



Acharya Lama Sönam Rabgye

**Reaching the Other Shore -
The Six Paramitas**

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This translation of the invaluable course is humbly dedicated
in memory of His Eminence the Third Jamgon Kongtrul,
Karma Lodrö Chökyi Senge (1954-1992),
to the long life of His Holiness the XVIIth Gyalwa Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje,
His Eminence the IVth Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, Lodrö Chökyi Nyima,
all wonderful Lamas and Khenpos of the Karma Kagyü Lineage, and
to the preservation of the pure Lineage of Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye.

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Introduction

I am very happy to see older Dharma friends as well as those who are new here and wish to greet you kindly. This weekend I will speak about the Mahayana Buddhist tradition and the six paramitas. Before beginning our course, though, let us recite *The Refuge Prayer* and *The Short Dorje Chang Lineage Prayer* together and rest in stillness for a short while so that our body and mind become calm. Afterwards, please give rise to the great motivation, which is the sincere wish to receive the supreme and profound Dharma by listening to the teachings, contemplating, and meditating them so that all living beings as limitless in number as space is vast in extent become free from suffering and attain complete enlightenment.

Je Gampopa wrote in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation* (that I will be referring to on many occasions and therefore will not mention again) that every living being without exception has the cause to attain enlightenment, which is the Buddha nature. Yet, it is necessary to appreciate and acknowledge that we have the goodness of the Buddha nature within. Having realized that we have the potential to attain enlightenment, it's then necessary to practice the Dharma so that our true nature unfolds and manifests fully. We are endowed with the Buddha nature, but to attain peace and happiness in this life, we have to cultivate and develop it more and more by engaging in the practices of the path.

We experience and recognize that we have the Buddha nature (*bde-ba-gshegs-pa'i-snying-po* in Tibetan) when we see or learn that others suffer, especially those near and dear to us, and then we spontaneously have love and compassion for them. In moments like this, *Bodhicitta* (the Sanskrit term for 'the mind of awakening') arises in us. Bodhicitta is the sign that we have the Buddha nature within, and it is the cause to develop *snying-rje*, 'great love and compassion.'

Bodhicitta (*byang-chub-kyi-sems*) is not a specific characteristic of human beings. Every living being in the six realms of conditioned existence has Bodhicitta, but it needs to be awakened, *sä-d-pa*. Due to having many obstacles, there are countless beings cut off from their ability to have love and compassion. Signs that Bodhicitta is awakening are that someone cries or their body hairs rise when they see suffering beings in the world. When individuals who are closely connected with their Buddha nature read or hear about the life stories of the Buddha or great Bodhisattvas, tears naturally come to their eyes or their body hairs stand up, evidence that their Buddha nature is awakening in their mind-stream. Some people spontaneously start crying when they see His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa. Nobody shouted at these people, criticized them, or beat them up, or said, "You are bad!" Because of a special feeling, tears naturally come to some people's eyes when they see highly realized masters. I experienced this when I visited His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa in Dharamsala with a group last year. The members of our group were the first to see him, while I stood at the back of the line. His Holiness gave the disciples blessings and recited a short prayer - tears automatically came to their eyes. I really saw how their inner nature was awakening. So, just like one knows that there is a fire when one sees smoke, one knows that one has the Buddha nature in moments like this and wins certainty that it can be awakened more fully. It's very important to know that one can increase one's love and compassion. The Buddha nature is the ground to develop more and more qualities of worth by practicing the path of Dharma.

After having explained the first point, the cause to fully awaken, which is our Buddha nature, Je Gampopa continued the teachings and taught the second point, which is the basis to practice the

path by means of having a precious human body. We all have a human body, which beings living in the three lower realms of existence (the hell, hungry ghost, and animal realms) don't have, and therefore they lack the fortunate circumstances to practice the path of Dharma. What are the marks that define 'a precious human birth,' *mi-lüs-rin-chen*?

There are eight opportunities and ten acquirements that characterize a precious human birth. The eight opportunities are being free from the eight unfavourable states of existence. The eight unfavourable states are: hell states, spirits, animals, long living gods, barbarians, having wrong views, being born in a time devoid of buddhas, and being an imbecile. The ten acquirements are: being a human, being born in a country where there are Lamas and teachers to be attended and benefited from, having one's faculties intact, having faith in the Dharma, not having done extreme negative actions, a Buddha having come into the world, the sacred Dharma being taught, all the Dharma teachings being present, all the present Dharma being followed, and there are beings compassionately caring for one another. Having a precious human life also means having three kinds of faith, *dä-d-pa-gsum*. They are: faith of belief (*yid-ches-kyi-dä-d-pa*), longing faith (*död-pa'i-dä-d-pa*), and clear faith (*dang-ba'i-dä-d-pa*). These are the marks of a precious human life, and they are very important.

So, having the cause within, which is the Buddha nature, and the basis, which is the precious human body, the third point is having the condition (*rkyen*), which is our spiritual friend or teacher, *dge-ba'i-bshes-gnyen*.

Our spiritual friend is a teacher who explains how to practice the path so that we can develop and cultivate our potential. Since we rely on him, he needs to be competent and not lead us astray. His qualities are: Having studied a lot, he is able to teach extensively; having great wisdom, he is able to cut away the doubts of others; having the conduct of a realized being, his words are worth holding on to; he is able to explain the characteristics and the nature of the disturbing emotions and the completely purified; he is well-versed in the sacred texts of the Mahayana tradition; and he would never forsake the excellent behaviour of a Bodhisattva, not even for the sake of his life.

