
The Six Perfections

འཇུག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

16 July 2019

We will begin with our usual meditation followed by the Tara Praises. [*Tonglen meditation*]

(c) How it is not difficult to bear suffering if you gradually grow accustomed to it, starting with the small (cont.)

We will continue with the text, which reads:

If you initially develop a significant degree of courage, even great suffering becomes helpful. It is just like the case of warriors entering a battle and using the sight of their own blood to increase their boldness. If right from the start you belittle yourself, saying, “I have never heard of such a thing, and even if I had heard of it, I could never do something like that,” then even a small suffering becomes a cause for you to turn back from the path.

Here, we find inspiring advice regarding the question of how much we can tolerate any difficulty, hardship or suffering we experience. These lines are saying that it depends on our spirit, courage and determination. We will talk more about this in the next chapter on the perfection of joyous effort.

Here, the analogy of warriors going into battle is used to illustrate mental spirit or courage in the face of hardship. Rather than losing their courage, some warriors become even more determined to combat their enemy the moment they see any kind of injury, such as their own blood. Similarly, if we consider ourselves as Dharma practitioners, we are engaged in a battle against the enemy of our mental delusions or the afflictions within us. Our approach should be such that the stronger or greater the enemy appears to be, the more courage and determination we should muster in fighting it.

On the other hand, if we fail to show such inner courage, especially if we undermine ourselves in the face of such difficulty by simply saying to ourselves: ‘It is too hard, too painful’ and so on, then we may easily give up the fight. In that case, as it says here, you won’t be able to tolerate even minor difficulties and problems in life.

The text continues:

It is just like the case of cowards who see others’ blood and, fainting, fall unconscious.

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Some, seeing their own blood,
Become more intrepid.
Some, seeing others’ blood,
Fall unconscious.

This comes from the mind’s fortitude
Or from its timidity.

In following Dharma practice, if we lack patience, then as soon as we face some adversity – even something very small – we will easily give up our practice and make all kinds of excuses for ourselves. I normally say that the way two people, who may be equally fit and physically strong, cope when facing the same circumstances, can be different. One person may cope very well without any mental stress and

unhappiness, whereas the other, despite being in the exact same situation, may mentally experience more stress and unhappiness. So, we can clearly see that sometimes the way adversity affects us doesn’t always depend on the external conditions, or even the condition of our physical body. Rather, it has much to do with our way of thinking and mental courage, and how we inwardly cope with the situation – this determines whether the situation causes mental stress and unhappiness.

Shantideva’s *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas’ Way of Life* also uses the analogy of warriors who become more inspired when they see their own injuries caused by an enemy. However, when others see such injuries – even a tiny bit of blood – they will immediately lose courage and collapse to the ground, fainting. If we look for the main cause of why some people show courage in that difficult situation, while others completely lose their courage, it isn’t to do with external causes, because both can physically enjoy the same health and strength and confront the same circumstance. Therefore, the different responses are clearly to do with different mental dispositions, spirit and courage.

The strength of our mental spirit and determination is important for achieving both the goals of our Dharma practice and those of our worldly ventures. We learn here about the importance of maintaining a positive mental outlook, self-courage and determination. Whatever goals we wish to achieve, we must maintain strong inner courage, and the willpower and determination to face any hardship to reach our goals. In my case, I have to apply this teaching to Dharma practice because I don’t have any worldly affairs to worry about. But you must apply this advice for a successful worldly life, even if you are not all that serious about Dharma practice. You can’t afford to be laid-back, always relaxing and enjoying yourself, while at the same time wanting to accomplish many things. So really, this advice is very important and relevant.

The reality is that in whatever work you do – even if you go to work for one day – you must be prepared to face some hardships or undesirable conditions. To be productive and to enjoy the work you do in that one day, you have to maintain a level of good, positive motivation and courage. Without that, you will easily lose interest in going to work. This advice also applies to school students. For example, they can’t say to themselves, ‘I am not going to school because I am hungry’. If their motivation is weak, they will easily miss going to school and fall behind in their learning.

So the message here is the importance of developing and maintaining our positive spirit, courage and determination. Then, whatever work or activity we do, even if it is worldly, we will not only be able to overcome any hardship or difficulty we face, but overcome it with great ease. With inner courage and determination, you handle the situation with a pleasant and positive state of mind, and this can be a cause for you to feel positive about what you are doing. If we lack that positive spirit, determination and courage, then we will always be complaining about even the very small problems we face.

In relation to the analogy of the warriors used to illustrate the power of mental spirit or courage, let me tell you about something I heard about that happened during a fighting incident in Tibet. A person engaged in the fight had received multiple bullet wounds, but he held his gun tightly and kept it aimed at the enemy. It seems he was so determined to kill his enemy that he couldn’t even die or let go of the gun. Then he heard his friend say, ‘Don’t worry, I’ve already

killed the enemy'. As soon as he heard that, he relaxed. So, brave warriors do not feel pain even if they are severely injured and are able to keep fighting their enemies.

(c'') A detailed explanation from the viewpoint of the bases

Question: Given that one must accept the suffering that occurs, from where do these sufferings come and how does one accept them?

In this presentation, the great Tsongkhapa makes a good connection between what he has said before and what he says next. What he said before was all about the importance of practising the patience of accepting suffering. In this section, the text goes on to elaborate further, focusing on the kind of suffering that we should accept in cultivating patience or tolerance, explaining the causes of how these sufferings arise, on the bases from where their suffering arises.

Reply: There are eight bases for accepting suffering:

1. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on objects.* Robes, alms, bedding, seat, medicine, and necessities are objects that enhance pure conduct. Without displeasure and disappointment you accept the suffering that arises when these are given to you and you find them to be inferior or too few, or when they are given with disrespect or after a long delay.

Here, the first basis for the practice of accepting suffering is particularly recommended for renunciates or ordained persons. The basis here refers to the base or condition for experiencing suffering, such as living conditions or resources which, as it says, include *robes, alms, bedding, seat, medicine*, etc. In obtaining such resources, renunciates may face a situation where they experience *suffering that arises when they are given to you and you find them to be inferior* – that is, the object or alms given to them or offered to them are inferior in quality. Not only that, but, as it says *they are given with disrespect* – they may be given to them in a disrespectful way or *after a long delay*, even to the point of making them suffer hunger or thirst.

The second basis is:

2. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on worldly concerns.* The nine worldly concerns are: (1) loss; (2) disgrace; (3) blame; (4) pain; (5) disintegration; (6) extinguishment; (7) aging; (8) sickness; and, (9) the death of what is subject to death subsequent to its decay. After you have analyzed the sufferings based on all or each of these, you accept the suffering.

The third one is:

3. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on physical activities.* The four physical activities are moving around, standing, sitting, and lying down. When all day and all night you purify your mind practice of obstructions by means of the first [moving around] and third [sitting] of these four, you are accepting the sufferings that arise from them; however, you do not relax on a couch, chair, or bed of straw or leaves when it is not the time to do so.

We are just reading this out because the meaning is quite self-explanatory. The fourth is:

4. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on upholding the teaching.* The teaching is upheld in seven ways: by (1) worshipping and serving the three jewels; (2) worshipping and serving the guru; (3) understanding the teachings; (4) teaching extensively to others what you have understood; (5) reciting its praises in a loud, clear voice; (6) correctly reflecting on it in solitude; and (7) cultivating meditative serenity and

insight that is imbued with yogic attention. When you strive at these, you accept the sufferings that arise.

