
The Six Perfections

འཇུག་ཐོག་ཀྱི་སྒྲིབ་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We will do our usual meditation.

[*Tonglen Meditation*]

As usual, both the teacher and the listeners should begin by cultivating a proper motivation. The best motivation is the bodhicitta motivation, which we cultivate by thinking, 'I am listening to or teaching this profound Dharma to achieve the full state of enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings.' If we begin with such a proper motivation, then our meditation or whatever practice we engage in will be very beneficial and effective for us in progressing along the spiritual path.

(c") Based on the elimination of unfavorable conditions and the accumulation of favorable conditions, being intent on joyously persevering (cont.)

We are up to this quote in the text:

Through the power of relinquishment you become adept at how to joyously persevere. At this point you must develop the power of being intent on joyous perseverance, so I will explain this.

Here we learn that the *power of relinquishment* is a very important factor in maintaining joyful effort. The power of relinquishment means the necessity of taking a break or rest in our practice if we become very fatigued and tired mentally or physically. However, it also advises here that we must get back to the practice soon after taking rest. As we become used to, and good at applying the power of relinquishment, we will be able to engage in our practice with joyful effort, naturally, with ease and no sense of obligation.

The next line reads:

As to how you are to act when you joyously persevere at eliminating what is to be eliminated, ...

This shows us where to direct our joyful effort and enthusiasm. When it says it is to *persevere at eliminating what is to be eliminated*, this indicates that our joyful effort should be directed at the practice of eliminating what is to be eliminated i.e. the mental afflictions, which are a destructive force. We eliminate them by applying a remedial force through our joyful effort. In short, 'mental afflictions' refers to our unruly, vulgar state of mind.

It is very important that we relate what we learn here to our inner continuum, personal experience and Dharma practice. We need to understand that the implication here is that all our unhappiness, misery and suffering primarily derives from our unruly mind, the mental afflictions within us, not from any external things or events. The cause of our unhappiness is not something external 'out there'.

This line also implies that we should rely on our discriminating knowledge relating to what is to be

eliminated, which is the mental afflictions or delusions, and what is to be adopted and cultivated, which is a virtuous state of mind. So, we must direct our joyful effort at preventing and eliminating afflicted states of mind and cultivate, safeguard and increase a virtuous state of mind.

The point being made here is that the primary cause of our discontent and unhappiness lies within ourselves. This is evident from the fact that whatever measures we take to eliminate whatever external things and conditions we regard as being the cause of our problem does not eliminate our unhappiness. This implies that the cause of our unhappiness and dissatisfaction lies within us, and likewise the remedy also lies within ourselves. So what is that remedy? It is the positive mental attitude and energy that we need to cultivate within us. This is the counteforce that eliminates the causes of suffering within us.

The primary cause of true happiness also lies within us – it's not out there either. Therefore, directing all our effort to finding happiness or removing suffering in the outside world is futile. No matter how much effort we make that won't help to find the happiness we seek. No matter how many external things we manage to accumulate, they are not going to bring the happiness and satisfaction that we are looking for in our life. As soon as we acquire one thing we go after the next thing and the next, because the first thing that we have found didn't satisfy our mind – and neither did the next thing. We might keep chasing after things externally, but until and unless we change our mental attitude, we will never find the happiness that we are searching for. Likewise, external causes of problems seem to be unending.

It is very clear that our usual externally orientated way of finding happiness and avoiding suffering is ineffective and wrong. If not, then why do we see people who are very unhappy and continuously suffering when there is no external cause? They have a good house, good food, plenty of wealth and friends and so on, but none of these seem to give them any comfort. Obviously, they are suffering because they cannot separate themselves from their troubled mind, a mind that goes around and around thinking about and fixating on a problem and their suffering. Sometimes, such people end up taking drugs, which as we know, does long-term harm to their wellbeing.