The fourth point concerns our spiritual friend's instructions on the methods (*thabs*) of practice. Je Gampopa explained the methods precisely. Our spiritual friend first instructs about the transient nature of all things, i.e., that all compounded phenomena are impermanent and that we cling to a self due to having failed to realize the truth of impermanence. The definition of impermanence is that every phenomenon changes from moment-to-moment. We need to contemplate impermanence until we have gained certainty of it, and then clinging to the myth that the self is permanent will diminish. If we contemplate well that everything changes from moment-to-moment, we will realize that our suffering and problems are also not permanent but change in every instant. Lord Buddha said: "*Chös-thams-cä-d-mi-rtag-pa-red* - 'All phenomena are impermanent.'"

Contemplating and meditating impermanence is extremely beneficial and is the best remedy to relinquish our grasping for and clinging to things. As it is, we are very attached to things and crave to own and keep the many things that we struggled to acquire. Lord Buddha compared the footprint of an elephant with a flower and said that just as an elephant makes the most impressive footprint in the jungle, likewise, the best '*du-shes*' ('perception') a practitioner can have is that of

impermanence. Therefore, in order to follow in the footsteps of positive actions, we should again and again bring impermanence to mind and meditate it until we fully accept it. Whoever is in a high position falls; whoever is in a low position rises. Likewise, our life will end. Meditating impermanence causes us to be very diligent and to strive to do something good for ourselves and for others. Just meditating impermanence five minutes each day is a very positive action and will bring good results. If we gain certainty that all things are by nature impermanence, *mi-rtag-pa*, it will be easy to realize that nothing has substantial existence, i.e., nothing exists independent of other things, rather everything is interrelated and dependent upon many causes and conditions. This is the meaning of *stong-pa-nyid*, ‘emptiness.’

Continuing in the chapter on the methods of the instructions, Je Gampopa taught the second topic of instructions, which is on the defects of samsaric existence together with *karma* (‘actions and their effects’). He then explained the third point, which is taking refuge and meditating Bodhicitta, and the fourth point, which concerns increasing Bodhicitta. These are the four points that summarize the instructions of our spiritual teacher and that are the methods to practice the gradual path of Mahayana.

The third point, taking refuge, is the gate through which we enter Buddhism. Generating and developing Bodhicitta is the gate through which we enter Mahayana. Je Gampopa tells us that Bodhicitta has two aspects, Bodhicitta of aspiration (*smön-pa'i-byang-chub-kyi-sems*) and Bodhicitta of application (*'jug-pa'i-byang-chub-kyi-sems*). Not losing the enlightened attitude, not breaking it, strengthening it, increasing it, and not forgetting it are Bodhicitta of aspiration. Bodhicitta of application is practicing the six paramitas, the subject of our course.

An Overview

The Mahayana path consists of cultivating and developing Bodhicitta. There are many paths, but the path of Mahayana is supreme. If we investigate all other paths, we will find that they are all included in the six paramitas. The six paramitas are: generosity, ethics, patience, joyful endeavour, meditative concentration, and discriminating wisdom-awareness; in Tibetan: (1) *sbyin-pa* (‘generosity’), (2) *tsul-khrims* (‘ethics’), (3) *bzöd-pa* (‘patience, forbearance’), (4) *brtsong-'grüis* (‘diligence, joyful endeavour’), (5) *bsam-gtän* (‘meditative concentration’), and (6) *shes-rab* (‘discriminating wisdom-awareness’).

All the words that were spoken by the Buddha are contained in *The Three Pitakas*, the Vinaya-Pitaka, the Sutra-Pitaka, and the Abhidharma-Pitaka. *The Vinaya-Pitaka* deals with moral behaviour or discipline, *The Sutra-Pitaka* with meditation, and *The Abhidharma-Pitaka* with discriminating wisdom-awareness. They are the *slab-pa-gsum*, the ‘three trainings.’ Training in moral conduct involves the three paramitas of generosity, ethics, and patience. Training in meditation involves the fifth paramita of meditative concentration. Training in wisdom-awareness involves the sixth paramita of wisdom-awareness. Since it causes them to increase, the fourth paramita of diligence accompanies the five other paramitas. The association between *The Three Pitakas* and the six paramitas is explained extensively in the text entitled *The Ornament of Sutras*.

Paramita is a Sanskrit term and means ‘perfection, transcendence.’ It was translated into Tibetan as *pha-rol-tu-phyin-pa*, which literally means ‘gone to the other shore.’ Again, the six paramitas are: generosity, ethics, patience, diligence or joyful endeavour, meditative concentration, and wisdom-awareness. Actually, we have ten paramitas, but here there are six on how to train, starting from the beginner’s level. The first three are for practitioners at a beginner’s level and the second three for practitioners at a higher level of training. Je Gampopa also said this in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. He wrote that practicing the first paramita of generosity leads to wealth, that practicing ethics causes us to have a good and healthy human body, and that practicing patience causes us to have many friends and good relationships. Furthermore, being diligent causes our good qualities to increase, and practicing meditative concentration enables us to abide in the tranquillity of our mind. Practicing wisdom-awareness leads to having clear insight. That’s how the three trainings are explained.

The six paramitas progress in sequence, growing in importance. By being generous, we become wealthier and can thus engage in better ethical conduct. As a result, we attain a good human birth and thus can practice patience more easily. Then we have more friends, can be more diligent, thus having more qualities of worth. As a result, we can abide in calm and ease, which makes it easier to attain wisdom-awareness. Then we have more insight and therefore have a greater ability to realize selflessness, ‘realization of selflessness’ being the description of having clear insight. When we have achieved *lhag-mthong* (‘clear insight’), then we will have attained *shes-rab* (‘wisdom-awareness’), which is realization of the emptiness of a self of all phenomena and means realization of the true nature of all things. During the process of attaining *shes-rab*, we gradually cut away the root that is the source of all our negative emotions and defilements. That’s how the gradual path of progression is explained, like climbing the stairs to the upper floor of a 6-story building. One starts at the ground floor, reaches the first floor, and makes one’s way up to the top floor. In the same way, we begin practicing by engaging in the first paramita of generosity, then in the second paramita of ethics, then in the third paramita of patience, etc., until we reach the sixth stage of practice, which is developing *shes-rab*.