The fifth is:

5. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on living by begging.* The seven aspects of living by begging are (1) you experience having an ugly appearance due to shaving off your hair, beard and so forth; (2) you experience wearing cloth that is patched together and is of poor color; (3) you live by restraining yourself from the conduct of worldly persons and act in a way other than they do; (4) you give up farm work, etc., and then live by getting material goods from others, so you live in dependence on others; (5) since you do not accumulate or employ material gain, you seek things such as robes, etc., from others for as long as you live; (6) since you give up sexual intercourse, you turn away from human desires until you die; and (7) since you give up dancing, laughter, and the like, you turn away from human merriment until you die in order to give up friends, intimate companions, childhood friends, and the like, as well as pleasures and enjoyments. You accept the suffering that comes about based on these.

Then:

6. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on fatigue due to perseverance.* You accept the suffering that arises from mental and physical fatigue, hardship, and disturbance while you are persevering at cultivating virtue.

This relates to all the difficulties or obstacles we face in our spiritual practice or meditation practice. Sometimes, we might find the practice of meditation boring, and it can sometimes be physically exhausting. There is also the difficulty that, during our meditation practice, we have to try to keep our mind focused on the meditation object; however, there may be various distractions that can pull our mind out of meditative concentration. Making an effort to prevent such mental distractions can be very difficult. This is what the text is talking about here. We have to accept such difficulties as part of applying the patience of accepting suffering in practising virtue and the Dharma.

The eighth is:

8. *Acceptance of suffering that is based on current tasks.* You accept the suffering that arises from tasks for a renunciate, such as the work associated with the begging bowl, robes, and so forth, or from the tasks for a householder, such as faultless work on a farm, in business, as a government employee, etc.

Even if you are stricken with any of the sufferings that arise in dependence on these eight bases, you do not give up your joyous perseverance at each. You act for the sake of enlightenment, joyfully, not letting such sufferings become an obstacle that causes you to turn back once you have set forth.

(3') Developing the patience of certitude about the teachings

There's not much left now, so we will try to finish this section today.

The patience of certitude about the teachings means generating the forbearance of conviction. It has eight objects:

1. *The object of faith.* This is the good qualities of the three jewels.

2. *The object to be actualized.* This is the reality of the two selflessnesses.

3. *The desired object.* This is the great powers of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, of which there are three – the power of the superknowledges, the power of the six perfections, and the power which is innate.

4. *The object to be adopted.* This is wanting both the cause – good deeds – and the effect of these deeds.

5. *The object to be discarded.* This is wishing to avoid both the cause – misdeeds – and the effect of these deeds.

6. *The object of meditation that is the goal to be achieved.* This is enlightenment.

7. *The object of meditation that is the method for achieving the goal.* This is all the paths of training in the spirit of enlightenment.

8. *The object of subsequent practice through study and reflection.* According to Dro-lung-ba (Gro-lung-pa), this refers to the province of what is to be known, such as impermanence and so forth. *The Power-Lineage Chapter (Bala-gotra-parivarta)* of the *Bodhisattva Levels* mentions that the eighth is the sublime teaching – the twelve branches of scripture and so forth – so I think you have to take it as being this.

These eight show the objects of our practice or the objects of faith relating to our practice. As it says here: (4.) *The object to be adopted. This is wanting both the cause that is good deeds and the effect of these deeds.* (5.) *The object to be discarded. This is wishing to avoid both the cause and misdeeds and the effect of these deeds ...* We have talked about these in relation to our spiritual practice, in which the key elements are to recognise that there are things we should do, accept or adopt, and there are other things we should not do and that we need to discard or abandon. This is what the text is explaining here.

When we think about what to do and what not to do, we have to take into account the causes of both. When it says here *wanting both the cause* or in the next one it says *wishing to avoid*, basically the former relates to the practices we need to adopt. The reason why we need to adopt them is because the result of these things that we need to do are desirable. Whereas we need to discard or avoid other things or practices, because the results of these are undesirable and unpleasant. Therefore, when we talk about the object to be discarded, we must take into account both the cause and the effect.

To continue:

6. *The object of meditation that is the goal to be achieved.* This is enlightenment.

7. *The object of meditation that is the method for achieving the goal.* This is all the paths of training in the spirit of enlightenment.

8. *The object of subsequent practice through study and reflection.* According to Dro-lung-ba (Gro-lung-pa), [one of the great Kadampa masters] this refers to the province of what is to be known, such as impermanence and so forth. *The Power-Lineage Chapter (Bala-gotra-parivarta)* of the *Bodhisattva Levels* mentions that the eighth is the sublime teaching – the twelve branches of scripture and so forth – so I think you have to take it as being this.

The way to have conviction is to become certain about these objects just as they are, and then to think about them again and again, apprehending them without conflict.

This sentence describes what it means by gaining *conviction* or ascertainment in our knowledge of the Dharma. This means that our knowledge or understanding of the meaning is so definite and so clear that there is no room for any conflict to arise in our mind – no contradictory thought or view against our understanding can arise. When we gain such an understanding, we habituate our mind with it – as it says here, we think about it again and again until our mind becomes habituated with this definite understanding.

In accordance with passages in the *Bodhisattva Levels*, I have set forth the set of eight bases with respect to the patience of

accepting suffering and eight objects with respect to the patience of certitude about the teachings. In particular, there is extensive coverage there of the patience of certitude about the teachings.

(d') How to practice

When practicing any kind of patience, you practice it in association with the six supremacies and all six perfections. These are the same as in the earlier explanation, except the generosity of patience means to establish others in patience.

These were all covered in the earlier sections of this teaching.

(e') A summary

The recollection and cultivation of the spirit of enlightenment - the basis of the bodhisattva deeds - is the root of the wish to establish all beings in a patience wherein they have extinguished the contaminations. After you steadily increase this spirit, then aspire to practice the patience of those at high levels and then train your mind in it. Distinguish the trainings for the patience of a beginning bodhisattva, and then learn these properly. If you transgress the boundaries as explained, you must make an effort to amend this. If you neglect these transgressions at the time of practicing these trainings, you will be continually tainted by many great misdeeds, and even in future lifetimes your practice of the marvelous deeds of the bodhisattvas will be extremely difficult. Seeing that the essentials of the path are supreme, practice right now what you can, and inculcate the intention to practice even those you now cannot. If you do this, then, as the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* says, you will bring the perfection of patience to completion with little difficulty and minor suffering.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering
Edited Version*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

23 July 2019

We begin with the usual meditation.

[Meditation]

Before we begin the teaching, ensure that you cultivate the proper motivation, which is very important, as it predetermines the type of actions we create. For receiving the teachings, we need to make sure our motivation is to extend benefit and happiness for all sentient beings.

We have finished the teaching on the perfection of patience, which we went through in great detail.

The next is the fifth perfection, which is the perfection of joyous effort or joyous perseverance.

The presentation of the perfection of joyous perseverance in the text begins with:

(iv) How to train in the perfection of joyous perseverance.

This section has five parts.

(a') What joyous perseverance is

Obviously, in order to learn and train ourselves in the perfection of joyous perseverance, we first need to know what joyous perseverance is. In the presentation of the topic, the text first explains the definition or the meaning of joyous perseverance. This applies to anything we are trying to learn; we begin with its definition, otherwise we may be talking about it for hours and at the end we still don't have the faintest idea of what it is we have been talking about.

