
The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

5 March 2019

We will begin with our usual meditation of giving and taking [*tong-len meditation*].

I assume that you're taking this meditation practice seriously, with a clear recognition of its value and benefit to you. You should never underestimate the value of your meditation practice.

The end result that we seek from everything we do is happiness. Achieving happiness is why we do meditation practice – we want to achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence, or the complete state of enlightenment or buddhahood. Some may have a wish to be reborn as a human or a celestial god, but beneath that wish is the deeper goal to achieve happiness.

If you are engaging in meditation practice to seek happiness, then you have to ask, 'what is happiness?'. Generally, we can talk about two different types of happiness: inner happiness, which primarily arises from, and depends on, the mind; and outer happiness, which primarily arises from, or depends on, favourable external conditions.

External happiness and its causes and conditions are not that hard to recognise. In fact, we understand it well, and feel if we gain certain things, we will experience fun, excitement and happiness. Even less fortunate beings such as tiny ants know that external things bring satisfaction. This is evident from the fact that ants can find their way to sweet things, wherever they are: nobody needs to show them! They also know how to pass the message on to other ants about the location of the sweet food. We can also see from their reaction to any movement in their environment that ants know when they face any threat to their lives. The reason why ants are always keeping themselves busy, running here and there, is to find the external things that they recognise as a cause of happiness. Now, if we think about our own lives, perhaps our lives too reflect the life of busy ants, because we also seem to be living very busy lives, spending most of our time chasing after external things that we perceive as a source of happiness and fulfilment.

So, if we talk about happiness from the perspective of favourable external conditions, it is easy to understand. However, if we talk about happiness in terms of favourable inner conditions – such as having certain skills and education – then the causes and conditions become subtler, and not that simple. Even if we consider acquiring worldly education and skills, it may take years of hard work to gain them.

We need to ensure here that the kind of happiness we seek is inner happiness, which arises from within and has less to do with external causes and circumstances. It is more reliable and lasting than the happiness that depends on external conditions, which is unreliable, out of one's control and can change at any moment. The reason we engage in meditation practice is to understand this subtler and deeper level of happiness, for which we require knowledge and experience.

Lama Tsongkhapa stated that meditation is a practice whereby we place our mind on a virtuous object and familiarise ourselves with that object. The next question is, 'why do we meditate?'. The simple answer is that we meditate to bring the mind under our control. This is because the primary source of unhappiness or suffering in our life is our mind. Because we are always led by the mind, our situation will always reflect that mind. If the mind leads us in the wrong direction, then we will do wrong things, resulting in suffering. If we take a closer look at the type of mind that drives our everyday actions and shapes our character, we will notice that it is a form of delusion, an afflicted state of mind. In a nutshell, we are overpowered by our mind, but because our mind is overpowered by mental afflictions, we perpetually experience suffering.

Is it possible to gain control over the mind? Yes, it is possible, because we are not the mind and the mind is not us. It normally seems like the mind is the controller or the owner, and we feel as if we are controlled or owned by the mind. However, in reality, it should be the other way around. This is clear from our everyday use of the phrase, 'my mind', which sounds as if you – or the 'I' – are the controller or owner, and the mind is controlled or owned by you or the 'I'. But, this is not the case at all, for we have fallen prey to our mind. Unfortunately, the mind that overpowers and leads us is under the influence of, or intoxicated by, mental delusion or afflictions.

It is because of this force of the mental delusions that we are always rushing here and there. However, no matter what we do or accomplish, the result is not true happiness, but more suffering and restlessness. Even the good conditions we've gathered through hard work over a long time may end up as a further cause to increase and intensify misery and delusion; even these supposedly good and favourable conditions become bad and unfavourable, bringing suffering, instead of the happiness we seek. Take the example of achieving physical beauty: recognising this as the cause of more happiness and self-confidence, some people have worked hard and achieved it, but they have not become happier because they feel more pride, jealousy and competitiveness in relation to their outer image.

So, if we don't counteract the mental afflictions, no matter what we do or what we achieve, there'll be no end to our suffering, because the blame for our suffering lies with the mental afflictions. Now, when we talk about mental afflictions, we are referring to the various afflictive emotions we generate, such as attachment, anger, pride and jealousy. Attachment, as an emotion we experience, usually seems positive, harmless, or a cause of happiness. But, in reality, it serves as a perpetual cause of dissatisfaction and harm. The harm brought to us by other afflictive emotions, such as anger, pride, jealousy and competitiveness, on the other hand, is quite evident. Apart from all these afflictions, ignorance is the fundamental cause of all our faults. We know this from all the mistakes we have made, as a result of which we end up suffering and then regretting our decisions and actions – these mistakes would not have happened if we were not ignorant.

The key to cultivating a positive state of mind and overcoming negative states of mind is to be more aware of our thoughts and deeds. Most importantly, by understanding that our mental attitude is the source of all our actions, we need to be more responsible for the kinds of thoughts we generate. If we cultivate positive mental

attitudes – such as a good heart, loving kindness and compassion – we can definitely be a happier person, whatever we are doing, whether we are at the workplace, at home, or anywhere. At the same time, we can have a positive influence on other people around us, in terms of making them feel good and happy. So, this would naturally improve our relationships with them.

Therefore, our practice is to recognise that the true source of our happiness and suffering lies within us. Whenever we confront a problem, experience suffering, or cause others to suffer, we should try to recognise the cause within us. We should try to relate the cause to our inner mental delusions or afflictions. We should observe and recognise the mental afflictions within us as the source of all the troubles in our life, to the point where we can actually point our finger at them and put the blame on them. You can begin conversing with the mental afflictions, blame them for all your problems and mistakes, tell them off, scold them, even cite my name and say to them that Geshe Doga said they are the perpetrators, the trouble-makers, and the evil ones.

Indeed, we can trace the cause of every negative action we commit back to the mental afflictions – even when we utter a few harsh words or make a slightly unpleasant gesture or facial expression. The mental afflictions harm and destroy our life and cause us to harm and destroy the lives of other beings. Because of these mental afflictions, some parents always argue and fight over almost every issue, making their lives stressful and miserable. Their unending arguments not only destroy their relationship, but also affect the whole family, including relatives and particularly their children. Later on, when the children grow up and marry, they are likely to also end up living lives like their parents, arguing and being nasty to their partner. The main source of such conflict is the mental afflictions within us.

On the other hand, if we put an effort into cultivating and developing positive states of mind, such as love and compassion, we will find more peace and happiness in our personal life, and have a positive impact on our family, relatives, friends, and others. As I always say, the people who are most often directly impacted by our thoughts and actions are our own loved ones; the good and bad outcomes of our thoughts and actions affect those closer to us, which is another reason why we should cultivate positive mental attitudes and overcome negative states of mind within us.

We have all become very close and good friends over a long time. As friends, we share with each other those things we find to be beneficial, and those which are harmful. From my perspective, the most important thing is for us to realise that we must cultivate a positive mental attitude, and the best, most beneficial mental attitude is love and compassion for other living beings. I commend it as a priceless thing – it's benefit to oneself and to others is just incredible.

