
The Six Perfections

འཇུག་ཐོབ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We will begin with the usual meditation.

[meditation]

Try to cultivate your motivation for receiving the teaching. The best motivation is to generate the bodhicitta mind; however, if you are not able to generate the bodhicitta mind simply think that listening to this Dharma teaching is to benefit other beings.

Prior to undertaking any activity, it is very beneficial to keep our focus on the intention of whatever activity we undertake. Whatever activity we do, whether it is in accord with a bodhisattva's deeds or not, depends on our motivation. If our motivation when we engage in activities like eating, sleeping, walking or sitting is to benefit other beings, then these activities will be positive and resemble bodhisattva deeds. It is good to get used to that habit of giving a bit of thought to our motivation ahead of undertaking any action. Normally we just go ahead with whatever we have to do, without any thought about why we are engaging in those actions. As a result, the consequences of our actions are rendered meaningless. Hence, correcting our motivation or intention makes a huge difference to the efficacy of our actions.

If we are able to ensure that whatever action we do is aimed at benefiting other beings, we are automatically avoiding causing harm to others. In other words, our actions will bring happiness and no harm to others. Just as we admire and revere those who are always very caring and who benefit others and never harm them, others will also admire and like us if we follow their example in loving and caring for other beings.

(b') How to begin the generation of wisdom

At the end of last week's teaching, we stopped at this quote from Maitreya:

The venerable Maitreya also says in the *Sublime Continuum*:

The conceptualizations of the three spheres
Are asserted to be cognitive obscurations,
While conceptualizations such as stinginess and the like
Are asserted to be afflictive obscurations.

As we noted last week, when we take the line mentioning the two types of obscurations – the cognitive obstructions to the omniscient mind and the afflictive obscurations – literally, then it accords with the view of Svatantrika-Madhyamaka school in which *cognitive obscurations* refers to the conception of a self in the context of truly existent self of phenomena. *While conceptualisations such as stinginess and the like* refers to the conception of the substantially existent self in the sense of self-sufficiency and mental afflictions as afflictive obscurations. According to the Svatantrika-Madhyamikas the conception of the self of a person is an afflictive obscuration and the conception of a truly existent self of phenomena is a cognitive obscuration and an obstruction to omniscience. However, according to Prasangika-Madhyamaka school cognitive obscurations or obstructions to omniscience are not identified with any

types of conception. Rather, they point to the latency left by self-grasping or the conception of an inherent self. So when it says, conceptualisations of three spheres are asserted to the cognitive obscurations, we have to interpret that as referring to the latency of the conception of the self. Next:

Solely wisdom is the cause
Of their elimination, nothing else
So wisdom is supreme.

As clearly indicated here, the antidote that counteracts and uproots both types of obscurations, is *solely wisdom*. Only wisdom is the cause of their elimination. Since only wisdom has the capacity to uproot and eliminate both types of obscurations, *wisdom is supreme*. And on the basis of that:

Study is its basis,
So study is supreme.

Gaining such wisdom is dependent on wisdom itself, so *studying* this wisdom is both *supreme* and wisdom in itself. Studying or listening to the Dharma is really the supreme cause to gain wisdom. We can also interpret *study is supreme* to mean that studying is the supreme cause giving rise to wisdom.

The text continues:

And Santideva's *Compendium of the Trainings in Verse (Siksha-samuccaya-karika)* says:

Be forbearing and then study;
Stay in a forest, and then
Persevere at meditative equipoise.

This passage from the *Compendium of the Trainings* contains very important spiritual advice; it emphasises the importance of carefully studying the Dharma. To emphasise this the verse says, *Be forbearing and then study*. We need to try to overcome hardship and feeling weary, which requires great diligence and effort. So we should study well.

The advice is to *stay in a forest and then persevere at meditative equipoise*. When you are equipped through your study, go to a forest or place of solitude and deepen your understanding by engaging in meditation practice. This is very important because quite often we undermine our intention to gain a sound understanding and knowledge through studying. For example, sometimes without preparing well, people go to do a meditation retreat, and when they start, they don't know what to practice and then have to seek help from others about what they should meditate on. Or they intend to accumulate mantras, but they are not sure which mantra they should be accumulating.

We find here some very clear and structured advice on how we should go about our spiritual practice. The advice here makes good sense. It says that we should initially gain a good knowledge of the Dharma through studying it well. The next stage is contemplating and analysing what we have learnt. Since we have gained a degree of knowledge, we naturally have enough Dharma points to contemplate. Through contemplating and analysing, our knowledge becomes much deeper and more thorough. And after that we meditate to fully habituate ourselves with what we have contemplated. Since we have gained a definitive ascertainment of the Dharma through contemplation, we will know the subject of our meditation.

Then the text continues

His auto-commentary [*Compendium of Trainings*] to this says:

With impatience, you become disheartened and cannot forbear, so your perseverance at study, etc., declines.

This is emphasising that we should have enough patience to accept any hardship and difficulties we face in learning and studying the Dharma. If we lack the patience to overcome all the challenges that we face in our study then, as it says, we will easily lose our motivation and therefore won't be able to achieve any results.