The next heading is:

(b') How to begin the practice of joyous perseverance

Simply looking at the outline, we can clearly see the logical structure and sequence, and the purpose of the topic that we are studying. First the text introduces what joyous perseverance means and then it goes into the means of engaging in the practice of joyous perseverance.

The third heading is:

(c') The divisions of joyous perseverance

The text then it shows the divisions or the different types of joyous perseverance. Then it goes onto:

(d') How to practice

And finally:

(e') A summary.

We can notice here the consistency in the outline of this presentation and that of the previous chapters.

(a') What joyous perseverance is

When you have focused upon something virtuous, joyous perseverance is enthusiasm for that virtue.

This, in a nutshell, defines joyous perseverance. It is saying that joyous perseverance is focusing on a virtuous object and its mental attitude or aspect, and taking joy, delight and enthusiasm in that object of virtue.

Here we come across the term, translated as 'joyous perseverance' in English, which is called *tsongdu* in Tibetan. It refers to a specific kind of perseverance or effort or enthusiasm. As implied in the definition, joyous perseverance is a type of perseverance, which sincerely takes joy in virtue. So, it is a wholehearted, joyful and positive mental attitude towards virtue.

The generic term for active effort in Tibetan is *bay.tsol* or *dug.ru*. When we say 'put in an effort', the object or direction of our effort, can be virtuous or non-virtuous, or even neutral. We can also feel joyful or positive in that effort. Hence, the generic term 'effort' or 'perseverance' or 'active enthusiasm', and the term 'joyous perseverance' or 'joyous effort' are quite different. An effort in non-virtue or any worldly activities, or even in some neutral things, is an effort but not joyous perseverance. Likewise, we can sometimes have joyous perseverance in terms of great enthusiasm in virtue but only on a mental level, and not actually putting it into practice by making an effort. In this context, our effort is a joyous perseverance but not an active effort, or in Tibetan *bay.tsol*. Of course, there are instances which are both effort and joyous perseverance, and others which are neither.

The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

What is joyous perseverance? It is delight in virtue.

As we discussed before, essentially the object of enthusiasm or perseverance, whatever term is used, has to be something virtuous and the delight connotes the mental aspect or the attitude of perseverance or enthusiasm.

The definition of joyous perseverance is that which is directed at an object of virtue and sincerely takes delight in virtue. It is a kind of wholehearted, joyful and positive mental attitude towards virtue. The meaning of the terms laziness or slothfulness is the opposite of joyous perseverance in that it takes delight in non-virtue. I would even say, mental afflictions of desire and anger etc, belong to the type of laziness.

In terms of our practice, the implication here is that when we put an effort into our virtuous practices, we must generate joyous perseverance or joyous effort, which is to say mentally enjoying and taking delight in our practices.

The text continues:

The *Bodhisattva Levels* [a text by Asanga] explains it as a flawless state of mind that is enthusiastic about accumulating virtue and working for the welfare of living beings, together with the physical, verbal, and mental activity such a state of mind motivates.

Joyous perseverance, as indicated here, is a force which motivates, directs and drives the actions of our three doors toward virtue in a very joyous, delightful and positive way.

(b') How to begin the practice of joyous perseverance

Frequently reflect upon the benefits of joyously persevering and the faults of not doing so. When you habituate yourself to this reflection you will develop joyous perseverance.

The practical advice here is that we have to develop joyous perseverance and overcome, as much as possible, falling under the influence of laziness. The means to achieve this is by reflecting on the benefits of joyous perseverance. We need to reflect on the benefits of generating joyous perseverance over and over again, until we become very habituated to the knowledge of its benefits. When we become habituated to this knowledge, then, as we wish to gain those benefits, our reflection will lead to the development of joyous perseverance. Conversely, reflecting on the disadvantages and shortcomings of laziness leads us to the thought of abandoning laziness.

I will continue reading from the text.

As to its benefits, the *Exhortation to Wholehearted Resolve* (*Adhyasaya-samcodana-sutra*) says:

Always rely upon noble joyous perseverance,
Which clears away all suffering and darkness,
Which is the basis of freedom from miserable realms,
And which is praised by all the buddhas.

One who joyously perseveres
Has no difficulty accomplishing any project
Whether mundane or supramundane.
Who among the learned is disheartened by joyous
perseverance?

Those who set forth for the buddhas' enlightenment,
Perceive the faults of lethargy and sleepiness,
And then continually persevere with enthusiasm.
So have I advised them.

Perhaps if you read the verses you will understand their meaning.

Always rely upon noble joyous perseverance
Which clears away all suffering

You can think of the word *suffering* here in terms of immediate and long-term future suffering. The immediate or temporary suffering is that which we experience in this life, such as hunger, thirst and the suffering related to our living conditions, such as not having good shelter and so forth. As a benefit of developing joyous effort or perseverance we can eliminate these kinds of immediate suffering, and we can also eliminate the long-term future suffering related to future bad rebirths or samsara entirely. The term *suffering and darkness* in this text has the same meaning as we find in the *Garland of Birth Stories* by Aryasura which says, 'Listening is the supreme lamp dispelling the darkness of ignorance.' Similarly, joyous perseverance has the benefit of dispelling mental dullness.

Which is the basis of freedom from miserable realms,
And which is praised by all the buddhas.

This refers to the long-term benefit of being able to prevent future bad rebirths. The very fact that we have found a good human life and have also been born in a good country is the result of the virtuous practices we have done in the past. For example, taking rebirth in a

good country is the environmental result of a positive karma.

One who joyously perseveres
Has no difficulty accomplishing any project
Whether mundane or supramundane.

These lines explain how, even in worldly terms, we must make an effort to achieve our goal if we are to accomplish anything. The houses, temples, big towns and so forth that we see are the result of the effort and hard labour of the people who made these things. Likewise, taking rebirth in a pure land or a celestial mansion in a supramundane world is dependent on joyous perseverance. As a result of putting in joyous effort, all *mundane* and *supramundane projects* can be achieved.

The next lines are:

Those who set forth for the buddhas' enlightenment,
Perceive the faults of lethargy and sleepiness,
And then continually persevere with enthusiasm.
So have I advised them.

Here we are advised that after one sets one's mind to achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence, or the supreme liberation of complete enlightenment, then it is important to develop a consistent effort in one's practice on the path, both in the immediate time frame and also in the long term.

Also, the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

Joyous perseverance is supreme among virtues;
Based on it, you subsequently attain the rest.
Through it you immediately gain a supreme state of joy,
As well as the mundane and supramundane attainments.

When it says, *through it you immediately gain a supreme state of joy*, that refers to gaining the meditative state of calm abiding and, as a benefit of calm abiding, gaining the joy or bliss of the state of concentration *as well as the mundane and supramundane attainments*.

With joyous perseverance you attain the pleasures desired
in life;
Become possessed of utter purity;
Are liberated, transcending the view of the perishing
aggregates;
And reach buddhahood, the supreme enlightenment.

In these last three lines, the words *utter purity* connote the small stages of the path, and *liberated, transcending the view of the perishing aggregates* connotes the middling stages of the path, and the last one, *reach buddhahood* connotes the great stages of the path.

And also:

One who has joyous perseverance
Is not brought down
By prosperity, afflictions,
Discouragement, or petty attainments.

