

---

## Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

༄༅། །རྒྱལ་སྐྱེས་ལག་ལེན་སོ་བདུན་མ།

Commentary by Venerable Geshe Lobsang Dorje

Translated by Sandup Tsering

5 May 2021

---

The verses below explain the six perfections, the deeds bodhisattvas do to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Prior to that, the text covered topics on the view of emptiness and so on.

The two methods to achieve complete enlightenment are bodhicitta and the realisation of emptiness or wisdom. Bodhicitta is an aspiration to achieve enlightenment to free all beings from the suffering of cyclic existence and lead them to the state of liberation. The wisdom of emptiness is the direct means to attain complete enlightenment. The implication here is that simply having bodhicitta and the wisdom of emptiness is not sufficient. We must also engage in the six perfections to fully gather the two accumulations.

To simplify this let me give you an analogy. We are unhappy with where we live because we see many disadvantages and problems there. So, we make up our mind to move somewhere else. We not only make that decision, but we are clear that where we are going will be much better. After that we must act by packing and moving to the new place, otherwise there is no point to our decision. In a similar way, after we have cultivated renunciation, bodhicitta and the wisdom of emptiness, and resolved to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings, we must gather and complete the two accumulations of merit and wisdom to reach complete enlightenment. We do this by engaging in the bodhisattva's deeds of the six perfections. The first perfection we must engage in is the *perfection of giving*.

In terms of the ease of engaging in the bodhisattva's deeds, the perfection of giving is the easiest, compared to the other perfections.

We are up to Verse 25 of *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* which reads:

When those who want enlightenment must give even  
their body,  
There's no need to mention external things  
Therefore, without hope for return or any fruition  
Give generously -  
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

The first two lines of the verse explain how, if we want to achieve enlightenment, we must be prepared to sacrifice our own body, as did the Lord Buddha, according to the stories of the Buddha's former life. So, if we must give up our own body in order to achieve complete enlightenment, then what need is there to mention giving away external things.

The next two lines of the text say: *Therefore, without hope for return or any fruition; Give generously.*

It is said that the practice of giving results in wealth, and moral ethics results in a happy life. So, as a result of giving, we will gain wealth and a reputation in the future. However, it is implied here that for our practice of giving to be called 'the perfection of giving', we should, when engaging in that practice, not have any thought of receiving a reward, such as wealth or a good name and so forth. There should not be any hope that, if we practise giving now, we will have more wealth or become famous later in life or, if we practise giving in this life, we will become wealthy and famous in a future life.

Giving refers to the thought of giving - such as giving our body, possessions and virtues. Giving is divided into three types: the giving of material objects, the giving of Dharma and the giving of protection from fear. The object of giving can range from a large object, like giving our body, to a small object, like giving a spoonful of food. What characterises the giving as the perfection of giving is not what we give - which, as said before, can be a spoonful of food - but the mental attitude of giving. The mental attitude must be purely and completely to benefit others, without any ulterior motive of receiving a reward or gain for ourselves in return. The act of giving must be fully motivated by compassion and bodhicitta.

As part of the practice of giving, there are several things we must remember. Whatever we give must be appropriate and fulfil the needs of the recipient. Also, it is important to remember that after giving the object, we should not have any sense of regret such as, 'I have given too much to that person'. Likewise, upon the completion of giving, we should not feel a sense of regret by thinking that we have made a mistake by giving to that person or that giving was not the right action.

Similarly, if we make offerings to the object of refuge, it is important that, at the time of making those offerings, we do not have a sense of pride, thinking how we are 'making a great offering'. In short, it is important to ensure that giving is done wholeheartedly to benefit other beings, purely for their wellbeing. We should also remember to dedicate whatever virtues we have accumulated through our practice of giving towards the wellbeing of other sentient beings and pray for that.

