
The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

16 October 2018

Set the correct motivation and begin your meditation.
[Tonglen meditation]

It's time to arise out of your meditation.

As ordinary sentient beings we cannot sit in deep meditative equipoise and at the time can listen to Dharma; we can't do both things simultaneously. Only fully enlightened beings can do that. That is why we have to come out of our meditation in order to listen to this profound teaching.

It is very important to cultivate the right motivation, the bodhicitta motivation. It is said that even if you cultivate the bodhicitta motivation of an awakening mind, for a split second, there is a tremendous benefit. It also has the benefit of purifying all negativities and at the same time accumulating enormous merit. Therefore, try to cultivate the awakening mind, the wish to achieve the full state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, from the depths of your heart. Make sure that the motivation has no stain of self-interest or self-cherishing.

From today we begin teaching the section on How to Train in the Mahayana in General from Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise on the Stages of Path to Enlightenment*¹.

III) EXPLANATION OF THE PROCESS OF LEARNING THE PRECEPTS

This has two subheadings:

1. How to train in the Mahayana in general
2. How to train specifically in the Vajrayana

Study the meaning of the term 'Mahayana' or Great Vehicle in your own time to find out the connotation of Great Vehicle.

A 'HOW TO TRAIN IN THE MAHAYANA IN GENERAL'

There are three subheadings under this heading:

1. Establishing the desire to learn the precepts of the spirit of enlightenment
2. Taking the vows of the conquerors' children after establishing the desire to learn the precepts
3. How to train after taking the vows

1. Establishing the desire to learn the precepts of the spirit of enlightenment

In the discipline of individual liberation and in tantra it is inappropriate to study the precepts before you have first taken the vows

Those of you who have been studying for a long time will know what 'individual liberation' means., Here the discipline of individual liberation refers to the vows of individual liberation (Skt: *pratimoksha* Tib: *so.thar*

sDom.pa) such as the vows of novice monks and nuns, fully ordained monks and nuns etc. There is also reference to the tantric vows. When the text says 'it is inappropriate to study the precepts' it is saying that without first taking the individual liberation and tantric vows, it is inappropriate to study the precepts or instructions relating to those vows.

The text next comments on the vows:

but these bodhisattva vows are different. First you understand the precepts well and then, after you are trained in them, if you have an enthusiasm for taking them, you are given the vows.

If you just read the commentary it is quite self-explanatory. As far as taking the bodhisattva vows goes, however, it is different in that it is saying here that first you should study and understand the precepts and train in them well, and 'if you have enthusiasm for taking them, you are given the vows.' Here the text refers to taking the bodhisattva vows which are, unlike vinaya or pratimoksha vows, allowed to study before taking them. In fact, the text says that before taking the bodhisattva vows it is very important that you study the precepts related to the vows very well. The reason is that if you have really studied and understood them well, feeling strongly motivated and enthusiastic about taking the vows, your practice will be very stable.

Essentially when it says 'in the discipline of individual liberation', it refers to the vinaya or vows of individual liberation, and the tantric vows – it is not appropriate to study these vows before taking them. On the other hand, it is strongly recommended that you study the bodhisattva's precepts and vows prior to taking them.

In Tibetan the terms 'enthusiastic' literally means joyful effort, 'if you have an enthusiasm for taking them', connotes heartfelt joy in the bodhisattva's vows and precepts. After studying and learning those vows and precepts, and if you feel joyful, positive and inspired, then it says you should go ahead to take them. Indirectly this means that if you don't feel that way, it is not recommended to take the vows.

Then the commentary continues:

In this regard the *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

For persons wanting to take the ethical discipline vows of a bodhisattva you should make known in advance the fundamental precepts and the sources of fault for bodhisattva as taught here in the "Summary of the Bodhisattva Fundamentals" for the bodhisattvas' scriptural collection of the discourses. If after sincere investigation and intelligent analysis these persons are inspired, and if it is not because of being made to do it by someone else and it is not to compete with others, then know that these are reliable bodhisattvas. These persons should be given the vows of ethical discipline and should receive them in accord with the ritual.

If you read the actual text it is quite clear however you should take the time to reflect on the meaning of each line and word. For instance, when it says, 'If after sincere investigation and intelligent analysis,' it means that after you have initially studied the scripture by reading or by listening to the teachings, the next stage is to use your own intelligence to understand the depth of the meaning, particularly applying those points or advice to yourself.

¹ Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path, Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee - Joshua W.C. Cutler, Editor-in Chief and Guy Newland, Editor.

You should see the benefits of applying this methodology of sincere investigation and intelligent analysis, and understand the shortcomings if you don't apply it. It is saying that if as a result of fully understanding them through using your own investigation and intelligence you feel motivated or inspired to take the vows and follow the precepts, then you should go ahead. That is the proper way of approaching the taking of these vows.

The passage saying 'and if it is not because of being made to do it by someone else' means that you are not taking on certain practices or precepts because you're being forced to or obliged by someone else. It should not be like that. It also says, 'it is also not to compete with others.' You must decide to do certain things on the basis of your own understanding, your intelligence and what your wisdom tells you, not because you see someone else doing them and do them too out of a sense of competitiveness. It is saying that it should not be like that. The text then says 'then know that these are reliable bodhisattvas. These persons should be given the vows of ethical discipline and should receive them in accord with the ritual.'

Then Lama Tsongkhapa continues:

This is a very good method because, if you understand the precepts, bring them to mind, establish a wish to train in them from the depths of your heart, and then take the vows, you will be extremely constant.

To explain the precepts both here and below would make for too great a burden of words, so I shall indicate them below.

2. Taking the vows of the conquerors' children after establishing the desire to learn the precepts

I have already established in detail in my Basic Path to Awakening commentary on the Bodhisattva Levels' chapter on ethical discipline

This commentary by Lama Tsongkhapa is available in English. In the past I have recommended that you read this text to learn more about the precepts and so forth; it is a good reference.

First how to take the bodhisattva vows, immediately after that how to guard against fundamental transgressions and transgressions which constitute minor infractions, and then how to repair vows if they degenerate. It is most definitely necessary that you read this before you take the vows, so understand them from there.

3. How to train after taking the vows

How to train after taking the vows has three parts:

- a) What the precepts are based upon
- b) How all the precepts are included in the six perfections
- c) The process of learning the perfections

When it says, 'what the precepts are based upon', they are based upon the six perfections. Then, 'how all the precepts are included in the six perfections' will be explained by the next subheading.

a) What the precepts are based upon

There are limitless clear categorizations, but if you arrange the bodhisattva precepts by type, you can include them all within the six perfections

The six perfections are thus the great condensation of all the key points of the bodhisattva path. The four ways to gather disciples [generosity, pleasant speech, working at

the aims, and consistency of behaviour] are also included within these six perfections as follows.

Please list the six perfections.

The perfections are generosity, morality, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom.

The four ways to gather disciples are included within the six perfections.

That generosity is included is obvious.

The four ways to gather disciples are:

Pleasant speech in giving instructions to disciples, taking the six perfections as the point of departure;

The second way of gathering disciples is included within the perfections.

working at the aims is establishing others in the aims of these instructions;

This third way to gather disciples is to teach or help the disciples to understand the teachings as well as inspire them to put their understanding into practice.

and consistency of behaviour is practicing just as the disciple does.

This fourth way to gather disciples is being 'consistent' in the sense that the teachers should also implement the same practices they advise others to adopt. The teachers need to be consistent with whatever advice they give to others to put into practice, that they also engage in the same practices.

The commentary continues:

Although it is true that the entire bodhisattva path is also subsumed under other condensations such as the two collections, the three trainings [ethical discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom], and so forth, these are not able to produce the understanding that the six perfections do, so the six perfections are the best inclusive set.

Name the two collections and the three trainings.

The two collections are the collections of merit and wisdom. The three trainings are morality concentration and wisdom

b) How all the precepts are included in the six perfections

Explanation on how all the precepts are included in the six perfections has two parts:

1. A discussion of the main topic, the fixed number of perfections
2. An ancillary discussion of the fixed order of the perfections

The Bhagavan formulated a bare outline of the six perfections, and the holy Regent [Maitreya] produced certain knowledge of these by explicating in accord with the Buddha's intended meaning the key points of the rationale for formulating the perfections in that fashion. These explanations show that there is a fixed number of perfections. When you are convinced of this and astonished by it, you will understand the practice of the six perfections as the supreme instruction, so obtain such conviction.

A discussion of the main topic, the fixed number of perfections, has six parts:

1. The fixed number of perfections based on high status
2. The fixed number of perfections based on fulfilling the two aims

3. The fixed number of perfections based on perfecting the complete fulfillment of others' aims
4. The fixed number of perfections based on their subsuming the entire Mahayana
5. The fixed number of perfections in terms of the completeness of paths or method
6. The fixed number of perfections based on the three trainings

(A) THE FIXED NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS BASED ON HIGH STATUS

To fully complete the greatly effective bodhisattva deeds you need an immeasurably long succession of lifetimes.

This clearly implies that we may not be able to achieve the perfection of giving, moral ethics etc. in one single lifetime; rather we need to depend on many more lifetimes. In order to ensure that we make progress with our practice, we continuously need to find a life that has the four excellences, the causes of which are the practice of the six perfections.

Moreover, to attain quick success on the path within these lifetimes you need a life excellent in every aspect. Our present life is not excellent in every aspect but rather has only some of the aspects of full excellence; we do not make progress with it though we practice the teachings. You need a life that has four kinds of excellence: (1) resources to use [the result of the perfection of generosity], (2) a body with which you act [the result of the perfection of ethical discipline], (3) companions together with whom you act [the result of the perfection of patience], and (4) work that you are able to accomplish once undertaken [the result of the perfection of joyous perseverance].

The first excellence is relating to the **resources** we need for our life. Are good resources important for our life or not? Do you all want good resources? Yes. Having all the resources alone is not enough. Importantly you also need an excellent life or a **body** that is fit to enjoy those resources.

You also need **companions** or others with whom you can enjoy those resources. That is also important. The fourth is to **finish the task you have started**. Thus, the four excellences are excellent resources, excellent body, excellent companions and the excellence of completing any task once started. You can imagine how different our life would be if we had all of these four excellences.

Each of these four excellences can be accomplished through each of the first four perfections: the perfection of giving, through which we can achieve excellent resources; the perfection of morality (or moral ethics) through which we achieve an excellent body; the perfection of patience through which we achieve excellent companions; and lastly the perfection of joyous effort through which we are able to complete whatever work we start.

The commentary continues:

Since in many cases these four kinds of excellence alone may themselves become conditions for afflictions, you must not fall under the control of the afflictions

This passage highlights the point that even though we may have met with all of the four excellences, they too can turn into the source of mental afflictions unless we have cultivated a meditative concentration. It is important to ensure that good conditions do not serve to

increase mental afflictions. Hence the commentary says, *you must not fall under the control of the afflictions*, which is achieved as a result of the perfection of meditative stabilisation.

In order to prevent the excellences becoming a cause for increasing afflictions, we have to engage in the perfection of concentration which subdues all the mental afflictions. It is said that the benefit of meditation is decreasing mental afflictions.

As just the four kinds of excellence are not sufficient, you must also distinguish well, in regard to what to adopt and what to cast aside, precisely what things to do and to stop doing [the result of the perfection of wisdom].

This justifies the importance of integrating the perfection of wisdom into or practice. In relating the importance of developing the perfection of wisdom the commentary continues:

Otherwise, just as a bamboo or plantain tree dies after giving fruit, or a mule dies with pregnancy, you will be destroyed by the four excellences.

