

# The Six Perfections

ଆଶ୍ରମାକାରିତାବନ୍ଧନକ୍ରମା

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsiring

20 August 2019

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

As we need to ensure we have the correct motivation, it's good to reflect on the meaning of prayers like the *Taking Refuge and Generating Bodhicitta* prayer that we have just recited. Then, through this reflection, we are cultivating the proper motivation.

When we talk about taking refuge in the Three Jewels, and following all the precepts relating to that, it is very clear that we will find that there is a true refuge and protection for us at the end of our life, which has to be placed into our mindstream. So, while we have the opportunity and freedom, we must make the effort to seize that opportunity to recognise and cultivate faith in that inner refuge and protection, which is completely reliable at all times.

As we have said in the past, when we face the imminent reality of death and impermanence then no matter how beautiful or strong our body is, it is of no use at all. Similarly, no matter how many friends we may have, even if we are surrounded by them all at the time of death, they cannot help us. Likewise, all of our wealth and possessions are of no benefit to us then.

At that moment it becomes very clear that the only thing that can be of true benefit is finding refuge and hope within our own mind. That which guides and protects us from within is the true Dharma. In fact, the purpose of engaging in meditating on death and impermanence is to recognise the value of the Dharma and be inspired to put it into practice. If you are familiar with that meditation, there are three main reasons that you apply to see why death is inevitable. Then, as an outcome of those reasons, we have to come to three definitive decisions in relation to our approach to Dharma practice. We have the opportunity to engage in this death and impermanence meditation right now to come to these three decisions, and to realise the deeper purpose of understanding the meaning of our life.

When we don't engage our mind with such meditation practices then all we will be doing is feeding our mind with all kinds of various disturbing thoughts, which only bring more disturbance and more confusion to our minds. But if we direct our mind to a meditation topic such as death and impermanence, then not only will it benefit us at the time of death and beyond, but it will enhance our peace and happiness in this immediate timeframe.

In other words, ultimately there's no benefit in this body, in our possessions or our worldly friends. The message here is that we must at the very least overcome very strong attachment to our body, wealth, friends and so forth. We will find that the moment we ease or release this forceful pressure of attachment, our mind will become relaxed and joyful.

The cause of the problems and suffering in our life is not completely related to our physical body or external living conditions. The major cause of our problems is worrying

about things. For example, if you have some physical illness, then of course that can cause pain and distress. However, if on top of the problems directly related to the illness, you mentally worry about those problems, then those overly negative thoughts about your situation will only add more problems. Quite often, we suffer because of mental worries and our inability to cope with that. This is unnecessary and we can overcome it through training our mind and engaging in meditation practice.

That is why we have to recognise that the main purpose of following a spiritual practice – such as taking refuge, or any other Dharma practice – is to combat states of mind that bring suffering. Then we will be combating the real cause of our problems which lies within and not in the external world. As we were saying before, most times the causes of hardship and suffering in our life are not external; rather the real cause is our mind unnecessarily worrying and thinking negatively about things. So if we want to get rid of a problem, we really must subdue this worrying and restless mind, and the Dharma is the most effective means of subduing the mind.

We must understand that we all have the freedom and capacity to train and bring changes to our mind. Our mind works with and goes after whatever is most familiar. If the mind becomes habituated to positive thoughts, then they will arise more easily. We can change the mind through training it. When we engage in a virtuous practice, we might find it difficult and challenging in the beginning to keep our mental attention on the practice. However, as we habituate our mind with a practice, we will be able to do that practice more easily. Then even at the time of death, we will be able to apply that practice easily in peace and joy.

When we learn that there is no essence to our body, wealth and friends, we should not literally take that to mean there is no value or benefit in having them. Of course, they are of benefit, and our wellbeing can be dependent on them. Many people have a misconception that being a good Buddhist means not possessing wealth or caring about beauty and so forth. Sometimes these people comment to Buddhists, 'Why are you making money?' They have a preconception that if you are a Buddhist you should not be making money. I want to say to them, 'Is it true that after becoming a Buddhist you don't need to eat food, wear clothes, or have a house for shelter?' If it wasn't true, then Buddhists wouldn't need to work and earn money.

So, the teaching on the shortcomings of body, wealth and friends is not meant to advise us to say we don't need them, or even throw them away. Rather it advises us to stop being attached to, craving or desiring them. We need them for our livelihood and to support us in our life. Indeed, wealth is the most important factor when we talk of the wellbeing and development of the whole country.

It's important to always point the teaching to our own mind, rather than to any external people or things. When we talk about cultivating a sense of contentment in relation to wealth and so forth, we're not saying we should not have wealth or get rid of our wealth. That is not the point. The main focus of the practice of contentment is mentally having less attachment to, or even eliminating attachment to wealth. The benefit of the practice of contentment is a sense of satisfaction and inner peace, which occurs when we reduce or overcome attachment and desire.

I've side-tracked from the topic, which happens frequently, because we have known each other for many years and I

tend to talk about whatever I see as relevant or beneficial for you at the moment.

However, we had better continue with the teachings.

### (1) Stopping discouragement about the goal

Last week we finished at this sentence:

Rather, I too shall reach total perfection in utterly unsurpassed, perfect, and complete enlightenment. With joyous perseverance in common with all living beings and joyous perseverance focused upon all living beings, I too shall seek and strive for enlightenment.

The text continues:

*The Praise of Infinite Qualities* also says:

"Even some who have earlier obtained the state of a sugata previously fell to states much lower than this one." Thinking thus and in order to inspire us, you [Bhagavan] did not disparage yourself even when you fell into a dreadful condition. To disparage oneself is wrong, causing those with well-developed faculties to become discouraged.

If we look into the meaning of this passage, we find is essentially a reflection on what we should do in order to inspire ourselves so that when we face any hardship or difficult situation we won't be discouraged or give up. We should think that all the buddhas faced great hardship and difficulty before they reached their state of complete enlightenment. However, they never lost their spirit or their courage. Rather, when they faced obstacles, they became even more determined by thinking about the benefit of fulfilling their aspiration to achieve supreme enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. The passage is saying that if we reflect in the same manner, we will not disparage ourselves or let ourselves down in the face of hardship.

When the text says *well-developed faculties*, it is referring to well-developed virtue, or faith in virtue. So, in a sense, through disparaging ourselves we will become discouraged even if we have developed good faith in virtues. When it says, *to disparage oneself is wrong, causing those with well-developed faculties*, this means that if we disparage ourselves, then even if we have well-developed virtue and faith we will become discouraged.

Furthermore:

As to this discouragement, since a buddha's good qualities are infinite and results follow from causes, you must accomplish good qualities and remove faults through limitless avenues while on the path. After you have understood this well, you may become discouraged when you then take a look at yourself.

When the text says, *as to this discouragement*, it is further explaining the meaning of the previous line. Here, the person who is in danger of becoming discouraged really refers to someone who has developed a good understanding of the framework of the entire path in terms of what is required to achieve complete enlightenment. As it clearly mentions here, *a buddha's good qualities are infinite*, and the *results follow from causes*. We need to understand that as the qualities of buddhas are infinite, it follows then we have to create infinite causes because the result follows the cause. So, those with a complete understanding of the path to enlightenment can get discouraged through knowing that the ultimate goal here is to *accomplish all good qualities*, and in order to *accomplish infinite good qualities* you have to eliminate or *remove all faults*, and we feel, 'I can not do that.'

As said before, here the person who is discouraged clearly refers to someone who has a complete understanding of what is involved to in order to achieve complete enlightenment. *After you have understood this well* implies that many of us don't get discouraged because we don't have a good understanding of the path to enlightenment, and so we don't have a clue as to the amount of work that is needed to achieve supreme enlightenment. However, having understood the path well, *you may become discouraged when you then take a look at yourself* or when you consider yourself to be a follower this path, there is the possibility of becoming discouraged.

The text continues:

However, this particular discouragement will never arise at a time like the present when an erroneous understanding of the path is in operation.

As it clearly points out here, people like us who lack the understanding or hold an erroneous understanding are not people who could become discouraged.

Now, when practicing to attain the limitless buddha qualities, you suppose that they are achieved by one-sidedly pursuing just a single, small portion of a quality and intensively working on it.

