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# The Six Perfections

འཇུག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

17 September 2019

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We will do our usual meditation.

[Tonglen Meditation]

As usual, both the teacher and the listeners should begin by cultivating a proper motivation. The best motivation is the bodhicitta motivation, which we cultivate by thinking, 'I am listening to or teaching this profound Dharma to achieve the full state of enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings.' If we begin with such a proper motivation, then our meditation or whatever practice we engage in will be very beneficial and effective for us in progressing along the spiritual path.

**(c'') Based on the elimination of unfavorable conditions and the accumulation of favorable conditions, being intent on joyously persevering (cont.)**

We are up to this quote in the text:

Through the power of relinquishment you become adept at how to joyously persevere. At this point you must develop the power of being intent on joyous perseverance, so I will explain this.

Here we learn that the *power of relinquishment* is a very important factor in maintaining joyful effort. The power of relinquishment means the necessity of taking a break or rest in our practice if we become very fatigued and tired mentally or physically. However, it also advises here that we must get back to the practice soon after taking rest. As we become used to, and good at applying the power of relinquishment, we will be able to engage in our practice with joyful effort, naturally, with ease and no sense of obligation.

The next line reads:

As to how you are to act when you joyously persevere at eliminating what is to be eliminated, ...

This shows us where to direct our joyful effort and enthusiasm. When it says it is to *persevere at eliminating what is to be eliminated*, this indicates that our joyful effort should be directed at the practice of eliminating what is to be eliminated i.e. the mental afflictions, which are a destructive force. We eliminate them by applying a remedial force through our joyful effort. In short, 'mental afflictions' refers to our unruly, vulgar state of mind.

It is very important that we relate what we learn here to our inner continuum, personal experience and Dharma practice. We need to understand that the implication here is that all our unhappiness, misery and suffering primarily derives from our unruly mind, the mental afflictions within us, not from any external things or events. The cause of our unhappiness is not something external 'out there'.

This line also implies that we should rely on our discriminating knowledge relating to what is to be

eliminated, which is the mental afflictions or delusions, and what is to be adopted and cultivated, which is a virtuous state of mind. So, we must direct our joyful effort at preventing and eliminating afflicted states of mind and cultivate, safeguard and increase a virtuous state of mind.

The point being made here is that the primary cause of our discontent and unhappiness lies within ourselves. This is evident from the fact that whatever measures we take to eliminate whatever external things and conditions we regard as being the cause of our problem does not eliminate our unhappiness. This implies that the cause of our unhappiness and dissatisfaction lies within us, and likewise the remedy also lies within ourselves. So what is that remedy? It is the positive mental attitude and energy that we need to cultivate within us. This is the counteforce that eliminates the causes of suffering within us.

The primary cause of true happiness also lies within us – it's not out there either. Therefore, directing all our effort to finding happiness or removing suffering in the outside world is futile. No matter how much effort we make that won't help to find the happiness we seek. No matter how many external things we manage to accumulate, they are not going to bring the happiness and satisfaction that we are looking for in our life. As soon as we acquire one thing we go after the next thing and the next, because the first thing that we have found didn't satisfy our mind – and neither did the next thing. We might keep chasing after things externally, but until and unless we change our mental attitude, we will never find the happiness that we are searching for. Likewise, external causes of problems seem to be unending.

It is very clear that our usual externally orientated way of finding happiness and avoiding suffering is ineffective and wrong. If not, then why do we see people who are very unhappy and continuously suffering when there is no external cause? They have a good house, good food, plenty of wealth and friends and so on, but none of these seem to give them any comfort. Obviously, they are suffering because they cannot separate themselves from their troubled mind, a mind that goes around and around thinking about and fixating on a problem and their suffering. Sometimes, such people end up taking drugs, which as we know, does long-term harm to their wellbeing.

Most people are fixed on the view that suffering arises from the external world, yet they can't effectively single out or pinpoint the cause to any particular things or events. This can sometimes make them extremely anxious and frustrated and even depressed. They try their best, but nothing seems to be helping them to resolve their problem. So, they become confused about their lives and keep asking themselves why they experience so much suffering, and why they can't live a normal life. Out of such deep frustration and unresolved problems and conflict, some people then see no meaning in life. So, they choose suicide, whereas others outrageously resort to violent acts such as murder. If external things were the cause of suffering it would be just a matter of getting rid of those things and then being

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happy. If happiness simply results from external objects, then just obtaining those objects should bring happiness.

As we realise that we cannot buy happiness from the external world, we can appreciate the benefit of Dharma knowledge which really comes in very handy, particularly when the external world lets us down.

Knowledge of the Dharma gives us a different perspective on things and events and the world. We will find this perspective very powerful in maintaining inner peace and happiness, and an optimistic way of looking at things at all times. However, it is very important to understand the perspective of the world from the point of view of those who lack Dharma knowledge. Those who lack Dharma knowledge are misguided by some perverted or wrong view, which navigates them through life. If you imagine being in their situation, then you can understand the reason behind their deeds and the cause of their plight. Thus, you can be more patient and empathetic with them.

We must direct or relate whatever knowledge of the Dharma we have towards our inner continuum. As a benefit of learning the Dharma, we should develop within us a good sense of discrimination, which we call wisdom. Through this discriminating wisdom we recognise that suffering and happiness arise from a cause that lies within us. We gain a clear knowledge from our Dharma practice of what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected within ourselves. We understand that what is to be accepted is an inner value in the form of wholesome states of mind and what is to be rejected is inner negativity in the form of various mental afflictions. In other words, the primary objective of our practise of the Dharma is to get rid of mental afflictions together with their latency, and to enhance and fully perfect all the excellent qualities within us. This is how we can put an end to suffering and achieve everlasting happiness.

To continue with the text:

As to how you are to act when you joyously persevere at eliminating what is to be eliminated, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

As a seasoned warrior approaches  
A sword-fight with an enemy,  
I shall parry the blows of the afflictions  
And strongly strike the afflictions, my enemies.

An explanation of the meaning of this verse will come in the next passage in the text. Here, the enemy can be defined as something that destroys our happiness and joy, while inflicting suffering and problems. From this perspective we can say that the mental afflictions within us are also our true enemy. The moment these afflictions such as strong desire or hatred arise within us, we lose our joy, happiness and peace and then we succumb to misery and suffering. So, the mental afflictions are enemies that lie within us.

When we compare the suffering caused by these inner enemies with that caused by external objects, the suffering caused by the inner enemy of the afflictions is greater and more severe than that caused by external causes and conditions. This also means that inner value and happiness is more valuable than outer value and happiness. Therefore, we need to understand that if we

lose any external possession, we should not be concerned or worry too much. What really does matter a lot to us is our inner peace and happiness. That's why it is important to think about how to maintain our inner peace and happiness and recognise its enemy. It is quite natural that we would have an impulse to combat anything that we recognise as an enemy. Therefore, we first need to recognise that the mental afflictions within us are our worst enemies.

In the first two lines of the above verse, *as a seasoned warrior approaches a sword-fight with an enemy*, you are talking about a warrior who is very skilful and very experienced in the art of battle, who has a many strategies they use in the battlefield to defeat enemies.

The commentary continues:

For example, when seasoned warriors – the adepts who are accustomed to the activity of fighting battles – enter into a sword fight, etc., with their enemy, they do not put value only on destroying their opponent. Rather, they must accomplish two things - skillfully avoiding the blows of weapons directed at them and destroying their opponent.

When it says, *they must accomplish two things - skillfully avoiding the blows of weapons directed at them and destroying their opponent*, we understand that the warriors in the analogy here are those who are highly experienced and skilled in battle. They don't just focus on striking the enemy but at the same time they will do everything to protect themselves from being harmed. They will also have a broader perspective on how to position themselves on the battlefield. If you lack experience, then even though you manage to run away from one area, you will become a very easy target for the enemy from a different area. However, experienced warriors will make the right move, know how to strike to weaken and destroy the enemy, as well as know how to defend themselves against attack.