This reinforces the fact that without engaging in the practice of the perfection of wisdom, we will lose the advantage of having the four excellences, just like a bamboo or banana tree - if you peel off its skin you get nothing but skin and once it produces fruits it is of no use as it does not produce fruits again. It is important to relate this to our practice in order to understand why we need to practice all six perfections. Simply, if we want all four excellences, and we think of all the things we want in our lives, we will be motivated to engage in the six perfections. It is important to contemplate on each word and line found here and relate it to our practice. This is very effective.

The commentary continues with the perfection of wisdom:

The wise understand how these six - the four excellences, control of the afflictions, and knowledge of what to adopt and what to cast aside - are the results of earlier virtuous actions, and they strive again at steadily increasing their causes.

This says that if we cultivate the perfection of wisdom then we do not take for granted all the excellent conditions that we have found in this life. Whereas if we do not have the wisdom, we take it for granted and then as said here:

The unwise use the results of their earlier accumulations of virtue and exhaust them; as they do not increase them anew, they reach the brink of their future suffering.

Sooner or later all the excellences or good conditions will be exhausted and then we will fall into suffering. However, if we understand our situation through the eyes of wisdom, we will be encouraged to engage in practice even more because we will see that our excellent conditions are the result of our past virtuous actions, such as the perfection of giving. Since you appreciate the good conditions and know that they result from virtuous actions, you will be inspired to create more virtuous actions.

As we have discussed in the past, we should appreciate even small things like enjoying a cup of tea, and see it is as a result of our virtuous actions. As we enjoy that tea,

we will also be inspired to create more virtuous actions. In this way the good conditions that we have found now motivate us to create the causes for more good conditions in the future.

I have been saying over and over again that you should not exhaust all your good karmas by simply indulging in the pleasures and not accumulating any more good karma. But it appears that my words go in one ear and out the other. Even though you have heard about the eight worldly concerns you have not worked to overcome them in practice.

The worldly attitude towards pain and pleasure is that normally we view pleasure as something that we desire while we try to avoid pain. In fact, we should reverse that attitude, welcoming feelings of pain but not pleasure. We should see that feelings of pain are symptoms of exhausting the result of bad karma so in that sense it is good; it also as a reminder to not accumulate any more bad karma. Conversely, we should recognise that experiencing pleasures is an indication of exhausting our good karma, so our only alternative is to accumulate more good karma. If we think along these lines, we develop wisdom in our practice through which we are inspired to practice virtue and abandon non-virtue.

In this way, whenever we find pleasure we see it as a result of our virtuous actions which should inspire us to engage in more virtuous actions. Likewise, as suffering and pain is something we want to avoid, and if we see it as the result of our non-virtuous actions, confronting suffering should instil in our mind thoughts of abandoning non-virtuous actions. To practise virtue and avoid non-virtues, the first key is having a genuine thought and determination to practice virtue and avoid non-virtue.

When you again produce these six in future lives, their production will not be causeless, or from discordant causes, but rather from concordant causes that are the perfections, fixed as six in number. Therefore, in this lifetime you must repeatedly habituate yourself to constant reliance on the six perfections because the superiority of the effects is commensurate to the superiority of the causes. A life with the four excellences constitutes temporary high status, whereas the ultimate high status, which consists of ultimate excellence of body, etc exists at the buddha level.

Here the text indicates the temporary outcome of the six perfections and the ultimate outcome of the six perfections.

Thus the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras (Mahayana-sutralamkara)* says:

High status possessed of excellent resources and body,
Excellent companions and undertakings,
Not going under the power of the afflictions,
And never being mistaken in activities

This passage summarises how the four excellences are the result of the six perfections. Recall that the perfection of giving is the cause of excellent resources, the perfection of morality is the cause for a good body, the perfection of patience is the cause for excellent companions and joyous effort is the cause for the success of all undertakings. Meditative concentration prevents the excellences from being soiled by the power

of the afflictions, while never being mistaken in activities is the result of the perfection of wisdom.

(B) THE FIXED NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS BASED ON FULFILLING THE TWO AIMS

When someone in such a life of high status learns the bodhisattva deeds, these activities are comprehensively categorized as two: those which fulfil your own aim and those which fulfil the aims of others. Therefore, there is a fixed number of perfections based on fulfilling the two aims.

This paragraph indicates that having found the four excellences complemented by the last two perfections of concentration and wisdom, bodhisattvas do only two things: achieve the meaning of one's own purposes and the meaning or purposes of other beings. These are the only two aims.

This section of the text is showing how in terms of fulfilling the two aims - one's own aims and the aims of other beings - all the practices are included in the six perfections.

To fulfil the aims of others you must first help them with material goods. Since no benefit will come from generosity accompanied by harmfulness toward living beings,

This first talks of the perfection of giving, which primarily refers to your wholehearted intention to give. When you have cultivated that kind of thought in the depth of your heart, you will naturally give whatever resources you have to others, thereby fulfilling their needs.

The commentary then says:

To fulfil the aims of others you must first help them with material goods. Since no benefit will come from generosity accompanied by harmfulness toward living beings, you need ethical discipline, ...

This indicates the necessity of the practice of morality or moral ethics, essentially based on the principle of non-harmfulness. Without integrating the principle of non-harmfulness (or thought of not harming others) then you cannot do the practice of giving wholeheartedly. Therefore, in order to serve others, in order to benefit others, the practice of morality is mandatory.

...toward living beings, you need ethical discipline, which has a great purpose for others in that it is the state of desisting from harm to others and the causes of such harm.

This refers to refraining from the ten non-virtuous of the body, speech, and mind. In this Tibetan version, desisting from harmfulness refers to the non-virtuous actions of the body, and the base of harmfulness refers to the speech, four of the non-virtuous actions of speech and so forth.

To bring this to its full development you also need patience that disregards the harm done to you, for, if you are impatient with harm and retaliate a time or two, you will not attain pure ethical discipline.

As we discussed before, this relates to the practice of the six perfections in order to benefit others. It is saying that in order to benefit others we need to practise giving and morality (which is the thought of abandoning harm upon other beings). The text says that in order to benefit others we need to practise patience. For example, if we receive

harm from others and do not practise patience, i.e. do not tolerate any harm we receive from them and retaliate then instead of benefiting others we cause them harm. As such, the practice of patience is essential in order to prevent harmful actions and maintain our altruistic attitude towards others.

When you do not retaliate by practising patience, you prevent others from accumulating more negativities, because if you retaliate then they may retaliate back with more harmful actions. Whereas your act of non-retaliation may bring calmness in their mind and motivate them to create virtuous actions. Because of your practice of patience, it says here:

When you do not retaliate because of your patience, you prevent others from accumulating a great amount of sin and bring them to virtue by inspiring them with your patience.

Through this, when others observe your practice of patience, they may be inspired by it and through this, they may accumulate virtue. In this way, we can see here how our practice of patience helps others to achieve their great purposes. From this, we understand how the first three perfections of giving, morality and patience enable us to primarily benefit other beings. The text continues with the theme of how the six perfections are enough or essential to fulfilling one's own aims and other beings saying:

You attain your own aim, the bliss of liberation, through the power of wisdom.

Your own aim, which is state of liberation or nirvana, depends on the perfection of wisdom. Then it goes on:

Since you will not attain this with a distracted mind, ...

meaning you cannot achieve wisdom or insight if your mind is too distracted.

...you must set your mind in meditative equipoise by means of meditative stabilization,...

This shows that we have to rely on the perfection of concentration or meditative stabilisation to overcome all the distracted states of mind. And then:

obtaining a mental serviceability wherein you intentionally set your attention on any object of meditation ...

... refers to benefits of the perfection of concentration.

The commentary goes on:

since a lazy person does not produce this, you need joyous perseverance day and night that never slackens, so this is the basis of the other perfections.

Here a connection is made between the importance of generating joyous perseverance and achieving the state of concentration and wisdom. Without joyous effort, we can fall prey to laziness, and then we cannot achieve concentration and wisdom. So in this way, it summarises how the three perfections of joyous effort, concentration and wisdom are necessary to achieve one's own goals.

For accomplishing the two aims, then, the number of perfections is fixed as six.

In terms of fulfilling these two aims, one's own aim and of others, the number of the perfections is six. The text quotes *The Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* which says:

Those who strive for the aims of beings
Work at giving, non-harm, and patience;
And completely fulfil their own aims
With stabilization and liberation, together with their basis

In these six there is no complete fulfillment of others' aims. The mention of "stabilization and liberation" differentiates between the two as (1) the stabilization of the mind on the object of meditation, this being the imprint of meditative stabilization, and (2) the liberation from cyclic existence, this being the imprint of wisdom. Notice that this does not mistake meditative serenity for insight. As this is so, those who assert that the meditation of fixing one's attention in an absence of conceptual thought is meditation on the profound are speaking of a meditation that is a single portion of the meditative stabilization that is one of these six perfections. You must attain certain knowledge of the six perfections in their entirety.

I chose to teach you this text because I want you all to actually read it and contemplate on its meaning. That is my main hope. The six perfections are the core practice of the Mahayana. So, it is good to study the depth and breadth of the meaning as much as you can, e.g. knowing the difference between giving and the perfection of giving and so forth.

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Edited Version*

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Homework

Teaching: 16 October 2018

1. It is strongly recommended that you study the bodhisattva's precepts and vows prior to taking them. Why?

2. List:

a) The six perfections:

b) The four ways of gathering disciples:

c) The two collections:

d) The three trainings:

3. Summarise: A) The fixed number of perfections based on high status.

4. Summarise: B) The fixed number of perfections based on fulfilling the two aims.

The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

23 October 2018

We have just recited the prayer for taking refuge, which indicates that we are Buddhists, and the prayer for generating bodhicitta, which indicates that we are Mahayana Buddhists. Accordingly, we should cultivate the bodhicitta motivation and begin our usual meditation of giving and taking.

[Tonglen meditation]

Review of key elements of last week's teaching

We covered some very important topics that should serve as guidelines for our future, such as the **type of future life that we should seek**. We learnt that we should seek a life in a higher rebirth which is endowed with the **four excellences**. We then learnt that we can, indeed, find such an excellent life by engaging in the practice of the six perfections.

At the moment we may not actually have practised any of the six perfections, such as the perfection of giving, because here the word 'perfection' specifically includes the three attributes of bodhicitta, the wisdom of emptiness and dedication. However, we do have the opportunity to engage in the practice of the six perfections. We can practise the perfection of giving which is to cultivate a thought of giving; the perfection of moral discipline which is to cultivate a thought of restraint from committing harmful actions; and the perfection of patience with facing hardship or receiving harm from others and so forth.

We are aware that sooner or later we have to leave this life and go to the next rebirth without any choice. If we ask, 'Do we have any choice about the next rebirth?', the answer is that we do not have any choice because rebirth is predetermined by the force of karma and mental afflictions. Therefore, it is important for us to recognise and be convinced that positive karmas will result in a happy rebirth and negative karmas will result in a bad rebirth.

As we learnt in last week's teaching, we should first try to understand why it is crucial for us to find a life with the four excellences, and then understand that we can indeed find such a life by engaging in the practice of the six perfections. It is said that the perfection of moral discipline serves as the primary cause for us to achieve a happy rebirth; the practice of giving is the main cause to ensure that we have good resources; the practice of patience is the main cause to ensure good friends and companions to share and enjoy those good resources, and joyous perseverance is the cause to be able to successfully complete whatever we start.

