
The Six Perfections

ལྷན་ ། རྩེག་བ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

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As usual we begin with a short meditation. [*Tong-len meditation*]

On a daily basis it's beneficial to engage in meditation practice. Many of you are probably doing that, which is a good thing. Our meditation practice should benefit our life at this present moment and in the future. Meditation is not some sort of physical ritual of a sitting posture simply to relax our body without anything happening in our mind. If we follow this kind of meditation, then obviously it won't benefit us on a mental level, and when we go back into everyday life, our mind will be just the same - one filled with all sorts of mental afflictions.

As you know, the word 'meditation' or *gom* in Tibetan, literally means 'to become familiar with' and more specifically here, it means to familiarise or habituate our mind with virtuous objects. So clearly the purpose of meditation is to habituate our mind with virtue. If our mind becomes habituated to virtuous objects, then we can cultivate and increase virtue easily. What we want is a virtuous state of mind that arises very easily and naturally.

However, we are more strongly habituated with non-virtuous states of mind than virtuous states of mind. This is clearly evident in our experience of how negative, non-virtuous states of mind arise so easily, while virtuous states of mind don't arise as easily. This non-virtue serves as the main source of our daily problems. However, we can turn around our mental habituation. It's important to understand that right now we have the opportunity and freedom to make the changes we want and do whatever we want. If we apply the meditation practice properly and effectively, we will definitely be able to habituate our mind with virtue. If we have habituated our mind with a virtuous state of mind while we are alive, it is more likely that at the time of death we will also have a virtuous state of mind, and this in turn will result in a better future rebirth.

We have been engaging in Dharma practice. But if we measure the benefit of our practice in terms of achieving the state of liberation from cyclic existence, or the supreme liberation of complete enlightenment, we will find it extremely difficult to understand that benefit. However, if we measure the benefit of our Dharma practice in terms of our day-to-day, direct or immediate life experience and outcomes, we will understand that. Based on this understanding, conviction and belief, we can then see the benefit of the Dharma in terms of achieving the higher or ultimate goal of liberation.

That's why I say that the main focus of Dharma practice is subduing negative states of mind. When we study and practise the Dharma, we should always be relating it to our mind. Is our application of Dharma helping us to subdue our mind? If it is, then we can clearly appreciate the benefit of Dharma in our life right at this present moment. We can see how the Dharma makes us a calmer, happier and a more joyful person.

In my own Dharma practice, my focus and goal is on cultivating a virtuous state of mind, because I wish the mind that accompanies and goes with me to always be a virtuous one.

Wherever the self or the 'I' is, our mind is there. Our mind is an inseparable companion of the 'I', and we find that if the mind that accompanies us is a virtuous one, it can serve as our trustworthy protection from suffering and from falling into a lower rebirth. In other words, a virtuous state of mind serves as a source of genuine peace and happiness for us now and in the future. Therefore, we can say that Dharma practice brings us happiness and joy in this life as well as in future lives. Indeed, it is true that following the Dharma is like following a joyful path leading to a joyful result.

From this perspective we can understand the true meaning of the Buddha's saying: 'You are your own protector, and you can also be your own worst enemy.' If we practice the Dharma and cultivate a virtuous state of mind with a sense of self-responsibility, then, as the Buddha said, we will become our own protector. However, if we are irresponsible with our thoughts and actions, then we will end up being our own worst enemy because we will be the main cause of our misery and suffering.

(b') How to begin the practice of joyous perseverance (cont.)

Last week we stopped at these lines:

Thus, if you lack joyous perseverance, you come under the influence of laziness and become poor in all good qualities, so you lose every temporary and ultimate purpose of being human.

Prior to this, the text talks about the disadvantages of not having joyful perseverance. If we fall under the influence of laziness, which is the opposite to the joyful perseverance then, as the text said earlier, we do not possess all the excellent qualities. If we fall under the influence of laziness about doing a meditation practice then, either we won't engage in the meditation practice, and even if we do it, the practice won't be very effective.