As the text says:

Likewise, when practitioners battle their afflictions, they must persevere as they become proficient in two things - taking defensive precautions and thus avoiding a wound to their mind, and, on the offensive, destroying the afflictions by applying their remedies.

It is saying here that spiritual practitioners should be like skilled warriors when they combat the inner enemy of the mental afflictions. Like the warrior in the battlefield, they must remember two important things. Offensively they must direct the remedy to completely destroy the mental afflictions, while defensively they must protect themselves from being harmed by other mental afflictions. As the text puts it: *taking defensive precautions and thus avoiding a wound to their mind, and, on the offensive, destroying the afflictions by applying their remedies*. In other words, you eliminate some afflictions while at the same time making sure that there are no other mental afflictions wounding some other part of your mind.

As the text continues:

For, otherwise, while they may use the remedy to stop the activity of one portion of the afflictions, they are either robbed of some aspect of virtue by other afflictions, or else they develop a great fault in their mind so that the harm of the afflictions and the creation of virtue are equal, in which

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case it will be hard to make further progress in the virtuous practice of applying the remedy.

Essentially this is saying how it is important to not only try to counteract a particular affliction with a remedy, but it's also important that there are no other mental afflictions in different parts of our mind that will attack our virtue and wound our mind. If this happens, then even if you have a remedy for a particular affliction, other afflictions will harm your virtue and so forth, and the end result will be that they cancel each other out. In other words, you don't make any progress.

The text continues:

To cite an example, some people may think that knowledge is most important for practicing the teaching and make knowledge alone crucial. When they then inquire into the teachings, they dispel by means of study the confusion of ignorance, but meanwhile – because they were not cautious about the other afflictions – their mind-stream is utterly ruined by the stain of wrong behavior.

Here the text further explains the importance of having a holistic approach to our practice. It is wrong to think that studying and listening and acquiring this knowledge about the Dharma is what is most important. Doing that undermines our practice. Of course, it is important and, as it also says here, learning has the benefit of expelling ignorance of the Dharma. It is said that listening is like a lamp which dispels the darkness of ignorance.

However, a one-sided approach of focussing only on the learning, and ignoring the practice is ineffective and not the right way at all. With a lack of practice, then let alone your learning diminishing and eradicating mental afflictions, it can become a cause to increase mental afflictions. For example, the learning turns into a cause to fill your mind with more pride and self-importance. There are situations where people say, 'Oh he is a very knowledgeable person, but at the same time he is very arrogant!' That is the end result of directing all attention or focus in our spiritual pursuit towards learning. Since we pay no attention to contemplating and meditating, our learning increases pride and other mental afflictions within our mental continuum. Not only that, but it also doesn't help us to observe good ethical practice or morality.

Then the text gives another example:

Other people may think that disciplining the mind is much more important than knowledge and thus emphasize meditation. Casting away caution about the enemy, confusion, they neither study nor learn the teachings, so they become greatly confused about engaging in what is to be adopted and rejecting what is to be cast aside under the rules of the vows they have taken and are thus continually overcome by infractions.

With a one-sided spiritual approach of just studying or learning, we don't derive any benefits from our practice, such as being calm and subdued, while at the same time our inner continuum is quite the opposite to calm and subdued.

Here the text cites another example of a wrong approach. We might say, 'OK, listening to or studying the Dharma is not crucial, but meditating and observing the precepts is crucial.' However, if, in the name of following

meditation practice, we neglect learning, then we might unknowingly commit various moral downfalls and negativities because of our lack of knowledge. Sometimes I see people who do the Nyung Nye practice, but who are confused or unsure about the precepts. So, people commit negativities out of ignorance; their ignorance is to blame for their wrongdoing. Furthermore, some people even say that meditation brings more mental dullness and makes their head feel heavy. This shows their lack of learning and contemplation prior to the meditation. According to Lama Tsongkhapa, beginners must combine stabilising and analytical meditation, but of the two, analytical meditation is more important.

Then the text continues:

If in battle your sword were to fall from your hand, you would without hesitation immediately retrieve it out of fear for your life.

The example given here is really very effective in showing what we need to do in our practice. If a warrior drops his sword while in battle, he immediately tries to pick it up, for he fears the danger of being killed.

It then says:

Likewise, when you battle the afflictions and lose the weapon of mindfulness (which does not forget the subjective and objective aspects of engaging in what is to be adopted and rejecting what is to be cast aside), you must immediately reapply mindfulness out of fear of falling into miserable realms.

Likewise, in our practice the *weapon of mindfulness* is like the sword. If we lose mindfulness, we face the imminent danger of *falling into miserable realms*. This emphasises the importance of relying upon mindfulness in our practice. Without it, we could easily accumulate sinful actions or misdeeds, which will propel us into the miserable realms. So, this is particularly relevant to our practice of what is to be adopted and what is to be rejected. Mindfulness is the most crucial part of our practice.

As to the practice of what to accept and what to reject, we can simply think of the ten virtues as what to accept and the ten non-virtues as what to reject. From this perspective, our practice not only reflects the essential Buddhist practice but also the fundamental ethical practice which encompasses most of the higher bodhisattva and tantric vows too. So the benefit of adopting the ten virtues and abandoning the ten non-virtues is enormous.

Essentially *you must immediately reapply mindfulness out of fear of falling into miserable realms* means that if we lose mindfulness of practising the ten virtues and refraining from the non-virtues, we must immediately *reapply it out of fear*. We should be really fearful about losing mindfulness, because we will then be prone to accumulating non-virtuous actions, which will throw us into the lower realms. The great non-virtues will throw us into the hell realm; the middling non-virtues will throw us into the preta realm, and the small non-virtues will throw us into the animal realm. Nobody wants to take bad rebirth and if we apply mindfulness in our everyday life and practise the ten virtues, we can be very sure that we won't fall into such a lower rebirth. Moreover, the practice of adopting the ten virtues and

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abandoning the ten non-virtues also gives us a firm ground on which to eradicate all the mental afflictions together with their latencies, gain the wisdom of emptiness and cultivate bodhicitta and so forth.

To continue with the text:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says;

If you drop your sword in battle,  
Out of fear, you quickly pick it up.  
Likewise, if I lose my weapon of mindfulness,  
In fear of hell, I quickly retrieve it.

The protector Nagarjuna [in his *Friendly Letter*] also taught the great importance of mindfulness:

O lord, the Sugata declared mindfulness of the body  
To be the one path to follow.  
Hold fast to it and guard it.  
When mindfulness declines, all virtues perish.

The Kadampa master declares that mindfulness and introspection are our best friends. Here again, mindfulness refers to what to adopt and what to reject, while introspection refers to a sense of discernment of our actions of the three doors of body, speech and mind. His Holiness the Dalai Lama always advises others to not forget about the application of mindfulness and introspection.

The text further clarifies the meaning of mindfulness when it says:

Furthermore, regarding the object to which mindfulness attends, mindfulness apprehends an object that wisdom has fully discerned; mindfulness does not distinguish its object on its own.

Here the text clarifies that even though mindfulness is very important, more important is what mindfulness is mindful of. Mindfulness only becomes an effective tool when it is applied to an object we find through our discriminating wisdom, such as our knowledge of what to adopt and what to reject.

Then the text says:

*Question:* What does wisdom discern?

This relates to the object of your mindfulness.

*Reply:* In general wisdom discerns everything to be adopted and everything to be cast aside as explained in scripture; ...

Here 'scripture' means all of the Lord Buddha's teachings.

... in particular, it discerns what is to be adopted and what is to be cast aside according to the vows that you have taken.

As well as the knowledge you gain about the general teaching of the Lord Buddha the object of your mindfulness also includes your personal spiritual practice such as any vows, precepts or commitments that you have taken.

Therefore, once you apply mindfulness and vigilance to these, you will complete your practice; you will not be successful by just applying mindfulness and vigilance within the narrow confines of attention to an object of meditation.

This is saying that the object of mindfulness should be all your spiritual instructions on what you are meant to be practising and what knowledge you have gained through

your discriminating wisdom. Without that knowledge, mindfulness in its own right or applying it to a narrow subject matter is not of much benefit.