This clarifies the point about why those with an erroneous understanding are not discouraged. It says here that they think that they're on the right path and that they can achieve complete enlightenment, not because they have correct and complete understanding of the path, but because their partial or wrong understanding makes them think like that. We sometimes hear people saying that you can achieve enlightenment if you complete a hundred thousand prostrations or accumulate a hundred thousand Vajrasattva mantras or mandala offerings and so forth. According to them you can reach the state of enlightenment in one year, because you can accumulate one hundred thousand prostrations in a year.

Yet, in this case your not getting discouraged is not a good sign.

As it clearly says here, *in this case not becoming discouraged is not a good sign*.

Rather, it is the result of your not being certain about how to proceed on the path - or, having a rough understanding but not putting it into practice - so you are confused by its apparent ease. For, when you come up against the practice and receive an explanation of a fairly complete outline of the path, roughly arranged from beginning to end, you say, "If that much is needed, who could do it," and thoroughly give it up.

These lines indicate, again, how a person with an understanding of the *complete outline of the path* can be discouraged.

Also, Sha-ra-wa said:

For bodhisattvas who have not engaged in practice all the bodhisattva deeds seem easy, like looking at a target for arrows, and they do not even get discouraged. At present, we lack a complete practice of the teachings, so we have not even reached the level at which we would have discouragement or self-contempt. When we more fully appropriate the teaching, then there is great danger of discouragement and self-contempt.

This is quite true.

That finishes the causes of discouragement with regard to the goal, which is the state of buddhahood. Complete

enlightenment means the state that is endowed with infinite excellent qualities, and when we think of the ultimate goal in this manner, we may become discouraged.

## (2)) Stopping discouragement about the means to attain the goal

We may also be discouraged when we think about the path to attaining that goal.

The text starts with this qualm:

*Qualm:* To accomplish buddhahood you have to give away your feet, hands, etc., but I am not capable of such feats.

When we think about the sacrifice of giving *away your feet, hands, etc to accomplish buddhahood* we may become discouraged thinking, *I am not capable of such feats.*

The reply is:

*Reply:* You must bear suffering to that extent, for even those who live as they please without engaging in the bodhisattva deeds ...

The deed of giving becomes a bodhisattva deed when the giving is conjoined with the bodhicitta mind, and it includes giving away parts of your body, and so forth. Thinking about this can really discourage us.

The text is, however, saying we must bear in mind that even if we don't engage in such a bodhisattva deed, but live life recklessly in the way we want, we will still experience *unspeakable sufferings* because of being within cyclic existence. They:

... experience as they pass through cyclic existence unspeakable sufferings, such as having their bodies cut open, torn to pieces, stabbed, set on fire, and so forth, but they do not accomplish even their own welfare.

Because we are subject to cyclic existence such suffering is inevitable. Even if we don't engage in bodhisattva deeds, we can fall victim to being stabbed, killed, and other such unspeakable sufferings.

The text continues:

The suffering occasioned by undergoing hardships for the sake of enlightenment is not even a fraction of this suffering....

The suffering and hardship that we experience by engaging in the bodhisattvas' deeds is only *a fraction* of the suffering that we endure in this worldly existence.

... and also has the great purpose of accomplishing both your own and others' welfare.

Despite all the suffering and hardship that we go through in our life, we are not able to achieve the purpose of our own welfare, let alone extending benefit to others. The suffering we experience in following the practices of a bodhisattva is only a fraction of the suffering we experience in cyclic existence, but it has the result of accomplishing all our own purposes, as well as achieving the welfare of all other beings.

The text continues with a quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* which summarises what has just been discussed.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

"But it frightens me that I must  
Give away my feet, hands, and the like."  
Without distinguishing heavy suffering from light,  
Confusion reduces me to fear.

For countless tens of millions of eons

I will be cut, stabbed,  
Burned, and torn asunder numerous times,  
Without thereby attaining enlightenment.

This suffering which brings about my enlightenment  
Does have a limit.

It is like undergoing the pain of an incision  
To excise an injurious internal disease.

All doctors eliminate illness  
Through forms of discomfort which heal it.  
Thus, I will bear a little discomfort  
To destroy numerous sufferings.

The text continues:

With respect to giving away your body, you do not give it in the beginning when you are afraid. But through graduated training in generosity, you end your attachment to your body. Once you have increased the strength of your great compassion, you have no difficulty when you give it away, provided it is for a great purpose.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

The Supreme Physician does not employ  
Ordinary remedies such as those.  
He heals limitless chronic diseases  
With the most gentle treatments.

At the beginning the Guide enjoins you  
To give vegetables and so forth.  
Later, after you are used to this,  
You gradually offer even your flesh.

Once I come to conceive of my body  
As being like a vegetable and so forth,  
What difficulty will there be in giving away  
Such things as my flesh?

This is saying that if we train ourselves in the practice of giving stage-by-stage from easy to difficult we will make progress. The important point is that there is no need to become discouraged because of the practice of giving away your own body or flesh, as you are not expected to give your body away in the beginning or if you are not ready for it. Rather you train your mind in generosity by giving what is within your capacity such as food or a small amount of money and so forth.

As the text says:

Some say that since practitioners of the perfection vehicle must give away their bodies and lives, they undergo torment and are on a path that is very difficult to follow. This text clearly refutes this, because you do not give away your body so long as you perceive it to be a difficult deed, but rather do so once it becomes very easy, like giving a vegetable.

Some might say that the *practitioners of the perfection vehicle must give away their bodies and lives, undergo torment and are on a path that is very difficult to follow*, and refuse to follow that path on the grounds that it's too hard. *The text clearly refutes this:* that is not the case because you do not give away your body so long as you perceive it to be a difficult deed.

We are advised not to do something that is beyond our capacity. Rather, as the text says, *do so once it becomes very easy, like giving a vegetable*. One starts with giving something small and then develops that practice of generosity by giving something a bit bigger next time. There's a clear indication in the text that if there are deeds that we feel are too difficult to follow, it is reasonable not to attempt them.

## (3)) Stopping discouragement because wherever you are is a place to practice

The path to supreme enlightenment takes many lifetimes; achieving it in a single lifetime is extremely difficult. This means that one has to have a good rebirth as a human over many lifetimes, which in turn means that one is subject to the suffering nature of a human rebirth for a long period of time. This can be very discouraging. To overcome this the text begins with:

*Qualm:* Reaching buddhahood requires taking limitless rebirths in cyclic existence, so I will be harmed by the suffering therein. I am not capable of such a thing.

To overcome that qualm the text says:

*Reply:* Reflect as follows. Bodhisattvas have eliminated all sin; therefore, sin's effect – the feeling of suffering – will not arise because they have stopped the cause.

Here, *bodhisattvas* refers to those bodhisattvas who intentionally take rebirth in cyclic existence. And because they *have eliminated all sin; therefore, sin's effect will not arise*. Since bodhisattvas have overcome sinful actions, they have overcome the result of sinful actions, which is *the feeling of suffering*. Therefore, even though they take rebirth, they do not undergo the experience of suffering, because they've stopped the causes.

Through firm knowledge that cyclic existence lacks an intrinsic nature, like a magician's illusion, they also have no mental suffering.

This clearly indicates how bodhisattvas view things and events through the lens of their knowledge of emptiness. They see everything as being like a magician's illusion, and the effect of such knowledge is that there's no mental suffering. The result arises from their perception of the way things exist.

Given that their physical and mental bliss increases, they have no reason to become disheartened even though they are still in cyclic existence.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

Since sin is eliminated, there is no suffering.

Through knowledge, there is no lack of joy.

Misconceptions and sin

Harm the mind and body.

Through merit the body is blissful;

Through knowledge the mind is too.

Though remaining in cyclic existence for others' welfare,

Why should the compassionate ones be disheartened?

And also:

Thus, after mounting the steed of the enlightenment spirit,  
Which dispels all dejection and fatigue,

You proceed from joy to joy.

What sensible person would become discouraged?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama quotes this last verse frequently as does Khunu Lama Rinpoche. It is a great source of inspiration for retaining the bodhicitta mind. Because of their bodhicitta mind whatever a bodhisattva does, even taking rebirth in worldly existence, becomes a cause to accumulate merit as well as wisdom. So whatever they go through on the path is only joyful. As it says here, *you proceed from joy to joy*, therefore, *what sensible person would become discouraged?*

The first of Shantideva's verses quoted above is saying that we have to recognise that all the suffering we find in our life is the result or outcome of our creation and accumulation of sinful actions. Conversely, if we put an effort into overcoming such sinful actions, then we won't be afflicted with suffering.

