

# The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

11 June 2019

We will begin with the usual meditation. [*Tong-len meditation*]

Try to reinforce your motivation for listening to this teaching which is really to extend benefit and happiness to all sentient beings.

Chelsea requested an explanation of Tara and Chenrezig mantras. To fulfil that request, I will briefly explain Tara's mantra tonight, but I'll leave the explanation of the Chenrezig mantra for another time.

The Tara mantra is OM TARA TUTTARE TURE SOHA. The word 'mantra' is a Sanskrit word, translated in Tibetan as *sNgag*. Mantra has two syllables 'man-' and '-tra', which together means protecting the mind from ordinary perception and apprehension, and from fear and suffering. Lama Tsongkhapa uses 'protection' from the point of view of protection from suffering. If you refer to *The Heart Sutra*, it also implies the meaning of 'mantra'.

Going into further detail, there are relative and ultimate mantras. In relation to the Tara mantra, the ultimate mantra refers to Tara's all-knowing exalted wisdom. The relative mantra refers to the sound and syllables of mantra that are recited. By relying upon the repetition of the relative mantra, we will get closer to the realisation of the definitive or ultimate mantra, the omniscient mind of a Buddha.

In Tibetan, Tara is called Dolma, which means 'liberator'. As a deity of compassion, Tara is called a liberator because she has liberated limitless sentient beings from cyclic existence.

OM is normally used in the beginning of mantras to symbolise the beginning or source of everything. The Sanskrit word OM comprises three letters, A-U-M, and in written Sanskrit, we see a dot or drop on top of the vowel AH - this symbolises the MA. So AUM symbolises the qualities of the holy body, speech and mind of a deity such as Tara. It said that if we repeat this sacred syllable, it will leave a positive impression within us to achieve the qualities of holy body, speech and mind.

TARE means liberating from cyclic existence; TUTTARE, liberating from all types of fears, such as natural disasters and wild animals; TURE, freeing from diseases and suffering; and SOHA means to stabilise in the path. In relation to Tara being called a liberator of cyclic existence, fears etc, there are many accounts of Tara to illustrate this. If you refer to the Praises to Tara - called Lek-dri-ma in Tibetan - you will understand more about Tara as a Liberating One.

So, taking into account the meaning of Tara's mantra, when we say it we are effectively taking refuge in Tara as

our liberator and protector. It is important that, when we say the mantra, we generate unwavering faith in Tara as our refuge object or protector and make a fervent supplicating prayer to her.

**(1") Stopping impatience with those who prevent your happiness and with those who cause you to suffer**

**(a) Showing that anger is unjustified**

**(2) On analysis of the subject, anger is unjustified**

Last week we stopped at:

Therefore, just as you tolerate bleeding or burning as a treatment to cure a severe illness, it is appropriate to bear small sufferings for the sake of preventing great suffering.

These lines from the text present a very good example: in order to be healed or cured of a severe disease, as part of the healing process or cure, we have to be patient with any pain associated with the treatment, which may involve the burning or cutting of our body. By tolerating the pain of the treatment, we can overcome the disease and thereby more pain in the future.

The implication here is that we should get used to tolerating minor harms that we receive from others. In that way, we are avoiding major loss and pain in the future. However if, instead of tolerating it, we lose our temper and generate hatred towards others, we will be creating the cause for much greater suffering in the future.

When other people, whether they are friends or not, do something unpleasant or undesirable to us, if we can tolerate it in the first place, then that will be the end of it. By tolerating some harm or unpleasantness that we receive from others, we will prevent a greater amount of suffering for ourselves and for others; whereas, by not tolerating it, we create the cause for greater suffering in the future.

The practice of patience is the most effective remedy for counteracting anger and hatred. To be motivated to practise patience, we need to think about the shortcomings of anger and, on the other hand, the benefits of practising patience. Even if we find it difficult to prevent anger arising, if it does arise and we make an effort to practise patience, we can at least prevent that anger from fully overpowering or controlling us.

For example, when anger arises, in the very next moment you can remain vigilant and aware of the shortcomings, damage and harm that anger would bring, or you can think of the virtue of practising patience. By doing this, it is possible to stop anger from further increasing in the next moment. That's what the text is saying here; we also talked about this earlier.

If you think about the shortcomings of anger, you will recognise it as one of the most powerful causes of destroying your mental peace and happiness. Also, it is very destructive in terms of its very negative impact on you as a person, on your good human nature and personality. Therefore, we should make an effort to at least minimise or decrease anger, as well as to reduce its control over us.

**(3) On analysis of the basis, anger is unjustified**

On analysis of the basis, anger is unjustified has two parts:

1. Analyzing the causes of harm and where the fault lies
2. Analyzing your commitment

**(a') Analyzing the causes of harm and where the fault lies**

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

His sword and my body  
 Are both causes of suffering.  
 He obtained the sword, I obtained the body;  
 At which should I be angry?

This verse points out that, really, the object experiencing the pain is your body. The cause of that pain is the instrument or weapon used by the other person. So the text is just asking, at which do you direct your anger? Should your anger be directed at this body that experiences the pain, or at the weapon or instrument used to cause that pain?

The text continues:

If, blinded by craving, I have obtained  
 This abscess with a human form,  
 So painful that it cannot bear to be touched,  
 With whom should I be angry when it is hurt?

This indicates that the nature of our body is subject to pain and suffering. It is similar to someone affected by a disease that causes the skin to fall off; even a gentle touch to the skin can cause them excruciating pain. These lines are saying that the body we have acquired is in the nature of such suffering. They are also saying that craving blinds us to it – that, despite our body having this nature of being easily harmed and thus susceptible to pain, we are still very attached to it. We can't even tolerate a tiny ant biting us.

So this verse raises the question, if it is in the nature of our body to experience suffering and pain, why we are so attached to it?

The next verse reads:

If some people, out of confusion, harm others  
 While others in confusion get angry with them,  
 Who is blameless  
 And who is to blame?

This is indeed true. When we think of those who cause harm to others, the cause for them to do such harmful actions is related to their ignorant, confused state of mind. Due to that confused or ignorant state of mind, they can even kill other beings. Additionally, for those who receive the harm, the cause of not being able to tolerate receiving harm is also related to their ignorant, confused state of mind.

The particular type of confusion referred to here is ignorance of the law of cause and effect: of not knowing that virtue results in happiness, and non-virtue results in unhappiness. By being completely blind to the truth of the law of cause and effect, people harm others and also retaliate against others who harm them.

**(b') Analyzing your commitment**

Develop the fortitude of patience, thinking, "It is wrong for even *sravakas*, who act for their own purposes alone, to be impatient and get angry..."

So, in terms of fulfilling their spiritual goal, it is even inappropriate for *sravakas* – whose main aim is to fulfil

their own spiritual goal – to lose their temper or be impatient and become angry.

... So of course it is wrong for me. I committed myself to achieving the benefit and happiness of all living beings when I generated the spirit of enlightenment. I act for others' welfare and care for all beings."

This clearly reminds us that, in having cultivated the bodhicitta mind, we have resolved to work for the benefit of all sentient beings. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, if it is wrong for someone who is seeking their own spiritual goal to be impatient with others, what need is there to mention those who have committed to work for the welfare of all sentient beings? It is wrong for them to be impatient with others.

As the text says here, when you generate the spirit of enlightenment, you have genuinely aspired to achieve supreme enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. Having generated the aspiration for supreme enlightenment, to fulfil the welfare of all sentient beings, you then take the bodhisattva precepts and resolve to engage in the bodhisattva deeds of the six perfections, as well as the four means of gathering others. Therefore, you need to practise patience.