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# The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Try to produce a good motivation by cultivating a genuine aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. Then think that this is why we are listening to this profound teaching and resolve to put it into practice.

In our everyday life, it would be wonderful if we always tried to prevent any harmful thoughts arising, and always generated and maintained a very kind, beneficial mental attitude. In terms of our spiritual practice, we can say there is none more profound than this attitude: it is a supreme Dharma practice. Also, there is no better friend to rely on than this inner friend.

Therefore, in our everyday life, whether we are sitting or walking, throughout all our actions, it is important to maintain caring thoughts and a good heart towards others and prevent harmful thoughts towards them from arising. A good heart and caring thoughts will naturally bring people closer together, and these are important factors for developing trust and reliable friendship among people. We can observe the same situation among animals – for example, if there is an animal in a group that is friendly and never shows an aggressive nature, the other animals in the group will befriend that animal.

In the same way, we admire people who are warm-hearted and never want to harm others. We feel we can rely on them and trust them, and want to befriend them. This is just because we all have a natural desire to seek happiness and avoid suffering. So, it is natural for us to admire and befriend those who are kind-hearted towards others and refrain from harming them.

Therefore, as part of your daily practice, I suggest that each morning, as you wake up, spend a moment cultivating this altruistic mental attitude towards others. Then, throughout the day, remind yourself of this thought. Even though it is just a short moment of reflection – of affirming each morning that you will be a good-hearted person – that short moment will have a strong positive influence on your mind and attitude throughout the day. When we cultivate the thought, ‘I will follow an altruistic mental attitude and the principle of compassion’, we are really surrendering ourselves to the Dharma. The benefit that we will reap for ourselves and for others is enormous. Unfortunately, we normally give in to wrong thoughts, and hence suffer as a result.

We all understand that the purpose of the Dharma is to achieve happiness and alleviate suffering in our life. However, the way the Dharma directly benefits us, as individuals, is through each of us internalising it. Therefore, it is important that we always relate the Dharma to our own mind, and put it into practice. Quite often, people get confused. When it comes to practising the Dharma, they might ask: ‘What should I practise?’ or ‘What is the most beneficial Dharma practice for me?’ In fact, the most beneficial practice is obvious – it is what we are discussing here. There is no more profound Dharma than that which

will help one cultivate this altruistic mental attitude, and overcome any harmful or ill-thoughts towards others.

In relation to how to cultivate and develop such an altruistic mental attitude, we all know that there is a detailed guide in the lamrim teachings. For example, the lamrim says that, initially, we will find it easier to cultivate this attitude towards those who are close to us, like our friends. Then, we should cultivate it towards those who are neutral or indifferent to us, towards whom we neither feel close nor distant. After that, we should extend it to our enemies: those who are objects of our hatred.

If we put the Dharma into practice, we will be able to realise it within ourselves – this is how we derive the benefit of the Dharma.

**(c”) Based on the elimination of unfavorable conditions and the accumulation of favorable conditions, being intent on joyously persevering (cont.)**

To continue with our teaching, last time we stopped at this paragraph, which says:

*Reply:* In general wisdom discerns everything to be adopted and everything to be cast aside as explained in scripture; in particular, it discerns what is to be adopted and what is to be cast aside according to the vows that you have taken. Therefore, once you apply mindfulness and vigilance to these, you will complete your practice; you will not be successful by just applying mindfulness and vigilance within the narrow confines of attention to an object of meditation.

The key message, as it says here, is: *you will not be successful by just applying mindfulness.* The kind of mindfulness emphasised here is a special kind of mindfulness because, generally speaking, mindfulness does not have the attribute of being able to see the truth, to discern or differentiate right from wrong, and so forth.

Of course, mindfulness is important, but what is also important is the object, topic or subject to which you apply mindfulness – as it clearly says here, there is no point in mindfulness practice if it is applied *within the narrow confines of attention to an object of meditation.* As said before, we need to be mindful of the things that we understand through our wisdom knowledge that we should aspire to or eliminate. So, mindfulness becomes very beneficial when you use it as a way of not forgetting what to do or not to do, according to your wisdom knowledge.

However, if we look at the kind of mindfulness we normally have, we will note that it is mostly associated with the ten non-virtuous deeds. To be more specific, our mindfulness is mostly under the influence of desirous attachment. We are concerned about desirable objects – either those that we are unable to obtain, or those that, once obtained, we fear losing, and worry about whether we can hold onto them. This is where we normally direct our mindfulness, in terms of what preoccupies our mind.

The point that Lama Tsongkhapa is making here is that mindfulness, by itself, is not a big thing: it is simply a state of mind that has the ability to remember things. Rather, what is important here is this: *In general wisdom discerns everything to be adopted and everything to be cast aside.* This shows *where* we should be applying mindfulness. When the text says, ‘in general’, it is referring to the teachings generally, which show us the things we should be doing, and those we should cast aside or abandon. This is where we should be applying mindfulness.



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The text also says, *in particular, it discerns what is to be adopted and what is to be cast aside according to the vows that you have taken*. Specifically, here, it is saying that if we have taken any vows or precepts then, most importantly, each of us should apply mindfulness to the precepts we have taken. Observing those precepts or ethical practices is very important because moral ethics is regarded as the root or base from which all virtues arise.

The text then goes on to explain how we go about applying mindfulness:

What is more, when warriors are in a battle, they strive from the beginning not to lose their sword;...

There is no need to mention how important it is in battle for warriors to firmly grasp their weapon, and not lose it from the outset.

...when by chance they do drop it, they pick it up immediately.

So if, by chance, a warrior dropped his weapon on the ground, he wouldn't waste a second, but would attempt to immediately pick it up. Why does the warrior have to do that? The next line explains:

These two actions rest on a fear of being killed that is not mere words.

The moment the warrior loses the weapon, what he feels in the depth of his heart is the real and imminent threat of being attacked or even killed by the enemy. This sense of threat to his own life is not just words, but something he feels profoundly. That is why he won't waste any time picking up his sword from the ground.

The text continues:

These two actions rest on a fear of being killed that is not mere words. Likewise, those who cultivate the path are afraid to lose the mindfulness that does not forget what is to be adopted and what eliminated; even if they do lose it, they immediately reapply it.

By providing an analogy, Lama Tsongkhapa makes the presentation of the teaching and advice very clear. What is required of us is to read the text slowly, and reflect on its meaning. As said before, the mindfulness we need to practise relates to the instruction of what to adopt and what to reject. In a sense, relating mindfulness to ethical practice and the instructions on what to adopt and what to reject also refers to the practice of the law of karma.

As it says here:

These two actions are based on the development in their minds of a real terror of falling into miserable realms as a result of the pollution of infractions and faults that occur when mindfulness lapses.

Just as when the warrior feels fear about the threat to his life when he drops his sword, similarly, if we lose mindfulness, we will forget our core practice of what to adopt and what to reject. If we relate this to the law of karma, it means to practise virtue and abandon non-virtue. Therefore, losing mindfulness is like opening ourselves to the danger of forgetting our virtuous practice and committing non-virtues, or staining our continuum – in particular, through the transgression of our vows, or the *pollution of infractions and faults that occur when mindfulness lapses*.

This, in turn, depends on having made karma and its effects central to their practice and then sustaining that approach.

This sentence points out to us how karma should be the central, core practice when we talk about what to adopt and

what to abandon. When we relate this to our own practice, we can feel how much of a gap there is between theory and practice. Normally, when we think of spiritual practice, we hardly ever think about the ethical practice of karma. This may be because we lack the time for Dharma practice because we are overly preoccupied with worldly work; or it may be because in whatever practice we may do, we don't really pay attention to the real practice, as advised here... *karma and its effects central to their practice and then sustaining that approach*.

Those who fail to develop the awareness that these points are profound instructions...

This refers to the ethical practice of karma.

... sever the root of the good qualities ensuing from the practice that delights the learned, the sacred foundation of the path.

