
The Six Perfections

འབྲུག་གི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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We will begin with our usual meditation.

[Meditation]

As usual we now cultivate the bodhicitta mind.

Last Sunday, we did a course on cultivating bodhicitta through the method of exchanging self with others. So, those of you who did the course should apply this method to give rise to bodhicitta.

At the course I forgot to mention the meaning of 'exchanging' in the context of applying the method of exchanging the self with others. But you should be able to find out about it by yourselves.

With the 'giving and taking' meditation we are habituating our mind with the thought of giving and taking. For example, with regard to giving, we imagine giving our body, possession and virtues to other sentient beings.

Of course, we should not leave the meditation of giving simply at the thought of giving. We must try to translate this thought into deeds of giving of our body, possessions and virtues, and in this way we engage in benefitting other beings. Having said that, we should not give any objects that we are not ready to give away, such as our body. Great bodhisattvas can give their bodies if they see it as being beneficial for others. We, however, should engage in the practice of giving as best as we can according to our own capacity, and not give anything that we should not be giving.

As part of giving, we must avoid holding any harmful thoughts towards others and committing harmful deeds, otherwise we defeat the purpose of giving, which is to benefit others. So, our main practice is to benefit others as much and as best as possible. This is indeed the essential element of our Dharma practice, and it is grounded on feeling love, compassion and a sense of endearment towards others, as well as a recognition of their kindness for us.

Therefore, we need to train and habituate our mind to feel close to others, and to cherish them with a loving mental attitude. When we see other sentient beings, we should think that they are our mothers and, as such, are incredibly kind and affectionate to us like a mother loves her only son. We should also think that by depending on them, we can accumulate all the virtues to achieve the perfect state of buddhahood. Therefore, we should think that these sentient beings are truly a field of spiritual merit as they provide us with an opportunity to accumulate merit. Having recognised them as a field of merit, we see them with the eyes of a loving mind and with deep regard and respect. Viewing sentient beings in such a loving and very respectful way over and over again is a true cause to please and delight all the buddhas.

Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* says,

(Pleasing living beings) delights the Tathagatas
And perfectly accomplishes my own purpose as well.

In addition, it dispels the pain and misery of the universe,

Therefore I should always practise it.

In Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* we also find advice on how to speak with other sentient beings. It says,

When talking I should speak from my heart and on what is relevant.

Making the meaning, clear and the speech pleasing.

I should not speak out of desire or hatred

But in gentle tones and in moderation.

When we see other sentient beings, we should acknowledge their kindness because we depend on them to achieve the state of buddhahood. Shantideva goes so far as to say that we pay homage to the Buddha because we see the Buddha as a cause to achieve the state of buddhahood, the state of enlightenment. In the same way, when we practise generosity, moral ethics and so forth, we are really depending on others to be able to practise the six perfections that serve as a cause for us to achieve enlightenment. As Shantideva states:

There is no doubt that those with the nature of compassion

Regard all these beings (to be the same) as themselves.

Furthermore, those who see (this Buddha-nature) as the nature of sentient beings see the Buddha themselves;

Why then do I not respect (sentient beings)?

If merely a benevolent intention

Excels veneration of the buddhas

Then what need is there to mention striving to make

All beings, without exception, happy.

Shantideva reminds us that when we look at other sentient beings, we should recognise their kindness in giving us the opportunity to be able to achieve enlightenment. Therefore, we should view them with love, and a deep sense of respect.

When beholding someone with my eyes,

Thinking 'I shall fully awaken

Through depending on this being'

I should look at that person with love and an open heart.

You should memorise these verses, include them in your daily practice and reflect on their meaning.

One of the students who did the Sunday course gave very positive feedback about the group discussion, saying it was very helpful for their practice, and that at the discussion people were speaking from their heart and sharing their knowledge based on their personal experience. I was pleased to hear that.

This verse from the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* shows how to counteract anger and your reaction to a person who annoys you.

Thus, since patient acceptance is produced

In dependence upon a hateful mind,

That person should be worthy of veneration just like the sacred Dharma

Because he is a cause of patience.

If you can recollect that verse, say it to yourself and reflect on it, you will find it very effective in preventing anger.

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

(iv) A somewhat elaborate explanation (cont.)