Relating to meditation practice, I say to people that the purpose of meditation is to free our mind from the bondage of mental affliction. We should always ensure that we feel fully relaxed and not feel any tension in our practice. Do not rush into practice or expect to see an immediate outcome. If we meditate with a relaxed mind and body, we will gradually see our practice benefiting us.

It is best that we initially aim our meditation to counteract any negative state of mind or mental affliction that inflicts suffering and harm upon us at the moment. For example, it could be a strong or compelling emotion of attachment, or aversion, that affects our normal life activities and functioning. Since the shortcomings of these afflictions are

easy to recognise, we will be more motivated to counteract them, and our practice will yield immediate benefits.

In other words, it is unrealistic for us as beginners to target our meditation at counteracting the mental afflictions at the level of the root cause. The point is that, as long as we perceive things as good or bad by boxing them into two categories – desirable and undesirable, or pleasant and unpleasant – we will continuously generate mental afflictions of some sort, such as attachment or aversion. Although they all are mental afflictions and harmful to us, not all of them necessarily disturb us by causing pain and inflicting harm on us at the present moment.

So, I am saying that we first need to get rid of those afflictions that are more aggressive and compelling, and which affect us right now, and then try to get rid of the next most pressing type of afflictions, and so on.

Now we turn to the text.

How to give

3)) Things to be given

(b')) Detailed explanation of the things which are and are not to be given

(2')) Detailed explanation about outer things which are and are not to be given

(a')) How not to give outer things (cont.)

(3')) Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of the person (cont.)

We will continue from the end of page 134:

Also, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says, "Do not give up something exalted for something lesser," ...

So, *do not give up something exalted for something lesser*, is a quote from the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*. One should not forsake or give up the greater purpose for some lesser or inferior purpose. Here, the text is talking about instances of where it would not be appropriate to give certain things to others as part of the practice of generosity.

... so it is not that there is merely no fault in not giving it away.

The way to refuse to give is to avoid using harsh language, such as saying, "I am not giving it to you." Rather, communicate with skill-in-means and then send the person off.

This implies the importance of not undermining the person requesting the thing. Although you cannot fulfil that person's request, you have to be very careful in how you communicate with that person as to why you cannot give. Your communication must be wise and skilful, so that you don't show disregard or disrespect to that person, and the person will fully understand why you cannot give.

Skill-in-means is as follows. From the first, bodhisattvas turn over with pure intention all their belongings to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions.

The suggestion here is that you may want to imply that one of the reasons you cannot give is because you are not the actual owner of the thing the recipient is asking for, so it is inappropriate for you to actually give it away. Indeed, bodhisattvas view everything they have as belonging to buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The text continues:

This is like, for example, the way that fully ordained monks keep religious robes and the like which they have mentally earmarked for their abbot or master. Because the monks have transferred their robes in this

way, even though they accumulate belongings, they are called “bodhisattvas living in the noble family” and infinitely increase merit.

Bodhisattvas living in the noble family and infinitely increase merit means that, although bodhisattvas don’t give certain things and instead use these possessions themselves, they infinitely increase merit by their deeds. Why? Because they have pure minds. On the contrary, when we use our possessions and don’t give them to others, we simply increase our mental afflictions and our merit decreases. This is because we cling to our possessions. Bodhisattvas do not have such clinging, for they do not see their things as their personal possessions: they see them as belonging to others.

In relation to this, His Holiness the Dalai Lama always admires the way the Christian belief in Almighty God as a creator of all things inspires them to practise charity and contentment and live a very simple life dedicated to serving the community.

The bodhisattvas, then, hold their belongings in trust, as it were, for the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

If someone asks for something, and if the belonging is suitable to be given to this person, then bodhisattvas give it, thinking, “I have no belonging that the buddhas and bodhisattvas have not given away to all living beings.”

So we’ll just go to:

... let the person know the situation, saying with soothing words, “My good person, this belongs to someone else. It is not something that I can give to you.” Or else, the bodhisattvas might give the monetary equivalent of two or three times the price of the book to someone to whom they have refused a text. In any case, the person who asks for it will think with regard to the bodhisattva, “It is not craving that keeps this person from giving me the text; it is not in this person’s power to give it.” This kind of activity is the generosity of the wise.

(4’’) Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of material things

Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of material things is, for example, such gifts as your parents; food and drink that have bugs; a child, wife, servant, etc. whom you have not told or, even if told, does not want to be given away; or a child or wife who are persons of the sort who have become accustomed to comfort. Though it is said that you should not give your child, wife, etc. into servitude, I have included them here among “material things” because the gift of material things is the form of generosity that is emphasized the most.

The *Bodhisattva Levels’ Compendium of Determinations* says that even if you do not satisfy a request for your three kinds of religious robes and any extra belongings [robes] other than those which the Buddha has permitted renounces to own, you incur no fault if you do not have a stingy attitude toward them, and if they are requisite to your cultivation of virtue. Thus it says:

If renunciate bodhisattvas give away extra belongings—robes other than their three kinds of religious robes—that are permitted by the Buddha, are resources for their bodies, and are conducive to maintaining their comfort, and do so after they have looked carefully at the persons who want them and ask for them, they do not incur a misdeed. Even if they do not give them away, they incur no misdeed at all as long as

their not giving is for the purpose of their cultivation of virtue and they do not have attachment to them.

The *Bodhisattva Vows of Liberation* says:

Sariputra, if bodhisattvas give away their three kinds of religious robes, treating the one who asks for them as more important than themselves, they are not relying on few desires.

Hence, if renunciate bodhisattvas give away their three kinds of religious robes, they incur a transgression.

We will stop here.

Just before this teaching I spent half an hour reading and reflecting on the section we have covered today. I have found it extremely beneficial and began to realise the profundity of the bodhisattva practices. I encourage everyone to read the text and think about its meaning as much as possible. You will gain a lot of knowledge from simply reading it. Even coming across a term like ‘intelligent giving’, which we covered in tonight’s teaching, has a profound effect on my practice. Intelligent giving is a form of not giving, so how is this possible? We find from this text that, with the right skill-in-practice, we may even need to keep things instead of giving them to others; furthermore, using and enjoying things ourselves may become a source of increasing merit. Of course, the key here is not having any attachment to the goods but having a clear sense of good purpose behind possessing and enjoying things.

I encourage everyone to read the text. If you keep your mind busy with reading the text, it has no time for mischief and worry about other things! Whereas if you don’t look after the mind or preoccupy it with something virtuous, it will slip away and bring you trouble.

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

12 March 2019

We can begin with our usual meditation.

[Tong-len meditation]

It is very important to always begin our practice with the bodhicitta motivation. If we maintain bodhicitta or a good heart we will be much happier regardless of where we are, who we are with and what we do.

If we maintain an altruistic mental attitude or good heart within us, we can automatically reduce and prevent various negative states of mind. However, if our mental attitude is very self-centred or self-cherishing, then we will be very insecure and temperamental, easily losing our temper, or getting upset about any minor hardship that we face. If we are the sort of person who is easily upset or who is very vulnerable to everyday events, then this is a sign that we lack familiarity with a good heart and that we are very familiar with the self-cherishing mind.