Without study, you do not have the means for either meditative stabilization or for clearing away afflictions. Therefore, without becoming disheartened, study.

As discussed earlier, if we lack enough Dharma knowledge gained through studying and listening to the Dharma, then we lack knowledge about meditation itself as well as how to apply the remedies for overcoming mental afflictions. Essentially the text is also saying that without a background of good knowledge of the Dharma you won't be able to contemplate and meditate effectively.

And the *Questions of Narayana Formula (Narayana-pariprccha-dharani)* also says:

Just so, child of good lineage, if you study, wisdom will come. If you are possessed of wisdom, the afflictions will be stilled. Once you have no afflictions, demons do not have a chance with you.

Again, this is saying that wisdom arises from listening to and studying the Dharma, and with this wisdom we will be able to overcome the mental delusions or afflictions. Then, having overcome the mental delusions there will be no more interferences. Here the text is referring to the four types of demons or evil forces (*maras*) of delusion, aggregates, the lord of death, and the godly son.

Sometimes people complain that they receive harm from this or that, but these harms are nothing other than the mental delusions that lie within them.

Scripture and reasoning establish the following: Those who wish to properly practice the teaching need a broad study of the stainless scriptures and their commentaries, the unexcelled cause that gives rise to the wisdom which thoroughly distinguishes phenomena, which is the sacred life-force of the path.

Here, the *study of the stainless scriptures* refers to the sutras or words of the Buddha while *their commentaries* refers to the *shastra* or treatises on the sutras by the later masters. The text is saying that the knowledge that you can gain through learning the Dharma is the *sacred life-force of the path*, which refers to the knowledge and wisdom that you produce through listening to and studying the Dharma.

However, not achieving wisdom while thinking that a broad study is necessary to develop it is simply the fault of your not being convinced that you need the analytical meditation of discerning wisdom when the time comes for practice, and of having the mistaken conviction that thinks that analytical meditation is not necessary. Therefore, those of you who want what is best for yourselves should eliminate such a mistaken conviction as though getting rid of poison.

Knowledge can be gained through relying on the authentic scriptures as well as through applying one's own discriminating wisdom. The text is saying that it is a great mistake to think that it is not necessary to gain such knowledge in order to practice the Dharma or to meditate.

Nal-jor-ba-chen-bo said:

Jo-wo-pa (Jo-bo-ba), when it comes to accomplishing the state of omniscient enlightenment, whether you show off or conceal that you studied only a handbook, you cannot get anywhere without reading a yak's load of books.

What it is saying here is that it is not sufficient to study a small number of books that you can carry in your hand; you need to study a load of books that would require a yak to carry.

Pu-chung-wa (Phu-chung-ba) placed an opened sacred text beside his pillow and said:

We must learn the texts, so even though you do not get a chance to read them, make a wish to read them all. If someone said that you should practice the teaching without understanding it, how would you do it?

The Kadampa master Pu-chang-wa always kept an open book next to his pillow to make it easily accessible to read whenever he could. *Make a wish to them all, if someone said that you should practice the teaching without understanding it, how would you do it?* Having a text nearby makes it easy to be able to refer to. Many great lamas keep important texts next to them, some of them opened. The late Geshe Ngawang Dhargye always had the *Eight Thousand Lines Sutra* placed open next to him. Then, every time he got an opportunity, he would read a few pages, and in this way, he read the sutra over two hundred times.

Then the text continues:

Bo-do-wa said three times to a monk of Jen-nga-wa (sPyan-sngaba) who was escorting him a short distance, "You are enjoying yourself too much." He then continued:

You rely upon my teacher who is like the sky covering the earth...

This implies the enormity of the excellent qualities that are possessed by Bo-dowa's teacher.

... so do not salivate over other teachers. Since you do not have to read the root texts and their commentaries and mark their corresponding passages, you do not have a lot of work. You are happy because you do not think about cause and effect, while you work at certain activities by means of certain tantric practices. And you can be satisfied with these many things?

Sha-ra-wa said:

Until you become a buddha, your studies are not finished. They are finished when you are a buddha.

Ga-ma-pa (Ka-ma-ba) said:

Some say, "When you practice the teachings, what need is there of knowledge," and they degenerate. This idea is a real danger for those of us who have studied little. Others say, "If you really try you do not need knowledge." This is very dangerous. If you are making a big effort at the teaching, knowledge is required; since it is not completed in this brief lifetime, we must resolve, "I will study continually through many lifetimes without interrupting the succession of lives having leisure and opportunity." Some think that meditators do not need to study, only those who explain the teachings do. But those who explain the teachings and do not study merely run the risk of sinning, while it is precisely the meditator who must study to avoid straying from the path.

These lines also emphasise the importance of learning and studying the Dharma. When we think about it, we either need to learn or there is no need to learn about the path – there is no third option – and we fit into the category of those who need to learn.