This points out why ethical practice is so important. It is the *sacred foundation of the path* and something that *delights the learned* – we are talking here about one's lama or gurus, and how, of all the offerings we could make, the offering of our practice is the one that pleases the gurus most. Therefore the text is emphasising the importance of ethical practice.

We must understand that if we do not put ethics into practice, then whatever else we do that we assume to be a practice – such as sitting in an upright meditation posture – is not something that will truly please our guru. When we meet the guru and offer the *kagtag*, we think that it is also going to please the guru, but that is not necessarily the case. As it says here, the thing that will really please the guru is ethical practice: the understanding of what to adopt and what to abandon in our life.

Those who fail to develop the awareness that these points are profound instructions sever the root of the good qualities ensuing from the practice that delights the learned, the sacred foundation of the path.

*Question:* Well, why is it necessary to look with fear upon even minor misbehavior, and not let it continue but immediately stop it?

This implies that we should not undermine the benefit of abandoning non-virtue; no matter how small it is, non-virtue must be abandoned. Similarly, we should not undermine the benefit of accumulating virtue; no matter how small it is, virtue must be accumulated.

The sutras elaborate this point about not undermining the importance of accumulating or abandoning even a small virtue or non-virtue with the examples – how a tiny spark can destroy a mountain of grass and how drop after drop of water can eventually fill a big container. This is also true in terms of saving money. We have to start saving dollar by dollar and eventually we will have two hundred or three hundred dollars. It is important for us to apply this advice to our practice of overcoming every negativity or non-virtue – even if it is tiny, we should try to avoid it. Whereas, no matter how tiny the virtue is, we must try to accumulate it.

The text continues:

*Reply:* Take the example of a poisoned arrow that makes a tiny surface wound. Before long, the poison from this wound will spread throughout the entire body. You must operate on the wound and remove the poison. Similarly, even when wrong behavior does not make anything more than a small wound in the mind, if you ignore it, it will quickly pervade your mind so that it becomes large. Therefore, from the start you must prevent wrongdoing

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before it takes place and, if it does happen, you must discontinue it immediately.

The advice here is in accord with the first of the four general characteristics of karma – that karma is definite. The next characteristic is that karma increases. That is why it emphasises here that we should not underestimate any action, even if it seems insignificant. In fact, it is said that with karma as an inner object – more so than what you see in the external world – a small cause can yield a huge result. So a small karma can be a cause for a huge result.

The last line above says, *therefore from the start you must prevent wrongdoing*. It is best if we avoid wrongdoing from the beginning. If we do happen to create any wrong action, even if it is very small, we cannot just leave it, but rather should apply the remedy. As clearly explained here, using the analogy of a wound caused by a poisoned arrow, it is important to remove the poison as soon as possible; otherwise, later on, it will spread to the whole body.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Just as poison spreads throughout the body,  
Carried by the blood,  
So a fault pervades the mind  
If it finds an opportunity.

*Question:* Well, how do those who want victory over the afflictions apply mindfulness and vigilance?

If we consider ourselves to be Dharma practitioners then, as it says here, our goal should be to gain victory over the mental afflictions, which are the enemies of our practice. We gain victory over these enemies by applying mindfulness and vigilance, as was practised by Katyayana, one of the principal disciples of the Buddha.

*Reply:* You must concentrate, just as *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

A practitioner must be as concentrated  
As someone carrying a pot full of mustard oil

The Tibetan term translated here as ‘mustard oil’ is *nyung-ma*, which is a kind of turnip.

Here’s the story of Katyayana. Once a remote king invited Arya Katyayana to his town to teach. The king greeted Katyayana with some grand street entertainment, but when he asked Katyayana, ‘How was it?’ the reply was, ‘Sorry I didn’t notice.’ The king was disappointed and puzzled, wondering how anyone could not notice such a festive welcome.

Later on, the king heard that monks practise mindfulness of their vows to prevent external distraction. So to test whether the mind directed to just one object will lose awareness of other objects, the king instructed a man to carry a basket full of turnips (translated here as a pot of mustard oil) on his head and walk the same street where the entertainment was happening. A guardsman – whose task it was to strike the man if he dropped any turnips from the basket – followed him. Of course, the man concentrated on his task well, so he didn’t notice the street entertainment. This led the king to believe in the power of mindfulness and meditation.

A practitioner must be as concentrated  
As someone carrying a pot full of mustard oil  
Who is fearful when a swordsman before him  
Threatens to kill him if he spills a drop.

The meaning of this verse relates to the level of intensity required, in terms of maintaining your mindfulness. As it says here:

Understand this from the scriptural statement with respect to the border region in the story of Katyayana.

This analogy shows how we should apply or maintain mindfulness.

While you are concentrating, if in general you should behave wrongly or in particular you should experience the causes of laziness – such as sleepiness, etc. – then you must not assent to them but must confront and avert them.

So even if you apply mindfulness in your practice with great care, it is still possible that you will face obstacles like laziness or sleepiness. If any such interference occurs in your practice *then you must not assent to it but must confront and avert*. In other words, you must try to overcome it immediately.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Thus, if a snake came onto your lap,  
You would hastily stand up.  
Just so, if sleepiness and indolence come,  
Quickly avert them.

Furthermore, do not merely discontinue faults, but actively feel displeasure at their having occurred.

This clearly indicates the importance of *immediately* overcoming any interference to one’s practice, in the form of sleepiness or laziness. You wouldn’t just sit and do nothing if a venomous snake came towards you. You would immediately feel scared, and act to either stop the snake or run away. Similarly, the text is emphasising here the importance of overcoming that interference, of getting rid of it immediately, and then to *actively feel displeasure at their having occurred*. You want to act immediately to overcome that interference. Not only should you apply a remedy to overcome it, but at the same time, you need to have a feeling of displeasure, a sense of dislike, at being under the influence of defilements or laziness. This is why you should feel displeasure.

Then:

Contemplate as follows, “Because I proceeded in this way in the past as well, I have been wandering in cyclic existence up to now. In particular, it is especially blameworthy that I have taken the bodhisattva vows and yet continue with things that are incompatible with the vows’ precepts.”

This line shows why you have to remove this obstacle or fault in your practice.

Become inspired to henceforth restrain yourself, thinking, “From now on I shall make sure that this fault never occurs.”

To prevent sleepiness or other defilements occurring again in our practice, we need to apply the four forces to remedy negativities, including the force of resolution – being determined to not allowing such faults to occur again.

We will continue:

Frequently employ both these attitudes. *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

Whenever a fault occurs,  
I shall reproach myself and long ponder,  
“By all means I will do whatever it takes  
So that this shall never happen again.”

Strive at any deep causes that give rise to the continuous, powerful mindfulness that is the root of this practice.

This talks about striving to create the favourable causes that enable us to maintain this continuous and powerful

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mindfulness which, as it says, is the root of this practice. Then the text says:

Rely on such activities as keeping the company of excellent teachers and excellent companions, and broad learning, which are the causes of this powerful mindfulness.

This should be obvious to us, because the kind of mindfulness we are trying to practise here is that of always remembering virtuous objects: an important feature of this mindfulness is not forgetting virtuous objects. Therefore, to support our mindfulness, we should rely on *such activities as keeping the company of excellent teachers and excellent companions and broad learning, which are the causes of this powerful mindfulness.*

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

“In any of these situations  
I will practice mindfulness.”  
With this motive aspire to meet teachers  
And engage in appropriate activities.

The text then says:

In summary, you must study and discern well what bodhisattva training requires you to adopt and to cast aside, and then joyously persevere at continuously being mindful in all your conduct of what you have understood about what to adopt and what to cast aside. Hence, it is extremely important not to err about that at which you are to persevere.

This is about the benefit of learning, which is said to be ‘an opener of our wisdom eye’ or enlightening our mind to know precisely what we should do, and what we should not do. In other words, the benefit of learning is the very clear sense of discrimination that we will develop through learning. Then we should joyously persevere.