Another way of describing the practice of the six paramitas in Mahayana is engaging in the two accumulations. They are: the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. Even reading a verse of the teachings, contemplating, and meditating it for five minutes each day is a very positive activity and is an accumulation of merit. Training in the six paramitas is already perfection, which, as we saw, is the definition of the term *paramita*. Then why is there a discussion of the two accumulations? Because practicing generosity and ethics is the accumulation of merit. Practicing patience, diligence, and meditative concentration is the accumulation of both merit and wisdom. Developing *shes-rab* (‘wisdom-awareness’) is the accumulation of *ye-shes* (‘primordial, pristine wisdom’). The two types of obscurations, those of the emotional defilements and those of cognition, are overcome and eliminated by the two kinds of accumulation. Through *bsöd-nams-kyi-tshogs* (‘the accumulation of merit’), negative emotions are eliminated. Through *ye-shes-kyi-tshogs* (‘the accumulation of primordial, pristine wisdom’), cognitive obscurations are eliminated. This means that by accumulating merit and wisdom, all clouds of obscurations will be removed and finally every defilement and obscuration will be purified. What is the result of purification?

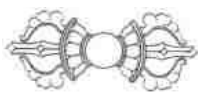
The result of purification is *dam-pa'i-sku-gnis-thob* ('attainment of the two truth bodies of a buddha'). The two sacred bodies of a buddha are the Rupakaya and the Dharmakaya. The *Rupakaya* ('the form body') consists of two kayas, the Sambhogakaya, *longs-spyöd-rdzogs-pa'i-sku* ('enjoyment body or the dimension of the full richness of being') and the Nirmanakaya, *sprul-pa'i-sku* ('emanation or manifest body'). And so, there are three kayas: the Dharmakaya, *chös-kyi-sku* ('truth body'), the Sambhogakaya, and the Nirmanakaya.

We engage in purification practices and in this process accumulate merit and wisdom. At fruition, we attain the three kayas - the two Rupakayas through the accumulation of merit and the Dharmakaya through the accumulation of wisdom. That is why we always recite the following prayer that was composed by Acharya Nagarjuna at the end of every practice:

དགེ་བ་འདི་ཡིས་སྐྱེ་བོ་ཀུན། །བསོད་ནམས་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཚྲིགས་རྣམས་ནས། །
བསོད་ནམས་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལས་བྱུང་བ། །དམ་པ་སྐྱེ་གཉིས་ཐོབ་པར་ཤོག །

"May all virtue that is created by accumulating merit and wisdom be dedicated to attaining the two truth bodies that arise from merit and wisdom."

This has been an overview of the six paramitas and a discussion of their significance for the entire Mahayana path. Let us now meditate together for a short while before looking at the detailed instructions.



The Six Paramitas in Detail

1. Generosity – *sByin-pa*

What are the disadvantages (*skyön*) of failing to engage in the first paramita of generosity? In a Sutra it is written that whoever doesn't have generosity will eventually suffer poverty and be born as a beggar or in the realm of the hungry ghosts. We won't practice generosity as long as we have succumbed to miserliness. In that case, we cannot attain the beneficial results of being generous, which is prosperity and happiness in this life and in lives to come. Furthermore, if we are wealthy and overly attached to our possessions, we won't be able to practice generosity and will thus be cut off from the first paramita. As a result, one day we will lead the life of a poverty-stricken individual or hungry ghost. Again, we can't overcome the veil of stinginess as long as our mind-stream is ruled by miserliness and as a result we will not experience the positive results of being generous. Another disadvantage of being miserly is that we will hardly be able to help others. Then we won't have many friends and can't really train in being generous. Those are the disadvantages of being miserly, and we will experience them if we are stingy and uptight.

Looking at mind and phenomena, the inner mind or consciousness is much more important than things. As long as we fail to recognize that our inner mind is more important than outer things,

we will see no reason and thus will not have the wish to overcome our miserliness. Then we will not be generous, even though giving something very small already engenders the great result of *paramita*, ‘transcendence.’

As said, the advantages (*yöñ-tän*) of being generous are prosperity and happiness in this and in future lives. Je Gampopa quoted a Sutra that states: “One will not be born as a hungry ghost if one practices generosity. Furthermore, poverty and disturbing emotions will be vanquished and one will attain a life of prosperity and wealth if one is generous. Practicing generosity has immense positive results. One will have many friends and can then be an influential member in society.” Gampopa also quoted Chandrakirti, who wrote in *dBu-ma-la-jug-pa* - ‘Entrance to the Middle Way’: “Living beings who endure suffering will be led to maturation by practicing generosity. If their being is permeated by generosity, they will easily attain unsurpassable enlightenment.” Gampopa presented these quotations to show that we will experience the results of our generosity, which is prosperity and happiness in this and in many future lives. The cause to attain such wonderful results that benefit us as well as others is generosity, and that is why it is the first of the six paramitas. But we have to train, right?

Being generous most certainly benefits others. People immediately understand and think, “Oh, we really like this person who is being so generous very much.” Hearing this gives us a sense of strength when we approach people who think well of us and then they are happy too – they are happy and we are happy, and that’s the result. If we want to be rich in our next life, we have to practice generosity a little bit now. The result will come. So, there’s a difference between being generous and being stingy and uptight. If we don’t practice generosity, we also become greedier. The greedier we are, the less people will like us and they will think, “He/she is very selfish and greedy. We don’t like people like that.” We make others feel good if we are generous and we make them feel bad if we aren’t. So we have to train in generosity.