However, it's not good enough just to find a life with the four excellences, if we waste that opportunity and it ends up as a basis for even more mental afflictions. Hence, the need to practise the last two perfections - the perfection of meditative stabilisation, which is primarily to subdue or overcome the very gross or manifest form of mental afflictions; and the practice of the perfection of wisdom, which uproots these mental afflictions.

You have been doing the **meditation of giving and taking** for a long time. So it is important to check whether this meditation has increased your practice of giving at least on a

mental level. In this meditation, as the prayer that we chant tells us, we imagine giving our body, belongings, happiness and virtues to others. Along with that we are supposed to be reinforcing our sense of love and compassion for other beings.

It is important to focus on practices that are not only relevant, but which are within our capacity to actually integrate into our lives. In this way, whatever practice we do will become effective and beneficial. If we have conviction and faith in the working of the law of cause and effect, then we understand that our practices will yield results. As you have studied in the past, there is a type of result called a concordant result or a result similar to its cause, and it has two types: concordant with the causal experience and concordant with habitual patterns. Therefore, as a concordant result of your practice of giving in terms of habitual patterns, you will eventually be able to practise giving with ease, as thoughts of giving arise on a more instinctive level.

The meditation of giving and taking is primarily to train our mind to become accustomed to the thought of giving and taking. It is important not only because the actual act of giving depends on our thought of giving, but also so that the act of giving comes from the depths of our hearts. Therefore, it is important that we first train our mind thoroughly in order to be able to practise well. If our mind is not trained well with the cultivation of the thought of giving, then let alone giving our things to others, we would be too stingy to use them for ourselves. Sometimes we might give things to a person and then later on regret that giving, which could be because our act of giving did not come wholeheartedly from our heart.

On a day-to-day basis, we should remind ourselves about our spiritual practice. I frequently tell people who I meet casually or in my Dharma talks that each morning when you get up, you should try to cultivate the positive thought: **I will only do actions that benefit others and at any cost, I will not do any actions that will harm them.** You will find that cultivating such a positive state of mind is like the dawning of the sun dispelling the darkness of ignorance and confusion in your mind. It will make a huge difference to your experiences over the whole day. Whereas if you start the day with your mind filled with distractions and negative thoughts, then for the whole day you may experience a very confused and bewildered mind. Therefore, it is very beneficial to just to say to yourself every morning that 'benefitting other beings and not causing harm to them is my most important task.'

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that to remember the qualities of the Three Jewels, he recites this passage by Nagarjuna from *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* every morning, 'I prostrate to Gautama, who through compassion taught the true doctrine, which leads to the relinquishing of all views.' He follows this by saying, 'please grant me blessings.' It is essential to do this mind training practice on an everyday basis, in order to develop a positive habit and to habituate our minds to positive thoughts.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama also usually recites the same homage to the Lord Buddha before giving any Dharma teachings which His Holiness says is also a practice of one of his very important gurus, Khunu Lama Rinpoche. Likewise, I encourage you to think of benefitting other beings and not causing any harm to them every morning, as soon as you arise from your bed.

Last week, we talked about the six perfections. We should take note that there are **six opposites or six opposing forces relating to each of the six perfections**. The opposite of giving is obviously stinginess or miserliness.

We generally get the impression that Dharma teachings mainly focus on the future well-being of sentient beings, which may lead to people getting the wrong notion that maybe it is not relevant or beneficial to our present life. They may think that the Dharma is not meant to apply to bringing about happiness and overcoming various problems or hardships in this earthly life. But in fact, we will find that if we follow Dharma practice we will be able to achieve the higher goals of our existence and along the way, find that all our temporary or immediate goals are fulfilled automatically.

By following Dharma practice, we can directly experience immediate benefits from that practice, and we don't require any explanation to verify that fact. Because of this, the emphasis of Dharma teaching is on fulfilling higher and long-term aspirations of our existence, for which an attachment to, or too much worrying about our transient life can be an impediment. If we talk about the immediate benefits of engaging in the practice of giving, the benefits are very obvious, including removing poverty in the world and at a personal level gaining a good reputation and more personal friends.

The Lord Buddha said that initially you please and attract other sentient beings through your practice of giving. This advice is very true; it is a very effective way of benefiting other beings. Initially, through your practice of giving, you please them by alleviating their poverty or fulfilling their immediate needs. This will greatly please them, and they will become closer to you as if you have won their heart. Giving makes our resources or possessions a good cause for benefiting other beings, and in this way giving us a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment.

The opposite of giving is stinginess or miserliness, where let alone utilising our wealth and possession to benefit others, we even worry about utilising it for our own good. What point is there in being wealthy if we are stingy? The only good thing of having a stingy mind is accumulating material wealth *per se*.

The opposite of the practice of the perfection of moral discipline is immoral acts. More specifically the opposite of the moral act of refraining from killing is the act of killing; the opposite of refraining from stealing is stealing and so on. You can see how relevant it is for us to safeguard ourselves against all these immoral acts in order to secure our happiness and reduce suffering even in this present life.

The opposite of patience is hatred or anger, and we know how destructive and damaging that is to others and to our own lives.

The opposite of joyous perseverance or effort is laziness - let alone achieving our long-term goals we cannot even achieve short-term goals. The Lord Buddha said, 'If only you have effort you have all the Dharma, but if you have only laziness you do not have any Dharma.'

Similarly, the opposite of the meditative stabilisation or concentration is distraction. We know how it is important for us to have a calm and focussed mind if we are to be at peace and for our actions to be effective.

The opposite of wisdom is wrong or mistaken views which is a cause of a lot of confusion and ignorance, and as a result, brings a lot of suffering. We can talk about wrong

view in terms of the ultimate nature of things or in terms of knowledge of other truths such as impermanence. Therefore, the opposite of wisdom is really an ignorance with respect to the various types of knowledge.

In summary, last week we finished the discussion of how the practice of the six perfections includes all the practices related to achieving a higher rebirth or higher status. These six perfections subsume all of the practices related to fulfilling our own goals and the goals of other beings. I think we finished all of the detail related to fulfilling our own goals.

(C) THE FIXED NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS BASED ON PERFECTING THE COMPLETE FULFILLMENT OF OTHERS' AIMS

Actually, the heading indicates that to fulfil the aims of other beings you need to engage in the practice of the six perfections.

You first relieve others' poverty by giving away material goods. Then you do no harm to any living being and, in addition, are patient with harm done to you. Without becoming dispirited you joyously persevere at helping those who harm you. You depend on meditative stabilization and inspire them through displaying supernormal powers and so forth. When they become suitable vessels for the teachings, you rely on wisdom and give good explanations, cut through their doubts and thereby bring them to liberation. Because you do all this, the perfections are fixed as six in number.

In terms of the object of giving, the text only mentions *giving material goods*. But indirectly, it also implies other objects of giving such as giving Dharma and giving fearlessness.

I encourage everyone to read the text and reflect on its meaning as you read. It is very important to understand the finer points, and also to see how the contents are interwoven together, such as the linkage between the practice of giving being followed immediately by the practice of moral discipline. Then the text says:

Then you do no harm to any living being ...

We understand here that the practice of giving is done in conjunction with the practice of moral discipline, which makes a sense. Otherwise, our actions may be at odds with each other: on the one hand you give and on the other hand, you cause harm. This doesn't make sense, does it? Therefore, when you practise giving, you should work towards practising moral discipline.

This part of the text can be taken to refer to the necessity of the practice of **morality** in order to ensure that giving is wholeheartedly done to benefit others and that there is no self-interest and exploitation of other beings whatsoever. You don't want the giving to be like someone feeding a pig for its meat. Then the text continues:

... in addition, are patient with harm done to you.

In addition, we need to engage in the practice of **patience**, particularly patience with the *harm* we receive from others. Without the practice of patience, we retaliate when others harm us and such harmful actions are against our ethical practice and principle of refraining from harmful actions.

Then it continues:

Without becoming dispirited you joyously persevere at helping those who harm you. You depend on meditative stabilization and inspire them through displaying supernormal powers and so forth.

As it says here, in addition to the practice of the first three perfections, we need to rely on the practice of *joyous perseverance* in order to be able to benefit those who harm us, as well as being able to cultivate and develop the practice of the perfections of *meditative stabilisation* and *wisdom*. The text is saying that through developing meditative stabilisation such as the state of calm abiding, we can achieve actual concentration (Tib: *bSam.ten dNgos.shi*) and then the various clairvoyant powers (Tib: *mNgon.shes*). By utilising the clairvoyant powers of higher perception, we can then benefit other beings more effectively and to a greater extent. Then it says:

When they become suitable vessels for the teachings, ...

When other beings have cultivated an aspiration for and admiration and faith in the Dharma, or when they become suitable vessels for receiving Dharma, you teach them Dharma and lead them to the state of liberation. The text then says:

... you rely on wisdom and give good explanations, cut through their doubts and thereby bring them to liberation. Because you do all this, the perfections are fixed as six in number.

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

Through relieving others' poverty, not harming them,
Being patient with their harm, not being dispirited with
what they do,
Delighting them, and speaking well to them
You fulfil others' aims, which fulfils your own.

This verse, together with the one above, says that it is not possible to fulfil others' and your own aims without relying on the six perfections. Once you are certain about the way in which you fulfil your own and others' aims through these six perfections, you will have respect and deep admiration for the practice of them. Once you are certain about the way in which you fulfil your own and others' aims through these six perfections, you will have respect for the practice of them.

Here the text summarises how you will be inspired and feel motivated to engage in practising the six perfections because they have the potential to enable you to achieve all of your own aims and the aims of other beings.

(D) THE FIXED NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS BASED ON THEIR SUBSUMING THE ENTIRE MAHAYANA

Here we see a summary of the bodhisattvas' practice of the six perfections in general. The text says:

You are indifferent to resources because you are not attached to those you have and do not pursue those you lack. Since you then have the ability to safeguard precepts, you adopt and respect ethical discipline.

There is an indication here of how the practice of giving can serve as an underlying cause to engage in the practice of moral discipline. *Indifferent to resources* means without attachment to any wealth and possessions which you already possess, *and do not pursue those you lack* means not craving to have more or to possess those objects that you do not possess. So, the text is saying that because of such a lack of attachment you *then have the ability to safeguard the precepts* or, in other words, a conducive situation to practise moral discipline.

The text continues:

You are patient with the suffering that comes from living beings and inanimate things ...

If you practise patience then you will never be discouraged in the face of any suffering you receive from *living beings* or from *inanimate* causes.

We know from our own experience that when we lack the practice of patience, we can easily become discouraged and give up on our practice by saying that it is too difficult or 'I am not getting anywhere with it.' When faced with pressure or hardship, we feel despair (Tib: *sKyo.ba*) and hopelessness, and then we just give up. It is the same with our practice. However, patience brings resilience to our practice, and so it is a very important element of our practice of benefiting other beings and not harming them. Then the text concludes with:

... and you are enthusiastic about whatever virtue you set out to cultivate, so you do not get dispirited by either of these. You cultivate a non-discursive yoga of meditative serenity and a non-discursive yoga of insight. These six comprise all the Mahayana practices through which you advance by the six perfections, for you accomplish these practices in stages by means of the six perfections and you do not need any more than these six perfections. The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

The entire Mahayana is summed up in
Not delighting in resources,
Reverence, not being dispirited in two ways,
And the yogas free of discursiveness.

Given this, it is a contradiction to want to enter the Mahayana and yet to reject the practice of the six perfections.

