

THE SIX PERFECTIONS

As all of us now have what we term the precious human existence, we have the best, the most powerful of all possible forms of existence which are encompassed by Samsara. This human existence is a better existence to obtain than even that of a celestial being or god. And it is only appropriate that we should take this very rare, very precious opportunity and make the fullest use of it, make it as meaningful and useful as possible. You may ask what kind of thing makes the human existence meaningful? What kind of activity should we pursue to make the best use of it?

Well, the human existence is unique in that it affords the possibility of religious practice, specifically the practice of Dharma. Through the practice of the Dharma, we can come to achieve not only an improved existence within the realm of Samsara, but we can use it as a basis to begin treading the path to enlightenment. Through cultivation of Dharma practice in this life, we can, over the series of lives which follow, constantly strive at Dharma practice and so stage by stage not only come to freedom but eventually to full and complete enlightenment.

Of all the teachings of the Dharma, among the most important are the group which come under the heading of the Six Perfections, these are important in all Dharma practice but especially the Dharma practice which is based on the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions. The Six Perfections, when they are applied, constitute a complete and total practice of the Dharma.

The first of the Six Perfections is **the perfection of Generosity**. There are three kinds of Generosity here: There is the generosity of material wealth, the generosity of refuge or shelter, and the generosity of the Dharma itself.

These are the three principal kinds of generosity. And of these the generosity of material wealth is the particular practice for lay people; for the householder, his wife and children. The reason for this is that generosity of material wealth means simply what one would think it would mean: That is, to give things, material objects to those who need them. It can be directed to people who are practicing the Dharma or to people who are in need, who are poor, whatever the case may be.

The reason why this is a very good and appropriate practice for a householder is that a householder is someone who is engaged in worldly activity and because he is working, he is earning money. Because he is earning money, he will usually have quite a number of possessions and if he is to make the best use of these possessions, then to give them generously to gather accumulations of merit and awareness is a very good use toward which to direct material wealth. Ordained people, on the other hand, supposedly have abandoned the world and have very few possessions. So it is the lay person who is in the particular situation to practice generosity of material wealth best.

With regards to Material generosity, it can be directed in two ways: either to the Buddha and the Three Jewels, or to sentient beings. Now, to offer things to the Three Jewels means simply to prepare on the shrine offerings of incense, lighted candles, flowers, part of the food that one eats or drinks; all of these are material offerings to the Three Jewels and one thinks, when one places them on the shrine, that one is giving them to the Three Jewels for the welfare of all sentient beings. One can also give generously to sentient beings. This means simply to give food to those who are hungry, to give clothes to those who need them, to give money to those who need money, to give whatever is needed to any particular person. This kind of practice is called giving.

There are various stages to giving. There is great giving, which refers to the gift of one's spouse or children; and there is extremely great giving, which refers to the generosity of one's own physical body, speech and mind. Now, without having some kind of realization, without being a Bodhisattva who understands something very definitely about the nature of emptiness, it is very difficult to give one's body, speech and mind properly. These are not things that we practice at this point, but there are these kinds of generosity as well .

One may be curious as to how one is to give away one's spouse or children or how one give: away one's own body. Buddha, before he reached full enlightenment in India, lived a series of existences that became known as the five hundred pure existences and the five hundred impure existences. Over these one thousand existences, on many different occasions, he demonstrated the practice of generosity through the gift of wealth and material objects, through the gift of his spouse and children, and through the gift of his own body or parts of his body on various occasions.

There are many, many such stories in the Kanjur, which is the collection of scriptures that records the Buddha's actions and words. While these have not yet been translated into English, the translation of this body of work is currently going on; so it should be within the relatively near future that you will have access to such stories and understand how generosity is practiced at this level.

The second kind of generosity is the generosity of refuge or shelter or freedom from fear. It refers to such action as giving medicine and nursing the sick, because sickness and illness not only bring great suffering, but also bring great fear in the anxiety of death. To provide help and medicine to enable a person to get better is an example of generosity, of refuge or shelter. Again, if any animal or being is in danger of losing its life, to create the situation in which that life is preserved, that life is saved, is again the generosity of refuge, because death is something that is terrifying, and to save somebody or some animal from death is again an example of generosity.

