
The Six Perfections

འདྲེན་གྱི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལ་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་ལུགས་ལྔ་ལྔ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

12 November 2019

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

Try to cultivate bodhicitta as your motivation.

We have finished discussing the six perfections, the purpose of which is mainly for ripening one's own continuum. Now we move onto the four means of gathering disciples, which is mainly for ripening the continuum of other beings. In this topic we will find out how we can inspire and lead others to engage in virtue.

HELPING OTHERS TO MATURE: THE FOUR WAYS TO GATHER DISCIPLES (cont.)

(b) Training in the four ways to gather disciples that help others to mature¹

Training in the four ways to gather disciples that help others to mature has five parts:

1. What the four ways to gather disciples are
2. The reason they are stipulated as four
3. Their functions
4. The need for those who gather a following to rely on them
5. A somewhat elaborate explanation

(i) What the four ways to gather disciples are

First there is a list of the four ways to gather disciples.

- (1) Generosity is as earlier explained in the section on this perfection.
- (2) Pleasant speech is teaching the perfections to disciples.
- (3) Working at the aims is setting disciples to work on the aims as they have been taught, or involving them in correctly taking up these aims.

So, the first one indicates the perfection of generosity and the second indicates engaging in pleasant speech to ensure your interaction with others is pleasant and relevant to them. The third one is essentially leading or motivating others to put what has been taught into practice.

- (4) Consistency of behavior is stabilizing yourself in the very aims in which you have established others, and then training in them.

This indicates that you should practise what you teach to others.

The commentary then continues with the scriptural source of the four ways to gather disciples.

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* says:

¹ The introduction to the chapter on the perfection of generosity begins with the following heading structure.

c" The process of learning the perfections

1" how to train in the bodhisattva deeds in general

(a) Training in the perfections that mature the qualities you have when you become a buddha

So, Training in the Four Ways to Gather Disciples That Help Others to Mature is the second part of Training in the Bodhisattva Deeds in General

Generosity is the same as before; teaching the perfections, Involving others in taking them up, and involving yourself

Are asserted to be pleasant speech, working at the aims, And consistency of behavior, respectively.

(ii) The reason they are stipulated as four

Four ways to attract or gather disciples have been listed, so why are there four?

Question: Why are the ways of gathering disciples set as four?

Reply: In order to gather a following of disciples for the sake of establishing them in virtue, they must first be pleased. This, moreover, depends on your giving them material things, providing benefit to their bodies.

Your goal is to benefit others with the Dharma, so you wish others to hear, understand and develop faith in the Dharma, and to practise it. As a way to please and connect with others, you give them things, which is very a effective way of pleasing them. When they are pleased and become close to you, they will be receptive to listening to what you say.

The text continues:

Thus pleased, they first must know how to connect to the path. That is to say, by using pleasant speech to explain the teaching, you cause them to cast away ignorance and doubt, and then to correctly apprehend the aims.

Here, the words *pleasant speech* specifically refer to teaching according to the interest, mental capacity and exact needs of the listeners. As a result of listening to the teaching, they will cast away *ignorance and doubt*, and then the disciples will *correctly apprehend the aims*. Then:

Once they have understood these, you cause them to accomplish virtue by working at these aims.

One of the verses of the *Prayer of the Hundred Deities of the Land of Joy* has this request:

Please release a rain of vase and profound Dharma,
Precisely in accord with the needs of those to be trained.

This implies pleasant speech, which is teaching exactly according to the needs and spiritual temperament of the disciples. The text continues:

However, if you have not accomplished virtue yourself, when you say to others, "You have to engage in this, you have to reject that," they will say, "Why do you tell others, 'Accomplish this aim,' when you do not accomplish it yourself? You still need somebody else to correct you."

Here, you can clearly see how Lama Tsongkhapa emphasises that for the teaching that you give to be beneficial, you must first practise what you teach to others. Otherwise, they might ask why they have to practise what you teach them when you don't practise it yourself. Therefore, there is this emphasis on putting what you teach into practice. When you do this then teaching the Dharma becomes a means to subdue your own continuum, while at the same time helping others to subdue their continuum. If you don't practise what you teach, then not only will your own mind be unsubdued, but you won't be able to help subdue the minds of others either. However:

But if you are practicing yourself, they will think, "This person is established in the virtue to which he (or she) is leading us, so we will definitely derive benefit and happiness if we accomplish it." They then either engage in it anew, or (for those who have already engaged in it) do not reject it and become stable in it. So for this you have to be consistent in your behavior.

