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# The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

16 April 2019

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We will begin with our usual meditation on giving and taking.

As a motivation for listening to the Dharma, we should try to overcome the self-centred mind, and in its place try to cultivate an altruistic state of mind, a thought of benefitting other sentient beings. It would be wonderful if we could cultivate this intention to benefit others as a motivation for listening to Dharma.

If all of us, and I include myself here, cultivate this thought of benefitting other sentient beings as our motivation, then whatever activity we undertake will serve as a cause for the Buddhadharma to flourish and benefit other sentient beings.

## **(b') How to begin the cultivation of ethical discipline (cont.)**

Last time we stopped at this quotation from the *Compendium of the Perfections*:

Ethical discipline is the path of special attainment,  
Achieves equality with those of compassionate nature,  
And has the highest nature of pure sublime wisdom.  
Free of flaws, it is called the best of ornaments.  
It is a pleasant fragrance throughout the three realms,  
And a lotion not prohibited for a renunciate.  
Even those who copy appropriate attire, if they have  
ethical discipline,  
Will be superior to other human beings.

This summarises the benefits of observing moral ethics. If we gain a good understanding of these benefits, then we'll be more motivated and able to experience more delight and joy in practising moral ethics.

It's very important to reflect on the benefits of practising moral ethics, which include overcoming the fear of death, and the fear of taking a bad rebirth. We can be very sure that if we practise moral ethics well, then there will be absolutely no reason for us to fear death. Indeed, we may even be joyful when that moment of death approaches.

As you know, when we face death everything fails to support us and, as we say, our only protection and refuge lies within ourselves in the form of some sort of positive energy or force. This positive energy is nothing but the virtuous actions or spiritual practices we have accumulated throughout our lifetime, which includes the practice of morality. These positive actions remain in our mental continuum in the form of a positive force or energy, and at the end of our life, as I said before, that's the only thing that can serve as our true refuge and protection.

The last two lines of the quotation say *even those who copy appropriate attire, if they have ethical discipline, will be superior to other human beings*. This metaphorically shows how if there are two people, male or female, wearing exactly the same clothes, and one observes a very good moral practice and the other one doesn't, then the one who observes good moral ethics appears more beautiful than the other person.

We continue with the commentary:

Furthermore, other benefits arise from ethical discipline: although you do not speak flattering words and do not strive with great effort and hardship, you naturally gather immediately necessary resources;

This shows how a person who practises morality does not need to work hard to gather all the necessary resources, nor do they need to cheat, bribe or deceive others. An example of using flattering words to acquire resources, or receive the same gift from others again, is saying to them soothingly, 'Remember the thing that you gave to me last time, which I found extremely useful.' By practising morality, you will not need to work so hard, and you will *naturally gather immediately necessary resources* without the need to engage in this kind of cunning and flattering speech

The text continues,

... even without threats of force all beings pay homage to you;

This is quite obviously saying that as a benefit of moral practice there is no need to use any forceful means to gain respect from others. Rather, as it says, you earn their respect and *without threats of force all beings pay homage to you*.

... there is no casual talk about the lineage of your relatives, etc.;

In addition to being respected by your relatives and close friends, even those who are unknown to you, or who you have not benefitted previously will also be kind to you.

... people who previously did not know you or help you are naturally kind to you; and deities and humans revere the dust of your footprint and carry away what they can get as an object of worship.

If we think about it, these lines about the benefit of practising moral ethics are very true. For example, we Tibetans collect the dust from the ground where His Holiness the Dalai Lama has walked, and keep it as a holy object of faith, paying homage to it. It is definitely possible for us to experience the benefit of practising moral ethics as described here. Otherwise there would be no point in talking about it.

If we reflect on these lines, we can understand the positive impact the practice of morality has, not only on the person, but also on the place where the person resides. Both are suitable objects of homage. As it says here, even the dust under the feet of the person practising morality is an object of veneration by humans and deities. In old Tibet, at the end of the great prayer festival, a lot of ordinary nomads used to rush to collect the dust from the ground where the festival was held, which they took as a holy object for taking refuge and paying homage.

As we read and study this text, we must also try to relate our understanding to our practice. This is very important. We have to see that this text is a spiritual instruction and a spiritual guide. We all wish for a better future, and what this is saying is that if we aspire for a better future then we have to observe the practice of moral ethics and safeguard our moral practice.

The text gives another quote from the *Compendium of Perfections*:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Even without speaking or undertaking hardship  
You gather immediate necessities and service.  
Without threat all the world pays homage to you;

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You obtain power effortlessly and without toil.

You are among those about whom it is improper to talk casually.

Even all persons who you did not know previously,  
Who have not helped you or done what you need,  
Pay homage to you, a person with ethical discipline.

Excellent beings revere the dust blessed by your feet,  
Touching their heads to it; deities and humans bow down to it,

Place it on the crowns of their heads, and carry away what they can get.

Therefore, one who has ethical discipline is in the supreme lineage.

Basically, this summarises the benefits of the practice of moral ethics that we have discussed. With the practice of moral ethics, all the necessary resources and wealth come to us naturally or automatically, not requiring any hard work from our own side. Similarly, we gain respect from others naturally and automatically, without imposing or forcing ourselves upon them.

In short, as it says in the last line, *therefore, one who has ethical discipline is in the supreme lineage.*

The text continues:

The wise who reflect well on these benefits and grave consequences must safeguard their ethical discipline, as the *Compendium of the Perfections* explains.

Due to a craving for their own happiness, bodhisattvas  
Will not compromise ethical disciplines, which must be protected.

And also:

Because you control yourself, you experience happiness;  
Because you have the ornament praised by the learned,  
you safeguard ethical discipline;  
As you bring to perfection all the trainings,  
Rely on ethical discipline completely and without pride.

Next the text states:

Moreover, after you have cleared away your mere fear of the miserable realms and your wish for the mere excellences of deities or humans, safeguard your ethical discipline for the sake of establishing all living beings in ethical discipline.