Also, Bo-do-wa said:

The Buddha's teaching is to commit no sin. When you fail to cultivate patience with a slight harm, you make the curse, "May this eradicate the teaching." Thereby you give up your vow, and this eradicates the teaching. We do not have the teaching as a whole; when we break our vows, we dissipate what we do have.

When we talk of the Buddhadharma, we are referring to the Dharma that exists in the world or within ourselves. The implication here is that the personal Buddhadharma existing within ourselves is more important. Even if the Buddhadharma exists in the world, it doesn't exist within us if we go against the Dharma, such as transgressing our spiritual precepts, and so forth. In that case, we are depriving ourselves of the Buddhadharma and also causing the decline of the Dharma. So *we dissipate what we do have*.

And also:

When a yak has been saddled up for carrying goods, if the saddle tightens around his tail, he bucks, and the saddle beats against his legs. If the saddle is loosened, the straps drop, and the yak is happy. Similarly, if you do not relax around a harmdoer, the harmdoer matches what you do, and you steadily become more unhappy.

**(b) Showing that compassion is appropriate**

In this section, Lama Tsongkhapa is saying that not only should we stop retaliating or being impatient with others, but we should be really cultivating compassion for them. It shows here how we can arouse compassion within ourselves:

Contemplate from the depths of your heart, "All living beings have been in cyclic existence since beginningless time, and there is not one who has not been my friend and relative – father, mother, etc. Being impermanent, they lose their lives and are miserable due to the three types of suffering. Crazy by the demon of the afflictions, they destroy their own welfare in this and future lives. I must generate compassion for them. How could it be right to get angry or to retaliate for harm?"

So we reflect upon the situation of all other sentient beings – that there is no certainty about our past relationships with them, in terms of their having been our friends, enemies or strangers since beginningless time. Also reflect upon the fact that all beings are in the nature of impermanence; therefore, they are all subject to death sooner or later. They will soon be separated from their present lives.

Further, they are all subject to the three types of suffering. Not only that, but their minds are completely under the influence of mental afflictions. Due to this, not only are they suffering, but they also don't know what is beneficial or harmful in the immediate and distant future.

If we reflect on these points, we will be able to give rise to a sense of compassion. Then there will be no way for us to feel animosity towards others. We will be able to cultivate an unbiased compassion. As implied here, there is no certainty about our relationship with others. There are no grounds for us to feel close to some beings with attachment; nor feel aversion towards others, seeing them as something distant; nor feel indifference towards others, feeling neither close nor distant. If we take what is mentioned here as a way to generate compassion, then our compassion will be unbiased and impartial.

This reminds us that we need to make a deliberate effort to cultivate compassion towards those whom we view as an enemy or a stranger. Compassion and love towards beings we feel close to will arise naturally, whether that closeness is the result of a family connection, or physical attraction, or whatever it is. There is little need for us to make an effort.

However, we need to put effort into showing compassion towards enemies and strangers. As mentioned here, to generate compassion for our enemies, we need to consider that they are no different from our present friends; in the past, they were also our friends. The fact that we see them as an enemy now doesn't mean they have always been our enemy. We can see they are no different from our friends. So we make a deliberate effort to generate compassion towards all beings.

## **(2'') Stopping impatience with those who prevent your praise, fame, or honor, and with those who have contempt for you, or say offensive or unpleasant things to you**

Stopping impatience with those who prevent your praise and so forth, and with those who have contempt for you and so forth has two parts:

1. Stopping impatience with those who prevent three things – praise, fame, or honor
2. Stopping impatience with those who do three things to you, have contempt for you, or say offensive or unpleasant things to you

### **(a) Stopping impatience with those who prevent three things – praise, fame, or honor**

Stopping impatience with those who prevent three things – praise, and so forth has three parts:

1. Reflection on how praise and so forth lack good qualities
2. Reflection on how praise and so forth have faults

3. The need to delight in those who prevent praise and so forth

### **(1) Reflection on how praise and so forth lack good qualities**

When others praise you and spread your fame, it serves neither of two purposes: for this life it does not bring you long life, health, and the like, and for future lives it does not bring merit and so forth. Essentially the advice is how to prevent the feeling of hurt or losing one's temper because of some other who is causing harm to one's fame, reputation, good name. Therefore it points here about if you reflect really on what is the advantages of having good name or fame.

If you think about the benefit of having a good name and reputation in this life or in the immediate future, as Lama Tsongkhapa points out here, does it cause you to live longer or help improve your health? Of course, there is no such benefit. Likewise, in terms of your future life, will fame help you to create or increase merit? Of course it has no such benefit. The text continues:

Therefore, do not get attached to fame and praise, but reproach yourself by thinking, "My displeasure when my praise and fame are ruined is no different from when small children cry upon the collapse of their sand castles, which lack any of the requisites for a dwelling."

A child's sandcastle has no real purpose. It doesn't provide shelter, but if it is damaged, the child or children who built it can become upset and cry. The text is saying we should regard damage to one's good name and reputation in the same way.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Praise, fame, and honor  
Do not cause merit, nor longevity,  
Nor cause strength, nor health,  
Nor bring physical well-being.  
Once I understand my own welfare,  
What meaning is there for me in those?

This verse shows the practice of the bodhisattva: by applying this way of thinking, a bodhisattva never loses his or her temper, or feels hurt by their name or reputation being damaged. Harm to their name and fame doesn't cause harm to the mind of the bodhisattva. Otherwise, as it says here:

And also:

When their sand castles collapse,  
Children cry in great distress.  
Likewise, my mind is childish  
When my praise and fame are ruined.

### **(2) Reflection on how praise and so forth have faults**

Develop disgust for praise and so forth, thinking, "Praise, fame, and honor distract my mind with the meaningless, destroy my disenchantment with cyclic existence, make me jealous of those with good qualities, and spoil my virtuous activities."

Here, one overcomes desire for praise and fame by thinking about the shortcomings of praise and so forth. As it says here, *praise, fame and honour* can serve as a cause of great distraction. We see people who become popular, getting invited here and there, and becoming distracted from what they are supposed to be doing. And *destroy my disenchantment with cyclic existence* is the effect on one's renunciation, the thought of wanting to free

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oneself from cyclic existence. Praise, fame and honour also *make me jealous of those with good qualities, and spoil my virtuous activities.*

So when we think about the shortcomings of fame, it helps us not to lose our temper or feel impatient with those who harm our good name.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Praise and so forth distract me,  
Destroy my disenchantment,  
Promote my jealousy of those with good qualities,  
And destroy all that is good.

### **(3) The need to delight in those who prevent praise and so forth**

This section shows, in fact, there is reason to feel joy and take delight when others harm one's fame or prevent one receiving praise, and so forth. Reflect on this.

Stop your anger and feel delight from the depths of your heart, thinking, "In that case, damage to my praise, fame, gain, and honor protects me from going to miserable realms, cuts the bonds of my attachment, and, like the Buddha's blessing, blocks the door through which I am about to enter into suffering." Thinking like this, you should from the depths of your heart stop anger and feel happy.

This provides a different and more positive way of looking at damage to one's reputation.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Therefore, are not those involved in destroying  
Praise of me and the like  
Engaged in protecting me  
From falling into miserable realms?  
I diligently seek freedom  
And do not need the bonds of gain and honor;  
How could I get angry  
With those who free me from bondage?  
I am about to descend into suffering,  
But, like the Buddha's blessing, they are  
Giving me an opportunity to avoid it.  
How could I be angry with them?

### **(b) Stopping impatience with those who do three things to you have contempt for you, or say offensive or unpleasant things to you**

This is the next heading.

We are now going to recite the Samantabhadra Prayer for Jools Gardner's mother, who is apparently unwell. Jools is one of the oldest students and members of this centre. We will also dedicate the prayer for the wellbeing of Helen Sinnema.

