the warriors used to illustrate the power of mental spirit or courage, let me tell you about something I heard about that happened during a fighting incident in Tibet. A person engaged in the fight had received multiple bullet wounds, but he held his gun tightly and kept it aimed at the enemy. It seems he was so determined to kill his enemy that he couldn't even die or let go of the gun. Then he heard his friend say, 'Don't worry, I've already

killed the enemy'. As soon as he heard that, he relaxed. So, brave warriors do not feel pain even if they are severely injured and are able to keep fighting their enemies.

(c") A detailed explanation from the viewpoint of the bases

Question: Given that one must accept the suffering that occurs, from where do these sufferings come and how does one accept them?

In this presentation, the great Tsongkhapa makes a good connection between what he has said before and what he says next. What he said before was all about the importance of practising the patience of accepting suffering. In this section, the text goes on to elaborate further, focusing on the kind of suffering that we should accept in cultivating patience or tolerance, explaining the causes of how these sufferings arise, on the bases from where their suffering arises.

Reply: There are eight bases for accepting suffering:

1. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on objects.* Robes, alms, bedding, seat, medicine, and necessities are objects that enhance pure conduct. Without displeasure and disappointment you accept the suffering that arises when these are given to you and you find them to be inferior or too few, or when they are given with disrespect or after a long delay.

Here, the first basis for the practice of accepting suffering is particularly recommended for renunciates or ordained persons. The basis here refers to the base or condition for experiencing suffering, such as living conditions or resources which, as it says, include *robes, alms, bedding, seat, medicine*, etc. In obtaining such resources, renunciates may face a situation where they experience *suffering that arises when they are given to you and you find them to be inferior* – that is, the object or alms given to them or offered to them are inferior in quality. Not only that, but, as it says *they are given with disrespect* – they may be given to them in a disrespectful way or after a long delay, even to the point of making them suffer hunger or thirst.

The second basis is:

2. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on worldly concerns.* The nine worldly concerns are: (1) loss; (2) disgrace; (3) blame; (4) pain; (5) disintegration; (6) extinguishment; (7) aging; (8) sickness; and, (9) the death of what is subject to death subsequent to its decay. After you have analyzed the sufferings based on all or each of these, you accept the suffering.

The third one is:

3. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on physical activities.* The four physical activities are moving around, standing, sitting, and lying down. When all day and all night you purify your mind practice of obstructions by means of the first [moving around] and third [sitting] of these four, you are accepting the sufferings that arise from them; however, you do not relax on a couch, chair, or bed of straw or leaves when it is not the time to do so.

We are just reading this out because the meaning is quite self-explanatory. The fourth is:

4. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on upholding the teaching.* The teaching is upheld in seven ways: by (1) worshipping and serving the three jewels; (2) worshipping and serving the guru; (3) understanding the teachings; (4) teaching extensively to others what you have understood; (5) reciting its praises in a loud, clear voice; (6) correctly reflecting on it in solitude; and (7) cultivating meditative serenity and

insight that is imbued with yogic attention. When you strive at these, you accept the sufferings that arise.

The fifth is:

5. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on living by begging.* The seven aspects of living by begging are (1) you experience having an ugly appearance due to shaving off your hair, beard and so forth; (2) you experience wearing cloth that is patched together and is of poor color; (3) you live by restraining yourself from the conduct of worldly persons and act in a way other than they do; (4) you give up farm work, etc., and then live by getting material goods from others, so you live in dependence on others; (5) since you do not accumulate or employ material gain, you seek things such as robes, etc., from others for as long as you live; (6) since you give up sexual intercourse, you turn away from human desires until you die; and (7) since you give up dancing, laughter, and the like, you turn away from human merriment until you die in order to give up friends, intimate companions, childhood friends, and the like, as well as pleasures and enjoyments. You accept the suffering that comes about based on these.

Then:

6. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on fatigue due to perseverance.* You accept the suffering that arises from mental and physical fatigue, hardship, and disturbance while you are persevering at cultivating virtue.

This relates to all the difficulties or obstacles we face in our spiritual practice or meditation practice. Sometimes, we might find the practice of meditation boring, and it can sometimes be physically exhausting. There is also the difficulty that, during our meditation practice, we have to try to keep our mind focused on the meditation object; however, there may be various distractions that can pull our mind out of meditative concentration. Making an effort to prevent such mental distractions can be very difficult. This is what the text is talking about here. We have to accept such difficulties as part of applying the patience of accepting suffering in practising virtue and the Dharma.

The eighth is:

8. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on current tasks.* You accept the suffering that arises from tasks for a renunciate, such as the work associated with the begging bowl, robes, and so forth, or from the tasks for a householder, such as faultless work on a farm, in business, as a government employee, etc.