As the text says, *I will study continually through many lifetimes without interrupting the succession of lives having leisure and opportunity.* This says that if we don't finish learning in this life, we need to continue it in a future life or until we

achieve our final goal. Therefore, we need to ensure that we uninterruptedly find a suitable life to continue our learning, such as a human life of leisure and endowment.

The text then says, *some think that meditators do not need to study, only those who explain the teachings do.* This happens. We hear of people saying that it is not necessary to study in order to engage in meditation practice; they think studying is only necessary if you are giving teachings to others. This gives rise to the notion that the intention of those who study and learn the Dharma is to teach to others. Then, through not actually putting the Dharma into practice they risk creating sinful actions. The text warns against this by saying, *those who explain the teaching and do not study merely run the risk of sinning. It is precisely the meditator who must study to avoid straying from the path* indicates how, without the knowledge of the Dharma, you won't know what to practice and could easily follow the perverted path.

The text continues:

Thus you must be convinced that wisdom and the study that causes it are indispensable for proper practice. Moreover, unless you reach certainty about the need for analytical meditation when you practice, you will have a very hard time getting anywhere.

Even some well-regarded scholars of the scriptural collections claim, "Understand study to be either a mere preliminary to practice or to be a background support-like mountains at the back of a valley-but not the actual instructions. For this reason, you need practice to quickly attain buddhahood and study to benefit the Buddha's teaching." This is contradictory nonsense. There are just two kinds of teaching: teaching as scripture and teaching that has been put into practice; the former makes known the procedures for practice, and the latter is assimilating the practice after you have understood the procedures. Therefore, doing the practice without error is the best way to uphold the teaching. Moreover, unerringly upholding the teaching in the sense of practice depends upon an unerring understanding of scriptural teaching.

Therefore, it is not right to forget what you have studied at the time of practice, for you must first know many teachings and then put their very meaning into practice when the time comes to do so. Even if you do not understand the teachings from the outset, do not be discouraged, but strive to study them in accord with your mental capacity, as much as feasible, whether that be a little or a lot. Do not make study and practice into separate things. Rather, the very thing that you practice must be exactly what you first study and reflect upon. Beginning bodhisattvas must depend with certainty on a single procedure of the path - a practice that is not biased toward one side but is complete in all aspects of the path. When their mental capacity is small, they engage in conditioning themselves to just this process of study followed by practice. If their mental capacity is great or, though at first small, has become greater through conditioning, they steadily expand upon the very stage of the path they know, proceeding in connection with all the scriptures and their stainless commentaries. There is no need for them to pursue something else to study besides these. If their mental capacity is great or, though at first small, has become greater through conditioning, they steadily expand upon the very stage of the path they know, proceeding in connection with all the scriptures and their stainless commentaries. There is no need for them to pursue something else to study besides these.

Therefore if instructions are accurate and complete, then, although summarized, all of the key points of the sutra and tantra paths and the paths of the higher and lower vehicles

must be covered; once they have been explained at length, you must be able go through all the teachings. Until you reach something like this, it is possible to feel delight about just some portion of your practice, but it is impossible to become certain about the key points of practice for the complete corpus of the teachings.

Consequently, rely upon excellent teachers and companions. Make a foundation of pure ethical discipline to which you commit yourself. Listen again and again to the instructions, do four sessions of meditation, and then sustain the object of meditation and its subjective aspects. After you have made fervent supplications to the deities and gurus, strive at all the causes of engaging from many perspectives in accumulating the collections and purifying obscurations. If you do this, you will become profoundly certain that the good qualities in your mind will steadily improve. If you do this, you will become profoundly certain that the good qualities in your mind will steadily improve.

After that the text explains the indication of progress in following this practice. It says:

As the former excellent beings said:

Make all the teachings you have previously heard completely clear in your mind. You must reflect upon them again and again, evaluate them, and deliberate on them. When you have let yourself forget the teachings, there is nothing gained by learning to stabilize your attention on one object of meditation. The best meditators are the best teachers. Mediocre meditators become mediocre teachers.

Again, this is emphasising that in your meditation you focus on what you have contemplated or what you have studied. Then your meditation deepens and increases your understanding. In summary, *the best meditators are the best teachers. Mediocre meditators become mediocre teachers.*

Finally:

You need knowledge of the teaching and commensurate meditation that both proceed to ever greater levels together.

Once you gain a firm certainty from such reflection, you do not pay heed when bad friends say, "All thoughts, virtuous and non-virtuous, are conceptualizations and are therefore to be eliminated," but rather think, "The teachings do not say this nor do my teachers assert it." Otherwise, if you are a person who possesses a little faith but no wisdom, you are like the leading edge of water running downhill - you go anywhere you are led, taking anything said to be true, wanting to cry when you see others crying, wanting to laugh when you see others laugh.

We will now recite the *King of Prayers* and dedicate it to Bernii's mother who passed away last week. Many of you know that Bernii has been giving a lot to the centre through her voluntary work for the centre. She is also a very long-term student and a part of the publication team. She is very intelligent, loving and kind-hearted person.

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Edited Version*

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