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

25 June 2019

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As usual, we will start with tong-len meditation. [*Tonglen meditation*]

Try to cultivate a proper motivation. If you consider any activity that you engage in to be special, then generating the right motivation prior to the activity is particularly important. Whereas, if the action is insignificant, it may not be that necessary.

What all beings wish for is happiness, and what they don't want is unhappiness. Virtue is the cause of happiness and non-virtue is the cause of unhappiness. This fact relates to ourselves and to all other beings. When we engage in the meditation of giving and taking, we imagine all sentient beings in the space in front of us. Then, with our love and the thought of giving, we wholeheartedly give away all our happiness, including the causes of happiness – which is what all sentient beings desire or wish for. And with our compassion and the thought of taking, we imagine taking upon ourselves all the suffering, together with the causes of suffering, of all living beings.

Hence, we can understand how profound this meditation of giving and taking is, in which we generate and increase the genuine thought of wishing all beings to have happiness and to be free from suffering. Indeed, it is said that this is a cause for us to accumulate enormous merit.

However, we can't just leave it there; we should also follow up on this meditation by taking upon ourselves the responsibility of freeing all beings from suffering and placing them in a state of happiness. Therefore, after cultivating and developing love and compassion, we should also cultivate what we call a sense of universal responsibility, that 'I will free all beings from suffering and cause them to have happiness'. This is called the *superior intention* of taking the welfare of all sentient beings upon oneself.

Then, as we think over how to accomplish the welfare of all beings, we will realise that we must achieve complete enlightenment, the state of buddhahood – this is the only way by which we can truly accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings. In this way, we end up generating an altruistic mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, which is an aspiration to achieve buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings.

In this meditation of giving and taking and cultivating bodhicitta, we are resolving to give all beings all the things they want, and to free them from all the things they do not want. It is important that we try to live up to this resolution by integrating the bodhisattva deeds into our everyday life. This means applying the practice of giving and taking to those we live with, befriend and interact with, in our everyday life. As a result, we will be

adding genuine love and compassion to our relationships, as well as making others happy and helping them overcome difficulties in their lives.

In addition to benefiting those around us, we ourselves will directly benefit from practising love and compassion. We can see that, as a benefit of such a practice, we will appear pleasant and admirable in the eyes of those close to us, such as family, friends, and work colleagues. In fact, everyone, regardless of whether they are believers or non-believers, will greatly appreciate and admire anyone who practises giving and taking through showing love and compassion for others. Therefore, it is good to remember the profound and beneficial effect that such a practice has on ourselves and others. It is no doubt the most effective cause to build, strengthen and develop beneficial relationships with others.

As the great Lama Tsongkhapa advises, it is important that we put this teaching into practice according to our own capacity. Even though we may be learning about very advanced stages of spiritual practice, when it comes to our own practice, we should begin from where we are, and with whatever is most relevant for us, according to our ability. As we just said, in our everyday life, we must try to practise being a very caring, kind and gentle person with whomever we interact or meet. For example, when communicating with others, we must try to use gentle and pleasant words or gestures, knowing that even a few pleasant words or a little bit of pleasantness in our body language can be a cause to bring happiness in the minds of others.

At a practical level, there is no way we can match the deeds of a bodhisattva, but this doesn't really matter right now. What matters most to us is applying those practices we are capable of, even though they may be very simple and basic. In other words, we can only make progress on the path through practice.

We begin by implementing those practices that are within our reach, then move on to the next level, and so on. If we put aside the practices that we can do, and instead try or pretend to practise something that is too high or too advanced for our level, we will never progress along the path.

We will continue with the text from the heading:

## **(b'') Stopping both dislike for harmdoers' attainments and delight in their troubles**

Before we go into detail, think about what this heading tells us. What does 'stopping dislike for harmdoers' attainments' mean? It relates to the hate or dislike we feel when we witness the success or goodness of a harmdoer or someone we dislike. But what good and benefit is there in disliking their success and attainments? By disliking their success, do we really vanquish or harm them? Does this attitude bring more profit, joy or happiness to us?

On the other hand, when we see our enemies fail and go downhill, somehow it makes us feel good and happy; we like to see that happen. This is so wrong. So we need to consider whether or not there is a real benefit of holding this attitude of resenting harmdoers' attainments and delighting in their downfalls.

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We can see here, just in the outlines and headings of his writing – and indeed in every sentence throughout the lam-rim teachings – how the great Tsongkhapa makes very profound statements about finding happiness and eliminating suffering. However, to fully understand the meaning and derive benefit from them, we need to think over these statements with good concentration and discriminating wisdom.

Here, the teaching is simply saying that we should not feel jealous of others' success and good achievements. We all know that when we feel jealous, we lose our own happiness and feel bad. Therefore, this teaching motivates and helps us overcome such suffering in our life.

When it says here that we should stop dislike for harmdoers' attainments, the text is conveying to us a very beneficial practice: that we should not feel dislike for or hate harmdoers' attainments because, if we do feel such resentment, the result will be mental pain and suffering for us. Alternatively, if we take delight or rejoice in harmdoers' attainments, the effect will be mental joy and happiness for us.

Likewise, if we 'delight in their troubles', in harmdoers' downfalls, the result is that we prevent love and compassion from arising within us. It is wrong to hold such an attitude.

The presentation continues:

Contemplate as follows, "After I have generated the spirit of enlightenment for the sake of accomplishing all living beings' benefit and happiness, I get angry at harmdoers when they obtain happiness on their own. After I have said that I want all beings to become buddhas, I get unhappy when harmdoers get even minimal prosperity or honor. This is extremely contradictory."

The meaning of this is quite self-explanatory. It is saying we must try to overcome the thought of disliking others' success by thinking of how contradictory it is that, on the one hand, we think of cultivating bodhicitta or the altruistic mind of enlightenment – a resolve to benefit others – then, on the other hand, we dislike or hate other beings' attainments and successes. We should rather think of their attainment of happiness on their own as if they have completed half of our task of benefiting them. So, we only have to attend to the other half. This gives us a good reason to rejoice and take delight in their attainments and happiness.

The commentary continues:

You must eliminate your jealousy regarding any sort of attainment by other persons and delight in it from the depths of your heart. Otherwise your spirit of enlightenment and the achievement of the welfare and happiness of beings are nothing but words.

Earlier, we engaged in the meditation of giving and taking, which essentially is based on a loving and caring thought and the bodhicitta mind to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all beings. Giving and taking meditation is done with the spirit of the bodhicitta mind, whereby we mentally give away all our happiness and take the suffering of all beings upon ourselves. The text is saying here that if we always allow jealousy to arise in

response to others' happiness, then all our practices will be nothing but words.

The commentary continues:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

Since you want all beings to be happy,  
You have generated the spirit of enlightenment.  
Then, when beings find happiness themselves,  
Why do you get angry with them?

If you wish to attain for living beings' welfare  
Buddhahood, which is worshipped in the three worlds,  
Why are you tormented when you see  
Their most paltry gain or honor?

When a relative finds sustenance  
For those whom you should nurture –  
Objects of your care and generosity –  
Instead of being pleased, are you angry again?

If you do not wish even that for beings,  
How can you wish them enlightenment?  
Where is the spirit of enlightenment  
In someone who gets angry at others' attainments?

Whether your enemy gets something from someone  
Or it remains in the benefactor's house  
It is never yours, so why be angry –  
Whether it is given or not?

This is a direct quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*. So, to understand this in more detail, you should refer to any commentaries on that text.

Even your mere malicious thoughts that delight in your enemies' troubles or that wish for their destruction do not harm your enemy; they lead only to your own suffering. Yet, if such malice were to harm them, you should stop it completely, reflecting on the drawback that this would bring ruin to yourself and others.