If we have *joyous perseverance* we won't be deprived or short of wealth or *prosperity*, nor will we be brought down by, or be under the control of the *afflictions*. With joyous effort, we will be overruling the afflictions rather than being brought down by them. *Discouragement* indicates that if we maintain joyous perseverance then we will not experience a loss of courage or distress in our practice, while *petty attainments* indicates that with joyous effort relating to cultivating virtue, we won't be content to reap a small attainment of virtue, rather we will

continuously seek the perfection or full attainment of virtue.

The *Bodhisattva Levels* as well says:

Because joyous perseverance alone, nothing else, is the principal and highest cause for the correct attainment of a bodhisattva's virtuous qualities, the *tathagatas* have pointed it out, declaring, "Joyous perseverance is what brings about the attainment of unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment."

If we read these lines slowly and then reflect on them, then we will realise that the most important thing is to apply this by trying to bring joyous perseverance into our practice, knowing how this joyous perseverance is the principal cause for achieving a bodhisattva's qualities and so forth. Thinking on this we should be motivated to bring joy into our practice.

The *Compendium of the Perfections* also states:

If you are free of fatigue and have great joyous perseverance,
There is nothing you cannot attain or accomplish.

And also:

Even all non-human beings delight in helping you;
You attain all types of meditative concentrations
And spend all periods of the day and night fruitfully.
Your collection of good qualities does not decline,
And your purposes surpassing the affairs of humankind
Flourish like the blue utpala flower.

Can you find the *utpala* flower here? I have heard that it is a flower which comes in white or red and has a very nice fragrance, which lasts for two days. We don't find them in Tibet.

As said in the previous lines, *Your collection of good qualities does not decline*, which is to say, in order to prevent our virtuous qualities from declining we must maintain joyous perseverance, and your purposes surpassing the affairs of humankind, flourish like the blue utpala flower. We have covered this.

As to the faults of not joyously persevering, the *Questions of Sagaramati Sutra* states:

The enlightenment of the lazy is exceedingly far off and distant.

Enlightenment is very far off and distant for someone who is lazy.

The lazy lack all perfections from generosity to wisdom.

With laziness there is no way we can develop all the practices of the perfections: giving, patience, joyous effort, concentration, wisdom and so forth.

The lazy do not work for others' welfare.

It is also very true that somebody who is lazy will not engage in the act of benefiting others.

And the *Mindfulness of the Excellent Teaching (Sad-dharmanusmrty-upasthana)* states as well:

Whoever has laziness -
The single basis of the afflictions -

This is to point out how laziness can act as a cause for all other kinds of affliction to increase. Laziness is almost the single cause for the arising and increase of all other afflictions.

Whoever feels some laziness
Lacks all good qualities.

This means that if you have one laziness, then you don't possess all the excellent qualities.

Thus, if you lack joyous perseverance, you come under the influence of laziness and become poor in all good qualities. Then you lose every temporary and ultimate purpose of being human.

We will stop the teaching here and we recite the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* and dedicate it for the deceased mother of Jools Gardner.

Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Llysse Velez
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering
Edited Version

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

30 July 2019

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

On a daily basis it's beneficial to engage in meditation practice. Many of you are probably doing that, which is a good thing. Our meditation practice should benefit our life at this present moment and in the future. Meditation is not some sort of physical ritual of a sitting posture simply to relax our body without anything happening in our mind. If we follow this kind of meditation, then obviously it won't benefit us on a mental level, and when we go back into everyday life, our mind will be just the same - one filled with all sorts of mental afflictions.

As you know, the word 'meditation' or *gom* in Tibetan, literally means 'to become familiar with' and more specifically here, it means to familiarise or habituate our mind with virtuous objects. So clearly the purpose of meditation is to habituate our mind with virtue. If our mind becomes habituated to virtuous objects, then we can cultivate and increase virtue easily. What we want is a virtuous state of mind that arises very easily and naturally.

However, we are more strongly habituated with non-virtuous states of mind than virtuous states of mind. This is clearly evident in our experience of how negative, non-virtuous states of mind arise so easily, while virtuous states of mind don't arise as easily. This non-virtue serves as the main source of our daily problems. However, we can turn around our mental habituation. It's important to understand that right now we have the opportunity and freedom to make the changes we want and do whatever we want. If we apply the meditation practice properly and effectively, we will definitely be able to habituate our mind with virtue. If we have habituated our mind with a virtuous state of mind while we are alive, it is more likely that at the time of death we will also have a virtuous state of mind, and this in turn will result in a better future rebirth.

We have been engaging in Dharma practice. But if we measure the benefit of our practice in terms of achieving the state of liberation from cyclic existence, or the supreme liberation of complete enlightenment, we will find it extremely difficult to understand that benefit. However, if we measure the benefit of our Dharma practice in terms of our day-to-day, direct or immediate life experience and outcomes, we will understand that. Based on this understanding, conviction and belief, we can then see the benefit of the Dharma in terms of achieving the higher or ultimate goal of liberation.

That's why I say that the main focus of Dharma practice is subduing negative states of mind. When we study and practise the Dharma, we should always be relating it to our mind. Is our application of Dharma helping us to subdue our mind? If it is, then we can clearly appreciate the benefit of Dharma in our life right at this present moment. We can see how the Dharma makes us a calmer, happier and a more joyful person.

In my own Dharma practice, my focus and goal is on cultivating a virtuous state of mind, because I wish the mind that accompanies and goes with me to always be a virtuous one.

Wherever the self or the 'I' is, our mind is there. Our mind is an inseparable companion of the 'I', and we find that if the mind that accompanies us is a virtuous one, it can serve as our trustworthy protection from suffering and from falling into a lower rebirth. In other words, a virtuous state of mind serves as a source of genuine peace and happiness for us now and in the future. Therefore, we can say that Dharma practice brings us happiness and joy in this life as well as in future lives. Indeed, it is true that following the Dharma is like following a joyful path leading to a joyful result.

From this perspective we can understand the true meaning of the Buddha's saying: 'You are your own protector, and you can also be your own worst enemy.' If we practice the Dharma and cultivate a virtuous state of mind with a sense of self-responsibility, then, as the Buddha said, we will become our own protector. However, if we are irresponsible with our thoughts and actions, then we will end up being our own worst enemy because we will be the main cause of our misery and suffering.

(b') How to begin the practice of joyous perseverance (cont.)

Last week we stopped at these lines:

Thus, if you lack joyous perseverance, you come under the influence of laziness and become poor in all good qualities, so you lose every temporary and ultimate purpose of being human.

Prior to this, the text talks about the disadvantages of not having joyful perseverance. If we fall under the influence of laziness, which is the opposite to the joyful perseverance then, as the text said earlier, we do not possess all the excellent qualities. If we fall under the influence of laziness about doing a meditation practice then, either we won't engage in the meditation practice, and even if we do it, the practice won't be very effective.

We need to understand the importance of cultivating this joy or very positive mental attitude from the depths of our hearts in whatever virtuous practice we are doing. As emphasised here, this is very important.

This section has covered the way to generate joyful perseverance by contemplating its advantages on the one hand, and the disadvantages of laziness on the other. It is important to know that the opposite to joyful perseverance is laziness. It's just like love is the opposite to hatred. Our rational mind can tell us that if we cultivate a positive state of mind, then we have to overcome the opposite to that. In the same way, when we talk about generating joyful perseverance, we have to know its opposite force or hindrance, which is laziness. This implies that by overcoming the hindrances or opposite forces, we can naturally generate joyful perseverance.