As mentioned, our mind is very important, also when training in generosity. It is the subject. We need an object when we practice generosity. The subject is more important, though. Generosity means having less grasping and less greed. We also need contentment. We need these two: less greed and more contentment. Of course, everybody wants to be wealthy and nobody wants to be poor. It’s not necessary to become poor when practicing generosity, and we should think about this. Another wrong way of thinking is, “I want to practice generosity and will give everything I own and all my money away.” But, thinking and acting like this will probably cause us to suffer later, for example, when we are in need, and then it’s a problem. Having a little bit of money makes us happy, yet – because of not being enlightened or not having reached a higher Bodhisattva level - having nothing makes us sad. We have to live and feel comfortable, so it isn’t expected of us to become poor in order to engage in the first paramita.

Shantideva said in the fifth chapter on vigilance in *The Bodhicharyavatara* (the book he composed that I will be quoting many times and therefore will not always mention here): “We need to practice generosity.” He said that it’s more important to concentrate on our mind than on the object when practicing generosity, because the world is filled with an immense number of beggars. He wrote that it is in vain thinking it’s possible to end all poverty in the world. Even if we give our entire riches away, we will never be able to satisfy the needs of all beggars in the whole world. It’s a very difficult matter. But we shouldn’t feel discouraged by thinking, “Even if I

give all my riches away, I can't possibly eliminate a fraction of the poverty that people in the world experience. How awful for me to have to train in the paramita of generosity!" We shouldn't think like this, nor should we think, "The poverty in the world is so overwhelming! I give up and strike!" As said, we shouldn't focus our attention on the object, because generosity takes place in our mind and is a method to reduce our narrow-minded attitude as well as our miserliness. We are free to offer little things, which can bring an immense result. Even making a small donation is the cause for our action to become a transcending paramita.

If we have collected many goods that will last for 100 or 200 years, then we should reflect that we might die tomorrow or the day after and can't take anything with us when we die. That's why it's important to cultivate contentedness, because it will be easy for us to practice generosity if we are aware of the transient nature of our life and are content having enough.

Let's say we have 100,000 Euro. We can divide that into three parts; we can keep one part for ourselves, use one part to practice generosity by offering it to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, and use the third part for our family. This is a possibility and a way to practice generosity. Nobody needs to become poor by being generous. We can even divide 100 Euros into three parts and use each part in the same way. Let me tell you a story that I experienced.

Two years ago a lady came to Kamalashila Institute. Ani Chöying was giving a concert in Cologne at this time and sang the Chöd practice. This lady was very impressed by Ani Chöying's humanitarian project in Kathmandu and gave all the money she had to her. Later the lady came to me and said, "Oh, Lama-la. I gave what I had to the nun and now I don't have any money left. I'm at zero." She asked me, "Can you loan me money so that I can pay for my train fare home?" Of course, this lady had much love and compassion, but she didn't have enough intelligence to act wisely; she was too extreme. We need to divide what we have into three parts and keep one part for ourselves, one part for family members and our trip, and one part to practice generosity. Being generous and feeling regret afterwards isn't good. Should we act like this lady, we would only think about the money we gave away. If, on the other hand, we have lots and only give a little bit, then this isn't what being generous is about. In such a case, we aren't free of greed, because we have attachment. Therefore, we need to take care when training in what is referred to as the relative aspect of generosity and give what we can and without selfishness.

The absolute aspect of the first paramita is being free of *'khor-gsum*, the 'reference points that are conceptual thoughts of the three cycles,' the three cycles being a subject, an object, and an action. This means that the absolute aspect of the first paramita is transcendence of believing in and clinging to a giver, a recipient, and the act of giving. The essence of generosity is described to be spontaneity and non-attachment. Being generous in this way is *perfect* generosity. So, we differentiate between generosity with conceptual thoughts of the three reference points and generosity without concepts of the three reference points, the latter being the absolute aspect. Generosity with concepts of the reference points, which is the relative aspect, means having conceptual thoughts of the three cycles (also translated as 'spheres') of subject, object, and action. Beginners engage in the practice of relative generosity. Advanced practitioners engage in absolute generosity (also translated as 'liberality'). They have realized that the three cycles are emptiness, i.e., devoid of inherent existence, and are like an illusion or dream. Thus they are generous without clinging to a subject, an object, and an action and are free of attachment altogether.

Since it isn't easy and takes a long time to be able to practice generosity or liberality free of reference points or conceptual thoughts of the three cycles, ordinary beings begin training by practicing generosity with conceptual thoughts of the three cycles. In any case, generosity with conceptual thoughts of the three cycles is the basis and leads to the ability to engage in generosity without having conceptual reference points of the three cycles, *'khor-gsum-dmigs-med*. But it's necessary to have realized the essence of liberality, which is emptiness, to be able to engage in *'khor-gsum-dmigs-med* and thus turn ordinary generosity into perfect and ultimate liberality. Again, ultimate generosity presupposes having fully overcome miserliness by having become free of conceptual thoughts of the three cycles and means being spontaneously generous and totally free of grasping and attachment.

There are three categories of being generous and charitable, *sbyin-pa-gsum*. They are: (1) giving material goods, (2) giving loving protection from fear, and (3) giving most excellent Dharma.

I addressed giving material goods above, the first category of generosity. We can give whatever we have and whatever we can, no matter how big or how small. If we give material goods without being miserly and selfish, then this is practicing *zang-zing-kyi-sbyin-pa* ('giving material goods'). In Himalayan countries, people often donate rotten butter and old barley that they do not want for themselves to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha or to poor people. Western people do this too; they give old bread or old vegetables to the poor and keep fresh food for themselves. This isn't correct and certainly isn't pure generosity. As said, we first need to check how much we can give and then start. We also need to see what really helps others. Generosity doesn't mean only giving material supplies. We have other methods of being generous. In any case, practicing generosity causes us to grasp and cling less to things.