In this sentence, the text points out the kind of motivation you should have for practising moral ethics. It's saying there's a different way to consider our motivation. One motivation for practising moral ethics is the fear of taking rebirth in a lower realm, and finding a better rebirth such as a human or a godly being. It is also to establish all *beings in ethical discipline* or establish all other sentient beings into the state of complete enlightenment.

Another way is to think of our motivation for practising moral ethics as achieving the state of complete enlightenment to benefit all beings. As a benefit of our ethical practice, we will also find a good rebirth. Although the motivation for practising moral ethics is not intended to find a better rebirth for ourselves, we accomplish all our purposes automatically. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many other lamas quite often remark that if you direct your motivation or intention to benefitting other beings, then all your own interests and purposes will be accomplished automatically along the way. So, the automatic benefit of engaging in moral practice is the excellent rebirth that we need to rely upon in order to benefit others or to achieve full enlightenment.

The text continues:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Whoever aspires to establish in pure ethical discipline  
Every living being in worlds beyond measure  
And relies on ethical discipline to benefit the world  
Is said to bring ethical discipline to perfection.

Therefore, clear away fear of the miserable realms  
And the wish for the marvels of kingdoms and high status;

Safeguard a flawless ethical discipline, and depend on  
Ethical discipline because you are striving for the welfare of the world.

We can clearly see here that Tsongkhapa's text is really a word by word commentary on these quotes from The *Compendium of the Perfections*. Having explained the benefit of practising moral ethics and the shortcomings of not practising moral ethics, the text now goes to the next section.

### (c') The divisions of ethical discipline

There are three divisions of ethical discipline:

1. The ethical discipline of restraint
2. The ethical discipline of gathering virtue
3. The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings.

These three types of ethical discipline include all the deeds of bodhisattvas. We can talk about bodhisattva deeds in terms of either fulfilling the welfare of either oneself or the welfare of other sentient beings. Alternatively, we can talk about bodhisattva deeds in terms of ripening one's own continuum or ripening the continuum of other beings. In a way, the first type of ethical discipline of restraint pertains to the bodhisattva deeds for fulfilling one's own welfare or ripening one's own continuum. The other two types of ethical discipline encompass the bodhisattva deeds for fulfilling the welfare of other beings or ripening the continuum of other beings.

### (1') The ethical discipline of restraint

The *Bodhisattva Levels* says the ethical discipline of restraint is the seven types of vows of individual liberation. Thus, given that there are those who have taken vows of individual liberation and are also keeping the bodhisattva vows, the ethical discipline of restraint is either the actual vows of individual liberation for the group of either laypersons or renunciates, or it is a practice of restraint and abstention that would be associated with those actual vows.

The *ethical discipline of restraint* with respect to bodhisattvas who have taken any of the individual liberation vows, which can be either ordination vows or lay vows, refers to the actual vow of individual liberation and any vows associated with it. The text continues:

Also, given that there are those who have taken the bodhisattva vows who are unsuited to be recipients of the vows of individual liberation, ...

This refers to those bodhisattvas who do not have an individual liberation vow. For these bodhisattvas:

... the ethical discipline of restraint is the practice of restraint and abstention that gives up any deed that is wrong by nature or any deed that is wrong by prohibition that would be associated with the vows of individual liberation.

The moral ethic of restraint that they possess refers to any ethical practice of restraint or refraining from negative actions which are negative by nature or which are prohibited moral codes. For those bodhisattvas without individual liberation vows, the ethical discipline of restraint

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refers to the practice of *abstention that gives up any deed that is wrong by nature or any deed that is wrong by prohibition that would be associated with the vows of individual liberation.*

### **(2') The ethical discipline of gathering virtue**

The text states:

The ethical discipline of gathering virtue means that you focus on virtues such as the six perfections and then develop the virtues that you have not developed in your mind, do not spoil the ones that you have already developed, and increase both of these even further.

The ethical discipline of gathering virtue refers to all your acts of virtue such as engaging in the six perfections within the context of the morality of abstaining from any harmful actions. Given the definition of ethical discipline as a mental attitude of abstention, the question of whether the individual who engages in the ethical discipline of gathering virtues should actually possess the mental attitude or thought of abstention or restraint is debatable. I would say it is not necessary to have a manifest thought of abstention or restraint, however the individual's deeds must be conjoined with the force of that moral thought.

### **3') The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings**

The text continues:

The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings means that you focus on the welfare of eleven sorts of living beings, and then accomplish their aims in this and future lives in a suitable manner and without wrongdoing. Since I have already detailed these in my *Basic Path to Awakening*, you should definitely read that over and over again.

As homework please find out about the welfare of the eleven beings as described in the Tsongkhapa's *Basic Path to Awakening*, a commentary to Asanga's chapter on Ethics in *The Complete Bodhisattva*. Denis distributed a copy of this text last year, so you should find out about the eleven beings there. One of the eleven is helping those who suffer, and another is helping those who are ignorant of the method. In terms of practice, these eleven things can be integrated into practice in relation to an individual being, in other words to benefit each individual sentient being. Alternatively, the eleven can be taken to benefit eleven separate individual beings respectively. In not explaining the eleven to you now I'm not being stingy about giving Dharma to you. I want you to find out about these eleven by yourself as homework. I think studying and thinking about the topic before class is a very effective way of learning. Then what you hear from the teacher will complement and enrich your understanding. Students learn faster and more effectively when they study in this way.

At the same time, it is also important that after listening to or studying the teaching, you follow it up by reflecting on and recollecting what you have learned. You need to go through this process not just once but over and over again. This is what it takes to make the material really sink into your mind and have some effect in terms of subduing and calming the mind.

We face all kinds of problems in our life. Some problems are related to our physical health and others are related to our mental health. In order to overcome these problems, we have to apply the right remedies in our practice. If we do not apply the remedy thoroughly, then we won't be able to overcome our problems or illnesses.

Over the coming weekend we are running an Easter course, the theme of which is cultivating the bodhicitta mind which, as you all know, is a very important part of our spiritual practice. So, it would be good for you to do the course.

