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# The Six Perfections

འཇུག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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

As we need to ensure we have the correct motivation, it's good to reflect on the meaning of prayers like the *Taking Refuge and Generating Bodhicitta* prayer that we have just recited. Then, through this reflection, we are cultivating the proper motivation.

When we talk about taking refuge in the Three Jewels, and following all the precepts relating to that, it is very clear that we will find that there is a true refuge and protection for us at the end of our life, which has to be placed into our mindstream. So, while we have the opportunity and freedom, we must make the effort to seize that opportunity to recognise and cultivate faith in that inner refuge and protection, which is completely reliable at all times.

As we have said in the past, when we face the imminent reality of death and impermanence then no matter how beautiful or strong our body is, it is of no use at all. Similarly, no matter how many friends we may have, even if we are surrounded by them all at the time of death, they cannot help us. Likewise, all of our wealth and possessions are of no benefit to us then.

At that moment it becomes very clear that the only thing that can be of true benefit is finding refuge and hope within our own mind. That which guides and protects us from within is the true Dharma. In fact, the purpose of engaging in meditating on death and impermanence is to recognise the value of the Dharma and be inspired to put it into practice. If you are familiar with that meditation, there are three main reasons that you apply to see why death is inevitable. Then, as an outcome of those reasons, we have to come to three definitive decisions in relation to our approach to Dharma practice. We have the opportunity to engage in this death and impermanence meditation right now to come to these three decisions, and to realise the deeper purpose of understanding the meaning of our life.

When we don't engage our mind with such meditation practices then all we will be doing is feeding our mind with all kinds of various disturbing thoughts, which only bring more disturbance and more confusion to our minds. But if we direct our mind to a meditation topic such as death and impermanence, then not only will it benefit us at the time of death and beyond, but it will enhance our peace and happiness in this immediate timeframe.

In other words, ultimately there's no benefit in this body, in our possessions or our worldly friends. The message here is that we must at the very least overcome very strong attachment to our body, wealth, friends and so forth. We will find that the moment we ease or release this forceful pressure of attachment, our mind will become relaxed and joyful.

The cause of the problems and suffering in our life is not completely related to our physical body or external living conditions. The major cause of our problems is worrying

about things. For example, if you have some physical illness, then of course that can cause pain and distress. However, if on top of the problems directly related to the illness, you mentally worry about those problems, then those overly negative thoughts about your situation will only add more problems. Quite often, we suffer because of mental worries and our inability to cope with that. This is unnecessary and we can overcome it through training our mind and engaging in meditation practice.

That is why we have to recognise that the main purpose of following a spiritual practice – such as taking refuge, or any other Dharma practice – is to combat states of mind that bring suffering. Then we will be combating the real cause of our problems which lies within and not in the external world. As we were saying before, most times the causes of hardship and suffering in our life are not external; rather the real cause is our mind unnecessarily worrying and thinking negatively about things. So if we want to get rid of a problem, we really must subdue this worrying and restless mind, and the Dharma is the most effective means of subduing the mind.

We must understand that we all have the freedom and capacity to train and bring changes to our mind. Our mind works with and goes after whatever is most familiar. If the mind becomes habituated to positive thoughts, then they will arise more easily. We can change the mind through training it. When we engage in a virtuous practice, we might find it difficult and challenging in the beginning to keep our mental attention on the practice. However, as we habituate our mind with a practice, we will be able to do that practice more easily. Then even at the time of death, we will be able to apply that practice easily in peace and joy.

When we learn that there is no essence to our body, wealth and friends, we should not literally take that to mean there is no value or benefit in having them. Of course, they are of benefit, and our wellbeing can be dependent on them. Many people have a misconception that being a good Buddhist means not possessing wealth or caring about beauty and so forth. Sometimes these people comment to Buddhists, 'Why are you making money?' They have a preconception that if you are a Buddhist you should not be making money. I want to say to them, 'Is it true that after becoming a Buddhist you don't need to eat food, wear clothes, or have a house for shelter?' If it wasn't true, then Buddhists wouldn't need to work and earn money.

So, the teaching on the shortcomings of body, wealth and friends is not meant to advise us to say we don't need them, or even throw them away. Rather it advises us to stop being attached to, craving or desiring them. We need them for our livelihood and to support us in our life. Indeed, wealth is the most important factor when we talk of the wellbeing and development of the whole country .