Next the text goes into the divisions of joyful perseverance.

(c') The divisions of joyous perseverance

As the text says:

The section on the divisions of joyous perseverance has two parts:

1. The actual divisions
2. The method of developing joyous perseverance

As I mentioned last time, if we reflect on the logical sequence of these outlines, it will give us a very good understanding of the topic.

(1') The actual divisions

The section on the actual divisions has three parts:

1. Armor-like joyous perseverance
2. Joyous perseverance of gathering virtue
3. Joyous perseverance of acting for the welfare of living beings

Then the text goes in detail on each.

(a'') Armor-like joyous perseverance

When bodhisattvas joyously persevere, prior to actively engaging themselves they put on the armor of a preliminary enthusiastic thought such as, ...

When it says, *when bodhisattvas joyously persevere, prior to actively engaging* it's talking about what they do prior to engaging in their actual deeds. *They put on the armor of a preliminary enthusiastic thought.* Obviously, the analogy is the wearing of armour. I don't know if armies have to wear armour these days, but in earlier times, depending on the types of battle and weapons used, such as swords, bows etc., warriors used shields and armour to protect themselves from enemy strikes.

Likewise, bodhisattvas adopt an *armor of a preliminary enthusiastic thought* such as:

"For a trillion sets of three immeasurably great eons each composed of days as long as a thousand great eons, I shall not relinquish my practice of joyous perseverance.

I'll leave it up to you to find out the details of this measurement of time, but basically it means an infinite amount of time.

I shall not relinquish my practice of joyous perseverance refers to how, before engaging in the actual bodhisattva deeds, bodhisattvas train their minds in developing the bodhisattva's spirit, or courage. As it says here:

"For the sake of relieving the suffering of a single living being, I would rejoice at remaining only as a hell-being until I attain buddhahood.

Before engaging in their deeds, bodhisattvas train their mind, resolving that for the sake of even one sentient being they would stay in a hell realm for countless aeons.

The text continues:

"As I exert myself in this manner for the sake of complete enlightenment, what need is there to mention my perseverance over a shorter period or in the face of lesser suffering?"

The implication is that when your mental courage or determination has reached such a very high level as being determined to remain in the hell realms for countless aeons of time for the sake of one sentient being, then *as I exert myself in this manner for the sake of complete enlightenment, what need is there to mention my perseverance over a shorter period or in the face of lesser suffering?* So in this way, perseverance for any causes that require less time and hardship becomes very easy. Of course, when we actually think about this great bodhisattva spirit, we cannot even imagine ourselves as having such incredibly great courage. However, we have to understand here that we can train our very ordinary mind to become habituated with such a great thought of determined altruism. At least we can see that on a theoretical level our mind has the potential to develop this vast bodhisattva spirit and resolve.

The bodhisattva's spirit as described here is in accordance with the sutric path. In the tantric path the bodhisattva wishes to achieve enlightenment with a much greater sense of urgency and hence follows a quick path, whereby the practice of both method and wisdom is simultaneously present within a single instant of mind. However, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, the extent of the bodhisattva's spirit and courage seems greater in the sutric than in the tantric path.

We need to train our mind with the thought of wishing all beings to be liberated from suffering and to have the everlasting state of happiness. It is said that if we train our mind like this then, through the force of our familiarity with this altruistic thought, we will be able to actually engage in the deeds of liberating other beings and place them in the state of happiness.

The text continues:

Such is the joyous perseverance that is like armor. A bodhisattva who produces even an aspiration for, or just faith in, such joyous perseverance is steadfast; how much more so one who is endowed with this perseverance, given that he or she develops measureless causes for joyously persevering for the sake of unsurpassed enlightenment. The *Bodhisattva Levels* says that for such a person there is absolutely no action for the sake of others and for enlightenment that is discouraging or entails hardship. When you become conditioned to such a state of mind, it becomes the definite cause of awakening your potential for the Mahayana lineage, so train in it.

When it says, you become *conditioned to such a state of mind*, it is referring to what has just been said about training and habituating our mind with the bodhisattva spirit. It's saying that such training can actually result in *awakening your potential for the Mahayana lineage*. Generally speaking, when great compassion arises within your mind it is considered as a sign of the awakening of the Mahayana lineage, or your potential to follow the Mahayana lineage.

Therefore, we understand this mind training as being a very important cause to awaken our Mahayana lineage, which is essentially great compassion. Hence, this is also a very important cause to awaken the bodhicitta mind as well.

The text continues:

Concerning armor-like joyous perseverance the *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

In as many eons as there are drops of water in the ocean,
Eons in which the years are composed
Of long, drawn out days and nights equal in duration
Even to the temporal limits of cyclic existence,

You produce the spirit of supreme enlightenment once.
Though you likewise have to accomplish every other
collection,
You do not become disheartened because of your
compassion,
And undiscouraged you achieve sublime enlightenment.

To generate this immeasurable steadfast armor
While disregarding your suffering in cyclic existence
Is declared the first proper undertaking
For the disciplined hero possessed of compassion.

The text then clarifies the meaning of these verses.

Furthermore, even if it took you a hundred thousand years to produce the spirit of enlightenment once and to see one buddha, where each year is composed of twelve months, each month of thirty days, and each day as long as the time from beginningless cyclic existence to the present, and even if it took you this length of time multiplied by the number of

grains of sand in the Ganges River to know the mind and behavior of one living being, you similarly must come to know the minds and behaviors of all living beings. The *Teachings of Aksayamati Sutra* says the armor of being undaunted is the inexhaustible armor; it is armor-like joyous perseverance of the highest caliber.

Then Tsongkhapa gives this summary:

In short, if you can generate a single attitude such as this, you easily complete limitless accumulations and purify measureless obscurations. This becomes the most excellent cause for never turning back; by just being joyful no matter how long it takes, you quickly become a buddha. Those who want to become a buddha in a short time, but take no joy at all in the limitless deeds and great length of time required, take a very long time to reach buddhahood, because they thereby fail to produce the wonderful courage of the conquerors' children.

Essentially this indicates that the duration or the length of time that bodhisattvas resolve to work for the sake of all sentient beings is an unfathomably very, very long period of time. We should also not think of the duration of our practice in terms of an hour, a day, a month, or a year; rather think of practising for days, months, years and life after life. Cultivating such a spirit can serve as a cause to accumulate enormous merit and purify obscurations and so forth.

The line *by just being joyful no matter how long it takes, you quickly become a buddha* relates to the true bodhisattva spirit, where bodhisattvas take more joy if they have to serve sentient beings longer to benefit them with happiness or free them from suffering.

Those who want to become a buddha in a short time, but take no joy at all in the limitless deeds and great length of time required, take a very long time to reach buddhahood refers to our attitude in Dharma practice where we wish to find happiness and enlightenment very quickly. They will take a long time to reach enlightenment, *because they thereby fail to produce the wonderful courage of the conquerors' children*. Having this very short-sighted view acts as a hindrance or an obstacle. Therefore:

After you have put on such armor, you joyously persevere for two purposes: to gather virtue and to act for the welfare of living beings.

(b'') Joyous perseverance of gathering virtue

The joyous perseverance of gathering virtue is applying yourself to the practice of the six perfections in order to properly accomplish them.