We can learn a lot about Dharma practice simply by observing other people. For example, there are some people who normally have a good and calm nature, who are joyful and very broad-minded and always very happy. They also have a positive influence on others. Others admire them and enjoy their companionship because it makes them feel good and happy. When we observe such positive people, we should recognise that the main cause of their admirable qualities is their positive mental attitude and understand that we are also capable of cultivating the same positive mental attitude. We should be inspired by observing those people, knowing if we too cultivate the same mental attitude then we can be exactly like them - very calm, joyful, admired by others and able to benefit those around us.

On the other hand, there are others who are unhappy, unpredictable, short-tempered and very tense. Not only are they very unhappy and difficult people, but nobody wants to be close to them because they cause stress and unease to those around them. As we observe such negative people, we should be inspired to develop more control of our own destructive thoughts and emotions, otherwise we will end up exactly like them - unhappy and tense. As a result, people will try to steer clear of us.

Spiritual practice is not just learning a lot about Dharma; more importantly it is about putting into practice what learning and knowledge we have. After learning something, we need to go through the process of contemplating it over and over again, relating it to our own thoughts and deeds and recognising the benefits and relevance of putting it into practise. Our spiritual approach should not be simply gathering Dharma information, saying to ourselves, 'Oh this is this and this is this etc.', as if we are counting something, and then later on forgetting it altogether. Instead of this, it is important that we integrate our study into our practice, firstly internalising the knowledge by contemplating it not once or twice, but over and over again, and then making it our experience by meditating on it. If we do this, then we can gradually make progress in our practice.

In short, we have to try to direct our focus towards cultivating positive mental qualities, such as a good heart. The way to cultivate and develop positive qualities is by making an effort to familiarise ourselves with positive ways of thinking. We also have to try, as much as possible, to combat the opposite of these positive states of mind, such as anger and so forth. This is how we benefit from our practice. If we apply Dharma practice by utilising our own intellect, then we are implementing the Buddha's advice that we are our own saviour and protector.

We will now continue with the teaching.

(2'') Detailed explanation about outer things which are and are not to be given

(a'') How not to give outer things (cont.)

(4'') Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of material things (cont.)

Last time we stopped at:

The *Bodhisattva Vows of Liberation* says:

Sariputra, if bodhisattvas give away their three kinds of religious robes, treating the one who asks for them as more important than themselves, they are not relying on few desires.

Hence, if renunciate bodhisattvas give away their three kinds of religious robes, they incur a transgression.

Here moral *transgression* refers specifically to a *renunciate* or an ordained person who does not possess any extra robes. In other words, it is a *transgression* if a renunciate who possesses only one set of robes gives them away.

(5'') Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of purpose

Although the explanation here relates to the practice of giving in terms of the objects of giving, the recipients and the manner of giving etc., we can also apply the same knowledge to our other practices of benefitting sentient beings. We learn here how to properly serve others and what to do when we face certain critical situations when we do so.

The text is self-explanatory.

Inappropriate giving from the viewpoint of purpose is, for instance, when you fulfill a request for poison, weapons, fire or alcohol which is for harming either yourself or others; when you meet a request for things to play with and enjoy but which are associated with a prohibitive risk of accumulating the causes for taking a miserable rebirth; or when you satisfy a request for, or a request to learn about, pits and traps, ...

People use nets, traps and pits to catch animals.

... and so forth for the sake of hurting living beings.

It is inappropriate to give such traps to catch animals because they are harmful to other beings. Not only is giving harmful tools like traps inappropriate, but giving instructions on the skill of catching or hunting animals is also inappropriate if it is intended to harm other beings.

To continue:

This means that it is inappropriate even to give instructions about these things for the sake of bringing harm to the lives and resources of beings. Other examples are giving land or bodies of water when they are requested for the sake of harming beings that inhabit watery or dry areas; giving political authority over these or other places for the sake of bringing harm to the human inhabitants; or, when asked for such things by somebody whom you dislike, giving them instead to an enemy of this person.

(b'')) How to give outer things

You must give outer things if the timing is not prohibited by the Teacher with respect to the recipient, and if giving the gift to this person is appropriate and suitable. Moreover, if you as the giver are a person opposite to that explained above, and are stingy with regard to a text, you must give it to a person who asks for it and who wishes to understand it, even though you may not have finished using it. This is to say, if you have a second copy, you give that, and if you do not, then you should give the cost of having it copied out. If you do not have the money, you should definitely give the text away, thinking, "Though by giving this away I may be stupid in this life, it is all right; I will not acquiesce in my stinginess."

As to material things, you should give everything except those things listed above. If you are a ruler, and someone asks for others' children, wives, and so on, it is inappropriate to meet the request by separating each from their families, but you can give them as a whole together with the family dwelling and the like.

Even in Australia many aboriginal children were separated from their parents in the past. This is totally inappropriate.

Then the text continues:

Likewise, you must meet requests for things to play with that do not become a cause of taking a miserable rebirth; traps, etc. that do not hurt others; dry or wet places inhabited by living beings when no harm will come to the beings; and food and drink which do not have any bugs.

These lines make some reference to what has been explained before. It was said earlier that it is not appropriate to give things that are a cause of harm to other beings. However, it says here that if giving those things doesn't serve as a cause of harm, then giving them is appropriate. So, the text is now explaining the exceptions; sometimes it is appropriate to give things which are usually inappropriate to give.

It continues:

You should give even poison, weapons, fire, and alcohol if people ask for them in order to benefit themselves or others.

Then the text poses a question:

What should you do when you are giving material gifts and two persons ask you for something, one of whom is poor and the other of whom is wealthy?

The reply is:

If you are confronted by both of them right from the first and you are able to fulfill both of their wishes, you should do so.

If you are able to fulfil the wishes of two recipients – one poor and the other rich – who are requesting the same things at the same time, and *if you are able to fulfil both of their requests then you should do so.*

However:

If you are unable to do this, however, you should first think, "I will fulfill the wishes of the poor person," and work to give the gift to this person. So you should let the wealthy one know the situation, saying with soothing words, "My friend, I have already planned from the first to distribute this article to this poor person. Please do not think that I have spurned you," and then fulfill the wishes of the person who has no wealth.

As it says here, you have to prioritise your giving to the recipient who is poor, and you should explain to the wealthy person why you are doing this in an appropriate and skilful manner. It says here that you explain to the rich person how you have already decided to give to the poor

and apologise for not giving it to him. So you give it to the poor person but at the same time you do not displease the wealthy person.

Then it says:

I have written about the ways to learn these kinds of giving because they are extremely important for beginners who are keeping the bodhisattva vows. With the exception of some special cases I have explained all in accordance with the intended meaning of the *Bodhisattva Levels*.

Lama Tsongkhapa says here that the main reason why he is giving these detailed instructions is to guide beginner bodhisattvas.

(b)) What to do if you are unable to give

If you are overcome with stinginess when someone asks you for something, think as follows: "This material thing and I are definitely going to be parted by death; it will leave me and I will leave it. So I might as well take pleasure in giving this away and put it to good use, making a separation just as at the time of death. If I give this away, I will not have attachment to my wealth when the time comes for me to die. I will have no regrets and will give rise to feelings of pleasure and joy."