So we should direct our mindfulness to the things we should be mindful of – that is, what to adopt and what to reject – having gained that knowledge from our learning. We then have to apply joyful effort and enthusiasm to this mindfulness, which helps us keep our practice of virtue very alive, very present. The text is saying that if our effort is not directed at this, then whatever effort we make will be directed at the wrong purpose and our effort will be futile. As it says here, we should *joyously persevere at continuously being mindful in all your conduct* – throughout all our actions, we should direct all our effort and mindfulness at what should be adopted and what should be cast aside.

We will do the Twenty-one Tara Prayers for Jessie’s father who has been sick. He lives near Kumbum, which is the birthplace of Lama Tsongkhapa in Tibet. I saw a photo of him with the late Panchen Lama too. I think he is very fortunate to have met the Panchen Lama.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine  
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Edited Version*

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# The Six Perfections

འབྲུག་ཤིང་ལྗང་ལོ་སྤྱི་ལ་བསྐྱབ་ཚུལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

1 October 2019

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

Now, please try to establish the right motivation.

## 2' The method of developing joyous perseverance (c'') Based on the elimination of unfavorable conditions and the accumulation of favorable conditions, being intent on joyously persevering (cont.)

We stopped last time at this paragraph:

In summary, you must study and discern well what bodhisattva training requires you to adopt and to cast aside, and then joyously persevere at continuously being mindful in all your conduct of what you have understood about what to adopt and what to cast aside. Hence, it is extremely important not to err about that at which you are to persevere.

If we want to bring about true peace and happiness within us, we must direct our mind towards thinking over the meaning of this paragraph and then put it into practice. Then we can really achieve the true happiness and peace that we seek. As it clearly states, we should have a clear understanding of what to accept and what to reject in terms of both our Dharma practice and everyday life. In terms of our Dharma practice, we have to direct our joyful effort towards cultivating a virtuous state of mind through mindfulness. There is no question that what we seek is true happiness and the only way to achieve this is to cultivate a virtuous state of mind.

When the text refers to *being continuously mindful*, it's talking about how to make stable progress in our practice through cultivating, retaining and increasing a virtuous positive state of mind by continuously applying mindfulness. What is mindfulness? It is not forgetting the object of the mind, which has the function of non-distraction. Here it is a state of mind that enables us to remember a virtuous object thereby allowing us to familiarise ourselves with virtue.

We should also focus on that last line, which says, *hence, it is extremely important not to err about that at which you are to persevere*. This emphasises knowing exactly where we should be directing our energy and joyful effort. We all consider ourselves to be Dharma practitioners and we all follow meditation practices. Just like everything else that we do in our life, the goal of our Dharma and meditation practice is also to achieve happiness and to avoid suffering. So finding happiness is our goal in following the Dharma; in fact, it is the goal of all spiritual practitioners.

For example, those who follow the hearer (shravaka) and the solitary realiser (pratyekabuddha) path, aspire for the happiness of liberation from cyclic existence. Whereas those on the Mahayana path aspire for the all-knowing state of enlightenment. Similarly, spiritual practitioners on the small stage of the path aspire for the happiness of a higher rebirth. Therefore, if we aspire to achieve human happiness, we must be born as a human being and to achieve the

happiness of liberation we must achieve the state of liberation.

So, what are the causes and the conditions for a human rebirth? Well, the main cause for human rebirth is refraining from the ten non-virtues and practising the ten virtues. Therefore, we have to practise mindfulness and introspection, which is the key to living an ethical life thereby fulfilling our aspiration to continuously find a human life, and reach the awakened state of Buddhahood in order to benefit all motherly sentient beings.

Applying mindfulness and introspection means being fully aware of right and wrong actions, what to do and what not to do. This means, for example, being aware of the fact that killing and stealing are extremely negative actions. It also means being aware that if we happen to commit any non-virtuous action, we should purify it by applying a remedial force.

This is how we need to see the benefit of maintaining mindfulness and introspection in our spiritual practice.

In terms of our spiritual goal, I don't know about you but if it is to achieve the state of liberation, then I can say that this is something that I won't be able to achieve in this life. So, if we are not able to achieve the state of liberation in this current life, then we must come back with a human life of leisure and endowment again and again until we achieve that state of liberation. That's the reason the first topic of meditation in the lamrim treatise is on the rarity and meaning of the human life of leisure and endowment.

We must learn the Dharma and we must also put it into practice. In the end it is the progress we make in our practice that will lead us to achieve our spiritual goal. When we practice, we will gain a sense of achieving our goal and living life meaningfully. We frequently hear 'extract the essence of the precious human life and don't waste it'. We should remember this at all times.

What does taking the essence of a human life mean? First of all, we need to recognise and acknowledge the fact that we are so fortunate to have found this human life of leisure and endowment. We are fortunate because in addition to this precious human life we are surrounded by favourable external and internal conditions. Externally, we have met with all the favourable conditions such as a perfect teacher and the Mahayana teachings, and internally we have found a human life of leisure and endowment and possess a mind endowed with discriminating wisdom. Therefore, we must make the best use of this favourable condition and not waste it.

How do we make this life meaningful? We must practise the Dharma because the Dharma brings us true happiness both now and in future. It is said that if, through practising the Dharma we create all the necessary causes and conditions to obtain such a human life of leisure and endowment again, then we have rendered this life meaningful, at least at a basic level.

## (d'') How to use joyous perseverance to make the mind and body serviceable

To continue with the text:

The method for using joyous perseverance to make the mind and body serviceable is the power of mastery. Santideva sets forth in the chapter on conscientiousness [in his *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*] the necessity of learning the bodhisattva trainings; the extremely grave consequences if you do not train in these once you have

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pledged to do so; how to regard the afflictions as the enemy; and the ways to generate the courage that looks upon the hardship of battling the afflictions as an ornament rather than as a burden. Meditate on these before taking up the task of training in the bodhisattva deeds. Thus stopping all the inhibitions that prevent you from using your body and mind for virtuous activity, rise gladly to that task.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

In order to have strength for everything  
Before engaging in any activity  
I will recall the advice on conscientiousness  
And then gladly rise to the task.

If you read these lines slowly and contemplate their meaning, you should be able to understand them. Essentially, they explain why we need to achieve the state of mental and physical pliancy, which we studied earlier under the topic of calm abiding. The benefit of achieving both mental and physical pliancy is that they overcome mental and physical states of unserviceability, which prevents our mind and body from engaging in virtue. Then the text raises a question:

*Question:* What form will the joyous perseverance produced by such efforts take?

Gaining this state of serviceability of mind and body will not only make our practice easy, but it will also be very effective and powerful. The text continues:

*Reply:* Just as wind drives a piece of cotton to and fro, a joyful energy, enthused for virtue, controls your body and mind.

To illustrate the meaning of the previous lines, the text uses an analogy of how the wind can easily move a piece of soft cotton. Likewise, we need to gain the ability to easily direct or engage our mind and body in virtuous practices. This in turn makes our efforts to practise very effective.

The text continues:

When you act along with this energy, joyous perseverance is well-established. Once you produce this, you will easily achieve all the collections.

Here, the text is talking about a very special kind of joyful effort, one that is infused with the mental and physical pliancy that allows us to mentally and physically engage in virtue naturally and easily. It is also implying that if we make an effort, we can accomplish anything. As it says, *once you produce this, you will easily achieve all the collections.*

Here, the term 'collections' refers to the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. As you study you must reflect upon the meaning of any terms you come across. For example, when you hear the word 'accumulation' you should immediately remember there are two accumulations, as well as further details about them. The text continues:

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

Just like cotton under the power  
Of a wind that blows to and fro  
So I will be driven by enthusiasm;  
In this way I will accomplish all.

Although such tasks are difficult, it is wrong to give them up.

The advice here is that we should not lose our courage or give up by thinking or saying that a task is too difficult.

Rather, as the glorious Matrceta's *Praise in One Hundred and Fifty Verses* says, you must make effort:

"The sublime state, difficult to reach,

Is not attained without hardship."

Knowing this, you intensified your joyous perseverance  
Without concern for yourself.