We need to understand the importance of cultivating this joy or very positive mental attitude from the depths of our hearts in whatever virtuous practice we are doing. As emphasised here, this is very important.

This section has covered the way to generate joyful perseverance by contemplating its advantages on the one hand, and the disadvantages of laziness on the other. It is important to know that the opposite to joyful perseverance is laziness. It's just like love is the opposite to hatred. Our rational mind can tell us that if we cultivate a positive state of mind, then we have to overcome the opposite to that. In the same way, when we talk about generating joyful perseverance, we have to know its opposite force or hindrance, which is laziness. This implies that by overcoming the hindrances or opposite forces, we can naturally generate joyful perseverance.

Next the text goes into the divisions of joyful perseverance.

(c') The divisions of joyous perseverance

As the text says:

The section on the divisions of joyous perseverance has two parts:

1. The actual divisions
2. The method of developing joyous perseverance

As I mentioned last time, if we reflect on the logical sequence of these outlines, it will give us a very good understanding of the topic.

(1') The actual divisions

The section on the actual divisions has three parts:

1. Armor-like joyous perseverance
2. Joyous perseverance of gathering virtue
3. Joyous perseverance of acting for the welfare of living beings

Then the text goes in detail on each.

(a") Armor-like joyous perseverance

When bodhisattvas joyously persevere, prior to actively engaging themselves they put on the armor of a preliminary enthusiastic thought such as, ...

When it says, *when bodhisattvas joyously persevere, prior to actively engaging* it's talking about what they do prior to engaging in their actual deeds. *They put on the armor of a preliminary enthusiastic thought.* Obviously, the analogy is the wearing of armour. I don't know if armies have to wear armour these days, but in earlier times, depending on the types of battle and weapons used, such as swords, bows etc., warriors used shields and armour to protect themselves from enemy strikes.

Likewise, bodhisattvas adopt an *armor of a preliminary enthusiastic thought* such as:

"For a trillion sets of three immeasurably great eons each composed of days as long as a thousand great eons, I shall not relinquish my practice of joyous perseverance.

I'll leave it up to you to find out the details of this measurement of time, but basically it means an infinite amount of time.

I shall not relinquish my practice of joyous perseverance refers to how, before engaging in the actual bodhisattva deeds, bodhisattvas train their minds in developing the bodhisattva's spirit, or courage. As it says here:

"For the sake of relieving the suffering of a single living being, I would rejoice at remaining only as a hell-being until I attain buddhahood.

Before engaging in their deeds, bodhisattvas train their mind, resolving that for the sake of even one sentient being they would stay in a hell realm for countless aeons.

The text continues:

"As I exert myself in this manner for the sake of complete enlightenment, what need is there to mention my perseverance over a shorter period or in the face of lesser suffering?"

The implication is that when your mental courage or determination has reached such a very high level as being determined to remain in the hell realms for countless aeons of time for the sake of one sentient being, then *as I exert myself in this manner for the sake of complete enlightenment, what need is there to mention my perseverance over a shorter period or in the face of lesser suffering?* So in this way, perseverance for any causes that require less time and hardship becomes very easy. Of course, when we actually think about this great bodhisattva spirit, we cannot even imagine ourselves as having such incredibly great courage. However, we have to understand here that we can train our very ordinary mind to become habituated with such a great thought of determined altruism. At least we can see that on a theoretical level our mind has the potential to develop this vast bodhisattva spirit and resolve.

The bodhisattva's spirit as described here is in accordance with the sutric path. In the tantric path the bodhisattva wishes to achieve enlightenment with a much greater sense of urgency and hence follows a quick path, whereby the practice of both method and wisdom is simultaneously present within a single instant of mind. However, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, the extent of the bodhisattva's spirit and courage seems greater in the sutric than in the tantric path.

We need to train our mind with the thought of wishing all beings to be liberated from suffering and to have the everlasting state of happiness. It is said that if we train our mind like this then, through the force of our familiarity with this altruistic thought, we will be able to actually engage in the deeds of liberating other beings and place them in the state of happiness.