Most people are fixed on the view that suffering arises from the external world, yet they can't effectively single out or pinpoint the cause to any particular things or events. This can sometimes make them extremely anxious and frustrated and even depressed. They try their best, but nothing seems to be helping them to resolve their problem. So, they become confused about their lives and keep asking themselves why they experience so much suffering, and why they can't live a normal life. Out of such deep frustration and unresolved problems and conflict, some people then see no meaning in life. So, they choose suicide, whereas others outrageously resort to violent acts such as murder. If external things were the cause of suffering it would be just a matter of getting rid of those things and then being

happy. If happiness simply results from external objects, then just obtaining those objects should bring happiness.

As we realise that we cannot buy happiness from the external world, we can appreciate the benefit of Dharma knowledge which really comes in very handy, particularly when the external world lets us down.

Knowledge of the Dharma gives us a different perspective on things and events and the world. We will find this perspective very powerful in maintaining inner peace and happiness, and an optimistic way of looking at things at all times. However, it is very important to understand the perspective of the world from the point of view of those who lack Dharma knowledge. Those who lack Dharma knowledge are misguided by some perverted or wrong view, which navigates them through life. If you imagine being in their situation, then you can understand the reason behind their deeds and the cause of their plight. Thus, you can be more patient and empathetic with them.

We must direct or relate whatever knowledge of the Dharma we have towards our inner continuum. As a benefit of learning the Dharma, we should develop within us a good sense of discrimination, which we call wisdom. Through this discriminating wisdom we recognise that suffering and happiness arise from a cause that lies within us. We gain a clear knowledge from our Dharma practice of what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected within ourselves. We understand that what is to be accepted is an inner value in the form of wholesome states of mind and what is to be rejected is inner negativity in the form of various mental afflictions. In other words, the primary objective of our practise of the Dharma is to get rid of mental afflictions together with their latency, and to enhance and fully perfect all the excellent qualities within us. This is how we can put an end to suffering and achieve everlasting happiness.

To continue with the text:

As to how you are to act when you joyously persevere at eliminating what is to be eliminated, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

As a seasoned warrior approaches
A sword-fight with an enemy,
I shall parry the blows of the afflictions
And strongly strike the afflictions, my enemies.

An explanation of the meaning of this verse will come in the next passage in the text. Here, the enemy can be defined as something that destroys our happiness and joy, while inflicting suffering and problems. From this perspective we can say that the mental afflictions within us are also our true enemy. The moment these afflictions such as strong desire or hatred arise within us, we lose our joy, happiness and peace and then we succumb to misery and suffering. So, the mental afflictions are enemies that lie within us.

When we compare the suffering caused by these inner enemies with that caused by external objects, the suffering caused by the inner enemy of the afflictions is greater and more severe than that caused by external causes and conditions. This also means that inner value and happiness is more valuable than outer value and happiness. Therefore, we need to understand that if we

lose any external possession, we should not be concerned or worry too much. What really does matter a lot to us is our inner peace and happiness. That's why it is important to think about how to maintain our inner peace and happiness and recognise its enemy. It is quite natural that we would have an impulse to combat anything that we recognise as an enemy. Therefore, we first need to recognise that the mental afflictions within us are our worst enemies.

In the first two lines of the above verse, *as a seasoned warrior approaches a sword-fight with an enemy*, you are talking about a warrior who is very skilful and very experienced in the art of battle, who has a many strategies they use in the battlefield to defeat enemies.

The commentary continues:

For example, when seasoned warriors - the adepts who are accustomed to the activity of fighting battles - enter into a sword fight, etc., with their enemy, they do not put value only on destroying their opponent. Rather, they must accomplish two things - skillfully avoiding the blows of weapons directed at them and destroying their opponent.

When it says, *they must accomplish two things - skillfully avoiding the blows of weapons directed at them and destroying their opponent*, we understand that the warriors in the analogy here are those who are highly experienced and skilled in battle. They don't just focus on striking the enemy but at the same time they will do everything to protect themselves from being harmed. They will also have a broader perspective on how to position themselves on the battlefield. If you lack experience, then even though you manage to run away from one area, you will become a very easy target for the enemy from a different area. However, experienced warriors will make the right move, know how to strike to weaken and destroy the enemy, as well as know how to defend themselves against attack.