This is quite self explanatory. In order to achieve *the sublime state*, the state of buddhahood, we have to overcome all hardships by continuously making an effort. As the text says, it is *difficult to reach* this sublime state. *Knowing this, you intensified your joyous perseverance without concern for yourself.* These two lines recollect the life of the Lord Buddha and all the hardships and sacrifices that he made in order to reach the full state of supreme enlightenment.

#### (d') How to practice

You must practice any kind of joyous perseverance in association with the six supremacies and all six perfections. The generosity of joyous perseverance is establishing others in joyous perseverance after you have stabilized yourself therein. The remaining perfections are in accord with the earlier explanation.

Just as with the other perfections, you can also incorporate all of the six perfections into the perfection of joyful effort, for example, giving joyful effort. This means that just as you develop joyful effort, you also cause or inspire others to practice joyful effort too.

The text then says, *the remaining perfections are in accord with the earlier explanation.* Here we have the *six supremacies* and so forth, which we've already covered in our discussion of the preceding perfections. These also apply to the perfection of joyful effort.

#### (e') A summary

The recollection and cultivation of the spirit of enlightenment—the basis of the bodhisattva deeds—inspires you to train in order to set all living beings in joyous perseverance. So steadily increase this spirit, and then aspire to and train in the methods of joyous perseverance for those at high levels. Also, strive as you are able at the methods of learning joyous perseverance for a beginning bodhisattva. In particular, effectively stop the various forms of discouragement, ...

This relates to the various forms of laziness, like the laziness of procrastination, and the laziness of indulging in inferior activities, and so forth.

... these being uniquely subject to elimination by joyous perseverance. Mentally put on the armor of joyous perseverance that is enthusiastic about the following: the goal of enlightenment, the aim of accomplishing the happiness and eliminating the suffering of all living beings, the very long period of time, the limitless collections, and the immeasurable hardships.

Here the text talks about the necessity of putting on the armor of joyous perseverance in order to achieve *the goal of enlightenment*, and *the aim of accomplishing the happiness and eliminating the suffering of all living beings*, which takes a *very long period of time*. This indicates that you need to put on the joyful armour of enthusiasm because the journey to supreme enlightenment takes a very long period of time, *limitless collections*, and *immeasurable hardships*.

The text continues:

Strive at this attitude because, as the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* says, just by generating the powerful surge of such a resolve, you accumulate a great wave of merit. If you do not do this, you fail to secure your Mahayana lineage, and you are also continually stained by much wrongdoing.

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Next:

Then, in other lives as well, you will find it very difficult to learn the bodhisattva deeds. Also, after you have become aware of such things, even if you do not practice perfectly, motivate yourself in that direction.

Here, the text acknowledges our lack of ability, by saying *after you have become aware of such things*, i.e. understood what has been just said here, *even if you do not practice perfectly, motivate yourself in that direction*. Don't give up but try to direct your interest in the same direction. So, it's saying that even if you are not, for whatever reason, able to really practise perfectly, or practise precisely as instructed, then at least motivate yourself in that direction.

The text continues:

If you then joyously persevere to the extent that you are able, then, as the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* says, you will quickly complete the perfection of joyous perseverance in future lives, without suffering and with little difficulty.

Even if you are not able to fully and precisely put into practice what is said here, you should still try your best. The benefit is that whatever effort you make now will serve as a cause to make your practice easier in the future.

## THE PERFECTION OF MEDITATIVE STABILIZATION

### (v) How to train in the perfection of meditative stabilization

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

1. What meditative stabilization is
2. How to begin the cultivation of meditative stabilization
3. The divisions of meditative stabilization
4. How to practice
5. A summary

#### a') What meditative stabilization is

Meditative stabilization is a virtuous, one-pointed state of mind that stays fixed on its object of meditation without distraction to other things.

This explanation of meditative stabilisation is in accordance with that given in the *Bodhisattva Levels*.

The *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

It is the one-pointed state of mind-stabilized on virtue, and either mundane or supramundane-of bodhisattvas who have first studied and reflected on the bodhisattvas' scriptural collections. Whether it is oriented toward meditative serenity, toward insight, or toward both as the path that conjoins them, understand that this one-pointed state of mind is the bodhisattvas' meditative stabilization.

Meditative stabilisation refers to a single-pointed state of mind that is not affected by any distractions or mental agitation. The *Bodhisattva Levels* describe such a single-pointed state concentration as *meditative serenity* or calm abiding, or special *insight*, or a state which is the union of calm abiding and special insight.

Meditating well depends on how well you can contemplate the topics you choose. How well you contemplate depends on how well you understand the topics through listening or studying the scriptures. The *Bodhisattva Levels* clearly states the necessity of combining all three, - listening, contemplating, and meditating - not just one to the exclusion of others. This is, in fact, one of the unique instructions of the Kadampa masters. The more knowledge you have through listening, the more there is for you to

contemplate, and the more there is for you to contemplate, the more there is for you to meditate on.

When the *Bodhisattva Levels* states *whether it is oriented toward meditative serenity, toward insight, or toward both as the path that conjoins them*, it is talking about both serenity, which is calm abiding and special insight. Obviously, the union of calm abiding and special insight is different to the union of method and wisdom.

What makes special insight special or superior to calm abiding is that in addition to the bliss of pliancy being experienced through the force of the single-pointed concentration, the special insight in the bliss of pliancy arises through the force of the wisdom analysing the object of the meditation as well. We'll stop here with these words:

And *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* also says:

Having thus generated joyous perseverance,  
Set your mind in meditative concentration....

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson*

*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett*

*Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering*

*Edited Version*

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# The Six Perfections

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

8 October 2019

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Cultivate the right motivation as contained in the prayer of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, which we have just recited.

The first line of the refuge prayer: *To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha*, identifies the objects of refuge. This line reminds us that when we go for the refuge, there must be objects in which we take refuge. Those objects are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

The second line of the prayer is: *I go for the refuge until I achieve complete enlightenment*. This line denotes the person who goes for the refuge, the length of time he or she goes for the refuge, and the manner or the reason for taking refuge. Saying that the length of the time for which you take refuge is 'until I achieve complete enlightenment' implies that this is the refuge practice of the Mahayana or Great Vehicle. Whereas, according to the Lesser Vehicle, the duration of taking refuge is as for long as you live this life.

There are two main reasons or causes for taking refuge. The first is a sense of *fear* or fright towards cyclic existence, particularly the suffering of lower rebirth. Because you do not want to be afflicted by the suffering of samsara, you take refuge in the Three Jewels. The second cause of taking refuge is *faith*. This implies the manner or the meaning of taking refuge. So, taking refuge means whole-heartedly, completely and single-pointedly entrusting yourself with faith in the three objects of refuge as infallible objects, to end suffering existence and achieve liberation. In the line *I go for refuge*, the 'I' indicates the person who goes for refuge.

In fact, these lines that we recite to take refuge in the Three Jewels encompass the essence of the entire path and the Dharma practices we need to follow. As we said before, we should clearly recognise the reason why we seek refuge. Why do we seek help? It is to free ourselves from the suffering of cyclic existence, particularly the suffering of lower rebirths.

Now, the question is, how we do the refuge practice? Do we have those two causes of taking refuge? For example, do we have any sense of fear or concern about falling into lower rebirths? If we do, then with our refuge practice, we should not simply worry about the prospect of falling into lower rebirths, but we also need to find a way to prevent lower rebirths and motivate ourselves to follow the path of liberation. Reflecting on suffering is not just to feel fear; it also leads us to the path of ending suffering. So we take refuge in the Three Jewels to achieve liberation from suffering existence.

If we seek outside help when facing worldly problems, we have to think about many factors; it is the same when we sincerely take refuge in the Three Jewels. For example, with worldly problems, we will seek help from someone who we think can support us and who has the resources and capacity to do so. When we take refuge in Three Jewels, we seek help to achieve liberation from samsara. So, as part of our refuge practice, we need to understand the qualities of

the refuge objects in terms of them being able to lead us to the state of liberation. Just as we know that a person stuck in mud cannot rescue another person who is also stuck in mud, likewise, we cannot rely on someone who is not free from this suffering world to rescue us from this suffering world.