We will recite the *King of Prayers* for Wendy White's father who recently passed away peacefully. Before passing away he thanked people for saying prayers. Wendy White, as many of you know, has been closely related to Tara Institute for many, many years. So, we dedicate this prayer for the good rebirth of her father, and as an acknowledgement of the deep sense of loss and sorrow Wendy and her family may be going through.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett
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Edited Version*

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1. What does practicing each of the six perfections achieve?

As we learnt in last week's teaching, we should first try to understand why it is crucial for us to find a life with the four excellences, and then understand that we can indeed find such a life by engaging in the practice of the six perfections. It is said that the perfection of moral discipline serves as the primary cause for us to achieve a happy rebirth; the practice of giving is the main cause to ensure that we have good resources; the practice of patience is the main cause to ensure good friends and companions to share and enjoy those good resources, and joyous perseverance is the cause to be able to successfully complete whatever we start.

However, it's not good enough just to find a life with the four excellences, if we waste that opportunity and it ends up as a basis for even more mental afflictions. Hence, the need to practise the last two perfections - the perfection of meditative stabilisation, which is primarily to subdue or overcome the very gross or manifest form of mental afflictions; and the practice of the perfection of wisdom, which uproots these mental afflictions.

2. What does Geshe Doga frequently tell people to cultivate each morning when you get up?

On a day-to-day basis, we should remind ourselves about our spiritual practice. I frequently tell people who I meet casually or in my Dharma talks that each morning when you get up, you should try to cultivate the positive thought: **I will only do actions that benefit others and at any cost, I will not do any actions that will harm them.** You will find that cultivating such a positive state of mind is like the dawning of the sun dispelling the darkness of ignorance and confusion in your mind. It will make a huge difference to your experiences over the whole day. Whereas if you start the day with your mind filled with distractions and negative thoughts, then for the whole day you may experience a very confused and bewildered mind. Therefore, it is very beneficial to just to say to yourself every morning that 'benefitting other beings and not causing harm to them is my most important task.'

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that to remember the qualities of the Three Jewels, he recites this passage by Nagarjuna from *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* every morning, 'I prostrate to Gautama, who through compassion taught the true doctrine, which leads to the relinquishing of all views.' He follows this by saying, 'please grant me blessings.' It is essential to do this mind training practice on an everyday basis, in order to develop a positive habit and to habituate our minds to positive thoughts.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama also usually recites the same homage to the Lord Buddha before giving any Dharma teachings which His Holiness says is also a practice of one of his very important gurus, Khunu Lama Rinpoche. Likewise, I encourage you to think of benefitting other beings and not causing any harm to them every morning, as soon as you arise from your bed.

3. Talk about the opposites to the six perfections and what is gained from not engaging in them.

The Lord Buddha said that initially you please and attract other sentient beings through your practice of giving. This advice is very true; it is a very effective way of benefiting other beings. Initially, through your practice of giving, you please them by alleviating their poverty or fulfilling their immediate needs. This will greatly please them and they will become closer to you as if you have won their heart. Giving makes our resources or possessions a good cause for benefiting other beings, and in this way giving us a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment.

The opposite of giving is stinginess or miserliness, where let alone utilising our wealth and possession to benefit others, we even worry about utilising it for our own good. What point is there in being wealthy if we are stingy? The only good thing of having a stingy mind is accumulating material wealth *per se*.

The opposite of the practice of the perfection of moral discipline is immoral acts. More specifically the opposite of the moral act of refraining from killing is the act of killing, the opposite of refraining from stealing is stealing

and so on. You can see that how relevant it is for us to safeguard ourselves against all these immoral acts in order to secure our happiness and reduce suffering even in this present life.

The opposite of patience is hatred or anger, and we know how destructive and damaging that is to others and to our own lives.

The opposite of joyous perseverance or effort is laziness - let alone achieving our long-term goals we cannot even achieve short-term goals. The Lord Buddha said, 'If only you have effort you have all the Dharma, but if you have only laziness you do not have any Dharma.'

Similarly, the opposite of the meditative stabilisation or concentration is distraction. We know how it is important for us to have a calm and focussed mind if we are to be at peace and for our actions to be effective.

The opposite of wisdom is wrong or mistaken views which is a cause of a lot of confusion and ignorance, and as a result, bring a lot of suffering. We can talk about wrong view in terms of the ultimate nature of things or in terms of knowledge of other truths such as impermanence. Therefore, the opposite of wisdom is really an ignorance with respect to the various types of knowledge.

4. 'It is very important to understand the finer points, and also to see how the contents are inter-woven together.' Describe how the six perfections are interwoven.

I encourage everyone to read the text and reflect on its meaning as you read. It is very important to understand the finer points, and also to see how the contents are inter-woven together, such as the linkage between the practice of giving being followed immediately by the practice of moral discipline. Then the text says:

Then you do no harm to any living being...

We understand here that the practice of giving is done in conjunction with the practice of moral discipline, which makes a sense. Otherwise, our actions may be at odds with each other: on the one hand you give and on the other hand, you cause harm. This doesn't make sense, does it? Therefore when you practise giving, you should work towards practising moral discipline.

This part of the text can be taken to refer to the necessity of the practice of **morality** in order to ensure that giving is wholeheartedly to benefit others and that there is no self-interest and exploitation of other beings whatsoever. You don't want the giving to be like someone feeding a pig for its meat. Then the text continues:

... in addition, are patient with harm done to you.

In addition, we need to engage in the practice of *patience*, particularly patience with the *harm* we receive from others. Without the practice of patience, we retaliate when others harm us and such harmful actions are against our ethical practice and principle of refraining from harmful actions.

Then it continues:

Without becoming dispirited you joyously persevere at helping those who harm you. You depend on meditative stabilization and inspire them through displaying supernormal powers and so forth.

As it says here, in addition to the practice of the first three perfections, we need to rely on the practice of *joyous perseverance* in order to be able to benefit those who harm us, as well as being able to cultivate and develop the practice of the perfections of *meditative stabilisation* and **wisdom**. The text is saying that through developing meditative stabilisation such as the state of calm abiding, we can achieve actual concentration (Tib: *bSam.ten dNgos.shi*) and then the various clairvoyant powers (Tib: *mNgon.shes*). By utilising the clairvoyant powers of higher perception, we can then benefit other beings more effectively and to a greater extent. Then it says:

When they become suitable vessels for the teachings,...

When other beings have cultivated an aspiration for and admiration and faith in the Dharma, or when they become suitable vessels for receiving Dharma, you teach them Dharma and lead them to the state of liberation. The text then says:

... you rely on wisdom and give good explanations, cut through their doubts and thereby bring them to liberation. Because you do all this, the perfections are fixed as six in number.

The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

30 October 2018

We have just recited the refuge prayer through which we take refuge in the Three Jewels, distinguishing the path that we follow from a wrong path; and through which we generate the bodhicitta mind, distinguishing the path that we follow from an inferior or lower path.

When we recite the prayer, we should also reflect on its meaning. We should take refuge from the depths of our heart, recognising that the path we are following is the perfect one; and sincerely generate bodhicitta, recognising that the path we are following is the highest one.

We call bodhicitta motivation the heart of the Mahayana or Great Vehicle. Why is it called the Great Vehicle? We can explain the use of the word 'great' here from the perspective of whose purpose it relates to, and what goal we, as Mahayana practitioners, aspire to achieve. The bodhicitta motivation of Great Vehicle practitioners aspires to benefit all sentient beings and to achieve the unsurpassed state of buddhahood, a perfect state free of all faults and endowed with all excellent qualities.

Once again, reinforce your bodhicitta motivation of wishing to achieve the state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Then, think that, in order to achieve enlightenment, I will listen to this profound teaching and put it into practice. Here, you are making a resolution or promise to practise, so it is important that you actually practise it. It is crucially important that when you attempt to cultivate bodhicitta while reciting the prayer, you are sincere about taking that vow and holding it, from the depths of your heart.

We will now continue with the teaching.

(E) THE FIXED NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS IN TERMS OF THE COMPLETENESS OF PATHS OR METHOD

This teaching helps us understand the significance or necessity of integrating all six perfections into practice – generosity, morality, patience, joyous perseverance, meditative stabilisation and wisdom.

Here, the text says:

The path – i.e. method – for not being attached to the resources that are your possessions is generosity, because you become free from attachment to your things by becoming habituated to giving them away.

So, the **practice of generosity or giving** is explained as a way to overcome attachment to the things we possess. When we speak of the practice of generosity or giving, the focus of the practice is to initially cultivate the thought or intention of giving. It is this thought of giving that counteracts or opposes our attachment to possessions.

As you read the text, contemplate its meaning carefully. You'll find that what it says is not simply a theory that

doesn't relate to you; rather it's something that will resonate with your life experience.

For example, when the text says that generosity is the remedy to overcome attachment *to the resources that are your possessions*, we can ask: why do we need to overcome attachment to our possessions? If we think about our life, we'll find that attachment has made us slaves to our wealth and possessions. We'll recall how sometimes we've undergone tremendous suffering and hardship because we were worried about possessions. Sometimes people have even suffered a heart attack from such worry. Whereas I've come across other people who have less wealth than they'd had in the past who say they are happier now.

Then the text says *becoming habituated to giving them away*. So if we habituate or get our mind used to the thought of giving, as that thought develops, it would become possible for us to readily give away our things to other beings. Essentially, the text is saying that the practice of giving is a way to overcome attachment to our possessions. We must overcome attachment by recognising it as a major source of suffering and contemplate this in relation to our life experience: how we suffer, go through hardship, and even sometimes become paranoid because of our wealth and possessions. We might then become motivated to take up the practice of giving, which, as we said before, mainly refers to cultivating and developing an intention to give, which will then lead to the actual giving.

Then the text says:

The method for restraining yourself from the distraction of trying to possess what you do not possess is ethical discipline, for when you maintain a monk's vows, you do not have all the distractions of making a living.

This refers to craving, or attachment to things we do not possess, and the distracting thoughts we generate in order to obtain those things. It says here that the **practice of moral discipline** is an effective way to overcome external distractions associated with satisfying our craving for the things we do not possess.

Obviously, one of the reasons we crave things we do not possess is that we are not content with the things we do possess. This leads us to go after various objects of distraction, which bring stress, tension, anxiety and so on.

Therefore, the text says, to overcome these outer distractions caused by our lack of inner contentment, we need to apply the remedy of ethical discipline, the perfection of morality. As it says, *for when you maintain a monk's vows, you do not have all the distractions of making a living*. This example shows how, if we follow or live the life of a celibate, there's less room for distraction because we have fewer needs. Why are there fewer needs? Because of the moral vows – monks are supposed to live a simple life by contenting themselves with just enough things to sustain them. So we can understand here the benefit of practising moral discipline in diminishing, in particular, the cause of all external distractions.

If we think about the meaning of *the method for restraining yourself from the distraction of trying to possess what you do*

not possess, we can see the importance of cultivating a sense of contentment and less desire, because, without it, we would be continually trying to possess more. In order to possess more and fulfil our desirous craving mind, we would have to continually worry about how we might gain those things. In other words, our mind would be filled with distractions. For as long as we do not try to overcome that desirous mind, it will remain distracted: as soon as we acquire one object, craving for the next object will arise.

If we look at our own experience, whenever we are unhappy, our mind wanders off to the outside world, as if it is going on a long trip. It will go everywhere, occupying itself with various thoughts and objects. If we think about how we feel when the mind finishes its trip and comes back to us, we will not feel good. We will feel exhausted, agitated and disturbed, as if the mind has brought back a lot of problems with it. Understanding our situation in this way helps us practise contentment and less desire and to live an ethical life.