As the text says:

Likewise, when practitioners battle their afflictions, they must persevere as they become proficient in two things - taking defensive precautions and thus avoiding a wound to their mind, and, on the offensive, destroying the afflictions by applying their remedies.

It is saying here that spiritual practitioners should be like skilled warriors when they combat the inner enemy of the mental afflictions. Like the warrior in the battlefield, they must remember two important things. Offensively they must direct the remedy to completely destroy the mental afflictions, while defensively they must protect themselves from being harmed by other mental afflictions. As the text puts it: *taking defensive precautions and thus avoiding a wound to their mind, and, on the offensive, destroying the afflictions by applying their remedies*. In other words, you eliminate some afflictions while at the same time making sure that there are no other mental afflictions wounding some other part of your mind.

As the text continues:

For, otherwise, while they may use the remedy to stop the activity of one portion of the afflictions, they are either robbed of some aspect of virtue by other afflictions, or else they develop a great fault in their mind so that the harm of the afflictions and the creation of virtue are equal, in which

case it will be hard to make further progress in the virtuous practice of applying the remedy.

Essentially this is saying how it is important to not only try to counteract a particular affliction with a remedy, but it's also important that there are no other mental afflictions in different parts of our mind that will attack our virtue and wound our mind. If this happens, then even if you have a remedy for a particular affliction, other afflictions will harm your virtue and so forth, and the end result will be that they cancel each other out. In other words, you don't make any progress.

The text continues:

To cite an example, some people may think that knowledge is most important for practicing the teaching and make knowledge alone crucial. When they then inquire into the teachings, they dispel by means of study the confusion of ignorance, but meanwhile – because they were not cautious about the other afflictions – their mind-stream is utterly ruined by the stain of wrong behavior.

Here the text further explains the importance of having a holistic approach to our practice. It is wrong to think that studying and listening and acquiring this knowledge about the Dharma is what is most important. Doing that undermines our practice. Of course, it is important and, as it also says here, learning has the benefit of expelling ignorance of the Dharma. It is said that listening is like a lamp which dispels the darkness of ignorance.

However, a one-sided approach of focussing only on the learning, and ignoring the practice is ineffective and not the right way at all. With a lack of practice, then let alone your learning diminishing and eradicating mental afflictions, it can become a cause to increase mental afflictions. For example, the learning turns into a cause to fill your mind with more pride and self-importance. There are situations where people say, 'Oh he is a very knowledgeable person, but at the same time he is very arrogant!' That is the end result of directing all attention or focus in our spiritual pursuit towards learning. Since we pay no attention to contemplating and meditating, our learning increases pride and other mental afflictions within our mental continuum. Not only that, but it also doesn't help us to observe good ethical practice or morality.

Then the text gives another example:

Other people may think that disciplining the mind is much more important than knowledge and thus emphasize meditation. Casting away caution about the enemy, confusion, they neither study nor learn the teachings, so they become greatly confused about engaging in what is to be adopted and rejecting what is to be cast aside under the rules of the vows they have taken and are thus continually overcome by infractions.

With a one-sided spiritual approach of just studying or learning, we don't derive any benefits from our practice, such as being calm and subdued, while at the same time our inner continuum is quite the opposite to calm and subdued.

Here the text cites another example of a wrong approach. We might say, 'OK, listening to or studying the Dharma is not crucial, but meditating and observing the precepts is crucial.' However, if, in the name of following

meditation practice, we neglect learning, then we might unknowingly commit various moral downfalls and negativities because of our lack of knowledge. Sometimes I see people who do the Nyung Nye practice, but who are confused or unsure about the precepts. So, people commit negativities out of ignorance; their ignorance is to blame for their wrongdoing. Furthermore, some people even say that meditation brings more mental dullness and makes their head feel heavy. This shows their lack of learning and contemplation prior to the meditation. According to Lama Tsongkhapa, beginners must combine stabilising and analytical meditation, but of the two, analytical meditation is more important.

Then the text continues:

If in battle your sword were to fall from your hand, you would without hesitation immediately retrieve it out of fear for your life.

The example given here is really very effective in showing what we need to do in our practice. If a warrior drops his sword while in battle, he immediately tries to pick it up, for he fears the danger of being killed.