It's important to give material goods openly, with a smiling face and with respect and courtesy. For instance, if we have 100 Euro in our pocket, see a poverty-stricken person, shout at him, "Hey, come here!" and shove our money in his hands, then that's being arrogant and disrespectful. Such behaviour is not pure. The poor beggar will come to us for help, but that's not the point. We should look at the object of our generosity and ask ourselves, "Is it really useful for him or not?" If what we want to give is not useful for someone, we shouldn't give it. Even if poison is helpful for somebody and we can give it, we should. It's very important to look whether the object, the recipient, is pure and to give what we can with love and with a pure heart. If a poor person really needs and wants something from us, we can give what we can, even if it's only a little bit. This is pure generosity. If what we can give is not useful for someone or that person is much wealthier than we are, then it's worthless for him to receive anything from us. For example, we have a saying that goes: "Pouring a little bit of butter into an ocean filled with butter isn't useful." It isn't necessary or useful because the ocean is already full. In any case, when we give material goods, we should give with love and with *sems-rgya-che-ba*, a 'vast and open mind.'

The second category of generosity is *mi-'jigs-pa'i-sbyin-pa*, 'giving loving protection from fear' to anyone who lives in fear. We have many possibilities to protect living beings from fear, e.g., protecting someone from being hurt or harmed, or saving somebody's life, or giving any helpful ideas that we have that benefit people in need, or saving somebody from natural catastrophes. We are free to practice generosity in these ways. But we first have to know why someone is afraid and

just try to help as best as we can. Being a doctor who helps the sick and dying, for example, is really a very good way of being generous.

The third category of generosity is *dam-pa'i-chös-kyi-sbyin-pa*, 'giving the most excellent Dharma' to those who are sincerely seeking it, who really want to learn the invaluable teachings, who earnestly want to understand the meaning, and who realize that they need to practice. Giving the sacred Dharma is like giving refreshing water to someone who is really searching because he is thirsty. It's like leading him to a spring and showing him how to scoop up water to quench his thirst. That's how the feeling of giving the Dharma to those who really want it should be like. If we meet people who are thirsty for the Dharma, then we try to share our knowledge of the Dharma with them. Simply giving them advice is also practicing generosity. If we see that it helps, we just give and help, with a warm heart and without being arrogant or proud. But we have to make sure that this person really wants the Dharma. So, we have to examine a little bit. Not really wanting the Dharma, some people are only curious or are merely testing if we really have knowledge or not. We have to discern with wisdom and compassion whether someone really wants the Dharma. If we see that they sincerely want to enter the way of the Dharma, we gladly and wisely share our knowledge with them.

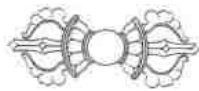
We also have to examine the many Lamas, teachers, and lay-monks that we think we can learn from. There are many people who only give teachings for money, or for material gain of some kind, or to become famous, which is not what pure generosity is. Giving the most excellent Dharma means giving with love and compassion. Therefore a good teacher is someone who really wants his students to mature spiritually and knows how to help them overcome their negative emotions and problems. He or she knows which teachings will benefit a student best and gives them, like a skilful doctor giving the right medicine with wisdom and compassion to a sick patient. This is pure generosity.

The student is the object and must have the right motivation to receive the teachings. A student needs to have *död-pa'i-däid-pa*, 'longing faith.' Longing faith means having the strong wish to practice, knowing that it's necessary to receive the teachings in order to be able to do so, and therefore seeking the teachings. When a qualified teacher presents instructions to such a worthy disciple, he or she follows them and develops his or her inner goodness. So, both subject and object, i.e., teacher and student, need to have *dang-ba'i-däid-pa*, 'clear and competent faith and trust' in one another. Then the connection is good. A student who wonders, "Hey, I want, but is it right or not?" is fearful and has doubts, which means he is unclear. It's not possible to walk through the gate of Dharma with doubts. The example given to illustrate this unclear attitude is a nail with two blunt ends, which is a useless nail. In the same way, if a student isn't sure, he or she will not get far and won't reach the goal. In short, both teacher and student need to be free of doubts and need to trust each other. Then, giving as well as receiving the Dharma teachings by listening to them, contemplating, and meditating them will be very fruitful. So, those are the three categories of the first paramita of generosity.

What is the benefit of being generous and charitable? There are many qualities that are perfected by being generous. It is said that the paramita of generosity is like a treasure trove with which it is possible to fulfil all wishes of every sentient being. If we practice generosity with a pure and open heart, then we have established the cause to benefit ourselves and everyone else and finally will be

able to make all living beings prosperous and happy. We will have many friends and good relations and thus will be able to greatly benefit many people. Innumerable qualities arise from practicing generosity. Therefore it's the source or seed to attain enlightenment.

Je Gampopa also tells us about the general benefits of giving specific things to others. He said that giving material goods and supplies benefits us in that we attain great abilities. He taught that giving clothing to those who have nothing to wear leads us to attaining a light and clear complexion, which is attractive and pleasant for others to see. He said that giving loving protection from fear benefits us in that demonic hindrances that surround us are vanquished. Furthermore, giving the Dharma benefits us in that we swiftly attain Buddhahood and meet the Buddha face-to-face. In *The Ratnavali – 'The Precious Garland,'* Acharya Nagarjuna wrote: "One purifies one's obscurations, one will see the Buddha face-to-face, and all one's wishes will come true by practicing generosity."



2. Discipline – *Tshul-khrims*

The second paramita is *tshul-khrims*, 'ethical conduct or discipline.' It is taught that we practice the second stage of the path by engaging in ethical conduct and that we won't attain the final result if we only practice generosity but have no ethical conduct. In *dBu-ma-la-jug-pa - 'Entrance to the Middle Way,'* Chandrakirti taught: "Just as someone who has lost his legs cannot walk a path, whoever has no ethical conduct cannot attain liberation." In a Sutra it is stated: "Through practicing ethical conduct, one won't be reborn as an animal or be reborn lacking the eight fortunate opportunities that characterize a precious human body. By practicing ethical conduct, one will always have the eight fortunate circumstances to practice the Dharma." Lacking the eight fortunate circumstances is like being born with an eye disease that makes it impossible to see clearly. This means that practicing generosity but having no ethical conduct makes it impossible to have a healthy body with which to really be able to see the Dharma. So, ethical conduct *ist auch sehr wichtig* ('is also very important' in German).