This explains how the fourth way of gathering disciples is consistent with the purpose, which is to put into practice what you teach to others. My intention in reading this text is so that you will also read and reflect on its meaning, to understand how what Lama Tsongkhapa instructs here is directly related to you. You will *either engage in it anew*, or if it's something that you've already heard or are already practising, then this helps to stabilise and give you more confidence in your practice.

The text then summarises this section:

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* says:

Know the ways to gather disciples to be four:
A method to give benefit, involving others in
Comprehending the teachings, involving them in
Engaging, and likewise involving yourself.

(iii) Their functions

This explains the function of each of the four means of gathering disciples. The text begins with a question.

Question: What do these four ways to gather disciples do for the disciples?

Reply: Generosity makes them fit vessels to hear the teaching, for it makes them happy with the person who explains it.

This clearly indicates how the practice of generosity is particularly effective in bringing people closer to you or winning their hearts and minds.

Pleasant speech makes them take interest in the teaching that is to be given, because it gives them a detailed understanding of the aims and dispels their doubts. Working at the aims makes them practice in accord with what they have been taught. Consistency of behavior makes those who have engaged in the teachings not reject them but practice for a long time.

Then there's a summary of the function of each of the four:

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* says:

By the first they become vessels;
By the second they take interest;
By the third they practice;
By the fourth they train.

(iv) The need for those who gather a following to rely on them

Because the buddhas have declared these four ways to gather disciples to be what achieves all the aims of all disciples and to be the superb method, those gathering a following must rely on them. The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

Those involved in gathering a following
Rely on this means;
It is praised as the superb method,
Achieving all aims for all.

This part of the text is repeating what the Buddha said.

(v) A somewhat elaborate explanation

There are two types of pleasant speech. The first, pleasant speech associated with worldly customs, means that you first assume a clear expression free of anger, give a smile, and then please living beings in worldly ways, such as inquiring after their health, etc.

Here the text indicates the benefits of observing the worldly customs of good manners as part of practising pleasant speech – showing a pleasant expression when meeting people, such as smiling and making friendly and welcoming

conversation. The worldly custom of asking people, 'How are you?' and things like that accord with the practice of pleasant speech that we need to put into practice.

The text continues:

The second type, pleasant speech associated with presenting the perfect teaching, means that you instruct living beings in the teaching for their benefit and happiness, beginning with teachings on developing faith, ethical discipline, study, generosity, and wisdom.

In these lines *for their benefit and happiness* indicates that our motivation for giving teachings is to benefit others with happiness; it should not be stained by any wrong thoughts such as wanting to become famous and so forth. Then the teachings that you give to others should help them to develop faith in the Three Jewels, and apply ethical practices (such as the ten virtues), learn about the three baskets of teaching, and develop the discriminating wisdom of knowing right from wrong, and so forth.

For those of you who give introductory teachings on Monday nights, I advise that before the teaching night, you might spend an hour considering the kind of motivation you will have in teaching the Dharma to others and reflecting on what you're going to teach. You will find going through this kind of rehearsal very beneficial.

The text continues with this advice:

The avenues of pleasant speech are as follows. To an enemy who would kill you, you say helpful words without a fault in your heart. With the very dull-witted, you willingly rise to the challenge, tirelessly giving talks on the teaching and causing them to adhere to virtue.

It says here that we should be very patient in giving teachings, especially to those who are very slow in learning. We should not undermine them or give up teaching them because you find that they're too slow, or that they never learn anything. Rather you should *tirelessly give talks on the teaching thus causing them to adhere to virtue*.

Next the text says:

To devious beings who deceive their masters, abbots, etc., and engage in wrongdoing, you speak pleasantly with helpful words and without anger, teaching even the most difficult persons. In order that persons whose minds have not matured may eliminate obscurity and be reborn in happy realms, you give discourses to them on preliminary practices-generosity and ethical discipline.

This refers to those whose inner continuum is not fully ripened. You teach them the preliminary practices such as generosity and ethical discipline in order to help them to find a good rebirth.

To persons whose minds have matured, who are rid of obscurity and possessed of a joyful frame of mind, you reveal the foremost and perfect teaching of the four noble truths. You encourage householders and renunciates who are careless to be conscientious, and to those who have doubts you speak elaborately and explain the teaching to them to dispel their doubts. Working at the aims is twofold: bringing the immature to maturity and liberating the matured. It is also presented in three parts as follows. (1) *Involving persons in taking up the aims of this life* is causing them to employ means consistent with the teaching to acquire, to protect, and to increase their resources.