It then says:

Likewise, when you battle the afflictions and lose the weapon of mindfulness (which does not forget the subjective and objective aspects of engaging in what is to be adopted and rejecting what is to be cast aside), you must immediately reapply mindfulness out of fear of falling into miserable realms.

Likewise, in our practice the *weapon of mindfulness* is like the sword. If we lose mindfulness, we face the imminent danger of *falling into miserable realms*. This emphasises the importance of relying upon mindfulness in our practice. Without it, we could easily accumulate sinful actions or misdeeds, which will propel us into the miserable realms. So, this is particularly relevant to our practice of what is to be adopted and what is to be rejected. Mindfulness is the most crucial part of our practice.

As to the practice of what to accept and what to reject, we can simply think of the ten virtues as what to accept and the ten non-virtues as what to reject. From this perspective, our practice not only reflects the essential Buddhist practice but also the fundamental ethical practice which encompasses most of the higher bodhisattva and tantric vows too. So the benefit of adopting the ten virtues and abandoning the ten non-virtues is enormous.

Essentially *you must immediately reapply mindfulness out of fear of falling into miserable realms* means that if we lose mindfulness of practising the ten virtues and refraining from the non-virtues, we must immediately *reapply it out of fear*. We should be really fearful about losing mindfulness, because we will then be prone to accumulating non-virtuous actions, which will throw us into the lower realms. The great non-virtues will throw us into the hell realm; the middling non-virtues will throw us into the preta realm, and the small non-virtues will throw us into the animal realm. Nobody wants to take bad rebirth and if we apply mindfulness in our everyday life and practise the ten virtues, we can be very sure that we won't fall into such a lower rebirth. Moreover, the practice of adopting the ten virtues and

abandoning the ten non-virtues also gives us a firm ground on which to eradicate all the mental afflictions together with their latencies, gain the wisdom of emptiness and cultivate bodhicitta and so forth.

To continue with the text:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says;

If you drop your sword in battle,
Out of fear, you quickly pick it up.
Likewise, if I lose my weapon of mindfulness,
In fear of hell, I quickly retrieve it.

The protector Nagarjuna [in his *Friendly Letter*] also taught the great importance of mindfulness:

O lord, the Sugata declared mindfulness of the body
To be the one path to follow.
Hold fast to it and guard it.
When mindfulness declines, all virtues perish.

The Kadampa master declares that mindfulness and introspection are our best friends. Here again, mindfulness refers to what to adopt and what to reject, while introspection refers to a sense of discernment of our actions of the three doors of body, speech and mind. His Holiness the Dalai Lama always advises others to not forget about the application of mindfulness and introspection.

The text further clarifies the meaning of mindfulness when it says:

Furthermore, regarding the object to which mindfulness attends, mindfulness apprehends an object that wisdom has fully discerned; mindfulness does not distinguish its object on its own.

Here the text clarifies that even though mindfulness is very important, more important is what mindfulness is mindful of. Mindfulness only becomes an effective tool when it is applied to an object we find through our discriminating wisdom, such as our knowledge of what to adopt and what to reject.

Then the text says:

Question: What does wisdom discern?

This relates to the object of your mindfulness.

Reply: In general wisdom discerns everything to be adopted and everything to be cast aside as explained in scripture; ...

Here 'scripture' means all of the Lord Buddha's teachings.

... in particular, it discerns what is to be adopted and what is to be cast aside according to the vows that you have taken.

As well as the knowledge you gain about the general teaching of the Lord Buddha the object of your mindfulness also includes your personal spiritual practice such as any vows, precepts or commitments that you have taken.

Therefore, once you apply mindfulness and vigilance to these, you will complete your practice; you will not be successful by just applying mindfulness and vigilance within the narrow confines of attention to an object of meditation.

This is saying that the object of mindfulness should be all your spiritual instructions on what you are meant to be practising and what knowledge you have gained through

your discriminating wisdom. Without that knowledge, mindfulness in its own right or applying it to a narrow subject matter is not of much benefit.

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Edited Version*

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