Here it talks about *malicious thoughts that delight in your enemies' troubles*. When we see our enemies fail, we take pleasure in it. We also wish them to lose and go downhill, and we hold malice and ill-thought towards them. It says here that, to overcome this, we need to consider whether taking joy in their downfall and wishing them to fail actually harms them, in the sense of defeating an enemy, or not. Of course, it doesn't defeat them. Instead, if we let such an ill-mind and malicious thoughts arise, we suffer and become unhappy as a result. As it also says here, *yet if such malice were to harm them* – even if we did hold malicious thoughts and did something to them, the result would not only be harm to them, but also harm to ourselves. So, thinking about the detrimental consequences of causing any harm to others, both for ourselves and others, we should try to overcome such thoughts.

The text continues:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

When my enemies are unhappy,  
What am I pleased about?  
My wishes alone  
Will cause them no harm.

Even if I should effect their suffering with my wish,  
What could I be pleased about?  
If I say I will be satisfied,  
What could be more ruinous?

Here it is saying that, usually, when we challenge or cause harm to our enemies, it gives us satisfaction and pleasure; we have a sense of accomplishment and achievement from being able to make them unhappy and harm them. These verses are saying that having such an attitude simply reflects our deep-seated anger and hatred towards them.

The text continues with the next verse from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*.

Once I am caught by the terrible, sharp hook  
Cast by the fishermen, the afflictions,  
I will surely be cooked by the hell-guardians  
In a kettle for the beings of hell.

This analogy explains the shortcomings of mental afflictions, such as strong anger and hatred.

The text continues:

You will be unhappy if you view as absolutely undesirable the obstacles to what you and your friends want, movement in directions you do not want, and the prosperity of your enemies. If this unhappiness increases, you become hostile. If you stop your absolute dislike of these three things, you prevent unhappiness. Once you do this, you will not feel hostile. Thus, dispel your absolute dislike of these by using the reasonings previously taught. Take many approaches to stop your anger, because it is a very great fault.

The content of the above lines is quite self-explanatory. The point being made here is about the causes and conditions that give rise to, and increase, anger and hatred – such as our intolerance towards harm done to ourselves or our ‘side’, or our intolerance towards the happiness and prosperity of our enemies. Hence, we are advised to counteract anger and hatred in whatever way we can, through applying various ways and means.

The text continues:

These instructions – the lines of reasoning of the conquerors and their children presented above – provide the techniques for defeating your greatest enemy, anger. They involve arguing with your own afflictions and looking within yourself.

Referring to all the things we mentioned earlier – such as the shortcomings of anger, and the benefits of patience – the text is saying here that we need to turn our mental focus and attention inward, and defeat anger and gain patience.

When you analyze well with discerning wisdom and stop anger with many lines of reasoning, you prevent many different types of anger, and you become patient in many ways. Since this is an experience engendered by penetrating understanding that uses flawless reasoning to get at the meaning of correct scriptures, it leaves an extremely stable latent propensity.

Those who reject meditative analysis with discerning wisdom are those who reject the whole of the great undertaking of bodhisattva deeds such as these. Understand that such rejection is the worst hindrance to using a life of leisure for the benefit of yourself and others. Get rid of it as you would poison.

Here and in many other texts, we will note that Lama Tsongkhapa emphasises developing discriminating wisdom more than developing single-pointed concentration. Indeed, of the two types of meditation – stabilising and analytical – the latter is more effective and

important for beginners in establishing a firm ground or basis on the path. Having said this, it is also crucial that we employ both analytical wisdom and single-pointed concentration together in our meditation.

If, instead of focusing on developing wisdom, we only focus on developing single-pointed concentration or a state of relaxation, the text warns here that we need to *understand that such rejection is the worst hindrance to using a life of leisure for the benefit of yourself and others. Get rid of it as you would poison*. You would have heard about how some godly beings, such as the long-lived gods, can remain in single-pointed concentration for as long as they want, yet at the end of their lives, they are subject to falling into lower rebirths. This clearly shows the drawback of concentration without wisdom.

Therefore, as indicated here, the union of calm abiding (*shamatha*) and superior insight (*vipasyana*) is crucial in our meditation because the mind is not only able to focus in a perfect state of single-pointed concentration, but at the same time is able to discern and penetrate reality with analysing wisdom. Further, in conjunction with single-pointed concentration, when that wisdom deeply and finely analyses the truth, the bliss of pliancy will arise as a result. It is said that this bliss of pliancy resulting from the force of wisdom analysing the truth also maintains a perfect single-pointed state of concentration.

In short, the implication here is that we should not reject analytical wisdom and simply direct our focus to single-pointed concentration. Rather, we should engage in the union of both single-pointed concentration and analytical wisdom, or the union of calm abiding and superior insight.

## **(2') Developing the patience of accepting suffering**

Developing the patience of accepting suffering has three parts:

1. The reason you must definitely accept suffering
2. The way to develop acceptance
3. A detailed explanation from the viewpoint of the bases

Again we can see here how the outline follows a logical progression, for example, immediately after the presentation of *the reason you must definitely accept suffering is the way to developing the acceptance*.

The text then goes into detail under each of those headings.

### **(a'') The reason you must definitely accept suffering**

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

The causes of happiness sometimes occur,  
Whereas the causes of suffering occur frequently.

As you continually experience whatever suffering is appropriate to you, you absolutely must know how to bring it into the path. Otherwise, as the *Compendium of Trainings* says, you either generate hostility or you become discouraged about cultivating the path, either circumstance interfering with applying yourself to virtue.

When we talk about the practice of accepting suffering as a type of practice of patience, broadly speaking, it is applicable to almost all situations. Whereas, when we talk about the other two types of patience – the patience of disregarding harm or of non-retaliation, and the



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patience of thinking of the Dharma - they are applicable only to specific situations and circumstances.

As it clearly says in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, 'the causes of happiness sometimes occur' - the reason we need to accept suffering is that if we think about it, the causes of happiness are few, whereas the causes of suffering are many. So we must know how to transform adverse situations into favourable ones. We are not necessarily talking about turning the experience of suffering itself into the path - rather, of making it a favourable condition for us on the path.

This technique of transforming adversity or a suffering situation into a favourable one is very important. Without this capacity, *as the Compendium of Trainings says, you either generate hostility ...* which is referring to how, whenever you confront adversity or something undesirable or unwanted, you begin to feel hatred or dislike or ... *you become discouraged about cultivating the path, either circumstance interfering with applying yourself to virtue.*

Moreover, some sufferings will be caused by others, and some will be produced by your former karma, whether or not you strive at the path.

This is talking about the causes and conditions that result in the various kinds of suffering we experience - how certain things arise, regardless of whether we are following the path or not, and due to those causes and conditions, suffering arises.

Some, as will be explained below, occur when you engage in virtuous activity but do not occur when you are not so engaged.

This specifies how some instances of suffering don't arise in a normal day, but arise when one engages in virtuous practice.

For the time being, you cannot dispel the sufferings definitely produced by the power of former karma and immediate conditions. You must accept them when they arise, because (1) if you do not do this, in addition to the basic suffering, you have the suffering of worry that is produced by your own thoughts, and then the suffering becomes very difficult for you to bear; ...

This clearly implies how certain sufferings are inevitable, we cannot stop them. On top of that, if we worry about suffering, or feel unhappy about the experience of suffering, we will be adding more suffering to the suffering we already have.

... (2) if you accept the suffering, you let the basic suffering be and do not stop it, but you never have the suffering of worry that creates discontentment when you focus on the basic suffering; (3) since you are using a method to bring even basic sufferings into the path, you greatly lessen your suffering, so you can bear it. Therefore, it is very crucial that you generate the patience that accepts suffering.