What is ethical conduct or discipline? There are many categories, e.g., taking the Vinaya vows, the Bodhisattva vows, and the various precepts. The Buddha presented many teachings on *sdom-pa'i-tshul-khrims*, 'discipline of the vows.' In summary, they are discipline with respect to the full-ordination vows and discipline with respect to the householder's vows, i.e., a monk's and nun's ordination vows and a lay-practitioner's vows. There are many subgroups of fully ordained monks and nuns, like *bikshus* and *bikshunis*. A *bikshu* is a monk who has taken all 253 Pratimoksha precepts of the Hinayana tradition. There are even more precepts that a *bikshuni* (a 'fully ordained nun') takes and applies herself to keep. But the five root vows that concern engaging in the ten virtuous actions and abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions are the main vows and are most important. It's very, very important for monks and nuns to abandon the ten non-virtuous actions.

What is the essence of discipline? Generally speaking, not harming others, which means being aware of our body and mind. The Buddha said: "By keeping the vows concerning one's physical

actions, one will easily keep the vows pertaining to one's speech. When that is the case, one will be able to easily keep the vows of the mind. Then everything will be fine." Let us first look at the vows pertaining to the body.

What should we do? The three physical actions that we have to heed are: (1) not to kill, (2) not to take what has not been given (i.e., not to steal), and (3) not to engage in sexual misconduct. The four wrongdoings of speech that we need to heed are: (4) not to lie, (5) not to engage in divisive speech (i.e., not to disrupt harmonious relationships or split the Sangha), (6) not to use harsh language, and (7) not to engage in idle chatter. The three wrongdoings of mind that need to be heeded are: (8) not being covetous (i.e., not being selfish and greedy of other people's possessions), (9) not having ill-will, and (10) not having misguided beliefs.

What should we adopt and how should we practice discipline or ethical conduct? There are three categories, *tshul-khrims-gsum*: (1) taking the vows of training in ethical conduct, (2) developing ethical conduct that includes all virtuous actions and deeds, and (3) cultivating ethical conduct that benefits all living beings.

The first category (*sdom-pa'i-tshul-khrims*) means not committing the ten non-virtuous actions. The second category (*dge-ba-chös-sdang-pa'i-tshul-khrims*) subsumes all virtuous actions and deeds and consists of practicing all ten virtuous actions, i.e., practicing the opposite of the ten non-virtuous actions. For example, the opposite of killing is protecting and saving lives when encountering the situation and if possible. The opposite of taking what is not given is being generous and charitable. The opposite of engaging in sexual misconduct is acting so that our relationships and family life are harmonious and everyone is happy. For example, a husband should be able to think, "*Meine Frau ist meine beste Freundin in der ganzen Welt* (from German, 'My wife is the best friend I have in the whole world')." In India and Nepal there is the saying that a wife is like Lakshmi, the goddess of the household, and there is something true about this. Or a wife should be able to say, "*Mein Mann ist mein bester Freund in der ganzen Welt* ('My husband is the best friend I have in the whole world')." That is how partnerships and family life should be - always harmonious. So, refraining from sexual misconduct is a very important precept that a householder can take.

In fact, all five *upasaka* vows of a householder are very important. A householder is free to take all five vows or to just take one or two. The five householder vows are: (1) not to kill, (2) not to steal, (3) not to engage in sexual misconduct, (4) not to lie, and (5) not to consume intoxicants, like alcohol, drugs, and so forth.

The opposite of telling lies is telling the truth, and the opposite of divisive speech is speaking in such a way that all family members and friends are at peace with one another. The opposite of using harsh language is speaking politely and gently. Acharya Nagarjuna presented two examples of how to speak and taught: "When one speaks, it should be as sweet as honey." Since it tastes really good, *Honig* ('honey' in German) tastes *lecker* ('delicious') and makes us feel good. That is how we should speak. Nagarjuna added: "When one speaks, it should be like a blossoming flower." We have a good feeling when we see a blossoming flower, right? When we speak, we should express ourselves kindly and with modesty, just as a beautiful flower. When we do, others will say, "Oh, he/she talks so nicely." People praise us and say to themselves, "He/she didn't

speak long enough for me. I want to hear him/her talk more.” Nobody wants to listen to people speak badly. So, instead of speaking badly, we should speak nicely. The opposite of idle chatter or worthless conversations, which is due to arrogance and pride, is saying things that are useful and worthwhile for us as well as for others. So, those are the four non-virtuous verbal activities and their remedies that we should apply.

What should we give up when cultivating ethical activities of the mind? The three non-virtuous mental activities are being covetous (i.e., being selfish and greedy of other people’s accomplishments or things), having ill-will, and having misguided beliefs. Our attachment naturally decreases as we give up being greedy, and then we will be more satisfied and content. So, contentment is the opposite of greed. The opposite of having ill-will and wanting to harm others is having love and compassion and aspiring to benefit living beings. The opposite of having wrong views is having a pure view and as a result leading a worthy and meaningful life. Those are the three non-virtuous mental activities and their remedies.

We have gone through the ten unethical activities of body, speech, and mind and the ten virtuous activities that remedy them. The ten unethical activities are the three non-virtuous physical activities, the four non-virtuous usages of language, and the three non-virtuous mental activities. Now we will look at the third category of ethical conduct, which is engaging in virtuous activities that benefit all living beings, *sems-cān-gyi-dōn-byed-pa ’i-tshul-khrims*.