This is saying that if you are unable to give due to stinginess then you have to reflect on impermanence. It is inevitable that you will be separated from your possessions at the end of this life; your things will have to leave you and you will have to leave them. You should also reflect on the fact that if we are stingy or attached to wealth now, then we will experience great difficulty and suffering at the time of our death because of that attachment. However, if we are not attached or stingy then we will make good use of our wealth and possessions, and there will be no reason to feel regret, unhappiness and be disturbed at the time of death. Indeed, you will pass from this life in a joyful and relaxed state of mind.

Try to instil a motivation for giving by reflecting on the disadvantages of being stingy and attached to things in terms of experiencing suffering, and the advantages of not being stingy and attached in terms of finding more satisfaction and making good use of that wealth. If, despite this, you are still unable to give away something, then, as it says here, you should apologise and explain in a polite, honest and respectful manner the reason why you can't give the thing the other person asked you for. The text says:

If you are unable to give it away even though you reflect in this way, then inform the person who asks for it by means of the three things that they should know. This is described in the *Questions of Householder Ugra Sutra (Grha-pati-ugra-pariprcna-sutra)*, which states that you should say, "I am new to the practice of the Mahayana and am still a person of small ability whose roots of virtue are not yet ripened. Also, I am under the influence of an ungenerous attitude. Further, I have a strong grasping view of self and constantly conceive of a self and that which belongs to the self."

Then it continues:

"So, excellent person, please forgive me and do not make it difficult for me. I shall try to do just what satisfies your thoughts and the thoughts of all living beings." According to the *Compendium of Trainings*, this is to eliminate the further fault of each losing confidence in the other, but it does not get rid of the fault of stinginess, ...

By saying sorry and explaining the reason for your failure to give, the person who asked for the thing may understand your situation and won't be upset. Also, this may not cause any damage to the good faith and confidence that exists

between you. So, there are many benefits in saying sorry and explaining things to the other person in a courteous manner. This, however, doesn't mean that you have eliminated stinginess or that you don't have the fault of stinginess. As the text says:

... but it does not get rid of the fault of stinginess, a fault in bodhisattvas that is looked down upon. Still it seems that doing this prevents the cardinal transgression of not giving the teachings and wealth because of stinginess.

So *the cardinal transgression* here is a form of moral downfall which is called *pham.pa* in Tibetan. Because of your expressed regret and your confession of your inability to fulfil the wish of the recipient, you don't accrue *the cardinal transgression* or *pham.pa* of not giving the wealth of Dharma, which is one of the root bodhisattva vows. You are also not breaking this root bodhisattva vow because the breaking of any of the root bodhisattva vows is contingent upon the presence of the four fetters or four ever-binding factors or *kun.dkTri bZhi*. These are: not recognising the breach as wrong; not wishing to avoid it in future; rejoicing in it; and having no moral sense of shame or embarrassment.

Then it says:

Also, the *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

If you cannot give because your ability is so small
Though people come and ask you for something,
So as to not make them feel low,
Comfort them with gentle speech.

Henceforth when people come to ask for something,
Do your best not to make them feel low and despairing,
And clear away the fault of stinginess.
Earnestly strive to eliminate craving.

(c) Relying on the remedies for the hindrances to generosity

According to what is found in the *Bodhisattva Levels' Compendium of Determinations*, there are four hindrances:

1. The hindrance of not being used to generosity
2. The hindrance of declining fortune
3. The hindrance of attachment
4. The hindrance of not seeing the goal

(1) The hindrance of not being used to generosity

This means not being habituated with the thought of giving.

The hindrance of not being used to generosity is when you do not want to give to those who ask for something, even though you have material goods to give.

If we are habituated to or are familiar with the practice of giving (which is essentially a thought of giving), then this thought should arise spontaneously whenever we find an opportunity to give. The fact that we lack such a thought of giving, shows our lack of familiarity with generosity.

As the text says:

The remedy for this is to avoid succumbing to the shortcoming of not being accustomed to generosity by quickly becoming aware, examining the situation, and reflecting, "This shortcoming is definitely the result of my previously not getting used to generosity," and "Moreover, if I do not make this gift, I will dislike generosity in my future life as well." Then, be generous.

Essentially the instruction here is that in order to become familiar with the practice of giving, we must think about the shortcomings of not practising giving. Think about why we are not generous at the moment or we don't think of giving to others. It is because we have never familiarised ourselves with giving in the past. Therefore, if we do not make effort

to familiarise ourselves with giving, we will have the same stingy thoughts in the future and won't engage in the practice of giving. Just by reflecting on these points we can slowly instil a thought of giving, which we can then develop into the practice of giving.

(2) The hindrance of declining fortune

This refers to the hindrance of declining fortune such as poverty.

The hindrance of declining fortune is when you do not feel generous because of the sparseness of your resources.

It is very obvious that if we do not possess anything or if we are very poor, then even if there is an opportunity to give, we don't have the resources or anything to give. As a result, we cannot practice giving.

The remedy to this is to make a gift after you willingly accept the suffering of poverty, thinking, "During the time that I have been passing through cyclic existence I have not helped others and have experienced many unbearable sufferings such as thirst, hunger, and the like because of being under the control of something else—that is, my former karma. So even if I die from the suffering of this lifetime on account of my helping others, it is just better for me to be generous; whereas to turn away the person who asks me for something is not all right. Even in the absence of those resources, I will survive on some sort of wild plant."

Here again, it is important to reflect on the key point that the poverty that we experience now is the result of not practising giving in the past. Therefore, if we don't practise giving now, we will suffer from poverty in the future. In this way we are motivated to practise giving right now. Furthermore, we will also understand that it is worthwhile to accept some hardship, difficulty, and be prepared to take a personal loss as a result of the practice of giving. As the text says, as a result of giving all of one's resources, *even in the absence of those resources, I will survive on some sort of wild plant*. This is particularly important to the ordained or the renounced who live a simple and humble life with few needs.

(3) The hindrance of attachment

The hindrance of attachment is when you do not feel generous inasmuch as you have become attached to extremely attractive and excellent material goods that are to be given. The remedy for this is to quickly become aware of your shortcoming of attachment, and then to think, "This mistaken notion that thinks 'I am happy' with regard to what is by nature suffering will bring me suffering in the future." Understanding this, eliminate your attachment and give away your material goods.

The remedy for this is to quickly become aware of your shortcoming of attachment, and then to think, "This mistaken notion that thinks 'I am happy' with regard to what is by nature suffering will bring me suffering in the future." It says here that attachment gives us the wrong notion of an object as being a cause of happiness when in fact it is in the nature of suffering. When we are attached to something or somebody the pleasure that we feel seems like true happiness. However, it is not actually happiness but merely a reduced level of apparent suffering, which seems like a pleasurable experience. In Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*, an example of a very itchy skin disease is used to describe this. A person who is infected with this disease feels good when he scratches the infected area, but in fact scratching only makes it worse. We won't go into more detail, but I think misunderstanding suffering as happiness is the major source of our unending suffering in our life. It's not that we want

suffering but because we mistake suffering for happiness that we continuously create the causes of the suffering we don't want.