The point being made here is that you teach others according to their interest, mental capacity and predisposition. Even helping others to gather material goods

or protect their wealth rightfully, and not through stealing and so forth is not necessarily on contrary to the way of the Dharma. Secondly:

(2) *Involving persons in taking up the purpose of future lives* means to establish persons in the life of a renunciate who lives as a mendicant after they have rid themselves of possessions. Although this is certain to bring happiness in future lives, it is not certain to do so in this life.

Here, the text mentions the benefit of living a life of a *mendicant* – an ascetic practitioner who owns little and is attached to nothing and who lives a very contented and free life. As a renunciate we are supposed to live like an ascetic, carrying a begging bowl for receiving food from others. You'll find the details about how a renunciate should live in the *Vajra Cutter Sutra*.

In my younger days I used to dream about spending the rest of my life as a mendicant. Even though mendicants hardly own anything, and never settle in one place I was quite attracted to living as a wandering practitioner which I thought was a very contented and peaceful life. However, my life didn't end up like that.

In fact, these days renunciates enjoy a life of comfort in terms of abundant food, and the luxury of a place to live, and so forth.

Thirdly:

(3) *Involving persons in taking up the aims of both this and future lives* means to cause householders and renunciates to take up freedom from mundane and supramundane attachment, for this generates mental and physical pliancy in the present life, ...

This shows us that even though renunciates (and others too) do not own anything externally, the way they live is very suitable for generating mental and physical pliancy.

... and the attainment of a purified deity and nirvana in the future.

Work at the aims even when it is very difficult. It is difficult to induce those who have not previously accumulated roots of virtue to take up virtue.

It is difficult to encourage those who have not accumulated the roots of virtue to put the teaching into practice.

It is difficult to work at the aims with respect to those who have magnificent resources² because they live in a situation where there are so many grounds for being unconscientious.

The text is saying that those who are materially rich and obsessed with wealth are filled with so many distracting thoughts that it's very difficult to get them to put the teaching into practice.

And it is difficult to work at the aims with respect to those who are indoctrinated with the views of non-Buddhist philosophers because they are hostile to the teaching and, because of their foolishness, do not understand reasoning.

With respect to the stages of working at the aims, you first cause those with childlike intelligence to follow easy personal instructions. Then, when their understanding has reached a middling level, you have them follow intermediate personal instructions. Finally, when their wisdom has greatly expanded, you have them follow the profound teaching and subtle personal instructions.

This clearly indicates the importance of teaching others according to their mental capacity. If their mental capacity is

very small, then you teach to suit that mental capacity, just as you teach to suit those of the middling capacity and those of great capacity. After explaining the importance of giving instructions according to the mental capacity of the listeners, the text continues:

Consistency of behavior means that you maintain practices equal to or superior to those in which you establish others.

This refers to the fourth means of gathering disciples which is to behave in a manner consistent with your purpose. In other words, you should practise what you teach to others. Your practice should be either equal to those you teach, or, as it says in the text, superior to them.

The text continues:

Accordingly, even though in whatever you do you must first focus on the welfare of living beings and not lose your resolve for others' welfare, you must discipline yourself in conjunction with these pursuits.

This is saying that your intention should always be to benefit others, helping them to subdue their continuums. It is important that this is always your motivation for giving teachings to others. And, of course, you should be practising the teaching yourself.

Lama Tsongkhapa always emphasises that without subduing your own mind, there's no way that you can help others to subdue their continuum. Therefore, you must first subdue your own mind. So, it makes a sense that you must put what you teach to others into practise before you teach it to others.

... in conjunction with these pursuits. Triratnadasa's *Praise of Infinite Qualities* says:

Some who are undisciplined use reasonable words, but
Contradict these words, so they are called "unable to help
others to discipline themselves."

Knowing this, you placed all living beings in your heart,
And strove to discipline yourself wherever you had
lacked discipline before.

The four ways to gather disciples also comprise two categories: gathering disciples via material things and gathering disciples through the teaching. Giving material things is the first of the four ways to gather disciples. The remaining three of the four ways are included in the second, gathering disciples through the teaching.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering
Edited Version*

© **Tara Institute**

² Meaning an abundance of wealth and possessions.