We often hear that first we should cultivate bodhicitta mind, and then, driven by that *bodhi* mind, engage in the deeds of a bodhisattva. We all consider ourselves to be followers of Mahayana Buddhism. Therefore, our core practice should be learning about and cultivating the bodhicitta mind. The spiritual benefits of bodhicitta practice are enormous. Even spending a short time trying to study bodhicitta will purify many negativities and accumulate much merit.

So, you must seize any opportunity to study and practise bodhicitta. Thinking of your situation from the point of view of your physical and mental health, as well as other external and internal life circumstances, you recognise your situation as being very conducive for practising Dharma. So you must make the best use of it. If you use your time for spiritual practice, you can be assured that your future rebirth will be a good one, better even than your current life.

Of course, I understand a lot of you have heard the teachings on the bodhicitta mind many times. However, you should study and reflect on it again and again, further developing and deepening your Dharma knowledge. For as long as our knowledge is not perfected, it needs to be further developed. Therefore, I encourage you to make the best use of your time and do the Easter Course if you can. There is no better way of using our time than studying the profound topic of the bodhicitta mind.

However, actually cultivating the bodhicitta mind is a tough call. Even a genuine thought of altruism or benefitting other beings is not easy. Let alone all sentient beings, or for that matter all human beings, or even of all people of faith, having such an altruistic thought is extremely rare. This is because most sentient beings have the mental attitude which is engrained with self-centredness. However, having said this, even if we spend a little time directing our mind towards bodhicitta, it's worthwhile and the benefit is enormous in terms of increasing our collection of merit and purifying negativities.

I am not teaching over the Easter weekend this year, so I want to say a few words to encourage you to utilise your time as much as possible for Dharma and spiritual practice. Whenever you study Dharma, reflect on its meaning such as by thinking about the bodhicitta mind. As a benefit of reflecting on a Dharma topic, you will find more calmness and happiness within your mind.

If you don't do any Dharma practice, and actively pursue worldly affairs then you are wasting your life and there will be no end to suffering as you go around and around the wheel of suffering. I meet some people who don't consider themselves to be spiritual believers. They come to seek my advice on how to solve their problems. They say they have plenty of money, a good job and all the rest, but they are confused and unhappy. They are not happy with their job, but they don't want to quit their job, saying they won't be happy not having anything to do. In a way they tell me their version of samsara, which is going around and around the vicious and perpetual cycle of suffering.

Essentially, the cause of their problems lies in the mental level, because most of the problems we experience are related to our mental and emotional wellbeing. As we all know, if we are not happy, or if we are extremely confused

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and disturbed, then this can take a toll on our physical health.

On the other hand, if we improve our mental hygiene, then this can not only bring more meaning to our life in terms of more happiness, but it also helps to improve the hygiene of our body too.

I understand that people have different needs in their lives. If you have children or a family, you have to give time to them, but at the same time it's also important to recognise the importance of your own mental and physical wellbeing too. Taking all of this into account, find the time for learning Dharma. And even if you have already learnt it, it is still worthwhile to learn it again, and think about it over and over again. In this way your understanding will become deeper and more extensive.

Of course, as well as studying we also need to put Dharma into practice. Cultivating the bodhicitta mind depends on how much effort you put into your practice. If you put in enough effort, then it is possible that you can generate bodhicitta to the point where by simply hearing the term 'bodhicitta', your eyes will fill with tears and the hairs on your body will stand on end. If we could develop bodhicitta to that level, that would be most wonderful.

From time to time it's also good to think about what sort of person you were before you met the Dharma, and what sort of person you are now. In what way has the Dharma changed you as a person? Our mental attitude and way of thinking might have changed drastically due to the influence of Dharma. Our mental attitude might be a lot more positive, wholesome and loving now than it was before we met the Dharma. I would say the difference between then and now might be like the difference between the earth and the sky. Sometimes, you need to think like this to feel more positive about yourself and more motivated to follow Dharma practice.

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

30 April 2019

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As usual, ensure that you relax yourself physically first. (*Tong-len meditation*)

Once again, try to reinforce your motivation. If we consider the purpose of engaging in meditation, it is to develop and safeguard our inner qualities, particularly our inner peace and happiness. Our inner qualities are not like our external possessions; we can share our possessions with others, and also lose them due to external causes. But we cannot share our inner qualities, or give them to others.

When we think about it, the conditions that make us lose our inner qualities lie within our mind. Whenever we give rise to negative or discursive states of mind – the mental afflictions – that’s when we lose our inner qualities.

If your partner or friend is unhappy, you may feel sorry for them and want to help them. But it isn’t easy to help another overcome their unhappiness and mental suffering. While you may be filled with joy and inner peace – which you may wish to share with your friend who is deprived of it – you cannot share it with them.

What we are getting at here is that, when we talk about inner peace and happiness, or inner suffering, each person has to undergo their own, individual experience. There is a limit to the outside help one can expect. Each of us has to create the causes for bringing about our own inner peace. Then, having found that inner peace, we are responsible for safeguarding and maintaining it.

When we speak of mental and physical happiness in our life, the more important of these is mental happiness. We have discussed this in the past – how we can lack happiness, despite being surrounded by favourable conditions.

It is good to give some thought to whether we enjoy happiness or not, in terms of both mental and physical happiness, because that’s what we always seek in life. Possessing good physical health depends on the actions we undertake to achieve it; in fact, we have no shortage of knowledge of what we should and shouldn’t do to improve our physical health. We are doing quite well in terms of maintaining the health of our bodies.

Where we are lagging is in improving the health of our mind and thereby enjoying more inner happiness. In fact, inner happiness is more important for our wellbeing than outer or material happiness. When we talk about having a happy life, we are not so much talking about outer happiness, but about how much inner happiness we enjoy.

Therefore, it is important to see whether you have such happiness. If you do have it, you should acknowledge it, and remind yourself to feel positive about it and contented with it, recognising its value and cherishing it. If you recognise its value, you will maintain that happiness. Even in the face of any change in your circumstances, you will still remember the value of that happiness, and do whatever it takes to keep it.