This touches on the meaning of the four noble truths. The first truth is the truth of suffering; once we identify this, it will give rise to the thought of avoiding suffering, the second truth. The third is the truth of the cause of suffering and knowing this will give rise to the thought of abandoning the cause of suffering – the fourth truth. The third and fourth truths – the cessation of suffering and the path to cessation – are the cause and the effect, in terms of how sentient beings are liberated from samsara. The truth of cessation is to be actualised. Realising that it can be actualised will give rise to the thought of following the path. So, the fourth truth is the truth of the path to cessation, which is to be meditated upon. It is said that this sequence of the four noble truths is in accord with the order of leading the beings along the path.

When we talk about the noble truths of cessation and the truth of the path, we are referring to the qualities of those on a high spiritual level, such as *arya* or superior beings. Strictly speaking, those inner qualities of *arya* beings are the Dharma Jewel, which is said as the actual object of refuge.

The question might then arise, how can the Dharma Jewel protect us? While it is true we don't yet possess the actual Dharma Jewel, we can still cultivate a Dharma mind and practise Dharma. Hence, it is important to relate the Dharma Jewel to whatever Dharma we practise, such as our moral practice of refraining from the ten non-virtues. For us, our Dharma practice is the true Dharma Jewel, which will serve as our actual refuge, guidance or protection. By progressing with our Dharma practice such moral ethics, we can prevent taking lower rebirths, and instead achieve higher rebirths and liberation from samsara.

The next part of the refuge prayer: *By my practice of giving and so forth* indicates the virtues or the merit we accumulate. In the next line: *May I achieve complete enlightenment in order to benefit all migrating beings*, 'in order to benefit all migrating beings' indicates the aspiration to accomplish the welfare of other beings, and 'achieve complete enlightenment' indicates the aspiration to accomplish complete enlightenment. These are the two aspirations – aimed at the two purposes of others and oneself – that define bodhicitta. The words 'may I achieve' indicates the actual bodhicitta, an awakening mind, in the form of a prayer.

So if we take time to look into the meaning of the refuge prayer, it encapsulates the entire meaning of the path to enlightenment.

## THE PERFECTIONS OF MEDITATIVE STABILIZATION AND WISDOM

Last week, we began with the first heading and its sub-headings:

### (v) How to train in the perfection of meditative stabilization

- (a') What meditative stabilization is
- (b') How to begin the cultivation of meditative stabilization
- (c') The divisions of meditative stabilization
- (d') How to practice
- (e') A summary

We covered a bit of the first sub-heading which is:

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### (a') What meditative stabilization is

Meditative stabilisation is a virtuous, one-pointed state of mind that stays fixed on its object of meditation without being distracted by other objects.

We also finished the quote from *Bodhisattva Levels*, which says:

The *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

It is the one-pointed state of mind - stabilized on virtue, and either mundane or supramundane - of bodhisattvas who have first studied and reflected on the bodhisattvas' scriptural collections. Whether it is oriented toward meditative serenity, toward insight, or toward both as the path that conjoins them, understand that this one-pointed state of mind is the bodhisattvas' meditative stabilization.

And *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* also says:

Having thus generated joyous perseverance,

Set your mind in meditative concentration ...

We will continue from here.

### (b') How to begin the cultivation of meditative stabilization

Think over the benefits of cultivating meditative stabilization and the faults of not cultivating it. I will explain this in the meditative serenity section.

Regarding the explanation of calm abiding, the text says, *meditative serenity* will be presented in great detail further on. We will have to study this well - it is really difficult to get a full understanding of meditation without carefully studying the detailed explanations of calm abiding. Regarding the types of meditative concentration, the text continues:

### (c') The divisions of meditative stabilization

In line with the above citation [from the *Bodhisattva Levels*], if you subdivide meditative stabilization according to nature, there are two kinds: mundane and supramundane; and if you do so according to orientation, there are three kinds [oriented toward serenity, toward insight, or toward both conjoined]. If you subdivide it according to function, there are three types: meditative stabilization that stabilizes the body and mind in bliss within the present life, meditative stabilization that achieves good qualities, and meditative stabilization that carries out the welfare of living beings. The first, meditative stabilization that stabilizes the body and mind in bliss within the present life, is all meditative stabilizations that generate mental and physical pliancy when you enter them with equipoise. The second, meditative stabilization that achieves good qualities, is all meditative stabilizations which accomplish good qualities shared with *shravakas* - the superknowledges, liberations, totalities, masteries, etc. The third, meditative stabilization that carries out the welfare of living beings, is meditative stabilization that accomplishes the eleven activities for others' welfare.

The eleven ways of accomplishing the benefit of other beings has been discussed in the past.

### (d') How to practice

Whenever you practice any virtuous meditative stabilization, you do so in association with the six supremacies and all six perfections. The generosity of meditative stabilization is maintaining meditative stabilization yourself and then establishing others in it. Understand the other perfections from the earlier explanation.

We also learned this in relation to the preceding four perfections - we should understand how all the *six supremacies and six perfections* can also be included within the perfection of concentration, such as the generosity of concentration, etc.

### (e') A summary

The recollection and cultivation of the spirit of enlightenment - the basis of the bodhisattva deeds - ...

The summary of the perfection of concentration as presented here is similar to the presentation of the summaries of the preceding perfections. The summary emphasises the importance of remembering and continuously developing bodhicitta, the spirit of enlightenment, because bodhicitta is the basis and driving force to achieve the perfect state of meditative concentration within oneself, and cause other beings to actualise the same state within their mindstreams.

...is what inspires you to train in order to set all living beings in uncontaminated meditative stabilization. After you have increased the stability of this spirit, aspire to the high meditative stabilizations and train in these.

*After you have increased the stability of this spirit* - the 'spirit' refers to bodhicitta. In terms of our own practice, this applies to whatever degree or type of bodhicitta we may have cultivated; we should try to steadily increase it. In other words, we must direct our attention to our own level of spiritual practice and make an effort to stabilise and develop that. As we progress on our level, we aspire and train to achieve higher levels of meditative stabilization. So, while our main focus is on developing whatever level of practice or qualities we have achieved, we should also aspire or pray to accomplish all the other higher qualities we have not yet achieved. Even if you are not able to fully develop meditative stabilisation, you must still regularly train in one-pointed concentration, to whatever extent you can.

Even if you are unable to fully develop the meditative stabilizations, you must strive to train from time to time in one-pointed concentration to whatever extent you are able. For, if you do not do so, you will be continually stained with the fault of breaking the precepts, and in other lives as well you will find it most difficult to learn the trainings for entering the many doors of the bodhisattvas' meditative stabilizations.

It is clearly saying here that if we completely neglect to do meditation - which here specifically refers to cultivating single-pointed concentration - then we are staining ourselves with the fault of breaking the precepts. This would not only disadvantage us now, but also in our future lives we would find it more difficult to cultivate meditative stabilisation.

The text continues:

Whereas if you never give up your effort, even in this life your mind will become steadily less distracted, making your accumulations of virtue very powerful.

Again, it is important to remember and reflect upon this line so that we can understand the benefit of cultivating single-pointed meditative concentration. As it is said here, the benefits of doing single-pointed meditation include lessening mental distractions and afflictions, as well as *making your accumulations of virtue very powerful*. This emphasises the benefit of cultivating meditative



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stabilisation, in terms of making whatever practice we do more effective and more powerful.

In future lives, as the *Questions of Subahu Sutra* says, you will have physical and mental bliss and a joyful mind, thereby easily completing the perfection of meditative stabilization.

I will not elaborate further here as I will be explaining this at length in the meditative serenity section.

#### (vi) How to train in the perfection of wisdom

How to train in the perfection of wisdom has five parts:

- (a') What wisdom is
- (b') How to begin the generation of wisdom
- (c') The divisions of wisdom
- (d') How to practice
- (e') A summary

#### (a') What wisdom is

In general, wisdom is what thoroughly discerns the ontological status of the object under analysis,...

So wisdom is the mind that discriminates or discerns the object of investigation. The text continues:

...but in this context wisdom refers to proficiency in the five topics of knowledge and the like.