Essentially, it is saying here that we should try to stop worrying about suffering.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that accepting suffering is the most effective means of eliminating it. His Holiness further said that he learned his most important lessons during the most difficult parts of his life. We can understand here that there is a positive side to the suffering and hardship we experience in our lives.

We will do the 'Twenty-one Tara Praises' for Ingrid for her quick recovery. It is said in the sutras if a person has enough merit, then all his or her wishes will be fulfilled. So, we will recite this prayer to increase merits for Ingrid, so that she will recover from illness, live long and find happiness.

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

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# The Six Perfections

འདྲེན་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

2 July 2019

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As usual we will do the giving and taking meditation.

## *Meditation*

There's no need to mention that we need to have the right motivation for receiving the teaching. The motivation should be bodhicitta, which is an aspiration to achieve enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. Essentially bodhicitta is a pure intention to benefit all beings and fulfil their wishes.

Hence, whenever we generate bodhicitta as a motivation for listening to the teachings or undertaking any activities, we are resolving to extend benefit and happiness to other beings. Everyone, believers and non-believers alike, recognises the excellent, admirable qualities of this thought of giving benefit and happiness to others. We should also understand that when we cultivate this marvellous wonderful thought within us, not only do we give peace and happiness to other beings, but we will also experience tremendous peace and happiness ourselves. We know this from our own experience, and also because it is common sense. We all admire and acknowledge the worthiness of this thought of altruism.

We praise this altruistic thought, but when we look into our own mind and check, 'Do I have this thought within me? Are my daily actions driven by it?' we'll find that most probably we don't have that thought of altruism. Rather we have a self-centred mind and everything we do is driven by that. Then, rather than that thought of altruism, we generate its opposite, i.e. thoughts of causing harm and trouble for others. In following Dharma practice, we must understand that our main goal is to eradicate negative states of mind and cultivate positive states of mind. This really is the essence of Dharma practice. If our practices have no effect in subduing our mind and cultivating positive or virtuous states of mind, then either we are not practising the Dharma, or we are not practising properly.

The main purpose of practising the Dharma is to bring about positive changes from within - to bring about peace and happiness within ourselves. Although there are some occasions where we rely on and seek help from others, we all have to take personal responsibility for bringing about that personal peace and happiness. What is that responsibility? It is to achieve what we want to achieve, which is happiness, and to avoid what we want to avoid, which is suffering. We follow Dharma practice to fulfil that responsibility. Although we talk a lot about benefiting other sentient beings, how can we benefit others if we can't take care of our own mental and physical health?

So, we need to ensure that whatever we do is beneficial for our own wellbeing too. As to the point of view of benefitting ourselves, one of the things that matters most is our own state of mind. That's why I was saying before that cultivating a mind of altruism, loving kindness and a good heart will automatically bring us the peace and happiness we seek. Indeed, altruism is the remedy to a lot of the problems we experience, which mainly result from generating negative mental attitudes. So, if we hold a

positive state of mind within ourselves, we will no longer experience those unnecessary problems, and we will find more happiness from within, which in turn supports our physical health too. In this way, we are in a good position to benefit other beings.

Normally, when we talk about helping others or contributing to the community, we primarily think in terms of material aid, such as giving away money. But in fact we can benefit others and society far more effectively by cultivating and sharing a positive state of mind, such as a good heart and loving kindness towards others. Then whatever actions we do will be truly beneficial to others, as well as to ourselves.

I hope I am not boring you because I feel that I often sound like I am telling you my own life story, and you are hearing the same thing again and again.

We know that those who live in the third world or in poor countries undergo suffering mainly because of not having shelter, clothes, food and drink. Every day they struggle to overcome that suffering. It is amazing to see how some Christian practitioners dedicate their lives to eliminating poverty in the third world, giving charity to those impoverished people. We could say that as living conditions get better in the third world people there will find more happiness and satisfaction.

On the other hand, in the developed world people undergo suffering that is mainly related to their mental and emotional wellbeing. There is no real problem of shortages of food, clothing or shelter. As the cause of the problem is related to mental health, people need to make an effort to bring a change within their own mind to remedy the problem. For example, cultivating loving kindness and a good heart is very effective in getting rid of mental illnesses and bringing lasting happiness and joy within us.

Usually we identify happiness with external objects. We seek the seeming pleasure of experiencing beautiful forms, pleasant sounds and tactile sensations and so on. In other words, our experience of happiness is contingent upon the contact of our sensory faculties with their respective objects. For example, many people identify happiness with money. So, when they have no money, they feel they are bereft of happiness. Likewise, people feel they can't be happy and there is no meaning to their life unless they gain whatever external or material object they are seeking. If, after gaining their sought-after object, they lose it, they feel empty.

The real question is this: Do material objects satisfy us of their own accord? No, they don't because satisfaction arises with contentment of the mind. If the mind is not contented, then no matter how much or what we possess we cannot be happy. Although there is an abundance of wealth and material comfort in the developed world, people live very unsatisfied and frustrated lives. This is because they are not mentally contented and are always looking for more and better goods. People always think that if I make good money, I will be happy; if I could have this, I would be happy; or if I win that person as my friend, I will be happy. However, if our mind remains unchecked and unsubdued external objects bring no satisfaction and happiness. In order to be happy and at rest, we need to prevent and reduce the mind of desire. Without controlling desire, we cannot be happy and satisfied, even if we possess a lot and live a very comfortable life. Likewise, feeling jealous of the possessions of others, wanting to compete with others or feeling pride can also be a cause for unhappiness and restlessness, despite being surrounded by good external conditions. So, it is

important to recognise the fact that filling our mind with states of mind like desire, anger, jealousy and pride and so on is suffering, and being free from such minds or having a state of mind lacking desire, anger, jealousy, pride and so on is happiness. If we don't recognise this difference, then we simply become prey to those miserable states of mind.

Does jealousy bring you joy or not? People who understand that jealousy is not beneficial and is in fact very harmful, because it destroys peace and happiness, will think of getting rid of it. Those who lack that knowledge won't think of overcoming jealousy and will have to put up with the suffering it causes. As a way of releasing the pain of jealousy they knowingly or unknowingly start criticising and denigrating others. Then things will go from bad to worse. At other times people lose their peace and happiness simply by seeing the goodness of other people, and then get tense and want to compete with them. Again, what use is this? With minds filled with mental afflictions we won't find peace and happiness, no matter how rich we are or how much wealth we possess.

In the third world and other poverty-stricken countries, people are subject to very poor living conditions. Every day they suffer and struggle to find food, drink, clothes and a roof over their heads. Their suffering is obviously related to poor material conditions. As it is not so much related to their mind, because they can be immediately contented and happy as soon as they meet their material needs, such as finding food and drink. We often see families enjoying the time they spend together having meals together and so on, even though they are very poor. So, from one angle, people in poorer countries are living more contented and happier lives than those in wealthier countries.

In summary, if we cultivate love and compassion, we can diminish mental afflictions and thereby enhance peace and happiness. And love and compassion underpin the essence of Dharma practice.

You would have heard of this advice from Geshe Chengawa, one of the most prominent Kadampa masters renowned for his mind generation of bodhicitta. He said, 'In general, if you were to condense all the teachings - all three baskets and the two vehicles - they can be embodied in two: refraining from harming others and helping others. Forbearance is critical to putting these two into practice, for without forbearance you will retaliate when others inflict harm upon you, and you will not turn away from causing harm when this happens. Without this forbearance there is no helping others. So, to succeed in your Dharma practice, forbearance is essential.' Essentially Geshe Chengawa was saying that even though the corpus of teachings is very extensive it can be condensed into the three baskets of teachings, or two vehicles, and practising them can be condensed into either refraining from causing harm to others or benefitting them. Furthermore, the practice of patience is indispensable to putting this advice into practice. If you have patience, then you will be able to make consistent progress. Without patience, then whenever you face adversity or receive harm from others, you will lose your temper and retaliate. If you continually hold onto a sense of retaliation, then you will never be able to prevent harmful actions.