The lines *Through merit the body is blissful; Through knowledge the mind is too* refer to merit or virtue being the main cause for achieving happiness and joy on a physical level while knowledge or wisdom is the main cause of happiness and joy on a mental level.. Essentially this advice is to motivate and encourage us to abandon sinful or negative actions. And since we want more happiness and joy in life, then we should create its cause, which is accumulating merit or virtues.

Really what do you need? You need happiness. So what do you do? You do virtuous practice. You really don't need suffering. So why create the cause of suffering? That comes from a negative mind. Keep a good mind and let the rubbish mind go. A rubbish mind is a really harmful and negative mind with too much anger, and jealousy, and no happiness. There are many kinds of negative mind here, but with happiness there is no room for negative minds. There's no room in a good mind for a negative mind.

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# The Six Perfections

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Translated by Sandup Tsiring

27 August 2019

As usual, we will begin with the giving and taking meditation. [Meditation]

Now, cultivate the right motivation, which is to achieve complete enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. Then think that it is for this reason that we are listening to this profound teaching and will put it into practice.

We understand that the meaning of joyful effort is having a genuine sense of joy or delight in whatever virtuous practice we do. When we engage in meditation practice, it is important that we place our mental focus on a virtuous object. However, it is not sufficient to just be able to retain that object of meditation. We should at the same time have a sense of real joy and delight in engaging in meditation practice.

(c) Stopping discouragement or self-contempt

(3) Stopping discouragement because wherever you are is a place to practice (cont.)

Now we continue with this line from the lam rim teaching:

Likewise, do not become discouraged even by being delayed in cyclic existence for an immeasurable length of time, ...

Then a few lines further on the text quotes *Precious Garland*.

Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland* states:

When suffering, even a short time is hard to bear;  
What need mention a time that is long?  
But when free of suffering and joyful,  
What harms you over even endless time?

Bodhisattvas have no physical suffering;  
How could they have mental suffering?  
Out of compassion they feel distress for the world;  
Thus they remain for a long time.

So do not be discouraged,  
Thinking, "Buddhahood is far away."  
Always strive at these collections  
So as to eliminate faults and gain good qualities.

As I always emphasise, as we go through this text the most important thing is to relate it to our own practice. We must see in ourselves some sort of difference between when we study and gain knowledge about the Dharma, and when we don't study or we lack knowledge of the Dharma. In this topic, the emphasis is that whenever we engage in virtuous practice, not only should we have very positive thoughts, strong interest and great enthusiasm, but also a genuine sense of joy and happiness about our practice.

In practical terms, we need to ask ourselves where our thoughts, interests and enthusiasms normally lie. What kinds of deeds or things do we take a great deal of joy and pleasure in? We find that the answer is that it is all mainly related to something opposite to the Dharma or spirituality; we are not short of enthusiasm or taking joy and delight in engaging in negativities. The text is saying that we need to

prioritise Dharma or virtuous practices over those other activities.

Fundamentally, we all wish for happiness and do not wish for suffering, both of which depend on their respective causes. The cause of happiness is virtuous actions, whereas the cause of suffering and unhappiness is non-virtuous or negative actions. So it should occur to us that, if we wish for happiness, then we should also have interest in and be enthusiastic and happy about creating virtue. Likewise, if we do not wish for suffering, then we should not have interest in, be enthusiastic and take joy in creating non-virtuous actions. Hence, in order to bring more happiness and reduce suffering we must change what we take interest and joy in. Unless we change this, we cannot expect to see the change we want to see, which is to experience more happiness and less suffering.

As followers of the Dharma, we have to be aware that if we create any negative action it will result in suffering. Therefore, we should think, 'I must purify negative actions by engaging in a purification practice.' Similarly, as we always wish for more happiness, then we should always remember to create virtuous actions, knowing that this is really the main cause of happiness. As a way to increase our merit and virtue, we should remember to rejoice and dedicate our virtue and merit. In this way, it is very important that we put our Dharma knowledge into practice so that we acquire the benefit of the Dharma, in terms of enriching our life with happiness.

True Dharma is related to our own mind, our own way of thinking and our daily deeds. Therefore, when we talk of Dharma practice, we must think of applying it to our thoughts and deeds. Dharma practice means changing or amending our mental attitude and conduct, for example adopting the ten virtuous actions of refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct etc., and abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions of killing, stealing etc. in both thought and deed.

The reason we need to adhere to the right practice of karma - in terms of what to adopt and abandon - is because adopting what needs to be adopted will bring happiness and abandoning what needs to be abandoned will prevent suffering in our life. However, in order for us to be motivated to follow the right practice of karma we must gain a firm and definite conviction faith in the law of karma - positive karma results in happiness and negative karma results in suffering. Once we gain such a conviction faith, we will follow the practice of karma because we all have the natural tendency to wish for happiness and avoid suffering.

Then the text continues:

... "To become a buddha requires completing limitless collections of merit and sublime wisdom."

Essentially, the text is talking about the various causes of discouragement that impede our practice, and how to overcome them. One of the causes of discouragement will arise when we think about the enormity of the accumulation of merit and wisdom required to achieve the state of enlightenment, when we may feel, 'This is too much, I can't do it.' In order to achieve enlightenment, we have to complete the two accumulations of merit and wisdom, which subsequently serve as the primary cause to achieve a buddha's form body (rupakaya) and truth body (dharmakaya). The word 'completion' in the context of the completion of the endless collections, emphasises the necessity of perfecting the two accumulations of merit and wisdom;

partial accumulation of merit and wisdom is not enough to achieve the state of buddhahood. If we truly understood the extent of the accumulations required to achieve complete enlightenment, we could easily become discouraged about seeking enlightenment, thinking:

... This is so difficult that I could not possibly do it."

Then, the text explains the way to overcome such discouragement:

First, motivate yourself with the desire to attain the goal of limitless buddha qualities for the welfare of the limitless beings you intend to help. Next, focus on remaining in cyclic existence for a measureless period of time and take the bodhisattva vows, thinking: "I shall accomplish limitless collections!"

These lines imply that there is no need to become distressed about accumulating enormous merit, for if you generate the spirit of enlightenment, and also take the engaging vows of the bodhisattva deeds - *the bodhisattva vows* - then you will constantly generate merit. It shows here the process of generating aspirational bodhicitta, followed by generating engaging or active bodhicitta through taking the bodhisattva vows. In this process, your mind is aimed at benefitting a limitless number of sentient beings in order to achieve the goal of limitless buddha qualities. To achieve that, you intend to accumulate limitless merit, even if it takes a *limitless period of time*. We then generate this kind of an aspirational bodhicitta and subsequently take the bodhisattva vows. Then the text continues:

Then, as long as you keep the vows, whether your mind is distracted by other things or not, asleep or awake, you will constantly accumulate merit as vast as space.

If you cultivate the spirit of enlightenment in such a manner and take the bodhisattva vows as mentioned here, then, whether your mind is distracted or not, or whether you are asleep or not, you are constantly accumulating merit. There is no reason to feel discouraged when you know that this is the way to accumulate merit.

Next, there is a quote from *Precious Garland*, the meaning of which has just been discussed.

The *Precious Garland* states:

Just as in all directions  
Space, earth, water, fire, and wind  
Are limitless, so, we assert,  
Suffering beings are without limit.

This is indicating that the number of sentient beings are as infinite or as limitless as space, water, fire, wind and so forth. Then:

With compassion the bodhisattvas  
Extricate these limitless beings  
From suffering and then determine  
To set them in buddhahood.

Those remaining steadfast in this way  
Properly make this commitment,  
And then, whether asleep or awake,  
And even when careless,

They constantly accumulate merit as limitless  
As living beings, for beings are without limit.  
Because of the limitlessness of this, know  
That limitless buddhahood is not hard to gain.

Those who remain for an immeasurable time  
Seek immeasurable enlightenment  
For the sake of immeasurable beings  
And accomplish immeasurable virtue.

Hence, though enlightenment is measureless,  
How could they fail to attain it  
Before long through a combination  
Of these four immeasurable ways?

This also indicates how the accumulation of merit becomes limitless and the sentient beings for whose purpose you accumulate merit is limitless. So, as the purpose of taking bodhisattva vows is directed to limitless beings, the merit you accumulate through it is also limitless.

Then the text continues:

It is most wonderful to think, "If only I could attain buddhahood in a brief time for the sake of living beings," because you are moved by the very intense power of your love, compassion, and spirit of enlightenment.