(4) The hindrance of not seeing the goal

This means not seeing the result of giving.

The hindrance of not seeing the goal is when you do not have in view the benefit of reaching perfect enlightenment that is contingent on generosity, but instead consider the benefit of a great amount of resources and then give things away. The remedy for this is to quickly become aware of this shortcoming; then to consider how, in general, all conditioned things perish moment by moment and how, in particular, your resources perish and leave you; and then to fully dedicate the giving of any gift for the sake of great enlightenment.

If you give while merely considering the karmic result of generosity—resources and the like—you will obtain a large amount of resources, but you will not attain liberation, just as business people who give without any hesitation all their goods to others for a price merely get a profit, but do not obtain merit. Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Stanzas (Catuh-sataka)* says:

From making gifts to this person
I will get a great reward.
Such getting and giving are looked down on
As being like wanting profit in business.

(2") The generosity which is just mental

The generosity which is just mental means that after you go to a quiet place and then withdraw your mind inward, with a pure motivation and faith from the depths of your heart, you construct with your thoughts an immeasurably vast quantity of diverse gifts, and you then imagine that you are offering them to all living beings. This increases merit immeasurably with little difficulty and, moreover, is the giving of wise bodhisattvas, according to the *Bodhisattva Levels*.

This is the kind of practice of giving that I do most of the time, because I do not have much in the way of wealth and possessions.

The text continues:

Although it says in the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* that this is to be done by those who do not have wealth, it is appropriate for those who have wealth to do it as well.

Essentially, we notice here how in this section Lama Tsongkhapa shows us how to integrate the explanation of the practice of giving we have just discussed into our practice. What you find here is how to engage in the meditation of giving. It shows us how we should sit in a quiet place and calm our mind. Then we mentally create various things in accordance with the needs of all beings and offer those things to them. As it says here, by doing this practice of mentally giving, we can create an *immeasurably vast quantity of merit*.

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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

19 March 2019

Try to establish a genuine bodhicitta motivation of wishing to achieve buddhahood to benefit all motherly sentient beings. With this motivation, we should think, 'I shall listen to the Dharma and put it into practice'.

Why do we use the term 'motherly' when we say 'to benefit all motherly sentient beings'? We refer to all other sentient beings as 'motherly' because their kindness and gratitude towards us in the past is the same as the kindness and gratitude shown to us by our mother of this life.

But simply saying 'motherly sentient beings' is not enough; we must also feel close to them in our heart, and in our mind think of all other sentient beings as if they were our own mother. This kind of recognition of all sentient beings as our mother is essential when we meditate on remembering their kindness.

In the motivation we also stated, 'wishing to achieve buddhahood to benefit all motherly sentient beings'. 'Buddha' is a Sanskrit word that the early Tibetan translators rendered as *sangye* – a word that carries a very special and profound meaning. 'Buddha' means 'awakened', in the sense of someone who has awakened from the sleep of ignorance. So the word buddha means an awakened one, and also connotes the enlightened state, in the sense of the blooming of a lotus flower. In Tibetan, the term *sangye* has two syllables: *sang-* means 'awakened' from the sleep of ignorance; whereas *-gye* connotes 'developed', which here means one who has developed all the excellent knowledge.

Therefore, when we say 'I wish to achieve the state of buddhahood' in our motivation, we are saying that we wish to achieve a state that is free of all faults and endowed with all the excellent qualities. The reason we wish to achieve the state of buddhahood is also indicated in our motivation – to benefit all sentient beings. In Tibetan, the term for buddhahood is *sangye go.pang*, where *go.pang* means status or position. So, in our motivation, we are expressing the wish to reach the status of a buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Therefore, if we include the bodhicitta motivation when we engage in any virtuous practice, it will make it very effective and a pure Dharma practice. If we don't want to waste our lives, we must practise generating bodhicitta, which will make our life truly meaningful.

10. HOW TO GIVE

(2')) Detailed explanation about outer things which are and are not to be given

(2'') The generosity which is just mental (*cont.*)

We will now continue with the commentary on the lam-rim. We stopped at the section which reads:

These ways for wise bodhisattvas to give when they have no resources are employed until they attain the first level, the level of pure wholehearted resolve, whereupon poverty in resources no longer occurs.

This is a summary of what has been said before – how bodhisattvas who are materially poor can develop the practice of giving by engaging in the practice of giving away imagined objects. Now the text points out that they need to do this *until they attain the first level*, which refers to the first bodhisattva *bhumi* or ground, *the level of pure wholehearted resolve, whereupon poverty in resources no longer occurs*.

The text then quotes *Bodhisattva Levels*. We can note here how Lama Tsongkhapa presents the teaching by citing the great ancient Indian masters to show the authenticity of the scriptural sources. At the same time, he provides his own explanation, backed up with reason and logic. It is quite amazing.

For, the *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

Thus, this is the giving of gifts for wise bodhisattvas while they have no resources ...

We can recollect how, earlier on, this section presented the bodhisattva practice of giving away mentally imagined objects, a way of giving practised by intelligent bodhisattvas. This practice is recommended for wise or intelligent bodhisattvas when they have no resources to give.

... and until they attain pure wholehearted resolve.

They engage in the practice of giving away mentally imagined objects until they attain pure wholehearted resolve, which is the first bodhisattva *bhumi* or level.

Just as bodhisattvas of pure wholehearted resolve obtain a state which transcends miserable rebirths, so also they attain inexhaustible resources in all lifetimes.

Upon reaching the first bodhisattva level, they no longer need to rely on the practice of giving away imagined objects, because they are free from bad rebirths and also from poverty. They have now gained the quality of having inexhaustible resources at all times.

What follows is a summary of what has been mentioned before.

(d') A summary

After you have taken the bodhisattva vows, make aspirational prayers with respect to how to learn the practice of generosity on the high levels, and then train in these methods.

While bodhisattvas engage in the practice of giving within their capacity, there are some other practices of giving that are out of their reach – for example, only bodhisattvas on the high-level path or bodhisattva *bhumi* can practise giving away their body parts to others. However, as it says here, after taking the bodhisattva vows, beginner bodhisattvas can make an aspirational prayer to be able to engage in the giving practice of higher-level bodhisattvas.

The text is also implying that we, too, can make prayers to be able to do advanced practices that we cannot do right now, for example, by praying 'May I be able to engage in such a profound practice of giving'. When we aspire or pray, we are also acknowledging and admiring those who possess such qualities. So, we can at least prevent ourselves from feeling jealous about these qualities. On the other hand, if we are unable to admire and rejoice in the good qualities of other beings, instead of venerating others for their qualities, we will envy them and feel jealous.

The text continues:

Understand and learn what is permitted and prohibited with respect to the methods of making gifts that you can engage in right away, as explained above.