For example, sometimes when we face an adverse situation, we become so mentally and emotionally entangled that we can easily lose what peace and happiness we have within us. It is important to always maintain our inner calmness, resilience and happiness. If we enjoy inner happiness, we will always find ourselves in a state of happiness, regardless of what we do, or where we go and who we are with.

On the other hand, if we lack inner happiness, it will be difficult for anything to make us happy. No matter what we do or acquire, or whatever success we have, somehow, inside, there will always be a feeling of emptiness. Deep down, we will feel that something, some favourable condition, is missing, even if we are surrounded by favourable conditions.

Therefore, the question of how successful we are in our lives should also be measured by our progress on a mental level – that is very important. When we develop a good mental quality, for example, we should feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Whereas if we measure our success only against our material or external development, no matter how much we develop along that path, there is no guarantee that we can say we are doing well and that we have become more satisfied, contented and happy.

If we look into the main cause that brings us inner happiness, as we always say, it is cultivating a positive mental attitude, such as a good heart towards others: developing love and compassion for other beings. We can understand this from our own experience of showing love and caring thoughts towards others.

The positive inner qualities, in the form of wholesome mental attitudes that we cultivate within us, counteract or reduce the mental afflictions, such as anger, pride and competitiveness, which serve as a source of unhappiness and suffering. The more we decrease our mental afflictions, the more inner peace and happiness we will experience.

This discussion is to remind us that the purpose of engaging in meditation practice is to overcome the mental afflictions and develop positive attitudes. When we understand how the experience of happiness or suffering depends on the various states of mind that arise within us, we will understand the benefits of meditation practice, because meditation practice enables us to get rid of states of mind that disturb us and destabilise our mental peace and happiness.

Meditation practice is the most effective tool we have for enhancing inner peace and happiness. This is because, when we engage in meditation practice we are directing our mind single-pointedly, with one-hundred-percent attention, on the meditation object. When the mind is fixed on the meditation object, the arising of mental afflictions will cease. While it’s not necessarily the case that we’ll overcome the seed of those mental afflictions through the meditation session, at least we will prevent afflictions from manifesting within our continuum. When there are no mental afflictions arising, it will leave our mind in a state of peace and happiness.

Meditation practice should also benefit us even when we are not meditating, such as during the post-meditation period, we are more aware or mindful of our thoughts and actions. As a benefit of our awareness and mindfulness, we will be more alert or vigilant, and able to recognise any mental afflictions emerging when we confront adverse situations.

This, in itself, is beneficial in reducing the influence of the mental afflictions on our thoughts and deeds.

As we said before, it is important to be clear about the purpose of meditation, which is to counteract mental afflictions. Therefore, as part of our meditation practice, we also need to have a good understanding of the disadvantages of mental afflictions.

For example, we should see how, the moment a mental affliction such as anger arises in our mind, we immediately lose our peace and happiness. One moment you're mentally happy, but the next, you lose your temper with your friend or partner. Therefore, we need to try and recognise the faults of the mental afflictions, and ensure that our meditation practice is always aimed at counteracting them.

In terms of benefiting others, there is no way we can act beneficially if we hold anger or hatred towards them. Even though tantric texts talk about transforming hatred as a means of benefiting others, it is almost impossible for us to do this. Anger is unlike other mental afflictions, such as desire or attachment, which have the effect of bringing people towards us, and in some ways enable us to benefit others. Anger, on the other hand, has the nature of destroying things.

As to the commentary, last time we finished under the heading:

### **(c') The divisions of ethical discipline**

#### **(3') The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings (cont.)**

The ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings means that you focus on the welfare of eleven sorts of living beings, and then accomplish their aims in this and future lives in a suitable manner and without wrongdoing. Since I have already detailed these in my *Basic Path to Awakening*, you should definitely read that over and over again.

As I mentioned in the last session, you should discuss the eleven modes of accomplishing the welfare of other beings in the next group discussion session. I will let you know the timing of the discussion night. As usual, Denis will coordinate the discussion night and Ross could prepare more on the list of eleven and some subdivisions within it. You can also refer to the section of the perfection of moral ethics in other lam-rim texts, such as *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, which mentions the eleven benefits.

To continue:

Therefore, since the rules of the vows of individual liberation are one aspect of the precepts for renunciates who have taken the bodhisattva vows, they are not set off apart from the precepts for bodhisattvas.

Also, within the three divisions of ethical discipline, the ethical discipline of restraint – the actual rules of the individual liberation vows or the practice of engaging in what is to be adopted and rejecting what is to be cast aside that would be associated with these vows – is initially very important even for bodhisattvas, so train in this.

*The Bodhisattva Levels' Compendium of Determinations* states:

Among the three aspects of ethical discipline, the ethical discipline of restraint includes and reaches to the other two; when you are bound by it and safeguard it, you will be bound by the other two and safeguard them as well, and when you are

neither bound by nor protect it, you will not be bound by the other two nor safeguard them. Consequently, it is said that if bodhisattvas' ethical discipline of restraint degenerates, all their vows degenerate.

These lines emphasise the importance of observing the ethical discipline of restraint or vows [of individual liberation] by stating that if we abide by this moral ethic of restraint, we will also be abiding by the other types of moral discipline. On the other hand, if we don't observe this ethical discipline of restraint or vows, then we will also be degenerating or weakening the other two types of ethical discipline.

So, when we engage in the practice of ethics, we must engage in the ethical discipline of restraint or vows which serves as the basis or foundation on which we are able to develop the practice of the other two ethical disciplines.

The text now continues; the meaning of this text is quite clear if you read it:

If you think that the vows of individual liberation are for *sravakas*, and if you cast aside their prescriptive and proscriptive rules and say, "There are other precepts, bodhisattva precepts, to train in," then you have not grasped the key point of the bodhisattva training in ethical discipline, for it is often said that the ethical discipline of restraint is the basis and source of the next two types of ethical discipline.

This paragraph clearly implies the importance of observing the vows of individual liberation, even for a bodhisattva, to the point that, for anyone to think a bodhisattva precept is something other than observing the individual liberation vows, that indicates their lack of understanding of the key practice of the bodhisattva precepts.