This sentence is saying that it is wonderful and praiseworthy if those, who, having cultivated a strong force of love, compassion and bodhicitta towards all sentient beings, and then moved by the force of love and compassion, generate an urge to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible, in the shortest timeframe. When it says here, *it is most wonderful*, this could refer to bodhisattvas who engage in the tantric path. However, bodhisattvas don't engage in the tantric path from the beginning; they first cultivate and develop love, compassion and bodhicitta. Because of the intense and strong force of their love and compassion towards all beings they follow the quick path to enlightenment.

Then the text continues:

However, when you are not within the sphere of these motivations, and you see the necessity of a very long training in endless deeds and that much hard work is required, you might think, "If this is the case, who could possibly do it?" If you should then claim that you are seeking a quick path, you directly damage the engaged spirit of enlightenment and indirectly damage the aspirational spirit of enlightenment.

Those who choose the quick path are making a mistake because their rationale for following the quick path is that they think the sutra path is too difficult, as it requires accumulating an enormous amount of merit over such a long period of time. In other words, they lack the courage to follow the sutra path. Moreover, their way of thinking could directly damage their engaging bodhicitta and indirectly damage their aspirational bodhicitta.

As the text states:

Your capacity for the Mahayana lineage steadily weakens, and your enlightenment fades into the remote distance, for you have utterly contradicted what Nagarjuna and Asanga determined to be the Conqueror's own thought on how to increasingly strengthen the spirit of enlightenment.

Thus, since becoming discouraged and remaining so brings no benefit at all and only leads to further discouragement, understand well the methods for achieving enlightenment and uplift your mind.

In these lines, the text asks us if there are any benefits or advantages to feeling discouraged. There are none at all. If we feel discouraged and don't overcome that, then that can lead to further discouragement, eventually making it impossible or extremely difficult to come out of that state. Therefore, we need to realise that discouragement can be a great obstacle to achieving our goals; whether they be spiritual or worldly. So we should think of overcoming that discouragement, and the method is to reflect on something

which will help uplift the mind. So understand well the methods for achieving enlightenment and uplift your mind.

When you do this, the completion of your aims is as if in your hand.

Rather than feeling hopeless and discouraged, we should direct our mind to what can be done to achieve our goal. As we do this, we will begin to see how we can achieve that goal completely. When we gain confidence about how we can achieve the goal, then, as it says here, we feel as though we have already accomplished the goal; *the completion of your aims is as if in your hand*. Then there's a quote:

The *Garland of Birth Stories* says:

Discouragement does not help to free you from misfortune,

So, rather than torment yourself in sorrow,

Develop stable proficiency in the required goals.

Then even the very difficult becomes easy, bringing liberation.

So achieve what must be done by the indicated method  
Without making yourself fearful and unhappy.

Support yourself with stability that has the brilliance of proficiency,

Then, the achievement of all aims is in your hand.

This passage from The *Garland of Birth Stories* is very effective advice, and also very inspirational. I would encourage you to memorise these words so that you can easily remember this advice and its meaning whenever you need to apply it.

Saying *discouragement does not help to free you from misfortune*, this is something we have to say to ourselves. Sometimes we feel discouraged by not being able to achieve what we want to achieve, or not being able to have things that we want to have; whether that is in the form of knowledge, material objects, or whatever it may be. There is a desire and interest to have something, but for whatever reason we are discouraged from pursuing it, and we think we will not be able to accomplish it. As a result, we will feel despair and anxiety and even depression. That's what it is saying: *discouragement does not help to free you from misfortune or from your despair*, and it won't help you to come out of that despair.

*Rather than torment yourself in sorrow* means that you may be discouraged and suffering because you don't understand certain things, or you are unable to have certain things. In this situation, you need to recognise that the knowledge you want is not going to arise through feeling discouraged and doing nothing, nor is the thing you want going to come to you.

*So rather than torment yourself in sorrow, develop stable proficiency in the required goals* and focus on directing your attention towards achieving that. Educate yourself on how to achieve what you want to achieve. In this way, *even the very difficult becomes easy, bringing liberation*.

The next verse, beginning with *So achieve what must be done by the indicated method without making yourself fearful and unhappy* indicates that rather than being overwhelmed by a sense of discouragement, if we focus on how to achieve what we can do, then our knowledge will increase, and through this we will be able to get rid of discouragement. Then some positive thoughts about our ability to achieve the goal will arise, which is as if the goal was already in our own hand.

As we can see here in the *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*, Lama Tsongkhapa cites the scriptures written by great and well-known early Buddhist masters; this is one of the hallmarks of Tsongkhapa's writings.

The text continues:

Arya Asanga says repeatedly that you have both to know well the methods of training in extensive practice without being discouraged and to not be satisfied with only minimal qualities.

As we direct our attention to learning the major scriptures, we will begin to find out more and more about the subject matter. However, this should not cause us to feel discouraged from learning more. Nor should this cause us to be satisfied with just a partial understanding. If we are not careful, this can easily happen with us. As we make some progress with our practice or we gain more knowledge, we inflate ourselves with a sense of pride. With this pride, we feel some sort of contentment, as if we have finished learning or have no more to learn. Such a false sense of contentment is an obstacle for our progress.

Then the text says:

At present you think, "I have reached a high level of the path," when you have produced a single approximation of a good quality; even if it is an actual good quality, it is only one aspect of the path. You are content to meditate solely on it. But then those knowledgeable in the key points of the path explain from within the guidelines of scripture and reasoning that it is indeed a fraction of virtue, but with just that alone you have not reached anywhere. When you understand what they have said, you become extremely discouraged. Thus, those who do not remain satisfied with just some portion of virtue, who seek higher distinction, and who are not discouraged even with the necessity to learn limitless trainings are extremely rare.

It says here that, amongst those who find out precisely what it takes to achieve supreme enlightenment, not becoming discouraged is very rare.

However, if we relate this to our practice, then as Lama Tsongkhapa said here, we are not one of those people. That is because at the moment we rather think that we are doing well in our practice and are satisfied with it. Not only is our knowledge very limited, but we are so satisfied with that limited knowledge that we cannot see anything beyond that, or the need to learn beyond that. Then, if we go outside of what we know and what practice we do, we will be discouraged.

For those who truly follow the path, the instructions given here are very real and the true practitioner will find them very effective and beneficial for making progress.

### (b") Gathering the forces of the favorable conditions

This section has four parts:

1. Developing the power of aspiration
2. Developing the power of steadfastness
3. Developing the power of joy
4. The power of relinquishment

#### (1") Developing the power of aspiration

As it is said that yearning acts as the basis for joyous perseverance, aspiration here refers to yearning.

The Tibetan word for the first power - yearning - is *mopa* which is said to refer to aspiration, of *dunpa* in Tibetan.

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Then the text says:

The need to generate it is stated in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*:

My present destitution has arisen  
From my not aspiring for the teachings  
Both now and in the past.  
Who would forsake aspiration for the teachings?  
The Sage declared aspiration  
The root of all aspects of virtue.

It then states how to develop aspiration:

Its root, in turn, is constant meditation  
On karma's fruitional effects.

This means that the way to develop aspiration is to meditate on how pleasant and unpleasant effects arise from virtuous and non-virtuous karma respectively.

In fact, this is exactly what I brought up earlier in this talk. In terms of our practice it is most important to aspire to practise karma, in terms of what to adopt and what to avoid. This aspiration is the root cause of developing virtue. Then, as a way to cultivate that aspiration, the text refers to the subject matter of knowing the results of positive and negative karma, or actions. Therefore, it is talking about the aspiration to adopt virtue or positive actions, and to abandon non-virtue or negative actions.

Then the text continues:

This is because it is taught that faith acts as the basis for yearning, so that the faith of conviction in the two types of karma and their effects will generate two kinds of desire: to eliminate non-virtuous karma and to adopt virtuous karma.

In order to generate an aspiration, we need to cultivate faith. Here, faith refers to a 'conviction faith'. There are two types of conviction faith relating to the cause and effect of good and bad karma: good karma results in happiness and bad karma results in suffering. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate this conviction faith in the infallibility of the causal link between these two karmas (good and bad karma).

The fact that we are very behind with our practice, or that we lack interest in our practice, is clearly because of our lack of conviction faith in the functioning of good and bad karma. Essentially, in order to generate such a conviction faith, we have to ask ourselves whether or not there is a cause for things and events to happen.