In Darjeeling, there is a Nyingma Lama called Chatral Rimpoche. In that part of India there is a festival on the 15th of every month in which many fish and eels are eaten. And every year, Chatral Rimpoche rides down from Darjeeling to the base of the Mountain, Siligurie, and buys many fish and eels while they are still alive and takes them to the nearest river and pours them in. This is an example of the generosity of refuge.

The third kind of generosity is the generosity of Dharma. To practice this kind of generosity, one explains the Dharma to the best of one's ability to those who

are interested, to those who want to hear about Dharma. It means simply to explain how virtuous actions are practiced, what constitutes unwholesome action and how unwholesome action is committed and how Dharma and all the facets of Dharma are practiced. One explains all of these things to the limit of one's knowledge and understanding. That's one kind of generosity of Dharma.

The second kind is practiced with reference to those who either can't understand Dharma or don't want to listen to it. This primarily refers to animals that really can't comprehend abstract ideas; one says aloud in their presence, so that they can hear it, such things as the names of various Buddhas or mantras, such as OH MANI PADME HUNG.

Of the three kinds of generosity, the generosity of Dharma is the most beneficial. It is the most beneficial because the act of the generosity of Dharma plants a seed or brings a person or being into contact with Dharma, which is the seed that will eventually blossom into full freedom. This is a very beneficial result. Generosity of material things and generosity of refuge are very beneficial for the immediate present. When they are accompanied by a deep enlightening attitude, and a sincere dedication of the merit of such an act, they are even more beneficial than when practiced ordinarily, because they are renewing and deepening these kinds of attitudes in the giver. But the most beneficial kind of generosity is the generosity of Dharma that gradually will lead many, many beings to freedom.

There are many aspects to the benefits of the generosity of Dharma. All of you are people who are practicing Dharma, and you are familiar with the names of many Buddhas and several mantras. It is very beneficial for you to be saying these things over and over to yourself, to be repeating the mantra OM MANI PADME HUNG over and over again. This is not only beneficial for yourself, but when people hear you saying this, even if they are not interested in Dharma, it is some contact with Dharma which will over the course of time ripen into a fuller contact and eventually place these individuals on the path to freedom. If one is living with people who are not interested in Dharma or even who do not like Dharma the same effect will come about. They will hear all of these things, and gradually their mind will change. So there are many aspects to generosity of Dharma. OM MANI PADME HUNG itself is a very special mantra, because it can help liberate beings who come into contact with it in any of four ways: the sight of the mantra will lead to liberation; the sound of the mantra leads to liberation; the thought of the mantra, and also contact, physical contact with the mantra, all of these things will help an individual come to liberation. Practice of these three kinds of generosity—Material things, refuge, and Dharma—will not only help you to reach enlightenment, but will simultaneously benefit many, many beings while you are engaged in the practice of reaching enlightenment.

The second perfection is **the perfection of morality**. There are three kinds of morality: there is the morality of vowing not to do any moral faults; there is the morality of gathering virtue; and there is the morality which works for the benefit of others, of sentient beings.

The first kind of morality, morality of vows concerning unwholesome action, refers to practicing the abandonment of such as the ten un-virtuous acts, not engaging in such actions, of cultivating the ten virtuous acts to the best of one's ability. On a more formal level, it refers to lay ordination, in which one takes some or all of

the four root vows of not to kill, not to steal, not to lie, not to commit sexual misconduct, and the fifth vow not to take intoxicants; this is the vow, the resolution not to do these things. Again, it can refer to the taking and preservation of ordination either as a novice monk or nun or as a fully ordained monk or nun; or again, it can refer to the Bodhisattva vow, particularly in its commitment not to engage in the four black dharmas, not to commit any of the failings or omissions of the cultivation of bodhicitta; or, in the Vajrayana context, it refers to keeping the Vajrayana vows of the fourteen root precepts and eighteen branch precepts. All such observance of ordination, of the abandonment of unwholesome action, constitutes the first aspect of the perfection of morality.

Very briefly, the first aspect of the perfection of morality means to abandon, as much as one possibly can, unwholesome action or that which brings on unwholesome action. If one can abandon all such actions, this is the very best practice of morality. If one can abandon half of the things that are unwholesome and bring on moral faults, or even some of them, this is very, very good. For instance, in respect to the ten non-virtuous acts: if one can abandon all of these, this is the fullest practice of the perfection of morality. If one can abandon only some of them, to resolve and commit oneself to abandoning some of them or particular ones is to practice morality.