It's important to always point the teaching to our own mind, rather than to any external people or things. When we talk about cultivating a sense of contentment in relation to wealth and so forth, we're not saying we should not have wealth or get rid of our wealth. That is not the point. The main focus of the practice of contentment is mentally having less attachment to, or even eliminating attachment to wealth. The benefit of the practice of contentment is a sense of satisfaction and inner peace, which occurs when we reduce or overcome attachment and desire.

I've side-tracked from the topic, which happens frequently, because we have known each other for many years and I

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tend to talk about whatever I see as relevant or beneficial for you at the moment.

However, we had better continue with the teachings.

### (1) Stopping discouragement about the goal

Last week we finished at this sentence:

Rather, I too shall reach total perfection in utterly unsurpassed, perfect, and complete enlightenment. With joyous perseverance in common with all living beings and joyous perseverance focused upon all living beings, I too shall seek and strive for enlightenment.

The text continues:

The *Praise of Infinite Qualities* also says:

“Even some who have earlier obtained the state of a sugata previously fell to states much lower than this one.” Thinking thus and in order to inspire us, you [Bhagavan] did not disparage yourself even when you fell into a dreadful condition. To disparage oneself is wrong, causing those with well-developed faculties to become discouraged.

If we look into the meaning of this passage, we find is essentially a reflection on what we should do in order to inspire ourselves so that when we face any hardship or difficult situation we won't be discouraged or give up. We should think that all the buddhas faced great hardship and difficulty before they reached their state of complete enlightenment. However, they never lost their spirit or their courage. Rather, when they faced obstacles, they became even more determined by thinking about the benefit of fulfilling their aspiration to achieve supreme enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. The passage is saying that if we reflect in the same manner, we will not disparage ourselves or let ourselves down in the face of hardship.

When the text says *well-developed faculties*, it is referring to well-developed virtue, or faith in virtue. So, in a sense, through disparaging ourselves we will become discouraged even if we have developed good faith in virtues. When it says, *to disparage oneself is wrong, causing those with well-developed faculties*, this means that if we disparage ourselves, then even if we have well-developed virtue and faith we will *become discouraged*.

Furthermore:

As to this discouragement, since a buddha's good qualities are infinite and results follow from causes, you must accomplish good qualities and remove faults through limitless avenues while on the path. After you have understood this well, you may become discouraged when you then take a look at yourself.

When the text says, *as to this discouragement*, it is further explaining the meaning of the previous line. Here, the person who is in danger of becoming discouraged really refers to someone who has developed a good understanding of the framework of the entire path in terms of what is required to achieve complete enlightenment. As it clearly mentions here, *a buddha's good qualities are infinite*, and the *results follow from causes*. We need to understand that as the qualities of buddhas are infinite, it follows then we have to create infinite causes because the result follows the cause. So, those with a complete understanding of the path to enlightenment can get discouraged through knowing that the ultimate goal here is to *accomplish all good qualities*, and in order to *accomplish infinite good qualities* you have to eliminate or *remove all faults*, and we feel, 'I can not do that.'

As said before, here the person who is discouraged clearly refers to someone who has a complete understanding of what is involved in order to achieve complete enlightenment. *After you have understood this well* implies that many of us don't get discouraged because we don't have a good understanding of the path to enlightenment, and so we don't have a clue as to the amount of work that is needed to achieve supreme enlightenment. However, having understood the path well, *you may become discouraged when you then take a look at yourself* or when you consider yourself to be a follower this path, there is the possibility of becoming discouraged.

The text continues:

However, this particular discouragement will never arise at a time like the present when an erroneous understanding of the path is in operation.

As it clearly points out here, people like us who lack the understanding or hold an erroneous understanding are not people who could become discouraged.

Now, when practicing to attain the limitless buddha qualities, you suppose that they are achieved by one-sidedly pursuing just a single, small portion of a quality and intensively working on it.

This clarifies the point about why those with an erroneous understanding are not discouraged. It says here that they think that they're on the right path and that they can achieve complete enlightenment, not because they have correct and complete understanding of the path, but because their partial or wrong understanding makes them think like that. We sometimes hear people saying that you can achieve enlightenment if you complete a hundred thousand prostrations or accumulate a hundred thousand Vajrasattva mantras or mandala offerings and so forth. According to them you can reach the state of enlightenment in one year, because you can accumulate one hundred thousand prostrations in a year.

Yet, in this case your not getting discouraged is not a good sign.

As it clearly says here, *in this case not becoming discouraged is not a good sign*.