Of course, everything happens because of causes. For example, in order to reap a good harvest the farmers initially sow the seed, and thus create the causes. They sow the seed because they know that the harvest depends on the cause. The happiness we seek and the suffering we wish to avoid also depends on causes. So, to cultivate such conviction faith in karma we have to ask the question, 'What is the cause?'

If it were the case that there is a cause for everything, what is the cause for happiness? To go into more detail about the law of karma we should refer to the explanation of karma in the section of the small stages of the path. In Buddhism, the teaching on the law of karma explains how beings are born in different realms according to their individual karma, and that's how the idea of past and future lives comes into being. However, those who don't accept this doctrine of karma of course think that, 'everything is created by God', and that God's creation is absolute, which gives no room for any questioning.

We will finish at this point in the text:

Furthermore, you consider karma and its effects in general, and in particular, the causality underlying the benefits of the bodhisattva deeds and the faults of violating them. Understand these from the relevant sections of this text.

So, we will leave it here and do the Twenty-one Tara prayers for Venerable Jampa who is having an operation on Friday, and for Ingrid Sorum.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Llysse Velez  
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Edited Version*

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# The Six Perfections

ଆଶା ସିଦ୍ଧାନ୍ତକର୍ମଶାସ୍ତ୍ରମାଲା

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsiring

3 September 2019

We will do our usual giving and taking meditation.

[Meditation]

Try to begin with the proper motivation. We need to cultivate whatever understanding of the proper motivation we have, and put that understanding into practice.

The reason why we follow the Dharma or meditation practice is to train our mind to be more kind-hearted and more wholesome. So, as we engage in this training, it is important that right at the beginning we make an effort to generate a positive and very good state of mind as part of our motivation.

I have mentioned in past teachings that there should be a difference between people who have knowledge of the Dharma, and people who don't have knowledge of the Dharma, in terms of how you live your life, and in particular, the way you manage any adverse or difficult situations. It is very important that those with knowledge of the Dharma and mind training apply it in their lives, otherwise having that Dharma knowledge will make no difference. Let's say you confront a situation where someone is annoying and harming you. With the application of Dharma knowledge you can prevent feelings of anger or wanting to retaliate, and thereby feel empathy and love for the perpetrator while maintaining your peace and sanity. One effective way to handle the situation in a more positive and holistic way is to view the perpetrator as being separate from their actions.

As Dharma practitioners we need to prepare ourselves not only in managing afflictive emotions such as anger as they arise, but also preventing them from arising in the first place. On the other hand, those who lack Dharma knowledge do not contemplate overcoming afflictive emotions, and when they face adverse situations, they won't consider tolerating that so they generate hatred and react negatively towards the perpetrator. The fact is that if we let anger control us, then we lose our peace and happiness and will also cause harm to others. Alternatively, if we overcome anger and cultivate loving kindness, we can maintain inner peace and happiness and be in a position to prevent any harmful actions. This is what the Buddha meant when he said in the *Dhammapada*, 'One truly is the protector of oneself; who else could the protector be? With oneself fully controlled, one gains a mastery that is hard to gain.' If you utilise your understanding and knowledge of the right approach then you can prevent any adverse or unfavourable situations from disturbing your mind.

## (b") Gathering the forces of the favourable conditions

## (1") Developing the power of aspiration (cont.)

At the last teaching we stopped at this sentence in the text:

Furthermore, you consider karma and its effects in general, and in particular, the causality underlying the benefits of the bodhisattva deeds and the faults of violating them.

Following this quotation, the text refers back to an earlier quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*.

It then states how to develop aspiration:

Its root, in turn, is constant meditation  
On karma's fruitional effects.

This means that the way to develop aspiration is to meditate on how pleasant and unpleasant effects arise from virtuous and non-virtuous karma respectively.

*This means that the way to develop aspiration primarily refers to conviction faith in how pleasant and unpleasant effects arise from virtuous and non-virtuous karma respectively.* Here we find an instruction on the importance of applying the fundamental Buddhist practice of the law of karma. In order to feel motivated to put this into practice, we need to generate and develop a conviction faith in the law of karma which is that the result of good karma is pleasant and desirable, whereas the result of evil or non-virtuous actions is unpleasant or undesirable. Cultivating this conviction faith in the pleasant and unpleasant effect of virtuous and non-virtuous actions respectively is the very core of our practice.

The result of virtuous actions is pleasant and desirable to us, so we need to understand that we must adopt virtuous actions. On the other hand, we must abandon non-virtuous actions because their results are unpleasant and undesirable. We can think of the pleasant or unpleasant result of karma in terms of a ripening or an environmental result. Therefore, here the emphasis is on cultivating and developing two types of conviction faith relating to the pleasant effects of virtuous actions and the unpleasant effects of evil or non-virtuous actions, and as a result, deciding to adopt virtuous actions and abandon non-virtuous actions.

The text continues:

Furthermore, you consider karma and its effects in general, and in particular, the causality underlying the benefits of the bodhisattva deeds and the faults of violating them.

*Furthermore, you consider karma and its effects in general* relates to the presentation of karma in general as expounded in the small stages of the path. The four general characteristics of karma are:

- Karma is definite
- Karma increases
- We cannot meet with a result of karma that we have not created
- The karma we create isn't exhausted.

This is emphasising that we should cultivate conviction faith in these four characteristics of karma in order to feel motivated to engage in practice with joyful effort.

For example, karma is certain or definite refers to the certainty that virtuous actions produce the result of happiness. If we cultivate a genuine strong faith in that, it will affect our actions and our practice. Simply cultivating such faith alone can be an effective cause to deter us from evil actions and lead us to create positive actions through positive thoughts and deeds. We can only reap the benefits of the Dharma by putting it into practice.

The text also touches on the bodhisattva deeds in terms of the six perfections of giving, morality and so forth, and the faults of violating these six, such as miserliness, immorality and so forth. In saying *causality underlying the benefits of the bodhisattva deeds and the faults of violating them*, the text is referring to the benefit of the six perfections followed by the faults or shortcomings of the opposite to each of those six perfections.

Next the text states:

Understand these from the relevant sections of this text.

Once you aspire to the Mahayana, you enter its door through a commitment to clear away all faults and achieve all good qualities for yourself and others.

Here, the words *once you aspire to Mahayana* indicate the generation of the bodhicitta mind which has two aspirations: the aspiration to achieve supreme enlightenment and the aspiration to achieve the welfare of other beings. Once you generate this bodhicitta then *you enter its door* which refers to entering the door of the Great Vehicle or the Mahayana. Then *through commitment to clear away all faults and achieve all good qualities* – referring to the cultivation of the aspirational bodhicitta mind – you commit yourself to achieving enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings.

We continue with the text:

You must exhort yourself, thinking, “I will have to meditate for many eons to purify myself of every single fault along with its latent propensity and to develop every single good quality to the fullest extent. Yet since I have not even a fraction of the joyous perseverance needed to clear away faults or accomplish good qualities, I have pointlessly wasted my leisure.”

Here we reflect on what it takes to achieve enlightenment. Initially you generate the bodhicitta mind through which you enter the Mahayana door and then commit yourself to achieving complete enlightenment, the state where you *clear away all faults and achieve all good qualities for yourself and others*. With the bodhicitta mind, you must have the motivation and courage to say, “*I will have to meditate for many eons to purify myself of every single fault along with its latent propensity*.” The indication here is that it is not enough just to abandon all the mental delusions, such as desire, but the latencies of all such delusions have to be abandoned as well. Even though an arhat or foe destroyer of the Lesser Vehicle has abandoned afflictive obscurations, they have not abandoned the latencies of those afflictive obscurations, i.e. they have not abandoned the subtle form of false or dualistic appearance.

*You need to purify [ourselves] of every single fault along with its latent propensity and to develop every single good quality to the fullest extent. Yet since I have not even a fraction of the joyous perseverance needed to clear away faults or accomplish good qualities, I have pointlessly wasted my leisure.* As indicated here, as you gain a full and complete understanding of what it takes to achieve complete enlightenment, and then consider where you are and your capability in terms of the path to enlightenment, there is a good chance that you will become discouraged. This is because you realise that you have not removed even a single fault or achieved a single excellent quality. When you think about this, and the amount of merit needed to achieve the major and minor signs of a buddha, the amount needed to achieve even a single hair of a buddha is enormous. With an understanding of the stages of the path and how little one has progressed on the path, a sense of discouragement may arise.