As mentioned earlier, you need to be very clear about what is permitted and what is not permitted, and then act accordingly. So, when the text says *understand and learn what is permitted and prohibited*, it is referring to what has already been said – what is and is not appropriate practice, from the point of view of the time, the object, and the purpose of giving. It was mentioned before, for example, that giving objects such as weapons to harm others is prohibited.

Next:

In particular, you must rely on the remedies to stinginess with respect to your body, resources, and roots of virtue.

With reference to the practice of giving our body, resources and virtues, it is very important that we avoid stinginess. Any benefit from giving with stinginess would be insignificant and weak. Whenever we practise giving, we must ensure that the practice is not tainted with stinginess and directed at counteracting miserliness.

Then:

After you strive to steadily increase your generosity, you must cultivate joy for this practice and generate a feeling of sorrow for not having earlier trained your mind in that way.

This implies that we should feel regret if we feel we haven't done this practice in the past when we should have. But, while we should feel remorse for not having done the practice in the past, we should also rejoice in the practice of generosity that we have done. Taking delight or rejoicing in our practice will multiply the benefits of that practice, just as making aspirational prayers will make the benefits of our practice inexhaustible. Therefore, we should rejoice in our practice with the same degree of joy as a beggar finding a lump of gold!

For, as it says in the *Questions of Subahu Sutra*, once you do this, you will be able to complete the perfection of generosity with little difficulty in another lifetime ...

This line is an inspiration for us to engage in the bodhisattva's practice. The fact that we find the practice difficult or have little interest in doing it indicates our lack of familiarity or habituation to the practice. As said in Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, 'There is nothing whatsoever that is not made easier through acquaintance' – whether we find something easy or difficult depends on how familiar we are with it. If we find the practice too hard or uninteresting, this is an indication that we have not familiarised ourselves with the practice in the past. If we don't familiarise ourselves with it now, we will face the same problem in the future. Hence, this line is to inspire us to exert effort and engage in the practice.

... whereas if you give all this up and set it aside, not only in this life will you be continually tainted by very grave faults, but in other lives as well you will not want to engage in giving, and it will therefore become extremely difficult to enter into the bodhisattva deeds.

So, in order to be motivated to engage in the practice, we should reflect on the shortcomings of not engaging in the practice right now: for instance, even in the future, you will not engage in giving and therefore find it difficult to enter into the levels of the bodhisattva deeds.

Furthermore, the *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

The spirit of enlightenment is the root of such generosity,
So do not give up this motive to make such gifts.
The Conqueror said, "In the world the supreme form of giving
Is the wish to give accompanied by the spirit of enlightenment."

Thus, being mindful of the spirit of enlightenment—the basis of the bodhisattva deeds—...

The basis of the bodhisattva deeds is the bodhicitta mind or the spirit of enlightenment. When it says *being mindful*, it is suggesting that we should remind ourselves of the bodhicitta mind by cultivating it as frequently as possible. If we can't cultivate actual bodhicitta, we should simply cultivate it in the form of an aspirational prayer, by saying aloud or wishing: 'May all beings be free from suffering and achieve happiness. May I be a cause to free them from suffering and place them into the state of happiness. May I be able to single-handedly free them from suffering and place them into the state of happiness.'

... cultivating it, aspiring to enlightenment, and making aspirational prayers to become enlightened form the root of all giving and the supreme kind of giving, so work hard at these. This is the excellent key point that sums up the meaning of the *Questions of Subahu Sutra*.

Lama Tsongkhapa is clearly highlighting here the supreme kind of giving, or the root of all giving – the bodhicitta mind. He is also emphasising that your aspiration to achieve enlightenment is the supreme prayer. Here, *the root of all giving* refers to the spirit of enlightenment or bodhicitta; *the supreme kind of giving* refers to aspirational prayers, such as dedicating your virtuous practice towards achieving complete enlightenment. So here we can also understand why Shantideva's dedication chapter in *Bodhicharyavatara* is regarded as the chapter presenting the perfection of giving.

The difference between prayer and dedication is that a dedication is contingent upon a substance or object, such as a virtuous practice we've done, to be dedicated towards complete enlightenment, and so forth. Whereas, prayer is not contingent upon, or requires any dedicated substance. We can pray, 'May all beings achieve the state of buddhahood'. This prayer is wishing for others to be free from suffering and to find everlasting happiness. In fact, this kind of aspirational prayer is known as 'the supreme form of giving'.

11: THE PERFECTION OF ETHICAL DISCIPLINE

We will now move on to the next chapter.

Lama Tsongkhapa elaborates on this topic of ethical discipline under the five main headings:

- (a') What ethical discipline is: What does ethical discipline or the practice of morality mean?
- (b') How to begin the cultivation of ethical discipline: Having understood the meaning of ethical discipline, you will then want to apply it in practice. To do this, you need to know how to practice. Hence, the second heading is how to begin cultivating ethical discipline.
- (c') The divisions of ethical discipline
- (d') How to practice
- (e') A summary

(a') What ethical discipline is

Ethical discipline is an attitude of abstention that turns your mind away from harming others and from the sources of

such harm. Therefore, you bring about the perfection of ethical discipline by progressively increasing your habituation to this attitude until you reach completion.

The term moral ethics generally implies a sense of refraining from harmful actions. Here, however, the term has a more specific meaning: *ethical discipline is an attitude of abstention that turns your mind away from harming others and from the sources of such harm.*

Here, *harming others* refers to physical or verbal harm. In terms of the ten non-virtuous actions, there are seven physically harmful actions – three of the body, which are killing, stealing and adultery; and four of speech, which are lying, slander, harsh speech and idle gossip. The *sources of such harm* refers to the intention, or impulse, to harm others, referring to the three non-virtuous actions of mind – covetousness, ill-will and wrong views.

Therefore, you bring about the perfection of ethical discipline by progressively increasing your habituation to this attitude until you reach completion. Here, it is important to understand the meaning of ethical discipline or morality within the context of our own mental continuum. We make progress in the practice of ethical discipline by habituating our mind to a sense of restraining from harming other beings.

The text continues:

However, it is not the case that you bring the perfection of ethical discipline to completion in the external world by establishing beings in a state free of all harm. Otherwise, since there are still living beings who are not free from harm, the conquerors who visited in the past would absurdly not have completed the perfection of their ethical discipline and would therefore also not be able to guide these beings to freedom from harm.

If we understand the bodhisattva's progress in the practice of ethical discipline on the basis of how much they have reduced or eliminated harm and suffering in the external world, then we will reach the absurd conclusion that the past buddhas have not achieved the perfection of ethical discipline and also have failed in guiding all other beings to achieve liberation from suffering.

Hence, in the context of the perfection of ethical discipline, whether all living beings in the external world are freed or not freed from harm makes no difference; the practice of ethical discipline is simply habituating your own mind with the attitude of abstention, which turns it away from thoughts of harming these beings.

So, it is good to repeat this line and think about it, over and over again, until its meaning sinks into your mind. We will then clearly understand the point made here with respect to the meaning of ethical discipline. Then the text continues:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Where can beings such as fish be sent
Where they will not be killed?
So it is said that by attaining an attitude of abstention
You perfect ethical discipline.