By wearing this armour of joyful perseverance, bodhisattvas engage in this *joyous perseverance of gathering virtue*, which mainly refers to the deeds of the six perfections – giving, moral ethics, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom. Essentially, what we can understand is that by wearing this armour of joyful perseverance bodhisattvas don't face any obstacles or hindrances in the performance of their deeds. In the perfection of giving, for example, they do not face any hindrances in giving their body, their virtues, their possessions, and so forth. Likewise, when engaging in the perfection of moral ethics, they will be able to maintain the perfection of moral ethics and so forth under all circumstances.

(c'') Joyous perseverance of acting for the welfare of living beings

The joyous perseverance of acting for the welfare of living beings is properly applying yourself to the practice of the eleven activities for others' welfare.

You should find the list of eleven activities or modes of benefiting others in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*.¹

(2') The method of developing joyous perseverance

Having realised how wonderful it would be to have such joyful perseverance, the text goes on to explain the method of developing this joyful perseverance.

As explained above, since you produce, maintain, and increase all the virtues of the two collections in dependence upon joyous perseverance, the practice that develops it is very crucial.

Here we understand that *produce* refers to producing or generating a virtue that we have not yet produced or generated; *maintain* refers to preventing it from declining or decreasing; and *increase* refers to how to develop and increase the virtue that has been generated. This is just emphasising how all these are dependent upon joyful perseverance.

The text continues:

I shall discuss the system of the text of the great scholar and adept Santideva, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, ...

So, the explanation will be based on Shantideva's chapter on joyful effort.

... noting that it is complete as well as easy to understand and to sustain in practice.

The text continues:

The method of developing joyous perseverance has four parts:

1. Eliminating unfavorable conditions that prevent joyous perseverance
2. Gathering the forces of the favorable conditions
3. Based on the elimination of unfavorable conditions and the accumulation of favorable conditions, being intent on joyously persevering
4. How to use joyous perseverance to make the mind and body serviceable

(a'') Eliminating unfavourable conditions that prevent joyous perseverance

This has two parts,

1. Identifying factors incompatible with joyous perseverance
2. Employing the methods to eliminate the incompatible factors

(1'') Identifying factors incompatible with joyous perseverance

There are two factors incompatible with entering the path: (1) not entering even though you see that you can do the practice, and (2) not entering because you become discouraged, thinking, "How can I do such a practice?" Indeed there is also not practicing because you are unconcerned with whether you are capable or not, but this is irrelevant here since this explanation is for those pursuing liberation.

The text then elaborates on these two sub-headings:

¹ Ed: (1) helping those who toil and those who suffer; (2) working for the sake of those blind to the right methods; (3) working for the sake of people by benefiting them; (4) working for the sake of those threatened by danger; (5) working for the sake of those afflicted with miseries; (6) working for the sake of the deserted; (7) working for the sake of the homeless; (8) working for the sake of those without like-minded people; (9) working for the sake of those on the right path; (10) working for the sake of those on the wrong path; (11) working for the sake [of all these people] through miracles. We can carry out ten of these, the exception being working through miracles.

Within the first factor, there are two possibilities: (1) you have the laziness of procrastination, thinking, "There is still time"; and (2) you are not procrastinating but you are overwhelmed by your attachment to inferior and common activities.

In this vein *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

The factors incompatible with joyous perseverance
Are said to be laziness, adhering to what is ignoble,
And self-contempt out of discouragement.

Causes for the production of laziness are indolence, ...

We need to recognise that we fall under the influence of laziness due to certain causes and conditions, and without these causes and conditions we won't fall prey to laziness. As the text says:

Causes for the production of laziness are indolence, attachment to the taste of inferior pleasures, craving the pleasure of sleep, and a lack of disenchantment with cyclic existence. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Laziness arises from craving based upon
Indolence, enjoyment of pleasure, and sleep;
And from a lack of disenchantment
With the suffering of cyclic existence.

The meaning here is quite clear and self-explanatory. Even if we are interested in engaging in practice, and even if we know that we have the ability to practice, we don't engage in practice because of laziness. We can also relate this to our mundane activities. Sometimes we might have some very important work, which we know we have to finish, but we decide to go to bed and sleep. In this instance sleepiness acts as a form of laziness.

The text then states:

Some assert that the first two lines indicate the form that laziness takes rather than its causes.

(2") Employing the methods to eliminate the incompatible factors

Employing the methods to eliminate the incompatible factors has three parts:

1. Stopping the laziness of procrastination
2. Stopping attachment to ignoble activities
3. Stopping discouragement or self-contempt

(a) Stopping the laziness of procrastination

This involves the following three meditations: you contemplate that the body you have at present is rapidly disintegrating, that after death you will fall into miserable realms, and that it will be difficult to find an excellent life such as this one again. Meditation on these stops the laziness that holds to the notion that there is plenty of time, thereby generating the conviction in your mind that there is no time to spare.

Through this laziness of procrastination, you never seize the time to engage in Dharma practice. You are always putting it off saying, 'I'll do it the next day or the day after' and so on. The great master Gungtang Jamyang advises us never to procrastinate in our Dharma practice as the time for practising is right now. In order to overcome the laziness of procrastination, we need to cultivate the thought that 'the time for practising Dharma is right now'. In other words, to counteract the laziness of procrastination, we should contemplate the three points clearly laid out here.

The body we have at present is rapidly disintegrating. Given the impermanent nature of this life it is wrong to think that we can put off practising the Dharma or procrastinate. Then, at the end of this life there are two destinations: a lower or

bad migration, or a happy migration. These two are the only destinations. If we don't seize this opportunity to practise Dharma now, then we will definitely fall into a lower realm and never find an opportunity or freedom to practise Dharma again.

Then the text continues,

These three meditations were explained earlier in the section on the person of small capacity.

It's important to overcome the laziness of the procrastination. Otherwise we'll never engage in Dharma practice. Probably the most effective and powerful meditation to overcome this specific laziness is, as instructed here, to meditate on death and impermanence. As an effect of the death and impermanence meditation, meditators can lose all attraction to worldly pleasures and see no meaning in worldly life and activities. Therefore, we can understand how the death and impermanence meditation can direct our lives towards Dharma practice.

This meditation on death and impermanence also counteracts our clinging or attachment to the objects of this worldly life. Unless we overcome attachment, we will find no satisfaction. For example, if we are afflicted with strong attachment, then we will find no satisfaction no matter what we accomplish because it is not good enough. So, overcoming attachment is necessary to live a happy and satisfying life, even in this current life.

(b) Stopping attachment to ignoble activities

You see that the sublime teaching is the source of endless joy in this and future lives, and that you lose its great purpose when you are distracted in idle chatter and amusements which are the source of much pointless suffering later. Meditate on this and stop your attachment.

This again touches on thinking about the benefits of practising the Dharma.

The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

How could you abandon the source of infinite joy,
The highest of pleasures, the sublime teaching,
And delight in distractions and amusements
That are the causes of suffering?

Gungtang Jamyang said that the reason you should engage in Dharma practice is because even though this body will deteriorate in age, you will gain joy and self-confidence as a benefit of your practice. Although you cannot avoid death, when it comes you can make it a joyful experience just like a child coming home.

Remember that our future is in our own hands, and the most beneficial thing we can do is to cultivate a positive state of mind which, as we discussed before, will be our real saviour and protector.

Next Tuesday you have a teaching break for a group discussion. At the discussion, it's very important everyone is humble and courteous in conveying your views; never be harsh or abusive to others in your language. Other people can get really hurt by harsh words. Those who have more understanding of the topic should not undermine others with less understanding. We should be aware that everybody is different. Some may have more understanding, but they may be practising less; others may have less understanding, but they may be doing more practice.