The text continues with this quote:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

I will destroy the immeasurable  
Faults of myself and others.  
To destroy each fault  
Will take an ocean of eons.

But if I cannot see in myself even a fraction  
Of the effort needed to terminate a fault,  
I am a source of measureless suffering.  
Why does my heart not break?

I will accomplish numerous  
Good qualities for myself and others.  
To cultivate each good quality  
Requires an ocean of eons,  
But I have never conditioned myself  
To even a mere fraction of a good quality.  
Somehow I have obtained this life –  
It is appalling to waste it.

## (2") Developing the power of steadfastness

Having generated joyful effort through the power of aspiration, we need to cultivate the power of steadfastness in order to maintain our effort until we successfully achieve our goal.

As the text says:

Developing the power of steadfastness means that you bring to conclusion, without turning back, anything at which you joyously persevere. First, do not try to do everything; examine the situation carefully. If you see that you can do it, you engage in it; whereas if you cannot do it, you do not engage in it.

This relates to how to bring steadfastness to our effort. As indicated here, whatever the task that we commence, whether it is spiritual or worldly, if we are steadfast, we will never give it up until we complete it. The first piece of the advice is *do not try to do everything; examine the situation carefully*. This is clearly saying that we should not jump into taking on tasks. Before we commence a task, we should carefully examine if we have the ability to accomplish that task. If we lack the ability, then, as the text is saying, it is better not to begin it in the first place. However, *if you see that you can do it, you engage in it*. If you have confidence that you can achieve the task, then you engage in it.

If you doubt that you are able to achieve that task then, as suggested here, *if you cannot do it, you do not engage in it*. The text then elaborates on why it is better not to begin a task if we think that we cannot achieve it.

You should not even start in the first place things you will do for a while and then discard.

As the text clearly says, if we start some task that we are not able to achieve then we *will give up in the middle*. Essentially the reason is:

The reason is that if you become habituated to giving up in the middle what you have committed yourself to do, then through this conditioning you will in other lives again abandon your commitment to the training, etc.

Rather than acquiring the habit of starting something and then giving up before you complete it, it is better not to start that task in the first place. Quite often we do things simply because someone else is doing them. We want to do the same thing, but don't give much thought to whether we can, in fact, do it. For example, we take too many commitments in our practice and later we are not able to keep up with them.

If you start something without thoroughly examining the task in advance, you may give it up in the middle and not complete the task. That's why the text is saying it is wiser not to engage in a task that you think you cannot accomplish, in order to prevent the habit of stopping tasks

in the middle and not completing them. Otherwise, we become habituated *through conditioning* and then *you will in other lives again abandon your commitment to the training*. As the text clearly states, not completing tasks will not only prevent us from achieving our set goal in the immediate time frame or in this life, but this habit of giving up in the middle of a task will also have an impact on our future lives as well.

Consequently, your sin will increase in that life, and in subsequent lives the suffering that is the effect of this sin will increase. Furthermore, you will not accomplish other virtues because you will be thinking of carrying out your earlier commitment; there will be an inferior result because you turned away from your earlier commitment; and your earlier commitment itself will not be fulfilled because you did not follow through.

Essentially this is indicating that if we fall into this habit of not completing whatever task we start, not only will we fail to achieve the task we started, but it will also be an obstacle to undertaking other tasks as well.

The text continues:

In sum, committing yourself to do something but leaving it unfinished is a hindrance to your accomplishment of other projects, and the conditioning also destabilizes your commitment to the vows you have taken. In this vein, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

First I examine the endeavor  
And then undertake it or not.  
If unable, it is best not to undertake it,  
But once begun, I will not turn back.

Otherwise I will be conditioned to this [starting and then stopping] in other lives  
And my sin and suffering will increase.  
Also, other actions and their results  
Will be poor and unaccomplished.

Therefore, if you want to complete what you have committed yourself to do, cultivate three types of pride.

The three types of pride are explained in the following quote:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

You should have pride in three areas:  
Action, ability, and afflictions.

The three types of pride are pride about action, ability and afflictions. Here the term 'pride' is not used in the sense of pride being an affliction or delusion. It is used in the sense of generating spirit or courage and determination. Next, we look into the meaning of each of these types of pride.

*Pride about action* means that no matter who else may be your companion as you practice the path, you do not count on them but accomplish it yourself alone.

This clearly states that pride about action is a form of mental spirit and courage that we need in our spiritual practice. We need the kind of courage that says, 'I can do it all by myself and don't need help from others.' As the text says:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

"I alone shall do it."

Also Nagarjuna's *Friendly Letter (Suhrl-lekha)* says:

Liberation depends on oneself;  
It never occurs through the help of others.

To be more specific, in order to reach the state of liberation we have to make an effort; if we do not make effort, then we won't reach the state of liberation. Our liberation is

dependent on ourselves alone and no one else. Therefore, we need to say, 'I must make effort to achieve liberation, and I won't rely on others to give me that.'

Then:

The thought, "I alone shall achieve this without having any expectation of others," is similar to pride, so it is given the name "pride about action."

As mentioned earlier, 'pride' in the context of pride about action, is not the pride that is a type of mental delusion. Here it is the kind of spirit and courage that we need to generate as we engage in spiritual practice, which provides an impetus to maintain steadfastness in our practice.

Next:

*Pride about ability* means that you accomplish your own and others' welfare, thinking: "Since living beings are under the power of afflictions, they are unable to achieve even their own welfare, much less the welfare of others. I am able to accomplish the welfare of both myself and others."

Pride about ability indicates that you have confidence in your ability which, you are saying, no other beings possess. They cannot even benefit themselves due to the power of their mental afflictions let alone working to benefit others. However, as says here, *I am able to accomplish the welfare of both myself and others*. With this you are generating pride in your ability.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

The beings of this world, subject to the afflictions,  
Cannot achieve their own welfare.  
They are not as able as I am,  
So I shall do it for them.

Then the text continues:

Furthermore, practice while thinking, "If these beings strive at lowly activities without interruption, why should I not perform the actions that will achieve the perfect effect?" *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

If others perform lowly actions,  
How can I be idle?

However, when you achieve these two prides [about action and ability], you should not do so with self-conceit, out of contempt for others. Rather, regard others with compassion, and do not mix in any pride.

Again, the text is clarifying how pride about action and ability is different from the deluded form of pride, because it is not a mental attitude of pride or arrogance where the self is viewed as above all others. *You should not do with self-conceit*, indicates that normally pride means looking down on or belittling others. An example to illustrate a person with pride is someone on the top of the hill who sees himself above all others, who are below them. However, the word 'pride' here doesn't have that deluded sense of self-importance. *Rather regard others with compassion and do not mix in any [deluded] pride*.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

I do not do it out of pride,  
I should have no pride.

Thinking, "Others are not capable; I am able," again resembles pride, so it is labelled "pride."

Next, the third type of pride is introduced.

*Pride about afflictions* means that with contempt for the afflictions on all occasions, you think, "I shall be victorious over these; they shall never defeat me." It means being

steadfast after you have generated the courageous thought to destroy the incompatible factors.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

I shall conquer all;  
Nothing shall defeat me.  
I, a child of the Victorious Lion,  
Shall continue to have this pride.

Otherwise, if you lose courage, even a small incompatible factor will harm you.

This clearly refers to showing courage in combating the afflictions. If you cultivate such courage you will not fall under the influence of mental afflictions; rather you will be on top of them at all times. So we can see how it is very important to have this kind of courage because it strengthens the force of our ability to counteract the mental afflictions for which we need to have a strong opponent force. Developing that courage is what cultivating pride about afflictions is all about. As the text says, *if you lose courage about the afflictions then even a small incompatible factor will harm you.*

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

Even a crow acts like a garuda  
When it finds a dying snake.  
If I am feeble,  
Even a slight shortcoming will harm me.

According to this example, when a crow, which is an ordinary bird, sees a dying snake, it will act like a *garuda*. Likewise, if we are weak and lack spirit and courage then even a minor downfall in our practice can cause us great harm.

How can one who gives up, discouraged,  
Find freedom from destitution?

Can you reach your goal if you simply remain discouraged and give up whatever you have studied in the past? Does this help you to reach your goal? Of course not!

Sha-ra-wa said:

The happiness of those who cast aside the teaching does not exceed their happiness before doing so. Consider the fact that if you give up the teaching in this lifetime, you must hereafter undergo endless suffering.