Furthermore, the principal aspect of the ethical discipline of restraint is abstaining from deeds that are wrong by nature.

Here, the *deeds that are wrong by nature* refers to deeds that are called in Tibetan *ka.na ma.to.wae.le* – deeds that are wrong or negative *by their nature*, meaning whoever commits those deeds, even if they are a renunciate or ordained, is committing a moral transgression. By contrast, there are certain deeds that we call prescribed vows (or codes). When those who have taken such vows transgress them, they only accrue a misdeed, while others who don't possess these vows won't accrue a misdeed, even if they commit the same deed. So that's the meaning of 'wrong by nature'.

Moreover, it is taught in all the vehicles, higher and lower, that this abstention from deeds that are wrong by nature is the abstention from the ten non-virtues, which comprise the crux of the major faults of the deeds that are wrong by nature.

The text is emphasising that, if you go into detail regarding the ethical discipline of restraint, the main discipline is that of restraining from deeds that are negative and wrong by nature, such as the ten non-virtuous actions.

You must correctly restrain yourself physically, verbally, and mentally by not allowing a flicker of mere motivation for these non-virtues.

Here, the text further emphasises the importance of refraining from any deeds that are negative or wrong by nature, primarily the ten non-virtuous actions.

Technically, when we talk about the ten virtues or non-virtues in Tibetan, we don't use the term karma or action,

which in Tibetan is *le*. Hence, it is not accurate to say ten virtuous or non-virtuous 'actions'. In fact, the term action or *le* or karma primarily refers to the mental factor of volition or intention.

If we look at the list of the ten non-virtues or negativities, there are three of body – physically refraining from the act of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. Then there are four verbal: refraining from lying, slandering, harsh speech and idle gossip; and three of mind – mentally refraining from covetousness, harmful thought and wrong view. We have come across this topic many times in the past.

So when we talk about Buddhist ethics, refraining from the act of killing is taught first. We can understand why it is listed first, because we can all understand how precious life is for everyone. There is no more harm that we can cause to another than bringing an end to their life. This is followed by no stealing – again, for all of us, our wealth and possessions are also very important to us, so refraining from stealing is the next important ethical practice. Refraining from sexual misconduct is also important for the wellbeing of ourselves and others.

In terms of moral practice, here we are not just talking about not committing, for example, the act of killing – although, of course, it is very important that we do not commit an act of killing, as not killing is a virtue. However, what is pointed out here is that we cultivate the intention to refrain from engaging in the act of killing – this is the true meaning of this practice of ethical discipline. With such a thought or intention of restraint, our act of refraining from or avoiding misdeeds makes more sense, and our practice of moral ethics yields more benefits. When the text says *by not allowing a flicker of mere motivation for these non-virtues* it means that, even on a mental level, we have no thought of engaging in non-virtue.

From one perspective, when we think of the practice of morality or ethics, the challenge is not so much our lack of ability to engage in ethics. Rather, the challenge for us is to put some effort into understanding what the practice of ethics truly means – which is bearing a sense of moral restraint within our continuum all the time. For example, in terms of refraining from the act of killing, for most of us, there is little need for us to engage in killing. Likewise, there are other wrong deeds we don't need to engage in. Rather, here we need to understand what the ethical discipline of, say, refraining from killing means, as well as cultivating awareness of the shortcomings of committing such non-virtues. Recognising the shortcomings of the non-virtues is the key, and we have to develop this understanding.

Otherwise, we may consider ourselves a Dharma student or spiritual practitioner, but in fact lack a constant, conscious awareness of Dharma practice, such as refraining from non-virtues. Instead, we may have thoughts of wanting to commit non-virtues, and may regret being unable to do certain non-virtues. So, in reality, the way we live our life may contradict our spiritual or Dharma practice.

The text goes into the benefits of observing ethical discipline. This is something we can all easily recognise. If we talk about the peace, stability and safe environment of a country, obviously where there are rampant acts of people killing each other, lying to each other and stealing things, nobody will feel a sense of peace, freedom and happiness. On the other hand, in a country where people adhere to the rule of law and order and the principles of non-violence and compassion – where there is no killing or acts of violence –

there will be peace and stability and everybody can feel free to do things without fear and threat.

The text continues:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

Do not let these ten paths of action degenerate;  
They are the path to the joys of high status or liberation.

Here, *high status* refers to higher rebirth as a human or celestial being. And *liberation* refers to either liberation from cyclic existence, or the liberation of complete enlightenment. These two lines are really saying that those who want to find the joy of a good rebirth as a human being in the future should follow the practice of the ten virtues. Likewise, those who wish to achieve liberation from cyclic existence or complete enlightenment should also follow the ten paths of virtuous action.

By maintaining these you reach your goals, which are  
Special contemplations wherein you think of helping beings.

So, having established oneself on the right path leading to the desired goal, one can then benefit others and help them find the same path and the same result.

Correctly restrain your speech, body, and mind;  
The Conqueror said, "This, in brief, is ethical discipline."  
This is the basis that comprises all ethical discipline,  
So train in this restraint.

The term *basis* here refers to ethical discipline as a basis for achieving all the excellent qualities. In some other scriptures, such as Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend*, 'ground' is used as an analogy to explain the benefits of moral ethics for growing all the excellent qualities. They all refer to the same thing.

The text continues:

The master Candrakirti also explains the practice of the perfection of ethical discipline as abstaining from the ten non-virtues in the chapter on the perfection of ethical discipline of his *Explanation of the "Middle Way" Commentary*, and such explanations also occur in many sutras such as the Sutra on the Ten Levels. Therefore, if you initially train your mind in such restraint as presented above, you easily accomplish the remaining two types of ethical discipline.

#### (d') How to practice

You practice the three types of ethical discipline in association with the six supremacies and the six perfections. When you practice in association with the six perfections, the generosity of ethical discipline is establishing others in ethical discipline after you have stabilized yourself in it. The remaining perfections are as presented before.