The Six Perfections

འབྲུག་གི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལ་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་ལམ་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་ལམ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

13 August 2019

Try to cultivate the motivation 'I wish to achieve the complete state of enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. For this purpose, I will listen to this profound teaching and put it into practice.'

The point of practising Dharma is not just to gain knowledge for stimulating our mind, but to really transform or subdue our mind. In our approach, Dharma must serve as a means to subdue our mind; it should serve as an antidote to, or counteract, the negative or undisciplined states of mind. For example, when we talk about the practice of loving kindness and compassion, it is not good enough to simply understand what compassion is all about and how to cultivate it. What is more important is that we actually cultivate compassion, so that it actually arises within our mind stream.

So when we talk about meditating on loving kindness and compassion, we are talking about the state of loving kindness and compassion actually arising in our mind. In contrast, when we talk about meditating on the view of selflessness or emptiness, we are talking about a meditation in which we take emptiness as the object of our mind. When we meditate on love, however, we are habituating our mind with love, which means that the mind arises in the nature of love.

Usually, whenever we hear these words 'love and compassion', we say to ourselves, 'love' means wishing others to have happiness, and 'compassion' means wishing them to be free from suffering. But we should not think that this understanding is the meditation on love and compassion. It is not, because such love and compassion simply pays lip service to the notion and we don't really feel it in our heart. In fact, we would have the notion that such love and compassion is something outside of us. This kind of approach brings us no real benefit.

We need to cultivate love and compassion within ourselves, within our mind. Then, as it is said, the mind of love and compassion will become our true, priceless, inner treasure, enhancing the happiness in our lives. We will notice that when love and compassion arise within us, it will automatically make our state of mind positive, joyful and happy. And a positive, joyful state of mind also serves as a cause to enhance our physical wellbeing, thereby increasing our longevity.

When we understand the Dharma, and effectively apply it, we can truly appreciate the benefits of practising Dharma. The more effort we put into developing love and compassion, the more love and compassion will increase in our mind. The more love and compassion in our mind, the more happiness and joy we will find in our life. Since we all are seeking happiness all the time, we must create the cause, such as cultivating love and compassion.

Basically, if we wish for a result, we need to understand that we must create the cause, because the result depends on the cause. If the result were not dependent on the cause, it

should arise automatically. The mind of love and compassion is the true source of happiness and joy for ourselves and others. When the causes are created, the results will automatically happen. Hence, if we put an effort into habituating our mind with love and compassion, these qualities will naturally increase. Then, as our mind becomes habituated with them, these qualities will arise with minimum effort on our part, or when we meet with the minimum causes and conditions.

This I know from my own experience of practising cultivating love and compassion. I am sharing my experience not with any intention to praise myself, but to say that it is possible to develop love and compassion within us. In the past thirty years or so of practising love and compassion, I found that initially, it didn't arise easily. Yet I persisted with the practice and, as a result, I can now say that it arises easily, even when I observe other beings experiencing a minor suffering. This shows that mental habits do change through training our mind. If we train our mind through meditation practice, our mind will become habituated to love and compassion.

We have been talking about joyful effort, which is an essential factor for cultivating any virtue that we have not cultivated, or to increase the virtues we have already cultivated. We have learned that cultivating joyful effort really means to cultivate a genuine, sincere, heartfelt joy and interest in engaging in virtue. Therefore, we can understand how, when we have joyful effort in our practice, we are also rejoicing in our own virtue, which fulfils the practice of the branch of rejoicing within the seven branches or limbs.

As we know, rejoicing is an important cause of multiplying or increasing our virtue. Most of you have studied the seven-branch practice. But the question is, do you apply it in your practice? Practising all seven branches is essential, because if we miss one of them in our practice, we won't be able to reach the state of buddhahood. That's why the seven are called the 'branches' to achieve enlightenment. It is similar to a car that has some of its essential parts damaged or missing – it won't start.

The seven branches of the seven-limb practice – beginning with the first two branches of prostration and offering – are for accumulating merits and purifying negativities, which is how we reach complete enlightenment. The third branch is confession, which – in contrast to the branch of rejoicing in virtue – means to regret any negativities or non-virtues we have accumulated. It is very important that we feel regret or remorse about our negativities, from the depths of our heart. While the branch of rejoicing inspires us to accumulate more virtues, the branch of confession inspires us to avoid accumulating non-virtues again. It is said that through the branch of confession, half of that negativity or sin will be purified.

In Tibetan, the word *digpa*, which means 'sin', connotes something very negative or undesirable. I would interpret undesirability as referring to the result of that negative or sinful action, which is something we don't want; that's why the action is called *digpa*, or a sin. Feeling regret about negativities will naturally result in us cultivating the purifying force of promise, which is a resolution to refrain from doing that same negative action in future.

Then, there are the branches of requesting the Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma and not to pass into parinirvana. Finally, the branch of dedication is also extremely important for increasing our virtue and making it inexhaustible.

As I have said before, putting Dharma into practice is what matters most, and our everyday actions can be integrated into our Dharma practice. For example, whenever we drink a cup of tea or eat any food, we can integrate that into our Dharma practice, such as the seven-limb practice of making offerings to noble beings. Here, we should remember what to think of – that, having made the offering to the enlightened beings, we have pleased them and caused uncontaminated bliss to arise. By feeling positive and rejoicing in the practice of offering, we integrate the branch of rejoicing. We can also integrate our everyday eating and drinking into the practice of giving, by thinking we are feeding all the bacteria and microorganisms that live in our body. At the end, we can dedicate any virtue we have accumulated through these practices to sustain our lives, so that we will cause the Dharma to flourish and benefit all sentient beings.

Khunu Lama Rinpoche said in his text *Jewel Lamp: A Praise of Bodhicitta*:

When you walk, walk with bodhicitta.
When you sit, sit with bodhicitta.
When you stand, stand with bodhicitta.
When you sleep, sleep with bodhicitta.
When you look, look with bodhicitta.
When you eat, eat with bodhicitta.
When you speak, speak with bodhicitta.
When you think, think with bodhicitta.

This beautiful passage showing the benefit of bodhicitta indicates how we can integrate all our actions of sleeping, sitting, standing and walking with our bodhicitta practice.

So, not practising Dharma is our main drawback; it is not as if we don't have the opportunity, or lack Dharma knowledge. Many of us make the seven-bowls water offering daily, which represents the seven-branch or seven-limb practice. Rather than doing it as just a ritual, we should remember that the main purpose of the offering is to reflect on the meaning of the seven branches and integrate them with our everyday practice. In this way, we engage in the practice of accumulating merits and purifying negativities on a daily basis.

It is by integrating Dharma with our daily activities, even something as ordinary as eating food or drinking tea, that we cultivate and maintain a positive state of mind. It is the same when we go to sleep. As we all know, sleeping is really for resting or rejuvenating our body. However, we should not just simply sleep to rest our body, but think that the purpose of resting is to serve the Dharma and all sentient beings. As we practise Dharma, we will notice our mind being calmed and subdued, and as a result we will find a stable and lasting state of peace and happiness.

[Geshe-la continues teaching from the Six Perfections chapter on joyous perseverance or joyful effort]

(2") Employing the methods to eliminate the incompatible factors (cont.)