The lamrim says that bodhisattvas have great confidence in performing the practice of giving. Whatever the needs that arise, they have no hesitation about giving anything. They have this confidence and capacity due to their habituation to the practice of giving and to their bodhicitta mind. So, we need to train ourselves in becoming familiar with the practice of giving, and then develop the practice of giving starting with giving something small to giving something a bit bigger. We must also train ourselves in cultivating bodhicitta or loving kindness, starting at a low level, and then developing it further.

The main obstacle we face in the practice of giving is miserliness. To counteract this, we meditate on impermanence and the meaninglessness of things. We can think about our own situation, how at the time of death, not only do we have to leave everything behind, but we must even leave this body behind. Our body is perhaps the most precious thing we possess. So, all things are

---

---

impermanent and have no true meaning or essence at the end.

As part of the practice of giving, we should also remember not to discriminate in relation to the recipients of giving, that is in terms of a person's social status. Everyone, whether they are of high status or low status should be treated and respected equally. It is also important to remember to give things to others in a polite and respectful manner. We know what difference it makes when someone gives us a gift if they show us respect, and their manner of giving is courteous and done in a humble way. This makes us feel more appreciative of their gifts.

In terms of what objects we can give it is said that we should only give our body when the time is right, when it is suitable for us to give it. If the time is not right, if we are not ready, then it should not be given.

This readiness depends on the stability of our bodhicitta mind. It is said that to give our body, the force of our bodhicitta mind should be strong and we should have no attachment to our body whatsoever. Our readiness for giving our body also includes factors such as our level of understanding of emptiness, which should reach a point where we see everything as an illusion.

When giving his commentary on the *Middling Stages of the Lam Rim*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama commented on the appropriateness of giving our body based on benefitting other sentient beings. If, by giving our body we can benefit others more than by not giving it, then giving it is justifiable. Whereas, if we can benefit others more by not giving our body, then not giving it is justifiable.

Also, the object of giving should be obtained in the right way. It should not be obtained wrongfully, such as through stealing or other wrongful means. So, we should remember how we acquire the things we give to others.

We should also consider the time or circumstantial factor for determining the appropriateness of giving. For example, it is not right to give weapons or poison to people who are in danger of taking their own life. Similarly, it is not right to give anything that people might use to harm themselves or other beings.

Now we move to the next type of giving which is *the giving of Dharma*. To give Dharma, do we need to sit on a high throne? This is not necessary. Nor do we have to be a high lama or scholar to give Dharma. Nor does the teaching have to be of a certain length to be considered as the giving of Dharma. There is no prescribed length. Even saying a few words is enough to engage in the giving of Dharma. We can engage in the practice of the giving of Dharma simply by reciting prayers or Dharma texts. But, at that time, we should imagine that other beings, such as celestial beings, insects, and many other forms of life are hearing us.

So, giving Dharma does not necessarily mean giving a formal Dharma talk to others or reading out a Dharma text. We can also engage in the giving of Dharma while casually chatting with others, such as saying things which are beneficial to them.

The next type of giving is *the giving of protection from fear*.

The giving of protection from fear refers to giving protection to others, such as rescuing people from drowning or giving protection to those suffering from scorching heat in summer, from the cold in winter or from wetness during heavy rainfall. All of these are ways to give protection to others or *giving of protection from fear*.

In brief, when we engage in the practice of giving, it is vitally important that our intention for giving is wholeheartedly and completely for the benefit of other beings, without any expectation of return. Also, at the end of giving, the benefit or virtues we accumulate from the practice of giving should be completely dedicated towards benefitting other beings.

Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, giving results in material wealth, even if that is not our expectation. Here wealth refers to the necessary good conditions, which we all need if we are to continue our Dharma practice. To practise Dharma we are dependent on the basic necessities, such as sufficient food, drink, clothing and shelter. So, through thinking of the benefits of the practice of giving, such as for our Dharma practice, we should be motivated to engage in the practice of giving.

Of the three types of giving, the supreme one is the giving of Dharma.

We will leave it here for tonight's teaching.

Thank you.

*Transcribed by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Katherine Boland  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version  
© Tara Institute*