#### (e') A summary

Not to weaken and to increase steadily the spirit of enlightenment is the basis of the bodhisattva deeds – it is the root of engaging in deeds of ethical discipline and so forth.

Here, the text is saying that engaging in the bodhisattva deeds, such as the deeds of ethical discipline, is the paramount cause of developing the spirit of enlightenment or bodhicitta – which is like the root – and also of preventing it from degenerating.



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It is also the best way to desist from harming any living being.

As part of our practice of ethical discipline, we commit ourselves to not causing any harm to other beings. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often advises people to make a pledge or resolve: 'If I am not able to benefit others, I will at least not cause any harm to them'.

Aspire to practice the ethical discipline of those at high levels and then train your mind in it.

Here, we are talking about the practice of ethical discipline as part of the bodhisattvas' practice at a very high or advanced level. As it is too difficult for us at the moment to apply this high level of ethical discipline in practice, we can at least practise through aspirational prayer - by sincerely aspiring, wishing and praying that one day we may be able to follow all the practices of ethical discipline at high levels.

Sincerely learn right now what to adopt and what to cast aside, starting with the ethical discipline of a beginning bodhisattva. In particular, each day frequently exercise an attitude of restraint with respect to what you know about deeds that are wrong by nature such as the ten non-virtues - and deeds that are wrong by prohibition. Among these also strive again and again to apply an attitude of restraint toward the fundamental transgressions of the vow to which you are committed. Once you do this, you will be able to complete the bodhisattva training in another lifetime as a causally concordant behavioral effect, with little difficulty and with little suffering. However, if you neglect these things now, you will be continually tainted by very grave faults and transgressions, and moreover for many lives you will be unable to learn the bodhisattvas' trainings. So from now on strive at these practices.

The great Lama Tsongkhapa has summarised very well the essence of ethical discipline in this section. So it is good to read and reflect upon the contents of this last paragraph.

We will leave tonight's talk here, and next week we will go on to the topic of developing patience.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo  
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Edited Version*

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# The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

7 May 2019

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We will begin with our usual meditation on giving and taking. [meditation]

As much as possible, try to generate a very good motivation for receiving these teachings. Any motivation that we generate before we begin an activity will guide and direct us, so if the motivation is a good one, then the deeds that follow it will also be good.

In a sense a motivation is a thought or intention that you will engage in a deed for a particular purpose, and this motivation drives you to engage in that deed. In Tibetan terms, action or karma is called *las* which can be either an intention karma or action, or an intended karma or action, referring to a mental factor of intention or volition that motivates or directs our mind towards its object. Intention karma is a thought that motivates us to engage in verbal or bodily deeds prior to engaging in those deeds. Whereas, intended karma is a mental factor of intention that is concomitant with our mind at the time of engaging in the deeds.

Simply put, the content of this thought or intention action is a spiritual guide for us in terms of indicating the kinds of actions that are to be accepted, and those that are to be rejected. The driving thought or intention action can be beneficial and positive, or it can be harmful and negative. Whether the intended actions and deeds that follow the intention actions are good or bad is predetermined by the intention actions, whether they are good or bad.

If the thought which is the intention action says to us that we should engage in a spiritual practice, such as doing prostrations or making offerings to the Three Jewels, or the thought says to help some other being, then obviously that thought is directed towards the right kind of actions that need to be adopted. Conversely, if the thought influences one to cause harm to other beings, for example, then one has to understand and recognise that one should not engage in that action and overcome that thought. In this way, we can change our deeds, behaviours and personality by understanding and changing the volitional thought or intention that presides over our deeds.

This is what I try to practice all the time, and we have discussed it in the past many times. Essentially our spiritual practice is to look into our mind, and through controlling and disciplining our mind, we develop ourselves in terms of finding more happiness and reducing suffering.

In this context we can clearly understand the Buddhist view that all the happiness and suffering that we experience in our lives is derived from our own thoughts and our own state of mind. When we understand how all of our actions are predetermined by our state of mind, we can understand how the mind is the source of our experience of happiness and suffering.

Regarding the text we are studying, I'm assuming that all of you at least know what the six perfections are. Tonight, we begin with the perfection of patience.

## THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE

### (iii) How to train in the perfection of patience

The explanation of how to train in the perfection of patience has five parts:

When you look at these five headings, or outlines, you will see that they are very similar to the outlines used in the explanation of the perfection of ethical discipline. These outlines cover everything we need to understand about the meaning of patience, as well as how to practice it.

The five divisions are:

1. What patience is

This introduces the nature of patience as a mental attitude.

2. How to begin the cultivation of patience

This shows how to engage in the practice of patience or in meditating on patience. Then having understood this, it goes on to show,

3. The divisions of patience

This covers the different types of patience.

4. How to practice

This explains what you actually do at the time of engaging in the practice of patience.

5. A summary

So, you can see how the outlines in the presentation on patience are the same as those in the presentation of ethical discipline, and how they show us the essential points of this topic.

#### (a') What patience is

Generally, we say that patience is an ability to not be mentally disturbed or affected when receiving any harm or confronting suffering in some way. It's a state of mind that is not affected by or disturbed or annoyed when afflicted with any form of harm or suffering.

When we talk about patience, we are talking about being patient with something. So, the question is being patient with what? It means being patient with any harm that we receive from others, or when facing any adverse circumstances. For instance, being able to be patient when somebody speaks harshly, or shows you a really angry gesture.

In terms of the time of practising patience, the most important time we need to practise patience is when we are mentally unhappy and unstable, or when we face an adverse situation. If we observe our experiences, we can see that when we easily lose our temper, become angry, react and throw tantrums it is usually a time when we are not in a good mood, not up to our normal self or when we are unhappy. In those times it doesn't take much for us to be provoked and lose our temper. Therefore, if we are able to practise patience in times of doom and gloom, then we can be more appreciative of the benefits of our Dharma practice.