## **2') Developing the patience of accepting suffering** **(a'') The reason you must definitely accept suffering** **(cont.)**

Last week we stopped at this line:

Therefore, it is very crucial that you generate the patience that accepts suffering.

Here we need to have some idea of what this patience of acceptance means. It means being able to tolerate any harm you receive from others, or any adversity you face, so that they don't disturb or provoke your mind. We also learn how the patience of accepting suffering is very important, because if we lack it, then we will just be adding more suffering to the suffering we already experience. Our inability to tolerate suffering and difficulties, mentally worrying about them and being disturbed by them, just adds more suffering to the initial problem.

### **(b'') The way to develop acceptance**

The way to develop acceptance has two parts:

1. Rejecting the idea that when suffering occurs it is absolutely unpleasant
2. Showing that it is appropriate to accept suffering

### **(1'') Rejecting the idea that when suffering occurs it is absolutely unpleasant**

This section talks about the importance of overcoming the thought that suffering and hardship is always very negative and harmful. If we hold that view, then whenever we confront hardship, we mentally view it as bad and begin to hate it, which then gives way to anger. As the text says:

If you can remedy a situation wherein suffering occurs, you do not need to feel that it is unpleasant. If you cannot remedy it, it is not helpful to find it unpleasant, so there is no need for, or effectiveness to, your displeasure; there is even a disadvantage.

This particular piece of advice is widely known and applied; many people have found it very useful because it helped them to transform their negative and pessimistic perspective of hardship or adverse situations into something positive and optimistic. The advice here is that whenever we face or confront certain difficulties pertaining to our physical or mental and emotional health, then rather than simply worrying about it, we should be directing our mind to thinking about whether there is a remedy. Is there any remedy to overcome that difficulty or hardship? For example, if it is a health issue that you face, then you have to ask what you can do by focusing on treating the illness that you have. Fortunately, these days when it comes to physical health, we have very good resources such as good hospitals, doctors and nurses. This is something we enjoy as humans, although animals don't.

What the text is saying is that when you consider what you can do to overcome a problem, then you can find the remedy and see an end to the problem. This gives you hope and helps to eliminate unhappiness. However, if there is no remedy, then why should we worry because worrying will add more suffering and be of no use. This advice is very educational and very enlightening because when we think like this, it makes us feel we are on top of the suffering; otherwise we fall under the pressure of suffering. Without that kind of perspective, the suffering and hardships of life can completely control us. Then we will lose all hope and experience despair.

As the text states:

If you are very impatient, a slight suffering is extremely difficult to bear, whereas if you minimize your impatience, you can endure great suffering.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

If there is a remedy,  
Why be displeased?  
If there is no remedy,  
What is the use of being displeased?

I shall not be impatient with  
Heat, cold, wind, and rain,  
Illness, bondage, beatings, and so on;  
If I am, the harm increases.

## (2") Showing that it is appropriate to accept suffering

Showing that it is appropriate to accept suffering has three parts:

1. Reflecting on the good qualities of suffering
2. Reflecting on the advantages of bearing suffering's hardships
3. How it is not difficult to bear suffering if you gradually grow accustomed to it, starting with the small

### (a) Reflecting on the good qualities of suffering

Suffering has five good qualities: (1) *The good quality of spurring you on to liberation.* This is because if you had no suffering, you would not develop the determination to be free of it.

The first positive quality of suffering is that it gives us an opportunity to cultivate renunciation. Renunciation refers to your desire to leave cyclic existence or the suffering of this worldly existence. It is saying here that the experience of suffering stimulates a sense of renunciation, a sense of wanting to emerge from suffering. So, with renunciation we begin to strive for the state of liberation. Therefore, the quality of suffering is that it causes renunciation.

(2) *The good quality of dispelling arrogance.* This is because when suffering strikes you, it reduces your sense of superiority.

This is again very true. Suffering causes a reduction in pride. For example, people who are normally very arrogant lose their pride when they face severe hardship; under adverse circumstances they may even look low and weak physically.

(3) *The good quality of causing you to shun sin.* This is because when you experience very painful feelings, they arise from non-virtue, so if you do not want these effects, you must avoid their causes.

When we experience suffering or any hardship, we do not want it and we have a strong wish to be free from it. So, the suffering situation can motivate us to look into the causes of suffering and make an effort to avoid suffering in the future. Essentially, suffering teaches us about the law of karma, for it shows us that sinful and negative actions are the cause of suffering, and if we do not want suffering, we must avoid non-virtues or sinful actions.

(4) *The good quality of causing you to like cultivating virtue.* This is because when you are tormented with suffering, you desire happiness, and once you want it, you must cultivate the virtue that causes it.

It is also a paradox that we recognise the value of happiness in the experience of suffering. It is when we face suffering or problems that our desire for life's happiness and joy becomes more apparent. Therefore, the experience of suffering can lead us to live life more skilfully and wisely and recognise accumulating virtues as a cause of the

happiness and joy we seek. In this way, suffering can inspire us to engage in virtuous actions.

The text continues:

(5) *The good quality of producing compassion for those who wander in cyclic existence.* This is because after you have assessed your own situation, you think, "Other beings suffer like this." From these five and what they indicate, recognize other good qualities on your own and then repeatedly train your mind to think, "This suffering is a condition that I want."

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

Since without suffering there is no determination to be free,  
You, mind, stay fixed!

And also:

Furthermore, the good qualities of suffering are that you  
Dispel arrogance with disenchantment,  
Develop compassion for the beings of cyclic existence,  
Carefully avoid sin, and delight in virtue.

This fifth quality of suffering is that suffering helps us to gain a better understanding of the suffering of other beings and thereby have more compassion for them. Based on our own experience of suffering, we have a better understanding of what beings are also experiencing. Therefore, we can easily feel empathy for those who are suffering. It is said that just as contemplating one's own suffering can instil a sense of renunciation and a wish to achieve liberation, contemplating the suffering of other beings can instil compassion, a wish to free them from suffering.

When Lama Tsongkhapa says *From these five and what they indicate, recognize other good qualities on your own* he is referring to the good qualities of suffering and hardship. Then he encourages us to *repeatedly train your mind to think, "This suffering is a condition that I want."* Through this we generate a positive mental outlook in relation to suffering and hardship.

In essence, we understand here the value of implementing the patience of the acceptance of suffering. Without it, then instead of finding peace, we will easily generate anger and hatred and harmful thoughts. As a result of holding such ill thoughts towards other beings, we will find no end to misery and suffering in our lives. So, the whole point is that if we want to be able to maintain a very happy and joyful state of mind, we must integrate the patience of the acceptance of suffering into our lives.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo  
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Edited Version*

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# The Six Perfections

ལྷན་ཁྲིམས་ཀྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

9 July 2019

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

Try to cultivate the proper motivation which makes a lot of difference to the efficacy of our practice.

Last week we discussed at length the benefits of developing the patience of accepting suffering. If we lack the patience of accepting suffering, then whenever we face any suffering or difficulties, we will loathe it and become very irritated or even angry. However, if our situation is favourable and pleasant and we like it, we then get attached to it and desire it.

As Dharma practitioners, we should be clear about what we should do and what we should not do. Whether we engage in meditation practice or any other form of Dharma practice, there are things we should do or accept, and things we should not do or reject. There is no point in being pretentious about our Dharma practice or appearing to be Dharma practitioners outwardly if we don't put this important point into practice.