We can draw inspiration from other people who live a noble life, such as some rich people who suddenly decide to stop making more money and instead focus on giving away their wealth to those in need. It seems like the sudden decision to do this is the activation of an imprint of a noble act of giving in the past. To observe such deeds is very inspiring; we should think of emulating them with whatever things we possess.

The text continues:

The method for not abandoning living beings is patience, because you do not despair at the suffering caused by the harm others inflict.

Here, the text implies that the **practice of patience** is the means by which we don't give up on benefitting other beings. As it says, one of the common conditions for us giving up on others is that of receiving harm from others, on either a mental or physical level. However, if we engage in the practice of patience – such as the patience of non-retaliation or remaining indifferent to harm from others – then when we receive harm from others, we will not alter our determination to benefit them. Therefore, the practice of patience is a way of not abandoning or giving up on others.

When the text says *not abandoning living beings*, what does *abandoning living beings* mean? It means losing love and a compassionate attitude towards them. When you lose your love and compassion for other beings, it is like you are abandoning them. As a bodhisattva or a practitioner who follows the bodhisattva's practices, you have taken an affirmation to benefit all sentient beings. So, to safeguard your vow to benefit other beings, it's very important to engage in the practice of patience.

Next it says:

The method to increase virtues is joyous perseverance, because you increase them when you joyously persevere at what you undertake.

So **joyous perseverance** here means taking joy in your virtuous practice. Of course, if you enjoy what you are doing, you will keep wanting to do the same thing because it delights you. Therefore, if we feel joy about our virtuous practices, we will naturally keep doing them

and hence increase our virtue. The opposite of joyous perseverance is laziness, which is the main obstruction to practising virtue.

The text continues:

The methods for clearing away obscurations are the final two perfections, because meditative stabilization clears away the afflictions and wisdom clears away the cognitive obscurations.

It says *the methods for clearing away obscurations are the final two perfections*. We may ask the question, isn't the perfection of wisdom enough to clear away or abandon all obscurations? If not, then what sort of obscuration does the perfection of meditative stabilisation clear away?

Here, when the text refers to the perfection of meditative stabilisation as clearing away or abandoning obscurations, the meaning is more in the sense of **suppressing** the mental afflictions. Whereas the perfection of wisdom is said to clear away obscurations by **uprooting** afflictions together with their latencies, imprints or seeds.

Under the topic of traversing the various levels of concentration, the text uses the term 'abandoning the mental afflictions of the desire realm' when talking of the abandonment of the meditator who reaches the first level of concentration. However, the meaning of abandoning the mental afflictions of the desire realm in this context is more in the sense of suppressing the afflictions, which means having prevented them from manifesting.

Thus the perfections are fixed as six in number. The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

Non-attachment to objects is a path;
Another is restraint from the distraction of obtaining them;
Not abandoning beings, increasing virtues,
And clearing away the obscurations are others.

This summarises what we have already discussed. We will continue to read the text, as the meaning is self-explanatory if we contemplate it with good concentration.

The following explanation produces strong conviction about the six perfections. In order to avoid being dominated by the distraction of sensual objects, you need generosity that is free from attachment. To prevent sensory experiences that have not occurred, you need ethical discipline that restrains distraction by things that are pointless [deeds that are wrong by prohibition] or counterproductive [deeds that are wrong by nature]. Given that there are a great number of living beings whose behavior is bad and who you are constantly in danger of meeting, you need a powerful conditioning to patience as a remedy for giving up on their welfare.

As a way to emphasise that **the practice of patience is indispensable**, the text points out here that you are expected to face continuous obstacles – there are living beings whose behaviour is bad and ill-natured, and the number of such beings is great. So *you need a powerful conditioning to patience as a remedy for giving up on their welfare*. Therefore:

In order to increase virtue in terms of the great number of actions and its practice over long periods of time, you need joyous perseverance that has the intense and long-term

enthusiasm that comes from reflecting on the benefits of virtuous actions, etc.

Again, the text emphasises **the practice of joyous perseverance**. It points out here how we need to cultivate and amass great amounts of virtue over a long period of time. So the practice of joyous perseverance is crucial. We should reflect on the benefits of accumulating virtuous actions to instil joyous perseverance within us.

The text continues:

In order to suppress afflictions you need meditative stabilization, and to destroy their seeds and the cognitive obscurations you need wisdom.

In fact the text actually uses the term *suppress afflictions* when talking about the **perfection of meditative stabilisation** – *in order to suppress afflictions you need meditative stabilization* – which we discussed before. But, *in order to destroy their seeds* – that is, the seed of the mental afflictions or afflictive obscurations, together with cognitive obscurations or obstructions to omniscient mind – you need the **perfection of wisdom**.

In short, this topic explains the bodhisattvas' practice, in terms of their motivation, and the deeds they engage in with that motivation. The bodhisattvas' motivation is bodhicitta, an altruistic mind of enlightenment, and their deeds are included within the six perfections.

(F) THE FIXED NUMBER OF PERFECTIONS BASED ON THE THREE TRAININGS

This section, *the fixed number of perfections based on the three trainings*, shows how, from the point of view of the threefold training of morality, concentration and wisdom, the number of perfections is fixed or definitive – in other words, the six perfections encompass the threefold trainings.

If we read the text carefully, we can understand this.

The nature of the training in ethical discipline [the first of the three trainings] is the practice of ethical discipline.

This indicates that the perfection of ethical discipline belongs primarily to the training in ethical discipline or morality.

The precondition of the training in ethical discipline is generosity, because once you have generosity that is indifferent to resources, you can properly adopt an ethical discipline.

The text is implying here that the perfection of giving is also included in the training of morality by saying that giving is a prerequisite, or leading cause of, the practice of ethical discipline.

The aid to the training in ethical discipline is patience, because the patience of not retaliating when scolded, etc. safeguards your properly adopted ethical discipline.

The next, the perfection of patience, is said to be an aid to the training in ethical discipline, so it can also be included in the training of morality *because the patience of not retaliating when scolded, etc. safeguards your properly adopted ethical discipline*.

Then:

Meditative stabilization is the training of mind [the second training, the training of meditative concentration] ...

So, the perfection of meditative stabilisation belongs to the training of mind or concentration:

... and wisdom is the training in wisdom [the third training].

And:

As for joyous perseverance, it is included in all three trainings, so the perfections are fixed at six in number.

So, the perfection of joyous perseverance is included in all three trainings.

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states:

The Conqueror rightly presented six perfections
In terms of the three trainings: three are the first,
Two of the six are connected with the final two,
One is included in all three.

By a certain kind of excellent life you bring to completion either others' or your own aims; you practice certain kinds of trainings by possessing a diversity of methods, depending on which vehicle you are in. Understand in this way that the six perfections comprise and bring to completion the above perspectives on their fixed number – life, aims, the Mahayana, the methods, and the trainings. Reflect until you get a deep conviction about how the six perfections are the summation of all the key points of bodhisattva practice.

Furthermore, there are two causes of not initially transcending or rising above cyclic existence – attachment to resources and attachment to a home. The remedies for these are generosity and ethical discipline, respectively.

So, in terms of remedies for overcoming various hindrances to one's practice, they are all included in the six perfections. For example, it says here that the remedies for attachment to resources and attachment to a home are, respectively, the practices of generosity and of ethical discipline.

You may rise above these attachments once, but still turn back without reaching the end. There are two causes of this – suffering from the wrongdoing of living beings and becoming dispirited at the length of time you have pursued virtue. The remedies for these are patience and joyous perseverance, respectively. Once you understand how to sustain a disregard for all suffering and harm, as well as an enthusiasm which views even an eternity as though it were one day, you must practice them in various ways. If you do this, you will produce the patience and joyous perseverance that are capable of functioning as remedies to what causes you to turn back.

Thus, they are extremely crucial. Never mind the matter of the bodhisattva deeds, even with regard to present-day cultivation of virtue, there are many who start out but few who do not turn back after a while because (1) their forbearance for the slightest hardship is tiny, and (2) their enthusiasm for the path they cultivate is tepid. This is the result of their not putting into practice the personal instructions associated with patience and joyous perseverance.

There are two causes for letting your virtue go to waste even if you do not turn back after a while – distraction, wherein your attention does not stabilize on a virtuous object of meditation, and faulty wisdom. The remedies for these are meditative stabilization and wisdom, respectively. Meditative stabilization is a remedy because it is said that even virtuous practices such as repetition of mantra and daily recitations are senseless if your attention wanders elsewhere. Wisdom is a remedy because if you fail to develop the wisdom that fully delineates the topics in the collections of Buddhist knowledge, you will be mistaken about what to adopt and what to cast aside, even the obvious, and will then conduct yourself wrongly. This fixes

the number of perfections at six in terms of their being remedies that eliminate the class of phenomena that are incompatible with virtue.

The number of perfections is fixed at six based on the fact that they are the foundation for achieving every quality of a buddha.

Then it goes to the next topic.

This is because the first four perfections are preconditions for meditative stabilization, so through these four you accomplish meditative stabilization—the perfection of non-distraction. Furthermore, when you cultivate insight based on this, you will know reality.

Fixing the number of perfections at six in terms of their being concordant with helping living beings to mature is similar in meaning to the third one [perfecting the complete fulfillment of others' aims] mentioned earlier.

I have explained here the noble Asanga's assertions as presented by the master Haribhadra [in his *Long Explanation of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines (Abhisamayalamkaraloka)*]. It is extremely crucial to gain conviction about the six perfections.

Where the text says *wisdom that fully delineates the topics in the collections of Buddhist knowledge* – in this context, *Buddhist knowledge* mainly refers to the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness, which is the philosophical view uniquely presented in Buddhism.

We'll stop here tonight and continue next week from the next section on 'An ancillary discussion of the fixed order of the perfections', which is not that much. After that, the text goes into detail on each of the six perfections.

The topics we are studying here are not just for stimulating our intellect but are for practice. Studying and reflecting on these topics will benefit us because we can do our everyday practice more effectively. We can take small regular acts, such as feeding our pets, as the practice of the perfection of giving.

I am glad to hear that Maria is recovering well. So, instead of saying the six-syllable Chenrezig mantra, which I was thinking of doing, we will recite the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* for her.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering
Edit 2 by Mary-Lou Considine
Edited Version*

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Homework Answers

Teaching: 30 October 2018

1. Why do we need the practice of generosity?

For example, when the text says that generosity is the remedy to overcome attachment *to the resources that are your possessions*, we can ask: why do we need to overcome attachment to our possessions? If we think about our life, we'll find that attachment has made us slaves to our wealth and possessions. We'll recall how sometimes we've undergone tremendous suffering and hardship because we were worried about possessions. Sometimes people have even suffered a heart attack from such worry. Whereas I've come across other people who have less wealth than they'd had in the past who say they are happier now.

Then the text says *becoming habituated to giving them away*. So if we habituate or get our mind used to the thought of giving, as that thought develops, it would become possible for us to readily give away our things to other beings. Essentially, the text is saying that the practice of giving is a way to overcome attachment to our possessions. We must overcome attachment by recognising it as a major source of suffering and contemplate this in relation to our life experience: how we suffer, go through hardship, and even sometimes become paranoid because of our wealth and possessions. We might then become motivated to take up the practice of giving, which, as we said before, mainly refers to cultivating and developing an intention to give, which will then lead to the actual giving.