I encourage you all to read this lam-rim text by Lama Tsongkhapa. It is profound in its meaning and also carries great blessings. You will find that simply reading the text and directing your mind to its meaning will be very effective in calming your mind and enhancing peace and happiness within you.

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

26 March 2019

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

[Tong-len meditation]

Make sure you reinforce your motivation for studying and practising the Dharma.

As much as possible, we need to habituate our minds with the thought of benefitting others and having a good heart towards others, while at the same time preventing any harmful or ill thoughts about others.

When we talk about integrating the practice of what to accept and what to reject, the key is cultivating a beneficial mental attitude towards others and getting rid of harmful thoughts towards them. For example, the meditation of giving and taking, which we have just performed, is about familiarising ourselves with the thought of giving and taking, through which we develop a good heart and rid ourselves of harmful thoughts.

By observing other sentient beings from the perspective of happiness, in our meditation we mentally give them the happiness they are lacking. Likewise, by observing all other sentient beings from the perspective of suffering, we mentally take their suffering upon ourselves in our meditation. Through training ourselves mentally with these thoughts of giving and taking, we habituate our mind with the thought of genuinely wanting other sentient beings to be happy and free from suffering.

I often say that our mind and our body always accompany us like inseparable friends. When these two are in a good state we are happy, and when they are not, we are unhappy. I frequently say that saying 'I'm happy' or 'I'm unhappy' simply reflects the state of our mind and body. For example, if our mind is disturbed and unhappy, we say 'I am not happy'. So, if we want physical and mental happiness, we need to ensure we practise good hygiene to protect our mind and body, and understand that it is we who are responsible for taking good care of our own mental and physical wellbeing.

The next question is, what do we need to do to take care of our mind and body? Physical hygiene primarily depends on the right external conditions that contribute to the physical health of our body. At the same time, there are other external conditions which are harmful to our physical health. So, in order to maintain a healthy body we need to understand what is good and bad for our health, and be responsible for meeting the right conditions, while avoiding the bad conditions.

Likewise, if we talk about our mental health or our happiness on a mental level, then within our mind we need to recognise the things that bring peace and happiness, and those that bring unhappiness and suffering. As we observe our experiences, we will note that the main cause of mental peace and happiness is cultivating a positive mental attitude or a virtuous state of mind.

As I mentioned earlier, if the mind that always accompanies us is positive and virtuous, then we will naturally be happy and peaceful, and if the accompanying mind is negative and restless, then naturally, we will be unhappy and restless too. Since we all want mental happiness, we must be responsible for our mind and take control of it, and that means making an effort to familiarise ourselves with positive mental attitudes.

Of course, this all sounds very good – it's not all that difficult to understand what is good or bad or beneficial or harmful for mental and physical hygiene. At the same time, of course, we must also put that into practise. For this we need to know what that practice is.

First of all, we need to correct our usual way of thinking. Our usual perception of unhappiness and suffering is that it is always derived from external causes and conditions. In fact, that is not the case at all; rather, our unhappiness and suffering primarily derives from our own mental attitudes and ways of thinking. The harm we inflict on ourselves is much greater than the harm caused by others. Furthermore, we don't have much control over the outside world in terms of the harm it can do to us. However, we do have the choice of changing our mindset – we can protect ourselves from harm by overcoming the mental, bodily and verbal actions that are harmful to the good hygiene of our mind and body. For example, harsh speech, negative body gestures and negative mental attitudes can damage our relationships with others to the point that even those who are close to us will become distant and their love for us will turn into hatred.

We know that having a good circle of friends and caring people around us makes a huge difference to our happiness and wellbeing. As said before, the single most important factor that affects our life and relationships with people is the state of our mind. If our mind is unchecked and unbridled, it will easily be filled with disturbing thoughts. As a result of that, our level of stress, tension and anxiety increases, which in turn makes us unhappy and miserable.

We will then become very susceptible to afflictive emotions such as anger and so forth. Overpowered by anger, we will cause much harm to others and harm ourselves as well. We need to understand that if we harm other beings, we are also harming ourselves. With this kind of understanding we will be more cautious about our actions, and more motivated to stop those actions that harm others because they are harmful to ourselves too. Likewise, if we benefit others, we will also benefit ourselves. This way of thinking is an effective and practical way of becoming kinder and more supportive, rather than being careless and harmful.

Sometimes when we think of cultivating a beneficial attitude or good heart towards others, we feel it's too difficult to put into practice. However, if we understand the reason why we should be kind and considerate of others' needs, that it is for our own benefit and interests, we will be more inspired and likely to be kinder and more helpful to others. Of course, we should also consider the needs of other beings by thinking that, just as we only want benefit and no harm, so too do all other sentient beings want happiness and no harm. On the basis of this reality, we cultivate a sense of consideration and empathy towards other beings. At the end of the day, a mental attitude that shows empathy, respect and care for others reflects honesty, fairness and positivity. When we cultivate such a mental attitude, we will find ourselves feeling positive and happy.

(a') What ethical discipline is (cont.)

We now continue with the text. Last week we left at this sentence:

Hence, whether all living beings in the external world are freed or not freed from harm makes no difference in this context; the practice of ethical discipline is just the habituation within your own mind to the attitude of abstention which turns away from harm to these beings.

Moral discipline, as defined here, refers to a sense of restraint and turning one's mind away from harming other beings. Rather than referring to freeing other beings from harm, when we talk about achieving the perfection of moral discipline, we are talking about perfecting our own moral sense of restraint, and we do this by habituating ourselves with it in our mind.

To continue:

Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

Where can beings such as fish be sent
Where they will not be killed?
So it is said that by attaining an attitude of abstention
You perfect ethical discipline.

This summarises the way to achieve the perfection of moral ethics. The perfection of moral ethics doesn't mean actually eliminating all the harms in the world. If that were to be the case, it says here, then it would be impossible to achieve. It is impossible, for example, to find a place where sentient beings such as fish will not die. The practice of moral discipline is the restraining of harmful thoughts about other beings, and becoming familiar with this sense of restraint. The text then continues:

Although ethical discipline does indeed have three divisions [the ethical discipline of restraint, the ethical discipline of gathering virtue, and the ethical discipline of acting for the welfare of living beings], it is explained in this context as the attitude of abstention in terms of the ethical discipline of restraint, the principal division.

This indicates that of the three types of ethical discipline, the ethical disciplines of gathering virtue, and acting for the wellbeing of living beings, do not by nature or identity involve a sense of restraint or abandonment.

Then:

Moreover, in terms that include motivation, it is the ten abstentions that eliminate the ten non-virtues;

The ten non-virtuous actions are generally considered to be the ethical discipline of restraint in the sense that they involve refraining from engaging in non-virtuous actions. When it says, *moreover, in terms that include motivation*, this refers to the three mental non-virtuous actions. The words *that include* refers to the other seven which are the three non-virtuous actions of the body - killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct - and the four non-virtuous actions of speech, lying, slander, harsh speech, and idle gossip. So the ten non-virtues by their nature belong to morality in the sense that they involve restraint. The three non-virtues of the mind are the motivation and the other seven are the actions.