Every event in life, good and bad, provides us with an opportunity to develop our practice of what to accept and what to reject. They give us an opportunity to practise the Dharma. When we experience suffering or any situation that we do not want, we should try to recognise that as being a result of non-virtue. This in turn should help instil the thought of refraining from engaging in non-virtues. Therefore, adverse situations serve as a cause to remind us of refraining from non-virtue. These adverse situations should also remind us to practise virtue because when we experience adverse situations we miss out on the joys and happiness of life even more than usual. Realising that happiness results from virtue, we should be inspired to practise virtue.

If we really apply this practice of adopting virtues and abandoning non-virtues, then we will find that as we develop this practice, and as our minds become more familiar with the thought of adopting virtues, and abandoning non-virtues, we will find lasting peace, stability and clarity within our mind.

The more we increase virtues and decrease non-virtues, the more peace, happiness and stability will we find in our life. So, it is essential that our spiritual practice integrates the practice of adopting virtue and of abandoning non-virtue. We know the Lord Buddha clearly said to us that the ten virtues are what we need to practise, and the ten non-virtues are what we need to abandon. This reflects the fundamental teaching of the Buddha. If we put this teaching aside and try to engage in something else that we think is very profound and meditate on that, then we are deluding ourselves.

The practice of adopting virtues and abandoning non-virtues is not only emphasised in Buddhism but is also advocated by all other major religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. You'll find that in the doctrines of all the spiritual traditions there are set guidelines as to what to adopt and what to discard. We need to adopt the ten

virtues, and discard the ten non-virtues because the ten virtues serve as a cause for yielding the desirable result of the happiness we seek, and the ten non-virtues serve as a cause for yielding the undesirable result of the suffering we do not want.

It is the same for all of us. Deep down we all have the desire for happiness, and the desire to abandon suffering and unhappiness. Yet the way we live our lives is quite the opposite; the causes we create are contrary to what we really seek in our lives. In other words, what we want and what we do are contradictory.

If we continue like that then there is no real hope of finding true peace and happiness. Even if we think we are following the Dharma and doing meditation practice, our daily actions do not accord with the Dharma teaching. I am simply saying that you should integrate the Dharma into your daily actions. This is how I try to live my life and I see it as my core Dharma practice. If we really want to gain some benefit from the Dharma and see positive change with our lives, we must integrate the Dharma into our everyday activities. The best thing I can offer to my close friends, which means all of you, is to tell you to put the Dharma into practise. I know I have been repeating myself over and over again, but I have a good reason to do so. However, if there are any among you who find what I say too noisy, I say simply close your ears. In fact, I note that even His Holiness the Dalai Lama quite frequently tells the public during his lectures that if they find his lecture too boring or deafening, they can simply cover their ears.

It's very important to remind ourselves about Dharma practice, because what we are lacking is the application of the Dharma to our daily thoughts and conduct. Through the practise of Dharma, we need to modify our daily thoughts and conduct. If we don't do that then what use is our Dharma learning! How can we expect the Dharma to benefit us and help us to achieve what we want if our thoughts and deeds run counter to the Dharma?

Now we'll continue with the text.

## **(b) Reflecting on the advantages of bearing suffering's hardships**

Reflecting on the advantages of bearing suffering's hardships has two parts:

1. Reflecting on the crucial benefits such as liberation, etc.
2. Reflecting on the benefit of dispelling immeasurable suffering

I'll continue reading from the text which you will find very striking. It says:

### **(1) Reflecting on the crucial benefits such as liberation, etc.**

Repeatedly make your mind steadfast, thinking, "I know that in the past while passing through cyclic existence I suffered for the sake of trifling desires and minor needs, yet I disregarded the many sufferings, undergoing a great deal of purposeless suffering that will in turn cause immeasurable suffering for me in my future lives. Given this, now that I know that I am engaged in virtue that will accomplish immeasurable benefits and happiness for myself and others, it is appropriate that I accept suffering a trillion times more than before - so of course I will accept sufferings smaller than that."

I won't go into this in detail, as the meaning is very clear. Essentially it is saying that in pursuit of very trifling, meaningless and minor purposes we sacrifice a lot. Not only

do we accept a great deal of hardship and suffering, but at the same time we accumulate a great number of non-virtues. Although the text is explicitly referring to the kinds of hardships and sufferings that we go through in association with our quest for trifling goals in the past and future lifetimes, this is also very relevant to our current life too.

The text continues:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

For the sake of my desires I have experienced  
Being burned, etc., thousands of times in the hells,  
But have not achieved either my own welfare  
Or the welfare of others.

This quote from *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* really summarises the meaning of the preceding passage. When it says, *for the sake of my desires I have experienced*, the word 'desire' can imply that you are misled by the wrong path. It also refers to the desire relating to any of the five sensual objects like beautiful forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch. To be more specific, out of craving for meat, people commit the act of killing of animals, out of attachment to wealth they commit the act of stealing, while lust can lead to sexual misconduct, and so forth. The word 'desire' incorporates all of this.

As result of the actions we create due to desire and attachment we experience *being burned, etc., thousands of times in the hells*. Basically, because of desire and attachment, we experience great suffering, such as of the suffering of the hell realms. Further, *we have not achieved either our own welfare or the welfare of others*. Let alone the welfare of other beings, the actions we have created out of desire have not even achieved our own purpose. Our actions have achieved nothing but a great amount of suffering!

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* continues:

This is not as harmful as that,  
And it achieves great purpose,  
So it is correct here only to delight  
In suffering that clears away all beings' hurt.

When it says, *this is not as harmful as that*, Shantideva is referring back to the previous verse which relates to the great amount of suffering we have endured in the past to achieve worldly desires and mundane goals, and the great hardship we will endure in future lives in order to achieve small mundane goals. The amount of suffering we go through and accept in the pursuit of trifling purposes of the world is very great, but when it says here *this is not as harmful as that*, the word 'this' refers to the effort we put into our Dharma or meditation practice. Compared to the hardship and suffering we endure in our pursuit of trifling goals, the hardship and suffering we experience in our Dharma and meditation practice is very small. As it says here, *this is not as harmful as that. And it achieves great purpose*, which indicates that our practice doesn't make us suffer or harm us as much as the pursuit of mundane goals, and the effort we put into our practice does not entail a great deal of hardship. Moreover, the suffering we experience and have to tolerate in Dharma practice is very little, yet what we gain from the Dharma practice is very great. *So it is correct here only to delight in suffering that clears away all beings' hurt*. There are many benefits to ourselves and all other beings from our spiritual practice. Therefore, as the text says, *it is correct here only to delight*. This is saying that whatever the degree of hardship, or the suffering that we experience in our Dharma practice, it is worthwhile and something that we should delight in.

The text continues:

Thus, after you reflect on how you have previously created only hardship that did not accomplish any of your own or others' aims, uplift your mind, thinking, "Why am I not now bearing a suffering that achieves great purpose? Although I am suffering, how excellent that I have found something like this to do."

The effort we put into Dharma practice has the great benefit of achieving complete enlightenment. Realising this great benefit, we should think that it is worthwhile to confront and tolerate any hardship and suffering in Dharma practice. In the face of any obstacles in our Dharma practice, we should never feel despair. Rather we should feel more inspired and raise our spirits and courage.

This makes us reflect on our deeds and their outcomes. Are we are gaining enough benefit from the various things in which we invest so much of our time, effort, and resources and which lead to much hardship? If we are not really achieving our desired goals, then what is the point of doing the things we do? What is the purpose of our life? The purpose is undoubtedly to achieve happiness and eliminate suffering.

As we carefully examine our everyday mundane activities, we will develop a sense of distaste or renunciation because they even do not fulfil our own purposes. To quote the master Shantideva:

Although seeking to avoid pain,  
They run headlong into suffering.  
They long for happiness, but foolishly  
Destroy it, as if it were their enemy.