When the six paramitas (generosity, ethics, patience, diligence or joyful endeavour, meditative concentration, and wisdom-awareness) that are practiced on the Mahayana path have become *paramitas* (‘perfections’), then - based on our abilities - through our ethical conduct, we will be able to benefit all living beings in a way that is appropriate and beneficial for them. We will be able to dispel the suffering of all living beings. We will be able to teach the right methods to individuals who do not know and feel lost for help to overcome their ignorance, defilements, and afflictions.

Due to having pure generosity, a Bodhisattva is able to give living beings what they need and what really helps them. These are things a Bodhisattva can do for sentient beings, which is the first of the four ways that a Bodhisattva benefits others. The second way a Bodhisattva benefits beings is speaking clearly and meaningfully to them. The third way a Bodhisattva benefits students who are ready to be tamed is showing them the right way and in accordance with their propensities and needs. The fourth way a Bodhisattva benefits beings is acting in a way that is always helpful. These four ways summarize a Bodhisattva’s pure conduct and describe his or her boundless virtuous acts that benefit all living beings.

Ethical conduct is very important. We discussed the three categories and saw that ethical conduct means engaging in the ten virtuous actions and that it benefits all living beings. We also discussed its characteristics and saw that always practicing ethical conduct engenders wonderful qualities of worth. It is the basis on which all other precious qualities arise. It is stated in a Sutra: “One should not be watchful of one’s ethical conduct for the purpose of gaining a kingdom, or to be born in a godly realm, or to become Indra or Brahma, or to satisfy one’s various sensory desires, or to become Ishvara, or to become a universal monarch, or for the sake of one’s body. Furthermore, one shouldn’t be watchful of one’s ethical conduct to avoid being born in a hell

realm or as an animal, or out of great fear of *Yama* ('the Lord of Death'). Instead, one should be mindful and aware of one's ethical conduct to emulate the beneficial conduct of a buddha for the welfare and happiness of all living beings."

Having spoken about the ten negative actions and the benefits of practicing ethical conduct, free of temporary and impure intentions, let me mention that the motivation that is Bodhicitta-mind is very important in Mahayana. Bodhicitta-mind means being deeply concerned and really caring for all living beings.

While presenting instructions on the ten non-virtues, the Buddha taught that the seven non-virtuous actions of body and speech may be carried out if and only if they are performed for the welfare of others. He said this when he recounted a story of his previous life, before he attained enlightenment. The story he told is that in a previous life he was the Bodhisattva named bDe-pön-snying-rje-chen-po and was on a ship carrying 500 merchants and their goods across the stormy sea. He saw that the captain of the ship wanted to kill the merchants and throw them overboard so that he could call all their goods on the ship his own. Out of deep compassion, Lord Buddha in his former life as Bodhisattva bDe-pön-snying-rje-chen-po thought, "If the captain kills all of us, he will amass much negative karma for himself, and it will also not be good for everyone who will be killed." He therefore thought, "Should I carry out the negative act of killing him in order to spare him such negative karma and to save everyone's life, too?" So, in a prayer that he recited before he killed the captain, Bodhisattva bDe-pön-snying-rje-chen-po said that he would do this for the sake of everyone on the ship. Through this act of great compassion, the Buddha in his former life saved the lives of the many merchants, spared the captain from accumulating so much negative karma, and in that life as a Bodhisattva accumulated very much merit.

Many followers asked the Buddha, "How can it be that a Bodhisattva may commit such a terrible act in order to save others?" They also asked him which karmic results arose for him. The Buddha answered, "The karmic consequence of this act is like constantly being pricked by the thorn of a sandalwood tree. It's an uncomfortable feeling, but much merit is accumulated." He took the small pain upon himself until it stopped after a short while, whereas he accumulated the positive karma that can be won over a period of seven *kalpas* ('aeons'), which is a lot. This incident is an exception to the rule and illustrates under which circumstances actions that are said to be very negative aren't negative.

Let me give an easy example to illustrate that an action that is said to be negative isn't negative. What would you answer if someone who is very angry at me runs to you with a knife in his hands and asks you with a crazed mind, "Where is that Lama? Tell me! I want to kill him!?" If you know and are honest with that man, you would endanger the Lama's life. If you have taken the vow not to lie and you do lie, saying, "I don't know," it's better and is only a little white lie. Although he is in Langenfeld and you know this, it's all right to say, "Lama isn't here. He went in the other direction. He is in Hamburg or Munich now. I didn't see any Lama here." If you tell that white lie to the angry man, he will turn around and try to go to Hamburg or Munich. He can go wherever he wants, it doesn't matter, but you saved the Lama and as a result the Lama's life is no longer in danger. So, there is the benefit of having saved the Lama and of having saved the angry man from accumulating very bad karma, and that is how you accumulated merit.

The Mahayana point of view doesn't mean that we have to be stubborn and uptight. We have to look and see whether anything we do is useful and meaningful. We should always speak nicely and with humility to others, but sometimes it's necessary to speak harshly or raise our voice. If being forceful benefits someone, then we can do that; if being soft benefits someone, then we can be soft. Therefore the Buddha said that we shouldn't be all too uptight and narrow-minded about the three physical and four verbal actions, but that we should be flexible and act as the situation calls for, of course, only if we don't hurt anyone and with the benefit of others in mind. But the Buddha said that the three ethical mental activities may never be turned around, i.e., it's never permitted under any circumstances whatsoever for a Buddhist to be selfish and greedy, to hurt and harm others, or to have wrong views. If you have any questions, please ask.

Questions & Answers

Question: "As a Bodhisattva in his previous life, you said that it was okay for the Buddha to kill one man in order to save the 500 merchants. How is it for an ordinary being? In my profession, I have to kill many bees to save the lives of many other bees from being infected by a disease that the bees I kill have."

Lama Sönam: It depends upon your motivation. It's difficult to answer this. Do you have thousands of bees that are endangered by other bees?