2. Obviously, one of the reasons we crave things we do not possess is that we are not content with the things we do possess. This leads us to go after various objects of distraction, which bring stress, tension, anxiety and so on'. What is the remedy to this and how does it work?

Therefore, the text says, to overcome these outer distractions caused by our lack of inner contentment, we need to apply the remedy of ethical discipline, the perfection of morality. As it says, *for when you maintain a monk's vows, you do not have all the distractions of making a living*. This example shows how, if we follow or live the life of a celibate, there's less room for distraction because we have fewer needs. Why are there fewer needs? Because of the moral vows – monks are supposed to live a simple life by contenting themselves with just enough things to sustain them. So we can understand here the benefit of practising moral discipline in diminishing, in particular, the cause of all external distractions.

If we think about the meaning of *the method for restraining yourself from the distraction of trying to possess what you do not possess*, we can see the importance of cultivating a sense of contentment and less desire, because, without it, we would be continually trying to possess more. In order to possess more and fulfil our desirous craving mind, we would have to continually worry about how we might gain those things. In other words, our mind would be filled with distractions. For as long as we do not try to overcome that desirous mind, it will remain distracted: as soon as we acquire one object, craving for the next object will arise.

3. a) What does the practice of patience imply?

The text continues:

The method for not abandoning living beings is patience, because you do not despair at the suffering caused by the harm others inflict.

Here, the text implies that the **practice of patience** is the means by which we don't give up on benefitting other beings. As it says, one of the common conditions for us giving up on others is that of receiving harm from others, on either a mental or physical level. However, if we engage in the practice of patience – such as the patience of non-retaliation or remaining indifferent to harm from others – then when we receive harm from others, we will not alter our determination to benefit them. Therefore, the practice of patience is a way of not abandoning or giving up on others.

b) What does abandoning living beings mean?

When the text says *not abandoning living beings*, what does *abandoning living beings* mean? It means losing love and a compassionate attitude towards them. When you lose your love and compassion for other beings, it is like you are abandoning them. As a bodhisattva or a practitioner who follows the bodhisattva's practices, you have taken an affirmation to benefit all sentient beings. So, to safeguard your vow to benefit other beings, it's very important to engage in the practice of patience.

4. What is the method to increase virtues?

Next it says:

The method to increase virtues is joyous perseverance, because you increase them when you joyously persevere at what you undertake.

So **joyous perseverance** here means taking joy in your virtuous practice. Of course, if you enjoy what you are doing, you will keep wanting to do the same thing because it delights you. Therefore, if we feel joy about our virtuous practices, we will naturally keep doing them and hence increase our virtue. The opposite of joyous perseverance is laziness, which is the main obstruction to practising virtue.

5. 'We may ask the question, isn't the perfection of wisdom is enough to clear away or abandon all obscurations? If not, then what sort of obscuration does the perfection of meditative stabilisation clear away?' What is the answer to this query?

The text continues:

The methods for clearing away obscurations are the final two perfections, because meditative stabilization clears away the afflictions and wisdom clears away the cognitive obscurations.

It says *the methods for clearing away obscurations are the final two perfections*. We may ask the question, isn't the perfection of wisdom is enough to clear away or abandon all obscurations? If not, then what sort of obscuration does the perfection of meditative stabilisation clear away?

Here, when the text refers to the perfection of meditative stabilisation as clearing away or abandoning obscurations, the meaning is more in the sense of **suppressing** the mental afflictions. Whereas the perfection of wisdom is said to clear away obscurations by **uprooting** afflictions together with their latencies, imprints or seeds.

The Six Perfections

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

6 November 2018

We will do our usual meditation first.

[Tonglen meditation]

Please cultivate a proper motivation for listening to the teaching. The reason for listening to it is to fulfil our altruistic aspiration to achieve the state of buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings.

With respect to the meditation which you have just performed, it is said that if you are doing the giving and taking meditation in conjunction with the breathing meditation, then you should exhale and inhale more forcefully with a bit of effort. You can imagine the outgoing breath of giving in the form of white light and the incoming breath of taking in the form of dark light. Normally when you do a breathing meditation, it is said that you need to breathe in and out gently and slowly, just as you normally breathe. You should not be able to hear yourself breathing in and out. There are of course a number of breathing meditation techniques, such as mentally counting the cycles of breathing, or simply focussing on the mindfulness of breathing in and out.

We will now continue with the lam-rim teaching on the following section:

2" An ancillary discussion of the fixed order of the perfections

This discussion has three parts:

1. The order of arising
2. The order in terms of inferior and superior
3. The order in terms of coarse and subtle

(a) The order of arising

When you have a generosity that is disinterested in and unattached to resources, you take up ethical discipline.

This section explains why the six perfections are listed in order of giving, followed by moral discipline, patience and so on. Giving is mentioned first because, as it says, *when you have a generosity that is disinterested in and unattached to resources, you take up ethical discipline*. Basically, this is saying that if you do well in the practice of giving, you will do well in the practice of moral discipline. It is not saying that the practice of giving is a prerequisite for practising moral ethics, nor is it saying that you have to practise giving in order to practise morality. It is saying that the practice of giving establishes a very sound base for the practice of morality. Giving is a sign of having less desire and reduced attachment which facilitates the practice of moral discipline. Conversely, attachment to and obsession with possessions leads to the various distractions that impede the practice of moral discipline. Then follows:

When you have an ethical discipline which restrains you from wrongdoing, you become patient with those who harm you.

Again, this is saying that if you do well in the practice of moral discipline, then you will also do well in the practice of patience. A firm sense of morality and restraint from wrongdoing, and harmful deeds in particular, will boost your ability to tolerate external suffering and hardship.

Then the text says:

When you have the patience wherein you do not become dispirited with hardships, the conditions for rejecting virtue are few, so you are able to persevere joyously.

This explains how the practice of patience leads to the practice of joyous perseverance. With patience, we are talking about not losing our spirit and determination in the face of any difficulty, such as receiving harm from others or hardships or the challenges we confront in our Dharma practice. If we practise the patience of non-retaliation or accepting hardship, then we don't lose our strength of mind or give up our practice easily. In this way, if we think about the benefit of patience in terms of maintaining our hope, our spirit and our motivation, we can see that patience is essential if we are to maintain our enthusiasm in what we are doing and develop joyous perseverance. Not only do we require patience and joyous perseverance to complete our Dharma practice, but they are also essential to achieve our mundane pursuits as well. Whatever our goal may be, it is very important to maintain our spirit and determination and persistent effort in order to achieve that goal. In other words, we need to be patient with hardship and suffering, and that patience makes it easy to persevere and maintain our effort. So, if we do well in patience then we will do well in developing joyous perseverance too. Then the text continues:

Once you joyously persevere day and night, you will produce the meditative concentration that facilitates the application of your attention to virtuous objects of meditation.

Obviously, this is saying that if we are able to maintain our effort in meditation practice then we can achieve results such as calm abiding. Here, *meditative concentration* refers to calm abiding, which *facilitates the application of your attention to virtuous objects of meditation*. This, in turn, makes your mind very serviceable so that if you direct it onto a virtuous object, it can just sit there single-pointedly, effortlessly and spontaneously for as long as you wish. So, we can understand how achieving such meditative concentration is dependent upon developing joyous perseverance day and night.

When your mind is in meditative equipoise, you will know reality exactly.

If our mind is in *meditative equipoise*, meaning in the state of calm abiding through the practice of meditative stabilisation, then *you will know reality exactly* which means gaining special insight through the practice of wisdom. So, it is saying here that the meditative state of calm abiding which one develops through the practice of meditative stabilisation facilitates knowledge of *reality* which refers to penetrative wisdom, specifically the special insight realisation of reality.

(b) The order in terms of inferior and superior

Each preceding perfection is inferior to the superior one that follows it.

This is quite clear. When you think of the list of the six perfections, *each preceding perfection is inferior* means that, for example, the perfection of giving precedes the perfection of moral discipline, so giving is inferior to morality or compared to giving, morality is superior. Likewise, morality is inferior compared to patience which means patience is superior to morality, and so on.

(c) The order in terms of coarse and subtle

Each preceding perfection is easier than the subsequent one to engage in and perform, so it is coarser than the subsequent one. Each subsequent perfection is more difficult than the preceding one to engage in and perform, so it is more subtle than the preceding one.

Similarly, the perfection of giving is coarse compared to morality because giving is easier to practise; morality is more subtle than giving because it is harder to practise than giving; morality is coarse compared to patience because morality is easier to practise than patience. So, patience is subtle compared to morality because it is harder to practise than morality. The same distinction between coarse and subtle applies to the rest of the perfections.

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* says:

Because the subsequent perfections arise contingent on the preceding ones,
Because they are ranked as inferior and superior,
And because of their coarseness and subtlety,
The perfections are taught in order.

It is quite amazing to see how Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise* expounds its subject matter in conjunction with a great many classical Buddhist scriptures. You rarely find any other lam-rim texts that refer to the great Buddhist classics in a similar fashion.

c" The process of learning the perfections

The process of learning the perfections has two parts:

1. How to train in the bodhisattva deeds in general
2. In particular how to train in the last two perfections

1" How to train in the bodhisattva deeds in general

How to train in the bodhisattva deeds in general has two subheadings:

1. Training in the perfections that mature the qualities you will have when you become a buddha
2. Training in the four ways to gather disciples that help others to mature

In terms of practice, the text has two very important themes or categories. The first is how to mature one's own continuum, which is presented under the topic of the six perfections. The second is how to mature the continuum of other beings which is presented under the topic of the four ways to gather disciples.

(a) Training in the perfection that mature the qualities you will have when you become a buddha

Earlier we studied all of the six perfections in a general sense. Now the text goes into detail about each one of the six, specifically relating to integrating them into our practice. This section has six parts:

1. How to train in the perfection of generosity
2. How to train in the perfection of ethical discipline
3. How to train in the perfection of patience
4. How to train in the perfection of joyous perseverance
5. How to train in the perfection of meditative stabilisation
6. How to train in the perfection of wisdom

(i) How to train in the perfection of generosity

This has four sections

1. What generosity is
2. How to begin the development of generosity
3. The divisions of generosity
4. A summary

If you think about it, the organisation of the outlines of the text is quite amazing. The structure covers everything you need to know in relation to a particular topic and does so in a logical way. Let us take a look into these four subheadings. The first is: What is generosity? We might have heard that word 'generosity' many times over. Do we know its meaning precisely? We need to know its meaning so as to be able to practise it. Without knowing what it is then we will find ourselves in confusion when it comes to practising it. Immediately after that the text then shows us the method to cultivate and develop the practice of generosity. Then it goes on to explain the different types of generosity, and finally it provides a summary of what has gone before.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has commented that in his dialogue with a lot of renowned scientists and other scholars he always finds room for questioning; he also finds that the kind of methodology they use for their presentations doesn't fully cover their topics or follow a sequential logical order. His Holiness remarked that he finds his formal training in the monastic educational system very effective in investigating and looking into things from various angles. You can find the same method, rationale and logic in this lam-rim too, which is a unique way of learning.

(a') What generosity is

Here there is this quote from the *Bodhisattva's Level*:

What is the nature of generosity? It is the intention accompanying bodhisattvas' disinterested non-attachment to all their possessions and their body and motivated by this, the physical and verbal actions of giving the things to be given.