The *Bodhisattva Levels* says:

Know that the bodhisattvas' wisdom is the thorough analysis of phenomena that engages or has engaged all of what is to be known and that operates through focusing on the five topics of knowledge – Buddhist knowledge, grammar, logic, technical arts, and medicine.

Here, *wisdom* specifically refers to the five topics of knowledge or the five sciences of knowledge. The first one, it says here, is Buddhist knowledge, which in Tibetan is *nang.don rigpa* – literally inner knowledge, which is really the Buddhist science of mind and philosophy. This includes all the topics relating to mind training. 'Inner' here can specifically indicate the Buddhist final view of selflessness as a remedy to self-grasping.

Next is grammar or language which in Tibetan is *dra rig.pa* – literally the science of sound – then logic, which in Tibetan is *ten.tsig rigpa*, which teaches the principles of reasoning and logic as a structured way of knowing things through analysing or investigating them. In logic, we use syllogisms as a form of language to analyse and establish what is factual and what is false. For example, 'a vase lacks true existence because it is a dependent-arising' is a syllogistic statement that logically establishes the thesis. The fourth topic is technical arts or fine arts and crafts, in Tibetan *zo rigpa*, and the fifth topic is the science of medicine, in Tibetan *sowa rigpa*, literally the science of healing.

Now, the science of grammar here – language or vocalisation – includes everything related to language or vocal sound, such as mastering the skill of interpreting different languages, including animal languages. When birds vocalise, they are communicating. At Sera Monastery, there was a monk who was expert in this. Once he heard the communication between two crows from a long distance. He heard one crow saying: 'I saw a frog', while the other one replied: 'It was a dead one'! So all animals communicate in their own language, but only people who have mastered the science of sound can properly interpret their communication.

The science of sound also includes proficiency in poetry, composition and writing. Our medium of language is

limited to only a few languages and various words, terms and sentence structures that we are familiar with.

The text continues:

Here, the wisdom that "engages" ...

It then refers to the bodhisattva levels or *bhumis* in relation to the two types of wisdom:

... refers to wisdom prior to attaining the bodhisattva levels; wisdom that "has engaged" refers to wisdom after attaining such levels.

#### (b') How to begin the generation of wisdom

The way to begin the generation of wisdom is to contemplate the benefits of generating wisdom and the faults of not generating it ...

It is important, as much as possible, that we understand the benefits of generating wisdom so that we will be motivated and inspired to generate wisdom.

Since I will explain the benefits and faults of having or lacking the wisdom of reality – selflessness – in the insight section, I will not elaborate on it here. But I will discuss the remaining types of wisdom a little.

*Wisdom* here specifically refers to the wisdom of selflessness. It will be explained under the chapter on special insight. This also refers to the main object of meditative concentration, which is selflessness or emptiness.

We will continue the reading:

With respect to indicating wisdom's benefits, wisdom is the root of all good qualities for this and future lives. As the protector Nagarjuna's *Hundred Verses on Wisdom* (Prajna-sataka) says:

Wisdom is the root of all good qualities,  
Seen and not yet seen.  
To achieve both of these,  
Embrace wisdom.  
The great source for what you seek  
And for liberation is knowledge.  
So, esteeming it from the start,  
Adhere to wisdom, the great mother.

In the quote, *wisdom is the root of all good qualities, seen and not yet seen*, 'seen' refers to those qualities we can see ourselves within this life, and 'not yet seen' are those qualities that are not apparent to us in this life, but will be in a following, future life. This is how we can understand it.

The great source for what you seek  
And for liberation is knowledge.

From one angle, we can interpret these two lines as saying that wisdom is the great source of the four excellences, namely Dharma, wealth, pleasure and liberation – in Tibetan, *cho*, *nor*, *doi* and *tarpa*, respectively. These four excellences and abundances serve as very favourable conditions for us to progress along the path. His Holiness Dalai Lama put these four into two sets of cause and effect: wealth is a cause for pleasure, which refers to the five sensual pleasures; whereas the Dharma is a cause for the state of liberation.

So, esteeming it from the start,  
Adhere to wisdom, the great mother.

Normally, wisdom is likened to the mother and method to the father. The wisdom of emptiness is referred as the great mother that gives birth to the enlightenment of all Three Vehicles. This can also refer to the traditional view in patriarchal societies that the race or caste of a child can only



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be that of its father, for example, a king or a Brahmin; whereas a mother could have children from any race. So wisdom is like the mother in producing all three types of enlightenment of the Three Vehicles.

The text continues:

As the *Verse Summary of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* states, wisdom functions like an eye for the other five perfections – generosity, etc:

When the other perfections are completed by wisdom,  
They acquire their eye and fulfill their name,  
Just as a painting may be complete except for the eyes,  
But until the eyes are drawn, no wage is obtained.

This is saying that the other perfections – giving and so forth – become ‘perfections’ by virtue of wisdom. It’s as if, without wisdom, the other five perfections are blind or incomplete. Each of the other five only becomes qualified as a perfection when it is conjoined with wisdom.

The text continues with further explanations of how wisdom glorifies all the others perfections:

How wisdom is necessary for other good qualities is illustrated by the example of a special piece of jewelry made of fine gold that becomes even more breathtaking when adorned with a precious emerald. Likewise, if the gold ornament of the five perfections from generosity to meditative stabilization is adorned with wisdom, which is able to distinguish right from wrong, they become more magnificent, because wisdom makes them much purer. It is similar to the way that the mental consciousness, by distinguishing the merits and faults in the objects of the five sensory faculties (the visual faculty, etc.), causes you to engage in what is to be adopted or reject what is to be cast aside.

Here, the text compares the other five perfections to the five sense consciousnesses. In the same way that the five senses can only perceive their respective objects, likewise the other five perfections lack the ability to discriminate *the merits and faults in the objects*. However, wisdom, like a mental consciousness, has the attribute of discriminating between what is to be adopted or rejected.

This is what the glorious Aryasura’s *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

The merits of generosity and so forth  
Are more powerful with wisdom as their lord,  
Just as an array of fine gold jewelry  
Shines more brightly when inset with jewels.

It is this wisdom that renders vast  
The capacity for virtue in the purpose of each one,  
Just as the mind’s additional power clearly displays  
The respective objects of the sensory faculties.

The explanation of this was just given.

The text continues:

Similarly, wisdom is also crucial for other faculties such as faith and so on.

There are five powers or spiritual faculties – faith, joyful effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. The text is saying here that, of these five powers, wisdom is the main one.

When wisdom is present as lord, your generosity, faith, etc. understand well the merit of virtue and the faults of stinginess and so forth, so you become skilled at eliminating the afflictions and increasing good qualities.

It is saying here that the fact one is able to eliminate faults such as stinginess through the practice of generosity is due to the power of wisdom. In fact, without the wisdom that enables one to recognise the benefits of giving and the shortcomings of stinginess, we wouldn’t even engage in the practice of giving. Therefore, wisdom is an important factor for developing each of the other five perfections, and because of it one *becomes skilled at eliminating the afflictions and increasing good qualities*.

The *Compendium of the Perfections* states:

Among the various faculties of faith and so on,  
Wisdom is chief, as the mind is to the sensory faculties.  
With wisdom as lord, you know what is a fault and what merit,  
So you are skilled in the method of eliminating afflictions.

Even in our own lives, the main reason why we sometimes get so confused about what to do and why our mind gets so deluded is our lack of wisdom and of not being able to fully utilise the wisdom within us. As I always say, the more knowledge or wisdom we have, the more we are able to rely on ourselves and not be easily misled or deceived by others.

We will read just a few more lines and will stop there.

Bodhisattvas depend on wisdom to purify the other five perfections - generosity, etc. Even when they give their flesh to someone who asks for it, they are unaffected by such thoughts as pride, discouragement, etc. It is as though they were taking a cutting from a medicinal plant. This is because their wisdom makes reality manifest.

So, reflect more on the benefits of developing wisdom on the one hand, and on the other, the disadvantages or shortcomings of not having wisdom.

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