Sharawa is raising this question: if we give up or don't follow the teachings or the Dharma will we find more happiness? Of course, not. Sharawa continues:

If you make no effort, the afflictions will not look upon you with compassion.

Earlier the text talked about the necessity of having this courageous mind in order to combat the mental afflictions. If we give up our practice because we hope that the mental afflictions will show us compassion and mercy, then, we are wrong, because the afflictions will never show us compassion. Furthermore:

Also, the remedy will not say, "You are unable to cultivate me, so I will complete the task for you." Even the buddhas and bodhisattvas will not be able to protect you.

We have a saying that if we don't have the ring of faith in the Dharma then the hook of the compassion of all the buddhas cannot hold us up. Again, the text is saying that without making an effort from our own side and maintaining a good motivation and high spirit in our practice, then even the buddhas and bodhisattvas will not be able to protect us.

In conclusion:

If you apply the aforementioned three prides, even great incompatible factors cannot block you, so you must generate these three kinds of pride. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Against one who strives with pride  
Even great obstacles will be in trouble.  
So with a steadfast mind  
I will overcome my shortcomings.

Otherwise, if practitioners are defeated by their shortcomings, their desire to conquer the afflictions of the three realms will be an embarrassment among the learned. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

If I am defeated by shortcomings,  
My desire to conquer the three realms is a joke.

It is called "pride about afflictions" because you have contempt for the afflictions and then want to destroy them.

Some commentators to *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* explain this pride about afflictions differently, but I think the above explanation accords with the text.

Thus, stop expecting something from others and put on the armour of doing it alone. That is, be confident and think, "Unlike me, others cannot do it. I can do it." When you practice with this perspective, you are sure that you will defeat the afflictions - that they will never defeat you - and you consider that it would be a mistake to abandon your commitment after a while. Train yourself until your mind is steadfast in the desire to finish everything to which you have committed yourself after you have carefully examined whether you can do it.

Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo  
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Edited Version

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## *The Six Perfections*

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# Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga Translated by Sandup Tsering

**10 September 2019**

As usual, we will begin with a short meditation. [Tonglen meditation]

It would be good to try to do at least some meditation regularly. To meditate properly, you should first have a good understanding of the practice - you need to gain what we call the wisdom arising from contemplating the subject matter. With wisdom based on contemplation, the subject matter you meditate on is fully established in your mind, by your own knowledge, based on your own reasoning.

However, to gain such a wisdom arising from contemplation, you have to first gain the wisdom arising from listening to the Dharma through studying. Even if the meditation you engage in is a very simple one, you still need to have some understanding of it.

The topics of our meditation should be based on teachings as taught by the Buddha. Therefore, we must first study the Dharma well to gain the wisdom based on listening to the Dharma. Without the wisdom arising from listening, we cannot produce the wisdom arising from contemplation, and without that, we cannot produce the wisdom arising from meditation. Therefore, it is very important to combine all three - listening, contemplating and meditating - in our practice.

The wisdom arising from listening is just based on information we have gathered from other people or scriptures; it does not give us a firm ground on which to make steady progress in our practice. In other words, the faith in the Dharma of a person who merely possesses such knowledge can be easily shaken.

Hence, it is crucial that we contemplate and critically examine and analyse the knowledge we gain from listening, and thereby make that knowledge our own. Then, when we engage in meditation practice, we can make good progress.

We will benefit from studying and practising the Dharma if we know it well and do it effectively. It is said, 'being peaceful and (self) controlled is the sign of learning; a decrease of mental afflictions is the sign of meditation.' As a measurement or sign of studying the Dharma, our continuum should be pacified and controlled, and the sign of meditation should be a decrease in our mental afflictions.

### **(3'') Developing the power of joy**

We've finished the section 'developing the power of steadfastness'. Now we move to the next topic, which is 'developing the power of joy'.

The text continues:

You develop the power of joy after the power of aspiration, an intense yearning, produces a joyous perseverance not previously present, and you have achieved the power of steadfastness (also called the power of pride) which causes the perseverance that has already developed to be irreversible. The power of joy means that when you first engage in an activity, you do it joyfully, and once you have

engaged, you have a sense of being insatiable in that you do not want to discontinue the activity.

Here again we find a profound instruction from Lama Tsongkhapa's own experience relating to how to sustain and develop joyful effort. What is clearly explained here is how, through cultivating the power of aspiration, we can generate the joyful effort we have not yet generated. Then, through cultivating the power of steadfastness or pride, we can maintain the joyful effort we have already generated. Regarding the power of steadfastness, we have already learned about the different types of pride, which really refer to types of courage. By cultivating such courage, we will be able to increase whatever joyful effort we have generated.

Regarding the power of joy, the text says that *the power of joy means that when you first engage in an activity, right from the very beginning, you do it joyfully, and once you have engaged, you have a sense of being insatiable*. The implication is that you enjoy the virtuous activity so much that, no matter how much you do it, you want to do it more; as it says here, you feel insatiable and *you do not want to discontinue the activity*.

The last sentence – *the power of joy means that when you first engage in an activity, you do it joyfully, and once you have engaged, you have a sense of being insatiable in that you do not want to discontinue the activity* – summarises the meaning of the power of joy. The text then further explains the meaning of the power of joy:

With respect to how you develop this sense of insatiability, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

Like those who want the pleasure that results from play,  
Bodhisattvas are passionate  
About any activity they have to do.  
Insatiable, they take joy in their work.

This verse from Shantideva's text shows us the insatiable joy that bodhisattvas take while engaging in practice. The verse refers to *any activity they have to do*, meaning virtuous activities, which may be listening to or contemplating the Dharma, meditating on bodhicitta, and so forth. So, you take tremendous joy in doing your practice. Your joy is so great you have a sense of insatiability in that you continuously want to engage in that practice.

The text continues:

So strive with an attitude like that of children who engage in play without being satiated.

As this example clearly explains, we should engage in virtue as joyfully as when children immerse themselves in play and can never have enough of it.

The text continues:

That is, you must be just as insatiable about what causes pleasurable results as you are about the results themselves.

Further, here Lama Tsongkhapa points out that, just as we should be insatiable about the pleasurable results of our actions, so too should we be insatiable about what causes these pleasurable results.

The text continues:

For, if ordinary persons strive even when they are uncertain whether they will obtain a pleasant result, what need is there to speak about activities, which are certain to bear pleasurable results?

To show why we should be motivated to put continuous effort into virtuous activities, the analogy is used here of how ordinary people, like business people, or farmers, put tremendous effort into what they're doing, even though

there's no guarantee of achieving the anticipated result. Yet we see them putting great effort into their endeavours.

As it says here, *what need is there to speak about activities which are certain to bear pleasurable results?* The words *what need is there to speak about activities* refer to virtuous activities; we need to understand that when we engage in virtuous practice, there is no doubt that this will bring happiness. There's no question about that. If we engage in any kind of virtuous action conjoined with a bodhicitta mind, or thought of renunciation, there is no doubt the benefit will be enormous. The short-term benefit is finding a good rebirth, and the long-term benefit is achieving the everlasting state of happiness of liberation, or even the omniscient state of buddhahood.

As we think about the fact that virtuous practice will definitely bring us the result of happiness, and observe how ordinary people direct tremendous effort into something that is not guaranteed to achieve their desired result, we can be inspired to generate joyful effort in virtuous practice and clearly see the reason and worth of not saying to ourselves, 'that is enough virtue.' In relation to this:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Even though they work for the sake of happiness,  
It is uncertain whether happiness will come.  
But as for those whose work itself is happiness,  
How can they be happy unless they work?

The text continues:

This is also the reason why being satiated is wrong.

Here, it says that being satiated or contented with our virtuous practice is wrong – it is wrong to feel that it is enough to do a bit of practice. Rather we should not be contented with our practice,. As it says here:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

If I am never satiated by sensual desires,  
Which are like honey on a razor's edge,  
How could I be satiated with merit,  
Whose fruition is happiness and peace?

So, while we should not be satiated with virtuous practice, we should be satisfied with sensual pleasures. As it says here:

Develop an attitude of being insatiable, thinking, "Indulging in sensual pleasures is like licking honey off the sharp blade of a razor; it is the source of a little sweetness, but it slices up the tongue.

The analogy here compares sensual pleasure to the sweet taste of honey on the sharp blade of a razor. If you try to lick honey smeared on the sharp edge of a razor just to experience its sweetness, you will end up cutting your tongue, and you will suffer greatly. This analogy shows how we inflict great suffering and pain on ourselves as a result of our attachment to, and indulgence in, short-lived sensual pleasures.