The text continues:

Such is the joyous perseverance that is like armor. A bodhisattva who produces even an aspiration for, or just faith in, such joyous perseverance is steadfast; how much more so one who is endowed with this perseverance, given that he or she develops measureless causes for joyously persevering for the sake of unsurpassed enlightenment. The *Bodhisattva Levels* says that for such a person there is absolutely no action for the sake of others and for enlightenment that is discouraging or entails hardship. When you become conditioned to such a state of mind, it becomes the definite cause of awakening your potential for the Mahayana lineage, so train in it.

When it says, you become *conditioned to such a state of mind*, it is referring to what has just been said about training and habituating our mind with the bodhisattva spirit. It's saying that such training can actually result in *awakening your potential for the Mahayana lineage*. Generally speaking, when great compassion arises within your mind it is considered as a sign of the awakening of the Mahayana lineage, or your potential to follow the Mahayana lineage.

Therefore, we understand this mind training as being a very important cause to awaken our Mahayana lineage, which is essentially great compassion. Hence, this is also a very important cause to awaken the bodhicitta mind as well.

The text continues:

Concerning armor-like joyous perseverance the *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

In as many eons as there are drops of water in the ocean,
Eons in which the years are composed

Of long, drawn out days and nights equal in duration
Even to the temporal limits of cyclic existence,

You produce the spirit of supreme enlightenment once.
Though you likewise have to accomplish every other
collection,

You do not become disheartened because of your
compassion,
And undiscouraged you achieve sublime enlightenment.

To generate this immeasurable steadfast armor
While disregarding your suffering in cyclic existence
Is declared the first proper undertaking
For the disciplined hero possessed of compassion.

The text then clarifies the meaning of these verses.

Furthermore, even if it took you a hundred thousand years to produce the spirit of enlightenment once and to see one buddha, where each year is composed of twelve months, each month of thirty days, and each day as long as the time from beginningless cyclic existence to the present, and even if it took you this length of time multiplied by the number of

grains of sand in the Ganges River to know the mind and behavior of one living being, you similarly must come to know the minds and behaviors of all living beings. The *Teachings of Aksayamati Sutra* says the armor of being undaunted is the inexhaustible armor; it is armor-like joyous perseverance of the highest caliber.

Then Tsongkhapa gives this summary:

In short, if you can generate a single attitude such as this, you easily complete limitless accumulations and purify measureless obscurations. This becomes the most excellent cause for never turning back; by just being joyful no matter how long it takes, you quickly become a buddha. Those who want to become a buddha in a short time, but take no joy at all in the limitless deeds and great length of time required, take a very long time to reach buddhahood, because they thereby fail to produce the wonderful courage of the conquerors' children.

Essentially this indicates that the duration or the length of time that bodhisattvas resolve to work for the sake of all sentient beings is an unfathomably very, very long period of time. We should also not think of the duration of our practice in terms of an hour, a day, a month, or a year; rather think of practising for days, months, years and life after life. Cultivating such a spirit can serve as a cause to accumulate enormous merit and purify obscurations and so forth.

The line *by just being joyful no matter how long it takes, you quickly become a buddha* relates to the true bodhisattva spirit, where bodhisattvas take more joy if they have to serve sentient beings longer to benefit them with happiness or free them from suffering.

Those who want to become a buddha in a short time, but take no joy at all in the limitless deeds and great length of time required, take a very long time to reach buddhahood refers to our attitude in Dharma practice where we wish to find happiness and enlightenment very quickly. They will take a long time to reach enlightenment, *because they thereby fail to produce the wonderful courage of the conquerors' children*. Having this very short-sighted view acts as a hindrance or an obstacle. Therefore:

After you have put on such armor, you joyously persevere for two purposes: to gather virtue and to act for the welfare of living beings.