The text continues:

... and in terms of what it really is, it is seven abstentions, which are the nature of the actions of body and speech that abstain from the seven non-virtues.

In terms of practice, morality means making an effort to restrain or safeguard our mind from heading in the direction of engaging in actions that harm other beings, mainly the seven non-virtuous actions. And then:

Candrakirti's Explanation of the "Middle Way" Commentary (Madhyamakavataraḥasya) says:

It is called ethical discipline because it does not acquiesce in the afflictions, because it allows no sins to arise, ...

The practice of moral discipline prevents our mind from falling under the influence of mental afflictions such as harmful thoughts. Mental afflictions are the source of sinful or negative actions. If we are under the influence of mental afflictions such as anger, then it is very difficult to prevent harmful or negative actions. The Sanskrit term for 'morality' is *shila*, which connotes coolness. Hence the text says.

... because it is coolness since it quells the fire of regret, or because it is that upon which the excellent rely since it is the cause of happiness. Moreover, it is characterized by seven abstentions. These are motivated by three qualities - non-attachment, non-hostility, and correct view.

These three qualities are the opposites of the three non-virtues of mind. Then:

Therefore, ethical discipline is explained as the ten paths of action in terms that include motivation.

(b') How to begin the cultivation of ethical discipline

As a person who generates the spirit of enlightenment and then promises to train in the bodhisattva deeds, you have promised to endow all living beings with the ornament of the ethical discipline of the perfect buddhas; therefore, you must accomplish the aims of all beings.

Here, *therefore* is a reference to what was said before, which is that the bodhisattvas' purpose in cultivating the bodhicitta mind is to establish all sentient beings into perfect ethical discipline, endowing them with *ornaments of the ethical discipline*.

In this regard you must first develop the strength of your own pure ethical discipline, for, if your own ethical discipline is impure and degenerates, you will fall to a miserable rebirth and will therefore not even achieve your own welfare, never mind the welfare of others. Hence, once you begin working for the welfare of others, value highly your ethical discipline. You need to sharply focus on safeguarding it and restraining your behavior. Do not be lax.

Basically, it is saying here that if you cannot achieve your own purpose, then you will have no hope of achieving the purpose of other beings. The indication here is that you need to practise morality, which is refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions, not only for the sake of accomplishing the purpose of others but also for the sake of accomplishing your own purposes. For example, if you don't practise morality then you will take a bad lower rebirth, such as a rebirth as an animal. Animals hardly have any capacity to benefit others, as all they can think about is their need to overcome hunger and thirst in the immediate timeframe.

The text then states:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Those who strive to endow all beings
With the ornament of the perfect buddhas' ethical discipline
Initially purify their own ethical discipline;
With pure ethical discipline they develop powerful strength.

And also:

If you cannot achieve your own welfare with faulty ethical discipline,
Where will you get strength for the welfare of others?

Therefore, those who strive for others' welfare
Do not relax their devotion to this.

Moreover, such pure ethical discipline is based on the practice (just as prescribed) of what to adopt and what to cast aside. This, moreover, depends on a strong and stable attitude of wanting to safeguard your ethical discipline. Consequently, develop a desire to safeguard your ethical discipline by meditating for a long time on the grave consequences of not safeguarding it and the benefits of safeguarding it.

With respect to the first, the grave consequences of not safeguarding your ethical discipline, the *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

Therefore, see the unbearable fright and
Eliminate even the smallest thing that should be eliminated.

Thus, once you are frightened by the grave consequences of your misdeeds, you strive to abstain from even the small ones. Think as explained earlier about the grave consequences of the ten non-virtues, the coarsest factors incompatible with ethical discipline.

The text now goes on to give instructions on the shortcomings of not practising moral ethics, and the benefits of practising moral ethics.

With respect to the benefits of safeguarding your ethical discipline, they are as explained earlier and as set forth by the glorious Aryasura in his *Compendium of the Perfections*:

In Tibetan the renowned Master Aryasura is known by names such as Mabo, dPa'bo and rTa dbYang. He was called ma bo because of his deep veneration and respect for his parents; dPa 'bo means a courageous one or bodhisattva and rTa dbYang means 'melodious one'.

Then:

The divine substances, the resources of humans in which to delight, and
The supreme bliss and supreme tastes which are the wonders of the deities –
Does anything more marvellous come from ethical discipline?
Even the buddhas and the teaching arise from it.

This says that the benefits of practising moral ethics include obtaining *the divine substances, the resources of humans*, but that these benefits are nothing to be amazed about because, as it says, *even the buddhas and the teaching arise from it*.

Further benefits of ethical discipline include:

Furthermore, in dependence on ethical discipline
your mind-stream progressively develops; ...

Through the practice of ethical discipline we will be able to eliminate all outer and inner mental distractions and conceptualisations, and thereby progressively bring about a calmer mind with more positive qualities. Having overcome all outer distractions, the practice of morality establishes a firm basis on which to accomplish meditative concentration, which will enable us to eliminate the coarse level of inner mental distractions and conceptualisations. Then, having overcome the coarse level of inner distractions and conceptualisations, that meditative concentration establishes a firm basis to bring about a discerning wisdom which enables us to eliminate subtle levels of inner distraction and conceptualisation. Hence, the development of meditative concentration and wisdom is dependent on the foundation of the practice of moral ethics.

The text continues:

... your training becomes the same as that of the *mahasattva* bodhisattvas, who have a compassionate nature; and you attain the pure sublime wisdom that eliminates all the seeds of wrongdoing. When worldly ornaments adorn the very young or very old, they make these persons seem ridiculous and therefore ugly. But no matter who has the ornament of ethical discipline – old, young, or in-between – it delights everyone; thus, it is the best of ornaments.

Here the text illustrates the excellent qualities of moral discipline through the use of analogies. It says here that the ornament of ethical discipline beautifies whoever wears it regardless of their age, whereas ordinary jewellery doesn't beautify children, and the very old will be a laughing stock if they wear it.

Then:

The pleasant fragrance of ethical discipline's good name spreads in all directions, whereas other pleasant fragrances must follow the direction of the wind and are thus limited.

Ordinary fragrances spread only where the wind goes, however the fragrance of moral ethics spreads in all directions.

Furthermore:

A lotion scented of sandalwood, which relieves the torment of heat, is prohibited for renunciates, but a lotion which protects against the torturous heat of the afflictions is not prohibited and is appropriate for them.

Similarly, a sandalwood lotion is not appropriate for everyone. For example, it is inappropriate for renunciates because it goes against their vows. However, the lotion of moral ethics suits everyone, including renunciates.

Someone who copies the outer appearance of being a renunciate but who has the jewel of ethical discipline is superior to others.

This emphasises that where there is a person who is a renunciate or ordained person by virtue of outer symbols or appearance, and another renunciate, who is actually adorned with the jewel of ethical discipline, the latter one is the superior renunciate. So, we can understand here that renunciates are not measured by outer possessions such as wealth, but by their jewel of ethical discipline.

Then comes this quote:

The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

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 is basically a scriptural source that supports what was explained before.

Please read the text!

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