The text continues:

If I cannot get enough of this experience, which gives me great suffering for the sake of just a slight, temporary pleasure, what sense could there be in feeling that I have had enough of the collections of merit and sublime wisdom, which give flawless, infinite happiness, both immediate and long-term?"

Here, we find a really valuable subject to contemplate and meditate on. Our situation is quite different to what is instructed here. The text advises that we should engage in

virtuous practice, and then explains why – because the long-and short-term benefit we derive from such practice is enormous. So, not only should we engage in virtuous practice, but we have good reason to engage in such practice with joy, with an insatiable desire for virtue, because of the great benefit we derive from it.

Yet we are attracted to sensual pleasures, such as the pleasure of the five sense objects – form, sound, smell, taste and touch. We go after and are never contented with sensual pleasures, even though such pleasure is short-lived, and the suffering we experience for the sake of it is great. This is very important to meditate upon and recognise. Our meditation practice should enable us to throw light on the reality, the truth, of what's truly beneficial or harmful for us, in both the short- and long-term. Our practice must transform us from inside. In this way, we can become true Dharma practitioners, not just externally, but from inside.

Otherwise, if we don't overcome whatever confusion we may have about what really brings benefit or harm to us in the long-run, we will willingly and deliberately engage in things that give us only short-term pleasure, but immense suffering in the long-run.

If we observe our own experience, we will notice that we have a narrow view of reality, because we only see and are attracted to things that directly appeal to us. We remain blind to the longer-term effect of things, as if there were no long-term effect at all. We crave sensual pleasures for the joy they bring us right now, in the immediate timeframe. However, this joy does not last long, and we don't think of the future outcome of indulging in that object, as if that future outcome did not exist or matter to us. However, when we recognise the long-term effect of sensual pleasures, we will be able to direct our mind more towards virtuous activities, which bring more benefit to us in the long-run.

The text continues:

Thus, in order to bring to completion the virtuous activities in which you have engaged, enter them as a sun-scorched elephant enters a pleasing lotus pond at noon. Train in this attitude until you produce it.

Here, it clearly says we must contemplate what has been said and familiarise ourselves with this point about the benefit of engaging in virtuous practice and the shortcomings of engaging in worldly activities. As part of our practice, we must really contemplate this, over and over again, to the point where we always feel ready to engage in virtuous practice. Here, the analogy used is that of an elephant that has been experiencing scorching heat on a hot day; at noon, when the elephant sees a pond, it will go and submerge itself in the water. We should contemplate this until the enthusiastic desire or wish to engage in virtue arises naturally.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Thus, in order to finish the work,  
I shall enter into it just as  
An elephant, scorched by the midday sun,  
Comes upon a pond and plunges in.

Now, we've finished the section on 'developing the power of joy', which we understand as the practice of cultivating such joy in virtue that our wish to engage in virtue becomes insatiable.

#### (4") The power of relinquishment

If you become physically or mentally fatigued from your perseverance, you must rest for a while. Otherwise, you will

become exhausted and very disheartened, thereby later preventing your joyous perseverance.

Here, the text talks about the need for our mind and body to rest, especially when we engage in practice for a long period of time, whether that is meditation practice, or a retreat. We must understand that if we feel mentally or physically tired, it's important for us to take a break or rest. We must acknowledge the fact that, right now, at this moment, we have some mental and physical limitations or impediments to our practice, because our mind and body are not as serviceable as they could be. On both the mental and physical levels we have not overcome negativities known in Tibetan as *lus* or *sems-kyi gNed ngan.len*. Therefore, it is important that we take a rest when we get tired in our practice.

The text says, *otherwise, you will become exhausted and very disheartened, thereby later preventing your joyous perseverance.* We know this from our own experience: if we push ourselves too hard in our practice, we can sometimes experience mental stress or tension; we may even physically experience tension, in the form of an acute pain in the back, and so forth. Such pain could then discourage us from engaging in practice, and we may even lose interest in the practice. Therefore, it's important to take a break and have a rest.

However:

Immediately after you have rested, persevere again, and when you have completely finished your earlier activity, do not let this satisfy you.

When it says, *immediately after you have rested, persevere again, it is advising that we should, however, go back to the practice immediately after resting. In our case, we tend to feel a sense of contentment, coupled with a sense of accomplishment, after engaging in a practice for a while, and say to ourselves 'that's enough', and then not go back to the practice. The text says we should not do that, but rather we should continuously carry on with our practice.*

Really, we should be taking what is being said here as advice for our practice. The text says, *immediately after you have rested, persevere again, and when you have completely finished your earlier activity, do not let this satisfy you.* In reality, if we check how we go about our practice, we will note that we have not even finished what we've already started, yet we think we have finished, and satisfy ourselves with our incomplete practice then move on to the next one. The text is saying that, even if you accomplish what you have already started, you should not be satisfied with that, but should strive to achieve even more with your practice.

In a way, this also indicates how we should progress in our spiritual practice, stage by stage.

The text continues:

You must joyously persevere at other, higher activities.

This explains why we should not stop after we have accomplished the first level of our practice. Next:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

When my strength declines,  
I shall leave the task so I can do it later.  
When it is really done, I shall set it aside,  
Seeking the next task and the next.

This summarises what has already been explained.

The text continues:

The next task is important, because if you consider each earlier good quality sufficient, this will be a big obstacle to the attainment of many higher attributes.

'The next task' refers to what was mentioned earlier – after you take a rest, you should not be satisfied with what you have initially accomplished, but rather, after accomplishing the first quality, you should go on to accomplish the 'next task'. This is important, because if you consider each earlier good quality sufficient – if, instead, you satisfy yourself with whatever you have achieved earlier – this will be a big obstacle to the attainment of many higher attributes. In other words, you won't achieve any more or greater qualities.

In a lot of cases, whatever we think we have achieved this year, last year, or even the previous year, we remain at the same level, or with little increase in our knowledge and our qualities. So it's important that we keep working on our practice.

The text continues:

The above presentation shows how to joyously persevere.

This shows us the manner in which we should generate or maintain joyful effort. Next:

Do not overexert yourself. You must avoid both being overly intense and being overly relaxed, so make your effort continuous like a river.

This is saying that what is required is consistency in our practice and maintaining joyful effort. We should not get overly enthusiastic and overly exert ourselves, then suddenly lose interest and even feel depressed. The text is saying our effort should be *like the flow of a river* – we should try to maintain a steady effort, and neither push ourselves too hard nor be too relaxed, but practise in a balanced way. This indicates the importance of having a relaxed approach to our practice.

Next, there is a quote from the glorious Matrceta, or Asvaghosa (or Aryasura), one of the other names for this master:

The glorious Matrceta's *Praise in One Hundred and Fifty Verses* states:

In order to make yourself more exalted  
You never overexerted or relaxed too much.  
Thus your good qualities are indistinguishable  
By former and later phases.

Bo-do-wa also said:

The scouts of Se-mo-dru-wa (Se-mo-dru-ba), for instance, never get there. But the scouts of Chang-wa (Byang-ba) take their time at the start and pursue the robbers until they reach them. Likewise, practice at a measured pace that you can sustain. For example, a louse proceeds at a modest pace but never stops, so it soon arrives; whereas a flea takes great successive leaps and then stops, so it never gets there.

A while ago, I used the example of a race between a louse and a flea. What it's saying here is that our effort should be consistent, and we should proceed like the louse, never stopping; we should not be like a flea, which takes a few jumps and then stops.

If you maintain consistency in your joyful effort, you will achieve success in whatever goal you pursue. But if, instead of being consistent, you make sporadic efforts, you won't achieve your goal.

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

After you have thus identified the three conditions unfavorable to joyous perseverance, you attend to their remedies. You generate three powers: the power of aspiration which is the favorable condition for weakening those as-yet unweakened unfavorable conditions, the power of steadfastness which is the cause of not turning back once you have started, and the power of joy which never wants to discontinue the activity once you have engaged in it. 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.

As it says, *at this point you must develop the power of being intent on joyous perseverance* – so what follows after this is the explanation of how to apply joyful effort in our practice. We will continue with that next week. We'll just read this for now:

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.

Using the example of a great experienced warrior in the battlefield vanquishing an enemy, we should be like that warrior in combating the enemies of the mental afflictions.

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