The second aspect of morality is morality that gathers virtue. This operates on many levels. It refers initially to the study of Dharma: learning what is virtuous and what is to be practiced. It refers to the contemplation of Dharma, understanding for instance the twelve links of existence, so that one knows why one is practicing Dharma and how Dharma is practiced. It refers to understanding what is virtuous action and to bringing this into one's personality. It also refers to the cultivation of Bodhicitta, working for the benefit of others, the cultivation of this attitude and the execution of this attitude. Generally, it refers to all those actions and aspects of Dharma which bring one into a virtuous frame of mind, into the realm of virtuous action.

The third aspect of morality, morality that works for the benefit of others, refers particularly to the development of compassion, of love for all sentient beings, and the cultivation of the enlightening attitude, the enlightening frame of mind, so that one is undertaking all Dharma practice for the benefit of others. Through this motivation for Dharma practice, the welfare of others is accomplished.

There are three aspects to **the perfection of forbearance or patience**. The first is not to retaliate or react to harm inflicted by others. Now all people who are practicing Dharma need to cultivate an understanding and a realization of the nature of emptiness, a direct realization of the fundamental nature of all phenomena. And while one is pursuing meditation, one can be interrupted by other people; or, during the course of Dharma practice, inevitably one is going to be frustrated, people are going to create difficulties for one, perhaps injure or inflict harm in some way or other. Not to retaliate, not to react to these misfortunes is the first aspect of the perfection of patience.

The second aspect of patience is the patience or the forbearance that overrides the difficulties one encounters in Dharma practice. While one is meditating, one gets hungry, thirsty, cold, or uncomfortable; many unpleasant things arise. One

patiently forbears all of these unpleasant things, persevering in the meditation with the attitude that one is engaged in meditation to reach enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

The third kind of patience is the patience that does not fear the deep meanings of Dharma. The fundamental teaching of Dharma that all phenomena lack any kind of intrinsic reality, are empty, can be to certain individuals a terrifying concept, terrifying idea, completely removing all ground for existence. Some people lose all their courage when faced with this idea. But to accept it and to be brave in the face of such an idea is the practice of this kind of patience.

Or again, in the Vajrayana context, one studies the stages of transformation and of perfection. And again, these things, the transformation of the impure into the pure, can be very foreign and alarming to some people, and they will feel that there is no possible way that they can do such a meditation; and even if they could do such a meditation, it would be very difficult for them to achieve enlightenment through it. It is very important not to fear the deep teachings and the deep meanings of Dharma practice, but to persevere in the meditation without alarm or disheartenment with regard to these very deep ideas.

Now we come to **the perfection of diligence**. The first kind of diligence is the armor of diligence, and essentially tills in the armor of resolution. One literally arms oneself with the idea that one is going to persevere at Dharma practice until one finally reaches enlightenment and never sheds this idea, never releases oneself from that resolution, so that it acts like an armor to enable one to persevere through all situations. For instance, with respect to the Foundational Practices, the Nondro practices, at the beginning of these one arms oneself with the resolve that one is not going to give these up until they are finally finished, that no matter how tired or difficult these practices may turn out to be, one will do all of the prostrations and all of the hundred-syllable mantra and keep at the practice until all of the five hundred thousand are finally completed. With such an armor of resolution, one practices diligence.

The second aspect of diligence is the diligence of fixation. In reference to say prostrations, one starts a session of prostrations and after about one hundred one is totally exhausted. One just feels, "I can't do anything. Well, I've just got to take a rest; this is too much; this is too hard." Then one thinks, "Now just a second; I've already resolved that I'm going to do one hundred thousand of these prostrations. And, well, tiredness is tiredness; everybody becomes tired. My objective here is nothing trivial: it is ultimately not only for my own welfare that I do these, but also for the welfare of all sentient beings." To renew oneself with resolution and then to think, "Well, even though I'm tired, I must do more," and to stick to the prostrations and do another one hundred or another two hundred, perhaps even work up to a thousand in a session and just keep doing these, overriding tiredness and lack of motivation time and time again-this is what is meant by the diligence of fixation.

The third kind of diligence is diligence that never turns back. And this, again in the context of the foundational practices, means that when one has completed the hundred thousand prostrations one doesn't think, 'Boy, were they difficult; I've finally finished them. Now I think I'll go out and get a job and have a nice time. I've done that much; that's good.' Instead of thinking in this way, one thinks, "Right, I've done one hundred thousand prostrations. That's good; that's

extracted some benefit from this human existence; now I should do the hundred thousand Vajrasattva mantras."