(b") Joyous perseverance of gathering virtue

The joyous perseverance of gathering virtue is applying yourself to the practice of the six perfections in order to properly accomplish them.

By wearing this armour of joyful perseverance, bodhisattvas engage in this *joyous perseverance of gathering virtue*, which mainly refers to the deeds of the six perfections – giving, moral ethics, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom. Essentially, what we can understand is that by wearing this armour of joyful perseverance bodhisattvas don't face any obstacles or hindrances in the performance of their deeds. In the perfection of giving, for example, they do not face any hindrances in giving their body, their virtues, their possessions, and so forth. Likewise, when engaging in the perfection of moral ethics, they will be able to maintain the perfection of moral ethics and so forth under all circumstances.

(c") Joyous perseverance of acting for the welfare of living beings

The joyous perseverance of acting for the welfare of living beings is properly applying yourself to the practice of the eleven activities for others' welfare.

You should find the list of eleven activities or modes of benefiting others in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*.¹

(2') The method of developing joyous perseverance

Having realised how wonderful it would be to have such joyful perseverance, the text goes on to explain the method of developing this joyful perseverance.

As explained above, since you produce, maintain, and increase all the virtues of the two collections in dependence upon joyous perseverance, the practice that develops it is very crucial.

Here we understand that *produce* refers to producing or generating a virtue that we have not yet produced or generated; *maintain* refers to preventing it from declining or decreasing; and *increase* refers to how to develop and increase the virtue that has been generated. This is just emphasising how all these are dependent upon joyful perseverance.

The text continues:

I shall discuss the system of the text of the great scholar and adept Santideva, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, ...

So, the explanation will be based on Shantideva's chapter on joyful effort.

... noting that it is complete as well as easy to understand and to sustain in practice.

The text continues:

The method of developing joyous perseverance has four parts:

1. Eliminating unfavorable conditions that prevent joyous perseverance
2. Gathering the forces of the favorable conditions
3. Based on the elimination of unfavorable conditions and the accumulation of favorable conditions, being intent on joyously persevering
4. How to use joyous perseverance to make the mind and body serviceable

(a") Eliminating unfavourable conditions that prevent joyous perseverance

This has two parts,

1. Identifying factors incompatible with joyous perseverance
2. Employing the methods to eliminate the incompatible factors

(1") Identifying factors incompatible with joyous perseverance

There are two factors incompatible with entering the path: (1) not entering even though you see that you can do the practice, and (2) not entering because you become discouraged, thinking, "How can I do such a practice?" Indeed there is also not practicing because you are unconcerned with whether you are capable or not, but this is irrelevant here since this explanation is for those pursuing liberation.

The text then elaborates on these two sub-headings:

¹ Ed: (1) helping those who toil and those who suffer; (2) working for the sake of those blind to the right methods; (3) working for the sake of people by benefiting them; (4) working for the sake of those threatened by danger; (5) working for the sake of those afflicted with miseries; (6) working for the sake of the deserted; (7) working for the sake of the homeless; (8) working for the sake of those without like-minded people; (9) working for the sake of those on the right path; (10) working for the sake of those on the wrong path; (11) working for the sake [of all these people] through miracles. We can carry out ten of these, the exception being working through miracles.

Within the first factor, there are two possibilities: (1) you have the laziness of procrastination, thinking, "There is still time"; and (2) you are not procrastinating but you are overwhelmed by your attachment to inferior and common activities.

In this vein *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

The factors incompatible with joyous perseverance
Are said to be laziness, adhering to what is ignoble,
And self-contempt out of discouragement.

Causes for the production of laziness are indolence, ...

We need to recognise that we fall under the influence of laziness due to certain causes and conditions, and without these causes and conditions we won't fall prey to laziness. As the text says:

Causes for the production of laziness are indolence, attachment to the taste of inferior pleasures, craving the pleasure of sleep, and a lack of disenchantment with cyclic existence. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Laziness arises from craving based upon
Indolence, enjoyment of pleasure, and sleep;
And from a lack of disenchantment
With the suffering of cyclic existence.