We now return to the text. In the previous teaching, we stopped at this paragraph:

When bodhisattvas whose minds are untrained in such marvelous but difficult deeds hear of them, they feel distressed. Although they are unable to practice such things at first, they come to understand them and then to intimately familiarize themselves with them as objects of aspiration. Later they engage in them spontaneously without any strain. Thus, familiarization is of the greatest importance, for if these bodhisattvas recognized their inability to actually engage in such deeds and then gave up on even the familiarization conducive to training the mind in them, they would greatly delay reaching the pure path.

Then the text gives this quote:

The Praise of Infinite Qualities says:

Deeds that hurt the worldly even to hear about
And that even you did not undertake for a long time
You accustomed yourself to, so in time they became
spontaneous.
Thus, it is difficult to develop good qualities without
familiarization

In this verse from the *Praise of Infinite Qualities*, we find the advice that if we become familiar with something then it will arise spontaneously. However, we must make an effort if we are to achieve that force of familiarity. If we stop making any effort by thinking it is too hard because of our lack of familiarity, then we will never become familiar with it. As the text says, *Deeds that hurt the worldly even to hear about and that even you didn't undertake for a long time, you accustomed yourself to, so in time they become spontaneous*. In worldly terms, some actions might initially be very hard to do, but if you make a strenuous consistent effort to accomplish those actions then eventually they will become easy. Then, as *you accustom yourself* to those actions, *in time they become spontaneous*.

When the Buddha was on the path of learning, he had to engage in many practices, and even he had to initially put a great deal of effort into possessing excellent qualities and getting rid of any faults. So, excellent qualities don't arise easily and require a great deal of effort to attain. Then, in the end, when you reach the state of enlightenment, all the excellent qualities arise spontaneously and effortlessly, and you are completely free of all the faults. So the text is advising us not to feel discouraged if we find our practice very hard and difficult. It is saying that through making a consistent effort we can definitely achieve our desired goal in terms of developing all the excellent qualities and eliminating all the faults. However, if we lose our courage and simply give up, then we won't achieve anything.

We would note that negative forces are very strong within us now while positive forces are very weak. So if we are to generate a positive state of mind or engage in a positive action we need to make a robust effort in our thoughts and deeds. Even if we are able to do something positive, we are unable to sustain it. So, with respect to the positive side we need to familiarise ourselves with positive states of mind over and over again, otherwise we can't achieve anything or, if we achieve something we will easily lose it.

On the other hand, negative forces are very strong within us. Therefore, negative thoughts arise very easily and engaging in negative deeds needs no effort on our part. We are already habituated with the negative side, and there is certainly no need to habituate ourselves with it further. For

example, we generate desirous attachment, hatred etc. and these negative emotions destroy our inner peace and joy and compel us to engage in destructive actions. We can observe how these negative emotions arise very easily without any effort – the slightest external condition is enough for them to arise.

Positive states of mind, however, such as the mind of non-attachment of not being attracted to sensual things, or the mind of non-hatred of not holding any hostile or ill feeling towards others are positive emotions, because they bring us peace and happiness. But these positive states of mind don't arise easily. Therefore, we need to make an effort to cultivate them and habituate ourselves with them over and over again in order to sustain these positive thoughts and deeds. Otherwise we can easily lose or forget about them.

The text continues:

Those who have taken the bodhisattva vows have no choice but to learn the bodhisattva deeds. But even those who have not adopted the engaged spirit of enlightenment through its ritual strive to inculcate a desire to learn the deeds, thus increasing the force of their enthusiasm for learning them. Then, when they take the vows, their vows will be extremely stable, so make an effort to do this.

From among the stages of the path for persons of great capacity, this concludes the explanation of the stages of the path for training in the aspirational spirit of enlightenment and for learning the deeds of the conquerors' children in general.

Even as ordinary beings, we can recognise how our experience of pain and pleasure primarily derives from our changing mental attitudes. You don't have to be particularly intelligent to see that. If we observe and examine our experiences, we can see that the reason we feel so much stress, anxiety and misery and bottle it up is mainly because of a certain pattern of thoughts. We can then understand that if we don't remedy these disturbing thoughts, then we will end up with serious mental illnesses and not be able to cope. At the same time, we can also understand that if we have a stable positive state of mind, we will have a stable experience of peace and happiness and a positive outlook on life regardless of external circumstances. Therefore, it is very important that we aim our meditation practice at bringing about a positive change within our mind in terms of extinguishing the negative states of mind and enhancing the positive states of mind. In this way, our meditation helps us to find more happiness and overcome suffering in our life.