(c) Stopping discouragement or self-contempt

It is not enough just to delight in the sublime teaching after you have stopped your procrastination and your attachment to ignoble activities; you must train as a Mahayana practitioner. Therefore, if you become discouraged, thinking, "Someone like me is unable to practice that," you must eliminate this discouragement. Stopping discouragement or self-contempt has three parts:

1. Stopping discouragement about the goal
2. Stopping discouragement about the means to attain the goal
3. Stopping discouragement because wherever you are is a place to practice

(1) Stopping discouragement about the goal

Qualm: If the goal is buddhahood – the total elimination of all faults and the total completion of all good qualities – then, since it is extremely difficult for me to accomplish even a few good qualities or to remove even a few faults, how could someone like me be capable of attaining such a result?

Reply: If such a sense of discouragement manifests, it is a very great fault because it constitutes giving up the spirit of enlightenment. Even if such a thought does not fully manifest, you must stop it at its incipient stage.

With respect to the lines *If the goal is Buddhahood – the total elimination of all faults and the total completion of all good qualities* a question may arise in the mind of someone with a very good background knowledge of what constitutes the perfect state of buddhahood or enlightenment. They already know that buddhahood means the total elimination of all faults and being endowed with all the excellent qualities. So this qualm about achieving this state may arise in the mind of such a person. As it is saying here, they may realise that, in the light of their own situation, even gaining a single quality or to eliminate a single fault is extremely difficult let alone achieving the infinite qualities or eliminating all faults. Such a person might get discouraged by thinking, 'how it is possible for someone like me to achieve the state of buddhahood?'

It is said that if one has already cultivated the bodhicitta mind, and becomes discouraged by thinking, 'I won't be able to achieve the state of enlightenment', there is a danger of losing that bodhicitta mind. So, how do we overcome this low self-esteem or sense of discouragement? It says here:

Reply: If such a sense of discouragement manifests, it is a very great fault because it constitutes giving up the spirit of enlightenment. Even if such a thought does not fully manifest, you must stop it at its incipient stage.

As a remedy, or to counteract discouragement, we need to reflect on something to uplift or lighten up our low self-esteem and bring positive thoughts and inner joy. This reflection is similar to counteracting mental sinking in the calm abiding meditation. The text continues:

How to stop it? Encourage yourself with this thought: "The Bhagavan – the authoritative person who speaks what is true and correct, never what is false or erroneous – said that even flies, etc. will attain enlightenment..."

The 'bhagavan' here refers to a fully awakened one, who is called in Tibetan *kyebu tsema* – an authoritative or valid person. *Kyebu* means person, and *tsema* means valid cogniser, which is a type of mind that is incontrovertible or infallible with respect to its object. Here, the bhagavan Buddha is called an authoritative or valid person because a buddha is an infallible or fully reliable person who only speaks *what is true and correct*. For example, Buddha taught the four noble truths, laying down the instruction of what to adopt and what to abandon, and so forth. Everything the Buddha has taught is valid and infallible and aligned with reality. Hence, the Buddha is a valid person. Lama Tsong Khapa says here that the Buddha had said *even flies, etc. will attain enlightenment*. So, since Buddha has said that even flies can attain enlightenment, why can't I? You need to think:

“...That being so, why should I not attain it – so long as I do not give up persevering – in as much as human birth...”

So, you say to yourself, ‘I have been born as a human being, and as a human being I am able to communicate and cognise the meaning of life.’ Of course, when it says you are able to communicate and understand the meaning of life, it is not in the same context as saying, ‘here is your food, you eat it’ i.e. understanding that your purpose is to eat that food. Rather, the purpose or meaning referred to here is the state of liberation and omniscience – enlightenment. You think about how, if Buddha has said that a fly can achieve enlightenment, then you can say to yourself, ‘I am a human being, I can do it’, and in this way uplift your mind and diminish discouragement.

“...human birth gives me an excellent basis and I have the mental capacity to analyze what to adopt and what to cast aside?”

As well as being born as a human being, you also have the gift of a good sense of discernment, or the intelligence to know the difference between what is right and what is wrong. This is how we dispel discouragement or sinking in our mind: by reflecting on something very positive that brings joy to the mind.

However, just as we don’t want our mind to feel so low that we lose our spirit and interest in our practice and become discouraged, we also don’t want our mind to feel so high or uplifted that it will be inflated with pride and arrogance. We need to cultivate the right level of mental attitude, not making us feel too low or too high.

Continuing with the text:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

“How could I attain enlightenment?”

I shall not indulge in such discouragement,

For the truth-declaring Tathagata

Has spoken this truth:

“Even flies, mosquitoes,

Bees, and worms will attain

Unsurpassed enlightenment, so hard to attain,

Once they generate the power of perseverance.”

Why should someone like me –

Born into the human race, recognizing benefit and harm –

Not attain enlightenment,

As long as I do not give up the bodhisattva deeds?

The two lines *Why should someone like me, Born into the human race, recognizing benefit and harm* are points we need to seriously reflect on. Being born as a human, do we really recognise the difference between what will benefit us or harm us? Unfortunately, we might be confused about the two, and think of benefit as harmful, and of harm as beneficial.

Furthermore, stop your discouragement with this thought:

“In the past there were former buddhas, now there are living buddhas, and in the future there will also be those who reach buddhahood. It is not the case that just one person who has already become a buddha accomplishes the path. Rather, those just like myself, gradually progressing upward, have become buddhas and will become buddhas.”

To inspire us, we must think that past buddhas became buddhas, not because they were already buddhas and then became buddhas, but rather, once upon a time, they were exactly like us. It says here, *it is not the case that one person who has already become a buddha accomplishes the path, Rather those just like myself...*’ Buddhas in the past were just like us;

each was an ordinary person, filled with all the negativities and faults.

However, the line, *just like myself, gradually progressing upwards*, indicates how all the buddhas reached the state of enlightenment through following the stages of the path to enlightenment or the lamrim. Beginning with the practice of relying on the spiritual guru, they then meditated on the precious human rebirth – recognising its rarity, meaning and transient nature – then on the sufferings of lower rebirth. Following this, they reflected on the law of cause and effect, the four noble truths, and the faults of cyclic existence, cultivating renunciation. This is followed by cultivating bodhicitta, through the sixfold causes and effect – from recognising all beings as having been our mother, to compassion, to superior intention, culminating in the bodhicitta mind. They then engaged in the six perfections and finally reached the state of enlightenment.

In this way – even though once upon a time they were exactly like us, completely afflicted with all negativities – all the buddhas progressed, stage by stage, to complete enlightenment. So, we must think that we too will reach complete enlightenment by practising according to our current capacity, such as initially working on counteracting a specific fault or cultivating a specific excellent quality. We can at least understand the possibility of achieving the same state of complete enlightenment that all the buddhas have achieved.

The text then says:

The bodhisattva thinks as follows: “All the tathagatas, arhats, perfect buddhas who have attained, who are attaining, and who will attain complete enlightenment have, are, and will attain complete enlightenment through this kind of method, this kind of path, this kind of joyous perseverance.” Thus, it is not the case that all these tathagatas are just one person who has already become a tathagata attaining complete enlightenment...

...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.

This indicates the truth of cause and effect – that, if we are to achieve the state of enlightenment, we must recognise that it doesn’t arise without causes and conditions. Here, the text is showing us that we all can achieve enlightenment, for we all have the buddha or tathagata nature or potential.

Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo

Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine

Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering

Edited Version

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