What we have to understand here is that when we talk of practising patience, we are really talking in terms of patience as lying within us. Patience doesn't simply mean that when you confront some adverse condition or circumstance, such as if somebody says something mean to you or does something hurtful to you, that you externally

stay very quiet and passive while internally you are boiling with resentment and hatred. That's not being patient at all. In fact, you are more impatient because you are holding a grudge. That's why some people say that practising patience or tolerance is painful. Yes, it can be painful, but you definitely are not practising patience if you are holding onto hatred or resentment. On the other hand, I know a lot of students here who have been applying patience to their real-life situations. I have seen them finding the benefit of the practice of patience. When speaking of the benefits of patience, you don't necessarily have to talk about life stories of past great lamas. In fact, we can observe the benefits by observing the people who we know practice patience and who are good at it. There are some people that I know here who have been able to turn past objects of hatred and suffering into an object of forgiveness, love and compassion, and thereby experience joy and happiness.

By applying this practice of patience, and even trying to engage in the giving and taking meditation practice like we did at the beginning of the session, you can transform hurtful things that happened in the past which have caused you a lot of pain, into something very positive, which brings joy to your mind. Through applying such Dharma practice to our lives, we are able to transform adverse situations into favourable ones that give us joy and happiness. That is the real benefit or the blessing of the Dharma that results from our Dharma practice. Without putting the Dharma into practice, you don't receive any Dharma blessing or benefits.

On the other hand, if we lack the practice of Dharma, then whenever unavoidable things occur, for example if we get very sick or confront a very adverse situation, we would then worry too much. This worry adds more suffering to whatever hardship we are already experiencing. So, our situation will become even worse. Sometimes, the difficult situation then becomes too much for us to manage.

So, no matter what we face externally, if we are able to remain calm, strong and clear internally, then we can pass through any hurdles of life and maintain stable peace and happiness. And for safeguarding inner peace, happiness and clear thinking, there is no means more effective and beneficial than Dharma practice. Dharma practice is done within the context of each and every individual's mental continuum. Hence, when we talk here about the practice of patience, the essential point is cultivating and developing patience within our own mind.

Based on our own life experience we have to try to see the benefit that the Dharma brings to our life, and the changes that it brings to our life. Through following Dharma practice, we can expect that we will gain more excellent qualities and become a better person than we were before we met the Dharma. We should also aim to gain more excellent qualities in a year than we have now. In other words, the more we follow Dharma practice, the more spiritual qualities and realisations we will develop, and the more qualities we develop, the fewer faults we possess. In this way, we can get some idea of our ability to increase excellent qualities and decrease faults, and thereby establish the possibility of achieving the complete state of enlightenment, which is the supreme state where one is free of all flaws and faults, and perfectly completed with all the excellent qualities.

Returning to the text:

#### **(a') What patience is**

Patience is (1) disregarding harm done to you, ...

This can be understood in the sense of being not concerned about, or annoyed by the harm done to you, and not retaliating to any such harm. This is called *the patience of disregarding harm*

Then,

... (2) accepting the suffering arising in your mind-stream, ...

As it clearly says, patience means being able to voluntarily accept suffering. This will be explained in detail a bit later on. Of the three types of patience, this is the *patience of accepting suffering*.

This is very important because we perpetually undergo some form of suffering in our life due of our inability to accept or cope with suffering and difficulties. Therefore, it is very important to be able to develop a good understanding of this type of patience so we will be more able to tolerate suffering and not be completely overwhelmed by it.

The text continues:

... and (3) being certain about the teachings and firmly maintaining belief in them.

It is important to develop this patience of being certain about the teachings, and firmly maintain our belief in them. This is the *patience of definitely thinking about the Dharma*. For example, if we are studying the view of selflessness, we need to maintain our focus, interest, and enthusiasm in order to gain an understating of the subject matter. Of course, this needs a great deal of patience so that our mind doesn't waver from faith and interest in the Dharma. The patience of definitely thinking about the Dharma means an ability to firmly maintain one's faith and interest in Dharma practice.

The text continues,

There are three sets of factors incompatible with these: ...

This is talking about the three opposites of the three types of patience just listed. The detail about all this comes later on so we won't go through it now.

In brief it says here:

... for the first, hostility;

If we lack the first patience, the patience of disregarding harm done to you, then we will be easily provoked by any harm that we receive from others. We will usually become angry or lose our temper, and animosity will naturally arise.

Next:

... for the second, hostility and loss of courage;

When we face a certain degree of suffering to the point that we are unable to accept personal loss or the suffering becomes intolerable, then we will become very frustrated, feel deeply hurt, disturbed and annoyed. At the same time, we become very angry and feel hostile.

As well as this, as the text says, our mind becomes filled with these unpleasant thoughts and unhappiness, so we also feel depressed and lose our mental spirit and courage. The text uses the Tibetan term *Sro shi.ba* which can be literally translated as dying of spirit or passion, meaning loss of courage.

Continuing:

... and for the third, disbelief and dislike.

Those of you who have been studying the Dharma will know how, if you lack interest or motivation in learning, then you will not be able to develop faith in your learning and in your practice, and then you may completely lose

interest in your practice. There are many cases where people start following the Dharma and then completely give it up.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama quite often comments that the best way to tackle problems is to fully engage in the method for solving problems, and the best thing that he has learned from difficulties is that accepting the difficulties is the most effective means of overcoming difficulties.

The text continues:

Perfecting patience means that you simply complete your conditioning to a state of mind wherein you have stopped your anger and the like. It is not contingent upon all living beings becoming free from undisciplined conduct because you would not be able to bring this about, and because you accomplish your purpose just by disciplining your own mind.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Undisciplined persons are as limitless as space;  
You could never overcome them.

If you conquer the single mental state of anger  
It is like vanquishing all your enemies.

Where could you get enough leather  
To cover the entire surface of the earth?  
Wearing just the leather of your sandals  
Is like covering all the earth.

We have already discussed these lines in the past and if you just read them, they are quite self-explanatory. In the first two lines Shantideva is explaining how to defeat the true enemy. If we target the external object of harm as our true enemy, instead of recognising that the true enemy lies within us in the form of anger or hatred, then, as it says here, as *undisciplined persons are as limitless as space; you could never overcome them*. If we see an external object or harm as our enemy, and try to win them over, then we will never be able to win because the number of such external enemies are, as it says here as *limitless as space*.