Essentially, the practice of giving refers to a genuine thought or intention to give without having any attachment to or craving for the objects of giving. *Motivated by this ... giving* refers to the initial intention or motivation of giving. It also refers to *the physical and verbal actions of giving the things to be given*. Here *physical and verbal actions* refer to the mental intention which is a mental factor that is concomitant with the mind at the time of the occurrence of physical and verbal acts of giving, due to the force of the initial motivation of giving. Therefore, giving refers to the mental intention of the thought of giving which is an intending action, as well as the mental factor of intention at the time of the physical and verbal acts of giving, which is the intended action.

Lama Tsongkhapa explains the meaning of the above quotation as follows:

It is the virtue of a generous attitude and the physical and verbal actions which are motivated by this.

What is the nature of the practice of giving? *It is the virtue of a generous attitude*, indicating that giving refers to the thought or intention to give. As discussed earlier, *physical and verbal actions* refers to the mental intention, which is called intended action, at the time of the actual act of giving, such as any physical or verbal actions. The nature of giving, therefore, refers to the initial thought of giving or intention to give, as well as the intended physical or verbal actions of giving at the time of the actual giving action taking place. It should be noted that the intended physical or verbal actions refer to the mental factor of intention concomitant with the mind.

Bringing the perfection of generosity to completion is not contingent on removing beings' poverty by giving gifts to others.

The text continues by saying that the development or *completion* of the practice of the *perfection of giving is not contingent* upon eliminating all the *poverty* in the world. If that was to be the case then, then as it argues here:

Otherwise, since there still remain many destitute living beings, all the earlier conquerors [referring to all past buddhas] would not have attained perfect generosity. Therefore, the physical and verbal aspects of generosity are not the main thing; the main thing is the mental aspect. This is because you perfect generosity after you destroy your stingy clinging to all that you own – your body, resources and roots of virtue and you completely condition your mind to giving them away to living beings from the depths of your heart and, not only that, but also to giving to others the effects of this giving as well.

This is saying that the primary focus of the practice of giving is to cultivate, develop and perfect the thought or intention of giving. Therefore, the primary focus is on the mental level, overcoming stinginess and developing an intention to give from the depth of one's heart. The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says,

If generosity were perfected
By removing beings' poverty
Since beings are still destitute
How could past saviors have perfected it?

Generosity is perfected, it is said
Through the attitude of giving away to all beings
All your possessions, along with the effects of this
Therefore generosity is a state of mind.

Thus, the practice of the perfection of generosity entails generating in various ways the intention to give and steadily increasing this generosity, ...

This last sentence clearly shows us the meaning of the practice of giving or generosity. It clearly implies that the nature of the practice of giving is to steadily increase the thought or intention to give.

... even though you may not be actually giving away something to others.

It is not necessary that you have to own possessions in order to practise giving. As emphasised here, the most important element of the practice of giving is to cultivate

and develop a thought or intention to give to others wholeheartedly.

We have been doing the giving and taking meditation for quite a while now. This meditation is also a practice of giving, so we need to check whether this meditation is helping us to develop our practice of giving in terms of increasing our thought of giving. Has it increased your thought of giving? I doubt it. Again, we see here that the practice of giving means to increase our thought or intention to give to others. If the thought of giving or intention to give is developed, and it arises forcefully and strongly, then we will automatically give whatever possessions we have to others.

(b) How to begin the development of generosity

The text states:

Simply destroying all stinginess in regard to your body and resources is not the perfection of generosity, for stinginess is included within attachment and so even the two kinds of Hinayana arhats have totally eliminated it along with its seeds.

It says here that achieving the perfection of giving is more than simply overcoming the mind of stinginess or miserliness. It does this by pointing out here that *even the two kinds of Hinayana arhats*, the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas of the Lesser Vehicle, *have totally eliminated it along with its seeds*.

Stinginess or miserliness is regarded as part of desire or attachment, which the two arhats of the Lesser Vehicle have abandoned along with its seeds. In other words, they have uprooted it. Here, seed refers to a causal capacity to produce a concordant result or produce a result which resembles the type of the cause. We speak of the imprint or the latency of mental afflictions which is different from the seed of mental afflictions. The former is a cognitive obscuration and the latter is an afflictive obscuration.

What is required, then, is that you not only clear away stinginess's tightfistedness, which prevents giving things away, but also that you develop from the depths of your heart the intention to give away to others all your possessions.

Hence, the key to the practice of the perfection of giving is mentally developing and perfecting an intention to give, rather than simply overcoming stinginess. This section of the text also indicates the objects of giving, which is all of your possessions.

An intention to give, which is the nature of giving, is produced by overcoming any form of attachment or craving for the objects to be given. The objects of giving should encompass all your possessions and also that you develop the intention to fully benefit all beings *from the depth of your heart*. This explains the various components or the qualities of the practice of giving.

If we relate this to our own practice of giving, what is indicated here is that we need to make an effort to cultivate and develop a thought of giving. We need to ensure that our mental intention of giving is wholehearted and that the reason for giving is to fully and completely benefit all other beings. Our objects of giving should include all our possessions, not just some objects

but the objects we do not want to give away. Then the text continues:

For this you have to meditate on the faults of holding on to things and the benefits of giving them away. I shall, therefore, discuss these.

This shows how to cultivate the thought or intention of giving. Next, the text states:

The *Moon Lamp Sutra* (Candra-pradipa-sutra) says:

These childish people are attached
To this rotting body and to this
Rushing life-force, both of which lack independence
And are like a dream or a magician's illusion.
So these unintelligent beings do terrible things,
Fall under the control of sin,
And, carried away by the chariot of Death's Lord,
Proceed to unbearable hells.

Then Lama Tsongkhapa explains the meaning of this sutra by saying:

This says that you should stop attachment by viewing the body as unclean, life as rushing like a mountain cascade, both body and life as devoid of an independent self because they are under the control of karma, and both as false like a dream or a magician's illusion.

We need to overcome attachment in order to develop the practice of giving. Here the text explains a way to overcome attachment, such as an attachment to the body and an attachment to life itself. As mentioned here, we can overcome attachment to the body by reflecting upon the uncleanliness or filthiness of the body in terms of the content of the body. Likewise, reflecting on the transient nature of life, and the way it fluctuates and changes moment by moment, just like a waterfall flowing down a steep mountain, overcomes an attachment to life.

We also need to meditate on how both our body and life are simply a by-product of karma and delusions. They only exist in dependence on other phenomena and lack an independent existence in their own right, i.e. they lack an objective existence. The analogy *like a dream or a magician's illusion* is also very effective in overcoming attachment to the body and life and other seemingly attractive objects. Although we grasp at these things as true, in reality, they are false or deceptive. [The appearance of false things such as a horse in the dream is due to the effect of sleep; at a magician's show the appearance is due to the magician's mantra spell. Similarly, things objectively appear to have a substantial existence due to the effect of ignorance.]¹

False or deceptive implies that things don't exist the way they appear to the perception of our mind. Whereas if there is no gap between the appearance to the perception of our mind and reality, that is the way things actually exist, which reflects the true mode of existence of things. Even though things appear to our mind to have a substantial existence, reflecting upon the fact that our body and life lack an existence from their own side, and therefore lack an independent and substantial existence, and that it exists only by depending on other

phenomena, is very effective in overcoming attachment to our body and life.

The most important thing is that we have to learn the nature and meaning of giving in terms of our own practice and be very clear about what it means to develop our practice of giving.

We can transform the food and drink that we take every day by offering them to holy objects and saying dedication prayers into a practice of giving, and as a cause for the Dharma to flourish and benefit other sentient beings. [Practice is very important. If you don't practise, you will never develop. You can't just forget about practice, because you need to walk the walk by taking the initiative to practice. If you practise regularly such as making an offering before eating or drinking, then it will become habitual. The practice will come to you automatically whenever you eat or drink something. It will be that easy to create merit!]

You are aware there are countless numbers of other beings in the form of bacteria living inside our bodies. Their survival is dependent on our survival. This is a fact. Therefore, whenever we eat or drink something, we should first cultivate a motivation that we eat or drink in order to benefit other beings such as the bacteria in our body, [and also to sustain our precious human life to practise Dharma to achieve buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings]. Then, as the foods or drinks go down, imagine that these bacteria experience uncontaminated bliss. You then pray that at the moment you are benefitting these beings through an act of giving and that in future you will be able to please them by giving pure Dharma.

[Part of our motivation in partaking of food and drink also includes being able to sustain this precious human life. This is also very important. The only way to reach the state of buddhahood, if we truly seek it, is by relying upon a series of life forms, and the most suitable life form is the precious human rebirth. Therefore, it is important to think that we eat and drink to sustain and prolong our life in good health so that we can practise Dharma to achieve Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.] Likewise, as I have mentioned to you in the past, we can integrate all our everyday activities, such as sleeping, walking etc. into our Dharma practice. [In this way, we can understand that Dharma practice becomes a part of our everyday life and we can practise it along with our everyday activities.]

We will recite the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* for Pat Geary's husband who is about to undergo surgery.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering
Edit 2 by Adair Bunnnett
Edited Version*

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¹ The material within these square brackets, and in subsequent instances were part of the teaching in Tibetan, but on Geshe Doga's advice were not translated on the night.

Homework

Nov 5th 2018

- 1. Discuss how the six perfections are listed in order of arising.**
- 2. Explain the listing of the six perfections from inferior to superior.**
- 3. Elaborate how the perfections are listed from coarse to subtle.**
- 4. How can one train in the Bodhisattva deeds in general?**
- 5. How can one train in the practice of perfection of generosity?**

Homework

Nov 5th Sept, 2018 teachings

1. Discuss how the six perfections are listed in order of arising.

When you have a generosity that is disinterested in and unattached to resources, you take up ethical discipline.

Giving is mentioned first because, as it says, *when you have a generosity that is disinterested in and unattached to resources, you take up ethical discipline*. The practice of giving establishes a very sound base for the practice of morality. Giving is a sign of having less desire and reduced attachment which facilitates the practice of moral discipline. Conversely, attachment to and obsession with possessions leads to the various distractions that impede the practice of moral discipline.

Then follows:

When you have an ethical discipline which restrains you from wrongdoing, you become patient with those who harm you.

Again, this is saying that if you do well in the practice of moral discipline, then you will also do well in the practice of patience. A firm sense of morality and restraint from wrongdoing, and harmful deeds in particular will boost your ability to tolerate external suffering and hardship.

Then the text says:

When you have the patience wherein you do not become dispirited with hardships, the conditions for rejecting virtue are few, so you are able to persevere joyously.

This explains how the practice of patience leads to the practice of joyous perseverance. With patience, we are talking about not losing our spirit and determination in the face of any difficulty, such as receiving harm from others or hardships or the challenges we confront in our Dharma practice. If we practise the patience of non-retaliation or accepting hardship, then we don't lose our strength of mind or give up our practice easily. In this way, if we think about the benefit of patience in terms of maintaining our hope, our spirit and our motivation, we can see that patience is essential if we are to maintain our enthusiasm in what we are doing and develop joyous perseverance. Not only do we require patience and joyous perseverance to complete our Dharma practice, but they are also essential to achieve our mundane pursuits as well. Whatever our goal may be, it is very important to maintain our spirit and determination and persistent effort in order to achieve that goal. In other words, we need to be patient with hardship and suffering, and that patience makes it easy to persevere and maintain our effort. So, if we do well in patience then we will do well in developing joyous perseverance too. Then the text continues:

Once you joyously persevere day and night, you will produce the meditative concentration that facilitates the application of your attention to virtuous objects of meditation.