The meaning here is quite clear and self-explanatory. Even if we are interested in engaging in practice, and even if we know that we have the ability to practice, we don't engage in practice because of laziness. We can also relate this to our mundane activities. Sometimes we might have some very important work, which we know we have to finish, but we decide to go to bed and sleep. In this instance sleepiness acts as a form of laziness.

The text then states:

Some assert that the first two lines indicate the form that laziness takes rather than its causes.

(2") Employing the methods to eliminate the incompatible factors

Employing the methods to eliminate the incompatible factors has three parts:

1. Stopping the laziness of procrastination
2. Stopping attachment to ignoble activities
3. Stopping discouragement or self-contempt

(a) Stopping the laziness of procrastination

This involves the following three meditations: you contemplate that the body you have at present is rapidly disintegrating, that after death you will fall into miserable realms, and that it will be difficult to find an excellent life such as this one again. Meditation on these stops the laziness that holds to the notion that there is plenty of time, thereby generating the conviction in your mind that there is no time to spare.

Through this laziness of procrastination, you never seize the time to engage in Dharma practice. You are always putting it off saying, 'I'll do it the next day or the day after' and so on. The great master Gungtang Jamyang advises us never to procrastinate in our Dharma practice as the time for practising is right now. In order to overcome the laziness of procrastination, we need to cultivate the thought that 'the time for practising Dharma is right now'. In other words, to counteract the laziness of procrastination, we should contemplate the three points clearly laid out here.

The body we have at present is rapidly disintegrating. Given the impermanent nature of this life it is wrong to think that we can put off practising the Dharma or procrastinate. Then, at the end of this life there are two destinations: a lower or

bad migration, or a happy migration. These two are the only destinations. If we don't seize this opportunity to practise Dharma now, then we will definitely fall into a lower realm and never find an opportunity or freedom to practise Dharma again.

Then the text continues,

These three meditations were explained earlier in the section on the person of small capacity.

It's important to overcome the laziness of the procrastination. Otherwise we'll never engage in Dharma practice. Probably the most effective and powerful meditation to overcome this specific laziness is, as instructed here, to meditate on death and impermanence. As an effect of the death and impermanence meditation, meditators can lose all attraction to worldly pleasures and see no meaning in worldly life and activities. Therefore, we can understand how the death and impermanence meditation can direct our lives towards Dharma practice.

This meditation on death and impermanence also counteracts our clinging or attachment to the objects of this worldly life. Unless we overcome attachment, we will find no satisfaction. For example, if we are afflicted with strong attachment, then we will find no satisfaction no matter what we accomplish because it is not good enough. So, overcoming attachment is necessary to live a happy and satisfying life, even in this current life.

(b) Stopping attachment to ignoble activities

You see that the sublime teaching is the source of endless joy in this and future lives, and that you lose its great purpose when you are distracted in idle chatter and amusements which are the source of much pointless suffering later. Meditate on this and stop your attachment.

This again touches on thinking about the benefits of practising the Dharma.

The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

How could you abandon the source of infinite joy,
The highest of pleasures, the sublime teaching,
And delight in distractions and amusements
That are the causes of suffering?

Gungtang Jamyang said that the reason you should engage in Dharma practice is because even though this body will deteriorate in age, you will gain joy and self-confidence as a benefit of your practice. Although you cannot avoid death, when it comes you can make it a joyful experience just like a child coming home.

Remember that our future is in our own hands, and the most beneficial thing we can do is to cultivate a positive state of mind which, as we discussed before, will be our real saviour and protector.

Next Tuesday you have a teaching break for a group discussion. At the discussion, it's very important everyone is humble and courteous in conveying your views; never be harsh or abusive to others in your language. Other people can get really hurt by harsh words. Those who have more understanding of the topic should not undermine others with less understanding. We should be aware that everybody is different. Some may have more understanding, but they may be practising less; others may have less understanding, but they may be doing more practice.