If, however, you conquer the single mental state of anger, it is like vanquishing all your enemies. If we recognise that our true enemy is our anger or the hostile mental attitude within us, then defeating it is equivalent to defeating all enemies. In other words, if we conquer our true enemy, our inner enemy such as anger, then there will be no more enemies.

We can observe this from our own experience. Someone who is very short-tempered and who becomes very angry very easily will upset many other people and will be viewed by a lot of people as an enemy. Whereas someone who practises patience, who is very tolerant and patient with things and people, actually draws people closer to them and so they don't have any enemies.

The lines beginning Shantideva's second verse, *where could you get enough leather to cover the entire surface of the earth* is an analogy showing how we need to defeat the inner enemy of anger in order to defeat all enemies. It is saying here that if we were to walk across to the other side of ground covered by thorns, it would be rather stupid to try to cover the entire surface of the earth with leather to protect every being as you could not get enough leather to cover the earth's surface. *Wearing just the leather of your sandals* to cover your own feet is the equivalent of covering the whole ground with leather. Likewise, conquering the anger within us is equal to conquering all enemies.

The quote from Shantideva continues:

Similarly, I cannot change  
External things, but when  
I can change my state of mind,

Why do I need to change anything else?

It is a waste of time trying to get rid of all undesirable things, because there is no end to them. However, as it says, *I can change*. If you can change your own state of mind, then there's no need for you to do anything to change the external circumstances, because once you have completely subdued your own state of mind, you have accomplished your purpose and there is no need to make any changes because there is no more any unfavourable situation or object to confront.

The text continues:

### (b') How to begin the cultivation of patience

Although there are many ways to cultivate patience, to begin I will explain the meditation on the benefits of patience and the faults of not being patient.

This is saying that in order to engage in the practice of patience, we first need to reflect on the benefits of patience, and then reflect on the faults of anger. In this way, as we become more aware of the benefits of patience then we will be inspired and motivated to engage in the practice of patience, and as well as developing a greater understanding of the faults and shortcomings of anger, we will be then more motivated to challenge and counteract anger when it arises.

I will just read the next part of the text as it is quite self-explanatory.

The benefits are set forth in the *Bodhisattva Levels*:

Initially, bodhisattvas consider the benefits of patience. They think, "Persons who have patience will not have many enemies later on and will not have many separations from those to whom they are close. They will have much happiness and contentment. They will have no regret at the time of death, and upon the disintegration of their bodies they will also be reborn among the deities in the happy realms of high status." By looking at such benefits, they too are patient. They engage others in upholding patience, and they also praise patience. When they see patient persons, they are delighted and full of joy.

The text continues:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

It is said, "Patience is the best approach  
For dealing with the inclination to disregard others'  
welfare";

This is saying that patience acts like armour to safeguard our benevolent thoughts of benefitting other sentient beings.

Patience against the fault of anger protects  
All that is excellent in this world.

As it says, patience is the source of all the possible excellent qualities that are achievable in this life and in future lives. It protects all these excellent qualities or goodness from harm caused by anger and hatred.

Patience is the best ornament of the powerful,  
The greatest strength for those who practice asceticism,  
And a stream of water on the wildfire of malice.  
Patience clears away much harm in this and future  
lives.  
The arrows of undisciplined people's words  
Are dulled by a superior being's armour of patience;

Through the armour of patience, the arrows of the harm that you receive from others (such as harsh speech) are all transformed into attractive flowers.

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These unruly people then give pleasant flowers of praise  
Which become attractive garlands of fame.

And also:

Patience is also the craftsman that creates a buddha's  
embodiment of form,  
Adorned with the beautiful signs of good qualities.

This indicates that as a result of the practice of patience, we  
can find a very pleasant body in this life in a short period of  
time, and ultimately find the excellent bodies of a  
sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya buddha fully endowed  
with all the major and minor marks of a buddha,

Lama Tsongkhapa explains the meaning of the previous  
verses as follows:

Thus, Aryasura praises patience by way of its many  
benefits: it stops you from turning away from others'  
welfare on account of living beings' misperceptions; it  
protects you from anger, the enemy that destroys many  
roots of virtue;

As this clearly indicates, whenever anger arises, it has the  
capacity to extinguish our virtues. However, we can protect  
our virtues with the practice of patience.

... it is a captivating ornament because it endures the harm  
of those of little power;

This line conveys quite a powerful meaning. Normally we  
lack patience when we are harmed by a weaker living being.  
For example, if a tiny mosquito lands on our hand, we won't  
tolerate it and without a second thought we will just slap  
and kill it. Whereas if we are bullied by a very strong  
person, we will be very scared and won't have a word to say  
or the guts to express our anger.

As it says here, if we develop practice of patience, then we'll  
extend our practice even to those weaker beings or those  
with little power who bring harm to us.

... it is the excellent strength of ascetics who are tormented  
by the afflictions; it is a stream of water that extinguishes  
the wildfire of malice; it is armor that cannot be pierced by  
the arrows of undisciplined persons' misperceptions; it is  
the skilled artisan who creates a fine form of golden color  
that captivates the eyes and minds of beings.

This relates to the meaning of the above quotations.

Furthermore, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says: in this  
way through the various ways the practice of patience is  
highly commended, or highly praised.

Continuing with the text:

Furthermore, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Whoever works hard and overcomes anger  
Is happy in this and future lives.

In the next paragraph you can see the great Tsongkhapa's  
profound explanation of these two lines.

When you rely on patience continually, you do not spoil  
your joyful attitude, so you are always happy even in this  
life.

With the words *whoever works hard and overcomes anger* is  
happy, he's talking about how the practice of patience can  
ensure happiness in this life and in future lives.

Moreover, patience stops miserable rebirths in future lives,  
gives special rebirths in happy realms, and ultimately  
bestows certain goodness, so you are utterly happy in this  
and future lives.

Meditate on these benefits until you gain a strong, firm  
certainty about the cause-and-effect relationship wherein  
benefits such as these arise from patience.

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