Even if you are stricken with any of the sufferings that arise in dependence on these eight bases, you do not give up your joyous perseverance at each. You act for the sake of enlightenment, joyfully, not letting such sufferings become an obstacle that causes you to turn back once you have set forth.

(3') Developing the patience of certitude about the teachings

There's not much left now, so we will try to finish this section today.

The patience of certitude about the teachings means generating the forbearance of conviction. It has eight objects:

1. *The object of faith.* This is the good qualities of the three jewels.

2. *The object to be actualized.* This is the reality of the two selflessnesses.

3. *The desired object.* This is the great powers of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, of which there are three – the power of the superknowledges, the power of the six perfections, and the power which is innate.

4. *The object to be adopted.* This is wanting both the cause – good deeds – and the effect of these deeds.
5. *The object to be discarded.* This is wishing to avoid both the cause – misdeeds – and the effect of these deeds.
6. *The object of meditation that is the goal to be achieved.* This is enlightenment.
7. *The object of meditation that is the method for achieving the goal.* This is all the paths of training in the spirit of enlightenment.
8. *The object of subsequent practice through study and reflection.* According to Dro-lung-ba (Gro-lung-pa), this refers to the province of what is to be known, such as impermanence and so forth. *The Power-Lineage Chapter (Bala-go-tra-parivarta)* of the *Bodhisattva Levels* mentions that the eighth is the sublime teaching – the twelve branches of scripture and so forth – so I think you have to take it as being this.

These eight show the objects of our practice or the objects of faith relating to our practice. As it says here: (4.) *The object to be adopted. This is wanting both the cause that is good deeds and the effect of these deeds.* (5.) *The object to be discarded. This is wishing to avoid both the cause and misdeeds and the effect of these deeds ...* We have talked about these in relation to our spiritual practice, in which the key elements are to recognise that there are things we should do, accept or adopt, and there are other things we should not do and that we need to discard or abandon. This is what the text is explaining here.

When we think about what to do and what not to do, we have to take into account the causes of both. When it says here *wanting both the cause* or in the next one it says *wishing to avoid*, basically the former relates to the practices we need to adopt. The reason why we need to adopt them is because the result of these things that we need to do are desirable. Whereas we need to discard or avoid other things or practices, because the results of these are undesirable and unpleasant. Therefore, when we talk about the object to be discarded, we must take into account both the cause and the effect.

To continue:

6. *The object of meditation that is the goal to be achieved.* This is enlightenment.
7. *The object of meditation that is the method for achieving the goal.* This is all the paths of training in the spirit of enlightenment.
8. *The object of subsequent practice through study and reflection.* According to Dro-lung-ba (Gro-lung-pa), [one of the great Kadampa masters] this refers to the province of what is to be known, such as impermanence and so forth. *The Power-Lineage Chapter (Bala-go-tra-parivarta)* of the *Bodhisattva Levels* mentions that the eighth is the sublime teaching – the twelve branches of scripture and so forth – so I think you have to take it as being this.

The way to have conviction is to become certain about these objects just as they are, and then to think about them again and again, apprehending them without conflict.

This sentence describes what it means by gaining *conviction* or ascertainment in our knowledge of the Dharma. This means that our knowledge or understanding of the meaning is so definite and so clear that there is no room for any conflict to arise in our mind – no contradictory thought or view against our understanding can arise. When we gain such an understanding, we habituate our mind with it – as it says here, we think about it again and again until our mind becomes habituated with this definite understanding.

In accordance with passages in the *Bodhisattva Levels*, I have set forth the set of eight bases with respect to the patience of

accepting suffering and eight objects with respect to the patience of certitude about the teachings. In particular, there is extensive coverage there of the patience of certitude about the teachings.

(d') How to practice

When practicing any kind of patience, you practice it in association with the six supremacies and all six perfections. These are the same as in the earlier explanation, except the generosity of patience means to establish others in patience.

These were all covered in the earlier sections of this teaching.

(e') A summary

The recollection and cultivation of the spirit of enlightenment - the basis of the bodhisattva deeds - is the root of the wish to establish all beings in a patience wherein they have extinguished the contaminations. After you steadily increase this spirit, then aspire to practice the patience of those at high levels and then train your mind in it. Distinguish the trainings for the patience of a beginning bodhisattva, and then learn these properly. If you transgress the boundaries as explained, you must make an effort to amend this. If you neglect these transgressions at the time of practicing these trainings, you will be continually tainted by many great misdeeds, and even in future lifetimes your practice of the marvelous deeds of the bodhisattvas will be extremely difficult. Seeing that the essentials of the path are supreme, practice right now what you can, and inculcate the intention to practice even those you now cannot. If you do this, then, as the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* says, you will bring the perfection of patience to completion with little difficulty and minor suffering.

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