Rather, it is the result of your not being certain about how to proceed on the path – or, having a rough understanding but not putting it into practice – so you are confused by its apparent ease. For, when you come up against the practice and receive an explanation of a fairly complete outline of the path, roughly arranged from beginning to end, you say, “If that much is needed, who could do it,” and thoroughly give it up.

These lines indicate, again, how a person with an understanding of the *complete outline of the path* can be discouraged.

Also, Sha-ra-wa said:

For bodhisattvas who have not engaged in practice all the bodhisattva deeds seem easy, like looking at a target for arrows, and they do not even get discouraged. At present, we lack a complete practice of the teachings, so we have not even reached the level at which we would have discouragement or self-contempt. When we more fully appropriate the teaching, then there is great danger of discouragement and self-contempt.

This is quite true.

That finishes the causes of discouragement with regard to the goal, which is the state of buddhahood. Complete

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enlightenment means the state that is endowed with infinite excellent qualities, and when we think of the ultimate goal in this manner, we may become discouraged.

## (2) Stopping discouragement about the means to attain the goal

We may also be discouraged when we think about the path to attaining that goal.

The text starts with this qualm:

*Qualm:* To accomplish buddhahood you have to give away your feet, hands, etc., but I am not capable of such feats.

When we think about the sacrifice of giving *away your feet, hands, etc to accomplish buddhahood* we may become discouraged thinking, *I am not capable of such feats.*

The reply is:

*Reply:* You must bear suffering to that extent, for even those who live as they please without engaging in the bodhisattva deeds ...

The deed of giving becomes a bodhisattva deed when the giving is conjoined with the bodhicitta mind, and it includes giving away parts of your body, and so forth. Thinking about this can really discourage us.

The text is, however, saying we must bear in mind that even if we don't engage in such a bodhisattva deed, but live life recklessly in the way we want, we will still experience *unspeakable sufferings* because of being within cyclic existence. They:

... experience as they pass through cyclic existence unspeakable sufferings, such as having their bodies cut open, torn to pieces, stabbed, set on fire, and so forth, but they do not accomplish even their own welfare.

Because we are subject to cyclic existence such suffering is inevitable. Even if we don't engage in bodhisattva deeds, we can fall victim to being stabbed, killed, and other such unspeakable sufferings.

The text continues:

The suffering occasioned by undergoing hardships for the sake of enlightenment is not even a fraction of this suffering...

The suffering and hardship that we experience by engaging in the bodhisattvas' deeds is only *a fraction* of the suffering that we endure in this worldly existence.

... and also has the great purpose of accomplishing both your own and others' welfare.

Despite all the suffering and hardship that we go through in our life, we are not able to achieve the purpose of our own welfare, let alone extending benefit to others. The suffering we experience in following the practices of a bodhisattva is only a fraction of the suffering we experience in cyclic existence, but it has the result of accomplishing all our own purposes, as well as achieving the welfare of all other beings.

The text continues with a quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* which summarises what has just been discussed.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

"But it frightens me that I must  
Give away my feet, hands, and the like."  
Without distinguishing heavy suffering from light,  
Confusion reduces me to fear.

For countless tens of millions of eons

I will be cut, stabbed,  
Burned, and torn asunder numerous times,  
Without thereby attaining enlightenment.

This suffering which brings about my enlightenment  
Does have a limit.

It is like undergoing the pain of an incision  
To excise an injurious internal disease.

All doctors eliminate illness  
Through forms of discomfort which heal it.  
Thus, I will bear a little discomfort  
To destroy numerous sufferings.

The text continues:

With respect to giving away your body, you do not give it in the beginning when you are afraid. But through graduated training in generosity, you end your attachment to your body. Once you have increased the strength of your great compassion, you have no difficulty when you give it away, provided it is for a great purpose.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

The Supreme Physician does not employ  
Ordinary remedies such as those.  
He heals limitless chronic diseases  
With the most gentle treatments.

At the beginning the Guide enjoins you  
To give vegetables and so forth.  
Later, after you are used to this,  
You gradually offer even your flesh.

Once I come to conceive of my body  
As being like a vegetable and so forth,  
What difficulty will there be in giving away  
Such things as my flesh?

This is saying that if we train ourselves in the practice of giving stage-by-stage from easy to difficult we will make progress. The important point is that there is no need to become discouraged because of the practice of giving away your own body or flesh, as you are not expected to give your body away in the beginning or if you are not ready for it. Rather you train your mind in generosity by giving what is within your capacity such as food or a small amount of money and so forth.