And without turning back from the whole objective that one has embarked upon, one does the hundred thousand mantras, even though they are very difficult and one is tired and fraught with much frustration. One just keeps going, and after the mantras are finished, then one does mandala offerings, and after mandala offerings, one does Lama Naljor, and after lama Naljor one keeps going with all the Dharma practice, never turning back, striving until one finally reaches enlightenment. This is the practice of diligence that never turns back.

Now we come to **the perfection of meditative stability**. The first kind is meditative stability which is the procurement of amusement, let's say. This means that one has had some kind of instruction perhaps on tranquility meditation; and one has played with this instruction, and perhaps gotten to the point that mind can rest for a while without too many thoughts, but it is neither rich nor clear. Or one has just practiced meditation on oneself; this is meditation that is essentially the procurement of some amusement.

The next kind of meditation is meditation that differentiates excellent meaning. This means that through the cultivation of tranquility meditation and insight, one comes to know, comes to let the mind rest in its natural state: clear, empty and unimpeded. The mind is brilliantly clear, lustrous; its clarity is extremely sharp, vivid. So one knows exactly what the Dharma is talking about through one's own meditative experience. And this is the meditative stability which best differentiates all meanings.

The next kind of meditation is the virtuous meditative stability "which goes like that," if one were to translate it literally. The One-Gone-Like-That is an epithet for Buddha; in Sanskrit it is Tathagata. Not only is mind realized to be clear, empty and unimpeded, but in this meditation, the meditator and the meditation are no longer different, they become identical; they become one. There is a complete absence of any kind of conceptual thought of discrimination, discriminative consciousness; this is completely terminated. And this is "going like that" or, in other words, full enlightenment. Since this kind of meditation is the highest possible form of virtue, it is called the Virtuous Meditation of the Tathagata.

Next is **the perfection of wisdom**. The first kind of wisdom is the wisdom of hearing, of listening, which means that one listens to the instructions in the Buddhist Dharma from a spiritual teacher, from a Lama. When one listens attentively and understands what one is hearing, one is practicing the wisdom of listening.

However, listening by itself is not effective; it is not sufficient. Having heard the Dharma, one must think about it, contemplate it. This means to think about it over and over again, looking at it from various points of view, until one clearly understands exactly what was being said, without any doubt, without any confusion. When one has thought about the Dharma to this point, one has practiced the wisdom of contemplation. But merely hearing and thinking by themselves are not sufficient. One needs to meditate upon it; to apply oneself through meditation. And this means not only to understand and comprehend what is being said, but to focus one's attention on it undistractedly so that it

becomes part of one. With the practice of these three kinds of wisdom - hearing, thinking, and meditating— one will reach Buddhahood.

These then are the Six Perfections that you should try to practice in everything you do. They constitute a most important part of Dharma practice, and should not be neglected but practiced in every way possible. I have explained them individually, the various aspects of these Six Perfections. It is possible to give much more commentary on what is meant by these Six Perfections, but I wish to illustrate how they can be practiced simultaneously.

For instance, with respect to listening to the Dharma: when one is taking Dharma teaching, one's mind is concentrated on the words of the Lama. One has no thought about worldly matters, about what's happening, about possessions, about one's home situation, one's wealth or anything like that, and this complete dismissal of all worldly thoughts and concern about possessions and everything like that is the perfection of generosity.

When one is listening to the Dharma, one is sitting still, focusing the attention on what is being said, and all sorts of unwholesomeness and all of these things are absent and this is the perfection of morality.

While one is listening to the Dharma, one's legs get sore, one's back gets sore, one becomes tired, but to bear all of this difficulty patiently is the perfection of patience.

While one is listening to the Dharma, one endeavors to hear every word and to understand everything that the Lama is saying, and this focusing of one's attention, or this not giving up but staying at the teaching of the Dharma and listening to it very carefully, is the perfection of diligence.

To focus one's attention exclusively on what is being said, not to be distracted by any thought or other things that happen in the room, is the perfection of meditation. And while one is listening, to understand exactly what is being said, to comprehend the words of the Lama, is the perfection of wisdom.

So, in just listening to the Dharma, one can practice all of the Six Perfections together. This is what one should try to do in everything that one does.