This very popular passage from the Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says that even though beings have a strong wish to avoid suffering, they run after the causes of suffering. They have a strong desire for happiness, but out of ignorance, they destroy their happiness, as if happiness was their enemy. This may very well reflect our situation because it shows what we desire and what we do are contradictory.

The text continues:

Moreover, develop a fearless attitude toward hardship, thinking how you were misled by bad teachers to ignoble, purposeless paths whereon you endured ascetic practices such as leaping on a trident, sitting close to five fires, and the like. Also think how for the sake of inferior, mundane purposes you made yourself bear many sufferings in farming, business, and war.

Here, the purpose is to encourage us to overcome any hardship and suffering we face in our Dharma practice by recognising that our practice will result in achieving supreme enlightenment, fulfilling the true wishes of ourselves and all other beings. Hence, our Dharma practice has the most marvellous purpose, and we should definitely maintain our determination, courage, and motivation to practise at all times.

There are those who are *misled by bad teachers to ignoble, purposeless paths*, etc., believing that if they leap onto on a *trident* (a three-pointed steel spike) then they'll achieve liberation. As a result, they are able to tolerate a vast amount of suffering. Others say that if you engage in the ritual of fire, burning the tips of your five fingers, then you can reach liberation, and this involves tolerating the extreme pain and suffering too. Whether misled by teachers, or out of their ignorance, some people tolerate this sort of suffering but for no good reason or purpose.



If we look at farmers, we can see how hard they have to work to make their living – they have to work on the farm in extreme weather conditions, whether it's hot or cold or wet. Business people also have to work hard without any rest in order to make a living. The hardship we face in our Dharma practice is very small compared to the hardships people face to make a living in the world or for some inferior reasons. But our Dharma practice has a far-reaching goal and thinking along these lines should instil the courage and motivation to continue our practice.

Here there are guidelines for both worldly life as well as spiritual life. As it says, in worldly life you have to make a lot of effort, face hardships and problems to fulfil your wishes and dreams. If a farmer wants to have a good harvest he can't just say, 'Oh I own a lot of land' but then sleep all day. That won't achieve anything. Rather he has to go out and work in his fields to achieve a good harvest. Whatever activity we undertake, we have to make the effort to gather all the suitable conditions, one after the other, and try to overcome all the obstacles, and in this way we are able to achieve our goal.

I once watched a TV series about the life of an American farming family. There was a young couple with five children who owned a very big piece of land. The father and mother worked hard on the farm to support, care for, and educate their family. In the end the whole family became very successful, so the show (which went on for a long while) had a good ending. The hard work and endurance of suffering paid off in the end.

Sometimes we can be inspired when we learn about the life story of successful people who climb from the bottom to the top of the ladder of success. There are the stories of those who come from a very poor background, and through hard work have gone on to become very successful in their chosen field. There are very successful people who initially had nothing, so they started with small jobs, and then moved on to better ones and after that even better ones. Likewise, when we follow spiritual practice, we have to be very clear about the purpose of our spiritual practice which, compared with mundane works, is far higher and greater, because it is aimed at achieving our full potential and our own ultimate spiritual goal, as well as benefitting all sentient beings. We can be inspired to overcome problems and not lose our motivation and courage when we think about how people exert themselves and work hard in order to achieve their goals, even if those goals are mundane and small.

Therefore, we have to say to ourselves, 'Compared to that, the hardship I face in my practice is very minor, but the outcome is so great.' With this way of thinking, we will never lose our motivation, determination and courage when we face hardships or problems in our spiritual practice.

It can also be inspiring to learn about the stories of the early migrants in Australia who worked so hard and built this nation and began a new life for themselves.

The text continues as follows:

## **(2) Reflecting on the benefit of dispelling immeasurable suffering**

Reflect well on the differences between short-term and long-term suffering, thinking, "A man who is to be executed is overjoyed when he is freed from execution by having merely his finger cut off. How excellent it would be if similarly, by means of this slight suffering of human hardship, I could permanently dispel the suffering of

limitless cyclic existence in general and in particular the suffering of miserable rebirths such as the hells, etc." If you do this well, you produce fearless courage with respect to hardship.

When you are doing the giving and taking meditation, you can reflect on the suffering and hardship other beings go through and take them upon yourself. Not only that, but you can think of the hardship and the suffering that you will undergo, and accept this suffering as taking on suffering of all other beings, including their future suffering. Then think, 'By accepting this, may all others be free from suffering.'

As a way to instil motivation and courage into your spiritual practice, think of the benefits and results of the spiritual practice that you do, which has the potential to stop lower rebirth, and achieve liberation from cyclic existence. So whenever you do a Dharma practice it has a very important purpose. For example, if you practise the act of refraining from killing, the benefit is that you prevent a bad rebirth. Likewise, if we refrain from the act of stealing, the result will be finding wealth and good resources in the future. Thinking like this is a way to help us understand that whatever the hardship or difficulty we go through in spiritual practice, or the effort we put into the practice, it is all very worthwhile.

The text continues:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

How is it unfortunate if a man who is to be executed  
Is freed from that by having his hand cut off?  
How is it unfortunate if by human suffering  
You are released from hell?

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

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

There is nothing whatsoever  
That does not become easier through habituation.  
So by becoming used to small harms  
You will bear great harms as well.

Here we learn that whether something is hard or easy depends on our familiarity or our habitation with that thing. We understand that with habituation we can change anything. This gives us more inspiration.

The text continues:

After you have conceived the armor-like thought to accept suffering, you gradually blend it with suffering, starting with small sufferings. When you do this, you steadily increase your capacity to accept suffering.

This shows us that the best way to develop our practice of patience is to start with practising patience with things that are within our capacity. For example, if you are living with someone who has the habit of always speaking harshly to you, try to first make an effort to tolerate a few unpleasant words. From there you can move on to developing patience with speech that is even more harsh. Likewise, you can develop patience with respect to unpleasant bodily gestures that others show to you, starting from a small unpleasantness to bigger unpleasantness.

The text continues:

The *Compendium of Trainings* says:

Once you have first grown used to small sufferings, you will become accustomed to the difficult and the very difficult. For example, just as all living beings have the idea that suffering is happiness through the power of conditioning, so you maintain the idea of joy whenever

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you experience suffering by becoming used to applying the idea of joy to these experiences.

As to how this comes about, the *Questions of Householder Ugra Sutra* states:

Free yourself from a mind that is like a piece of cotton.

Like a piece of cotton is easily blown about, the mind is easily disturbed or agitated when any disturbing thoughts arise.

And the *Array of Stalks Sutra* says:

Daughter, in order to destroy all afflictions you should develop a mind that is hard to defeat.

Thus, you need courage that is very firm and stable; you will not be able to accept suffering with a fragile mind.

If you initially develop a significant degree of courage, even great suffering becomes helpful.

The implication here is that the greater the challenges that we face, or the challenges that lie ahead, if we are already prepared in advance with a higher degree of courage then those great challenges will no longer be a difficulty. Indeed, that difficulty and suffering can be transformed into an aid to our practice.

The commentary continues,

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

If you get a chance it's good to read these lines out aloud. Just hearing them has a good effect. Just by saying *I have never heard of such a thing, and even if I had heard of it, I could never do something like that* we are undermining our own potential. Then *even a small suffering becomes a cause for you to turn back from the path*.

People have come to me and said they have problems with their son or daughter, and all day long keep saying to themselves, 'I have this problem. It's no-one else's problem but mine.' I tell them not to worry and they say to me, 'But I'm their mother and I worry about them all the time.' I tell them there's no benefit for you in worrying and there's no benefit for your son or daughter if you worry. Be there for them and help them. And they say, 'But my daughter or son is suffering.' I say, 'Worrying doesn't lessen their problems. Take a little holiday, go out for lunch, go outside for some fresh air. That's more beneficial than worrying.'

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