Benefiting self and others through the six perfections

With the six perfections, we can accomplish both our own purpose and the purpose of other beings in terms of accomplishing all the excellences, such as an excellent life, excellent living conditions and excellent companions. These excellences are the cause of a happy, marvellous and fulfilling life.

We want to live a marvellous life, not only in this life but also in all future lifetimes. Hence, we need to ensure we keep continuously creating the causes and conditions for this, life after life. Engaging in the six perfection fulfils all our needs now and in the future.

Generosity brings an abundance of wealth and good conditions. We should acknowledge our past generosity for all the wealth and good resources we have now, and through it, whatever joy and support we receive. In the same way, to have the same good fortune of wealth and

resources in our future lives, we must remember to keep practising generosity in this life.

Realising that there's no point in possessing an abundance of wealth and good resources unless we have found an excellent form of life to enjoy it, we understand that we need to adhere to the practice of moral ethics which is the primary cause to find a good rebirth.

Then, we also want to be surrounded by excellent companions and the primary cause for that is the practice of patience. We know that as social beings, having other people as our friends or a close relationship with them is an important cause for wellbeing and happiness. Needless to say, if we want to benefit other beings, they have to come to us, connect with us and trust us. For example, bodhisattvas are able to benefit infinite numbers of beings because they have a skill to attract other beings.

Next, we need to rely on joyful effort to ensure that whatever tasks we undertake are fully completed. The perfections of concentration and discriminating wisdom are the main means to subdue our mind, protect it from the influence of mental afflictions and develop true knowledge.

As I frequently remark, if our mind is under the dominance of mental afflictions, then whatever we accomplish in our lives brings us no inner peace and satisfaction. So, we need to cultivate meditative concentration to stabilise and calm down mental afflictions and disturbing thoughts, and then uproot them through developing discriminating wisdom. Cultivating wisdom knowledge is also important in terms of overcoming confusion, and knowing what to accept and what to reject, and accordingly moving along with our lives.

The best way to make this special life meaningful is through benefitting other beings. So, first we need to win their friendship and trust. Therefore, it is said, the most effective practice of benefitting others is giving or generosity. However, there is no point of giving if we harm them or if we don't refrain from harming them through our thoughts and deeds. Hence, in addition to the practice of giving, we must also practise morality, which is refraining from any acts of harmfulness.

Even though we offer other beings benefits and support, they may not view it that way or appreciate us – they may even become angry with us and harm us. What do we need to do in this situation? We need to practise patience, particularly the patience of accepting hardship and harm from others.

The first three of the six perfections – giving, moral ethics and patience – are primarily the means to benefit other sentient beings.

Now, in terms of achieving our own purpose, we need to gain wisdom, because ultimately we wish to achieve the bliss of liberation, which depends on gaining the insight of wisdom.

To actualise this wisdom, we must have a state of mind which is completely calm and stabilised. What brings about such a state of calm-mind is single-pointed meditative concentration, which enables us to get rid of all the agitated states of mind and rest the mind on any given object effortlessly for as long as we wish to stay there. Therefore, meditative concentration and discriminating wisdom are the primary causes to achieve our own purpose.

In short, all the activities that are aimed at accomplishing our purpose and the purpose of others require continuous

effort, day in and day out from our side. Therefore, the practice of joyful effort is essential for accomplishing the purposes of both others and ourselves or, in other words, to fulfil the two aspirations to achieve our welfare and the welfare of others. We must understand that the practice of the six perfections is the main cause for achieving the state of buddhahood. In terms of the causal order, we first achieve our goal, which is the state of buddhahood, and after that we achieve the goal of other beings in the sense of benefitting them perfectly.

Next week we have a teaching break and you have a discussion on the four means of gathering disciples.

We will now recite Samantabhadra's prayer, the *King of Prayers*. This is to dedicate all the virtues we have accumulated in the past, that we are accumulating now or will accumulate in the future for the sake of the flourishing of the Buddha's teaching and for the benefit of all living beings.

Finally, we will recite the Twenty-one Tara Praises for Llysse's mother who is unwell.

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Edited Version*

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