Obviously, this is saying that if we are able to maintain our effort in meditation practice then we can achieve results such as calm abiding. Here, *meditative*

concentration refers to calm abiding, which *facilitates the application of your attention to virtuous objects of meditation*. This, in turn, makes your mind very serviceable so that if you direct it onto a virtuous object, it can just sit there single-pointedly, effortlessly and spontaneously for as long as you wish. So, we can understand how achieving such meditative concentration is dependent upon developing joyous perseverance day and night.

When your mind is in meditative equipoise, you will know reality exactly.

If our mind is in *meditative equipoise* meaning in the state of calm abiding through the practice of meditative stabilisation then *you will know reality exactly* which means gaining special insight through the practice of wisdom. So, it is saying here that the meditative state of calm abiding which one develops through the practice of meditative stabilisation facilitates *knowledge of reality* which refers to penetrative wisdom, specifically the special insight realisation of reality.

2. Explain the listing of the six perfections from inferior to superior.

Each preceding perfection is inferior to the superior one that follows it.

This is quite clear. When you think of the list of the six perfections, *each preceding perfection is inferior* means that, for example, the perfection of giving precedes the perfection moral discipline so giving is inferior to morality or compared to giving, morality is superior. Likewise, morality is inferior compared to the patience which means patience is superior to morality, and so on and so forth. **Quote scriptural sources giving evidence to show that self-grasping is the root cause of samsara and how realisation of selflessness can be beneficial.**

3. Elaborate how the perfections are listed from coarse to subtle.

Each preceding perfection is easier than the subsequent one to engage in and perform, so it is coarser than the subsequent one. Each subsequent perfection is more difficult than the preceding one to engage in and perform, so it is more subtle than the preceding one.

Similarly, the perfection of giving is coarse compared to morality because giving is easier to practise; morality is more subtle than giving because it is harder to practise than giving; morality is coarse compared to patience because morality is easier to practise than patience. So, patience is subtle compared to morality because it is harder to practise than morality. The same distinction between coarse and subtle applies to the rest of the perfections.

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* says:

Because the subsequent perfections arise contingent on the preceding ones,
Because they are ranked as inferior and superior,
And because of their coarseness and subtlety,
The perfections are taught in order.

4. How can one train in the Bodhisattva deeds in general?

How to train in the bodhisattva deeds in general has two subheadings:

1. Training in the perfections that mature the qualities you will have when you become a buddha
2. Training in the four ways to gather disciples that help others to mature

In terms of practice, the text has two very important themes or categories. The first is how to mature one's own continuum, which is presented under the topic of the six perfections. The second is how to mature the continuum of other beings which is presented under the topic of the four ways to gather disciples.

5. How can one train in the practice of perfection of generosity?

This has four sections

1. What generosity is
2. How to begin the development of generosity
3. The divisions of generosity
4. A summary

(a') What generosity is

Here there is this quote from the *Bodhisattva's Level*:

What is the nature of generosity? It is the intention accompanying bodhisattvas' disinterested non-attachment to all their possessions and their body and motivated by this, the physical and verbal actions of giving the things to be given.

Essentially, the practice of giving refers to a genuine thought or intention to give without having any attachment to or craving for the objects of giving. *Motivated by this ... giving* refers to the initial intention or motivation of giving. It also refers to *the physical and verbal actions of giving the things to be given*. Here *physical and verbal actions* refer to the mental intention which is a mental factor that is concomitant with the mind at the time of the occurrence of physical and verbal acts of giving, due to the force of the initial motivation of giving. Therefore, giving refers to the mental intention of the thought of giving which is an intending action, as well as the mental factor of intention at the time of the physical and verbal acts of giving, which is the intended action.

Lama Tsongkhapa explains the meaning of the above quotation as follows:

It is the virtue of a generous attitude and the physical and verbal actions which are motivated by this.

What is the nature of the practice of giving? *It is the virtue of a generous attitude*, indicating that giving refers to the thought or intention to give. As discussed earlier, *physical and verbal actions* refers to the mental intention, which is called intended action, at the time of the actual act of giving such as any physical or verbal actions. The nature of giving, therefore, refers to the initial thought of giving or intention to give, as well as the intended physical or verbal actions of giving at the time of the actual giving action taking place. It should be noted that the intended physical or verbal actions refer to the mental factor of intention concomitant with the mind.

Bringing the perfection of generosity to completion is not contingent on removing beings' poverty by giving gifts to others.

The text continues by saying that the development or *completion* of the practice of the *perfection of giving is not contingent* upon eliminating all the *poverty* in the world. If that was to be the case then, then as it argues here:

Otherwise, since there still remain many destitute living beings, all the earlier conquerors [referring to all past buddhas] would not have attained perfect generosity. Therefore, the physical and verbal aspects of generosity are not in the main thing; the main thing is the mental aspect. This is because you perfect generosity after you destroy your stingy clinging to all that you own – your body, resources and roots of virtue and you completely condition your mind to giving them away to living beings from the depths of your heart and, not only that, but also to giving to others the effects of this giving as well.

This is saying that the primary focus of the practice of giving is to cultivate, develop and perfect the thought or intention of giving. Therefore, the primary focus is on the mental level, overcoming stinginess and developing an intention to give from the depth of one's heart. The text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says,

If generosity were perfected
By removing beings' poverty
Since beings are still destitute
How could past saviors have perfected it?
Generosity is perfected, it is said
Through the attitude of giving away to all beings
All your possessions, along with the effects of this
Therefore generosity is a state of mind.

Thus, the practice of the perfection of generosity entails generating in various ways the intention to give and steadily increasing this generosity, ...

This last sentence clearly shows us the meaning of the practice of giving or generosity. It clearly implies that the nature of the practice of giving is to steadily increase the thought or intention to give.

... even though you may not be actually giving away something to others.

It is not necessary that you have to own possessions in order to practise giving. As emphasised here, the most important element of the practice of giving is to cultivate and develop a thought or intention to give to others wholeheartedly.

We have been doing the giving and taking meditation for quite a while now. This meditation is also a practice of giving, so we need to check whether this meditation is helping us to develop our practice of giving in terms of increasing our thought of giving. Has it increased your thought of giving? I doubt it. Again, we see here that the practice of giving means to increase our thought or intention to give to others. If the thought of giving or intention to give is developed, and it arises forcefully and strongly, then we will automatically give whatever possessions we have to others.

(b') How to begin the development of generosity

The text states:

Simply destroying all stinginess in regard to your body and resources is not the perfection of generosity, for stinginess is included within attachment and so even the two kinds of Hinayana arhats have totally eliminated it along with its seeds.

It says here that achieving the perfection of giving is more than simply overcoming the mind of stinginess or miserliness. It does this by pointing out here that *even the two kinds of Hinayana arhats*, the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas of the Lesser Vehicle, *have totally eliminated it along with its seeds*.

Stinginess or miserliness is regarded as part of desire or attachment, which the two arhats of the Lesser Vehicle have abandoned along with its seeds. In other words, they have uprooted it. Here, seed refers to a causal capacity to produce a concordant result or produce a result which resembles the type of the cause. We speak of the imprint or the latency of mental afflictions which is different from the seed of mental afflictions. The former is a cognitive obscuration and the latter is an afflictive obscuration.

What is required, then, is that you not only clear away stinginess's tightfistedness, which prevents giving things away, but also that you develop from the depths of your heart the intention to give away to others all your possessions.

Hence, the key to the practice of the perfection of giving is mentally developing and perfecting an intention to give, rather than simply overcoming stinginess. This section of the text also indicates the objects of giving, which is all of your possessions.

An intention to give, which is the nature of giving, is produced by overcoming any form of attachment or craving for the objects to be given. The objects of giving should encompass all your possessions and also that you develop the intention to fully benefit all beings *from the depth of your heart*. This explains the various components or the qualities of the practice of giving.

If we relate this to our own practice of giving, what is indicated here is that We need to make an effort to cultivate and develop a thought of giving. We need to ensure that our mental intention of giving is whole-hearted and that the reason for giving is to fully and completely benefit all other beings. Our objects of giving should include all our possessions, not just some objects but the objects we do not want to give away. Then the text continues:

For this you have to meditate on the faults of holding on to things and the benefits of giving them away. I shall, therefore, discuss these.

This shows how to cultivate the thought or intention of giving. Next, the text states:

The *Moon Lamp Sutra* (Candra-pradipa-sutra) says:

These childish people are attached
To this rotting body and to this
Rushing life-force, both of which lack independence
And are like a dream or a magician's illusion.
So these unintelligent beings do terrible things,
Fall under the control of sin,
And, carried away by the chariot of Death's Lord,
Proceed to unbearable hells.

Then Lama Tsongkhapa explains the meaning of this sutra by saying:

This says that you should stop attachment by viewing the body as unclean, life as rushing like a mountain cascade, both body and life as devoid of an independent self because they are under the control of karma, and both as false like a dream or a magician's illusion.

We need to overcome attachment in order to develop the practice of giving. Here the text explains a way to overcome attachment, such as an attachment to the body and an attachment to life itself. As mentioned here, we can overcome attachment to the body by reflecting upon the uncleanliness or filthiness of body in terms of the content of the body. Likewise, reflecting on the transient nature of life, and the way it fluctuates and changes moment by moment, just like a waterfall flowing down a steep mountain, overcomes an attachment to life.

We also need to meditate on how both our body and life are simply a by-product of karma and delusions. They only exist in dependence on other phenomena and lack an independent existence in their own right, i.e. they lack an objective existence. The analogy *like a dream or a magician's illusion* is also very effective in overcoming attachment to body and life and other seemingly attractive objects. Although we grasp at these things as true, in reality, they are false or deceptive. [The appearance of false things such as a horse in the dream is due to the effect of sleep; at a magician's show the appearance is due to magician's mantra spell. Similarly, things objectively appear to have a substantial existence due to the effect of ignorance.]¹

False or deceptive implies that things don't exist the way they appear to the perception of our mind. Whereas if there is no gap between the appearance to the perception of our mind and reality, that is the way things actually exist, which reflects the true mode of existence of things. Even though things appear to our mind to have a substantial existence, reflecting upon the fact that our body and life lack an existence from their own side, and therefore lack an independent and substantial existence, and that it exists only by depending on other phenomena is very effective in overcoming attachment to our body and life.

The most important thing is that we have to learn the nature and meaning of giving in terms of our own practice and be very clear about what it means to develop our practice of giving.

We can transform the food and drink that we take every day by offering them to holy objects and saying dedication prayers into a practice of giving, and as a cause for the Dharma to flourish and benefit other sentient beings. [Practice is very important. If you don't practise, you will never develop. You can't just forget about practice, because you need to walk the walk by taking the initiative to practice. If you practise regularly such as making an offering before eating or drinking, then it will become habitual. The practice will come to you automatically whenever you eat or drink something. It will be that easy to create merit!]

You are aware there are countless numbers of other beings in the form of bacteria living inside our bodies. Their survival is dependent on our survival. This is a fact. Therefore, whenever we eat or drink something, we should first cultivate a motivation that we eat or drink in order to benefit other beings such as the bacteria in our body, [and also to sustain our precious human life to practise Dharma to achieve buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings]. Then, as the foods or drinks go down, imagine that these bacteria experience uncontaminated bliss. You then pray that at the moment you are benefitting these beings through an act of giving with and that in future you will be able to please them by giving pure Dharma

¹ The material within these square brackets, and in subsequent instances were part of the teaching in Tibetan, but on Geshe Doga's advice were not translated on the night.