As the text says:

Some say that since practitioners of the perfection vehicle must give away their bodies and lives, they undergo torment and are on a path that is very difficult to follow. This text clearly refutes this, because you do not give away your body so long as you perceive it to be a difficult deed, but rather do so once it becomes very easy, like giving a vegetable.

Some might say that the *practitioners of the perfection vehicle must give away their bodies and lives, undergo torment and are on a path that is very difficult to follow*, and refuse to follow that path on the grounds that it's too hard. *The text clearly refutes this: that is not the case because you do not give away your body so long as you perceive it to be a difficult deed.*

We are advised not to do something that is beyond our capacity. Rather, as the text says, *do so once it becomes very easy, like giving a vegetable*. One starts with giving something small and then develops that practice of generosity by giving something a bit bigger next time. There's a clear indication in the text that if there are deeds that we feel are too difficult to follow, it is reasonable not to attempt them.

## (3) Stopping discouragement because wherever you are is a place to practice

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The path to supreme enlightenment takes many lifetimes; achieving it in a single lifetime is extremely difficult. This means that one has to have a good rebirth as a human over many lifetimes, which in turn means that one is subject to the suffering nature of a human rebirth for a long period of time. This can be very discouraging. To overcome this the text begins with:

*Qualm:* Reaching buddhahood requires taking limitless rebirths in cyclic existence, so I will be harmed by the suffering therein. I am not capable of such a thing.

To overcome that qualm the text says:

*Reply:* Reflect as follows. Bodhisattvas have eliminated all sin; therefore, sin's effect – the feeling of suffering – will not arise because they have stopped the cause.

Here, *bodhisattvas* refers to those bodhisattvas who intentionally take rebirth in cyclic existence. And because they *have eliminated all sin; therefore, sin's effect will not arise*. Since bodhisattvas have overcome sinful actions, they have overcome the result of sinful actions, which is *the feeling of suffering*. Therefore, even though they take rebirth, they do not undergo the experience of suffering, because they've stopped the causes.

Through firm knowledge that cyclic existence lacks an intrinsic nature, like a magician's illusion, they also have no mental suffering.

This clearly indicates how bodhisattvas view things and events through the lens of their knowledge of emptiness. They see everything as being like a magician's illusion, and the effect of such knowledge is that there's no mental suffering. The result arises from their perception of the way things exist.

Given that their physical and mental bliss increases, they have no reason to become disheartened even though they are still in cyclic existence.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

Since sin is eliminated, there is no suffering.  
Through knowledge, there is no lack of joy.  
Misconceptions and sin  
Harm the mind and body.

Through merit the body is blissful;  
Through knowledge the mind is too.  
Though remaining in cyclic existence for others' welfare,  
Why should the compassionate ones be disheartened?

And also:

Thus, after mounting the steed of the enlightenment spirit,  
Which dispels all dejection and fatigue,  
You proceed from joy to joy.  
What sensible person would become discouraged?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama quotes this last verse frequently as does Khunu Lama Rinpoche. It is a great source of inspiration for retaining the bodhicitta mind. Because of their bodhicitta mind whatever a bodhisattva does, even taking rebirth in worldly existence, becomes a cause to accumulate merit as well as wisdom. So whatever they go through on the path is only joyful. As it says here, *you proceed from joy to joy, therefore, what sensible person would become discouraged?*

The first of Shantideva's verses quoted above is saying that we have to recognise that all the suffering we find in our life is the result or outcome of our creation and accumulation of sinful actions. Conversely, if we put an effort into overcoming such sinful actions, then we won't be afflicted with suffering.

The lines *Through merit the body is blissful; Through knowledge the mind is too* refer to merit or virtue being the main cause for achieving happiness and joy on a physical level while knowledge or wisdom is the main cause of happiness and joy on a mental level.. Essentially this advice is to motivate and encourage us to abandon sinful or negative actions. And since we want more happiness and joy in life, then we should create its cause, which is accumulating merit or virtues.

Really what do you need? You need happiness. So what do you do? You do virtuous practice. You really don't need suffering. So why create the cause of suffering? That comes from a negative mind. Keep a good mind and let the rubbish mind go. A rubbish mind is a really harmful and negative mind with too much anger, and jealousy, and no happiness. There are many kinds of negative mind here, but with happiness there is no room for negative minds. There's no room in a good mind for a negative mind.

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