Same student: "There are insects that harm the bees. They lay their eggs in the cages of the male bees, so I have to destroy the insects together with the male bees by putting them in the icebox. That is my job and I have trouble doing this."

Lama Sönam: You have to find a solution not to kill but to save them.

Other student: "The parasites are also killed with the male bees, and it's a dilemma. There's no solution."

Another student: "Maybe there is the long-term solution that makes the parasites disappear forever and then the future generation of bees will be saved. But it's important not to give the bees sugared water."

Lama Sönam: Maybe one can prevent the parasites from laying their eggs in the male bees' cages. No solution?

Student: "Maybe I have to give away my bees to get rid of the problem."

Lama Sönam: You have to check and see what is more beneficial. Actually, it's better not to kill. But there is a difference between an intentional and unintentional action. If you know that you are killing them and don't feel good because you know about the Bodhisattva practice, you feel regret, right? You can separate the sick insects from the healthy bees. In any case, try to find a solution.

Next question: "If an animal has been seriously wounded in an accident or is deathly sick and will die soon anyway, is it allowed to have what is called 'mercy death' performed on it to put an end to its suffering? Or is it better to refrain from having it killed and watch it go through unbearable suffering until it dies?"

Lama Sönam: The Buddhist point of view is not to kill. It would be better to think about karma, that previous negative causes are directly ripening for the suffering animal. Just feel this, give love and compassion, and pray. Sometimes we give blessed pills to a suffering animal and pray that it

dies in peace. After it has died, we make wishing prayers that it is reborn in a Pure Land or as a human being who can learn and practice the Dharma.

Next question: “If one shouldn’t and cannot change the karma of others anyway, wasn’t saving the lives of all the merchants on the ship changing their karma?”

Lama Sönam: Karma cannot be changed and doesn’t disappear. If one does something positive, one will experience a positive result. Karma is infallible. It’s certain that suffering results from negative actions. But karma can be turned, as was the case when the Buddha in a previous life saved the merchants. It was good for the Bodhisattva and good for them, too, because afterwards they could help many people. So, Bodhisattva bDe-pön-snying-rje-chen-po accumulated the merit of seven aeons through that very positive act. Maybe you know the dramatic life story of Angulimala. I will tell it for those of you who haven’t heard about him.

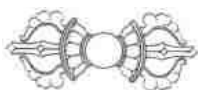
There was a man named Angulimala who lived during the times of Lord Buddha. He was very intelligent and smart and was a very kind person. His parents gave him the name Ahimsaka, ‘Harmless,’ when he was born. But he had a very negative teacher while studying at the university. The teacher said to him, “I can give you extraordinary teachings if you do what I say.” Angulimala agreed, so the evil teacher told him, “You have to kill a 1000 people and bring me the thumbs of their right hand.” Angulimala didn’t like this idea, but the evil teacher must have performed something like black magic, because suddenly Angulimala changed his mind. The evil teacher gave him a sword and he set out, killing everyone who crossed his way. All the people in the village were dead by the time he had collected 999 thumbs from the right hands of his victims. Only his mother was left. After she found out where he was staying and went to him, he ran towards her with his sword pointed directly at her. She stopped him and said, “Son, you have done something very, very negative. I am so sad and worried. Therefore I’ve come to you.” She gave him the food she had cooked and brought along for him and said, “What has happened to you? You have gone totally crazy. I’m your mother. If you kill me, you’ll create immense negative karma. This is not good for you.” Angulimala answered, “My teacher ordered me to do this. If I don’t kill you to get the last thumb that I need so that I have the 1000 he asked for, he won’t give me the teachings that I want.” When he was about to kill his mother, she said to him, “If you want my thumb, cut it off, but don’t commit one of the five most heinous offences.” She continued pleading with her son and told him, “Matricide leads to immediate rebirth in the very lowest realm of hell.”

While Lord Buddha was surveying the world with his eye of wisdom, he saw Angulimala arguing with his mother. The Buddha thought, “He is actually a good person, but presently he is enmeshed in bad ways.” Out of great compassion, the Buddha put on the clothes of an ordinary monk and arrived at the scene just as Angulimala started cutting off his mother’s thumb. Thinking he could kill the monk instead of mutilating his mother, Angulimala stopped what he was doing. The Buddha performed a supernormal feat that made it look like he was running away, while in truth he was only walking. Wanting to kill the monk, Angulimala ran as fast as he could to catch him, but he couldn’t catch up with the Buddha disguised as a monk. He saw that the monk was walking slowly and thought, “This monk isn’t normal. Although I’m running as fast as I can and he’s just walking, I can’t catch up with him.” He stopped running and shouted, “Stop, monk, stop!” The monk turned around and faced him. When Angulimala lifted his sword to attack him, the Buddha gave him a teaching and said, “Rest and relax. You are really doing

very negative things. The instructions your teacher gave you are totally wrong. Give up your wrong and bad ways. Listen to what I have to say and everything will be all right.” When Angulimala heard the short instruction that the Buddha gave him, he became very calm and cool. He breathed out fully and inhaled deeply. He changed totally, felt sincere regret that he had killed 999 people, and confessed his very negative actions to the Buddha.

Angulimala became one of Lord Buddha’s closest disciples and due to having received teachings from the Buddha, having regretted and confessed his very bad deeds, he purified all his negative karma and attained enlightenment. He is known to this day as one of the eighty eminent Arhats of the Hinayana tradition.

Arhat is a Sanskrit term and means ‘Worthy One.’ This title of distinction was translated into Tibetan as *dgra-bcom-pa*. So an Arhat is an exceptional Buddhist who has overcome (*bcom-pa*) his enemies (*dgra*), which are own emotional defilements and obscurations. It is said that bad deeds, which are carried out in dependence on emotional defilements, have no qualities other than that they can be purified by regretting and confessing them.



3. Patience – *bZöd-pa*

As mentioned, the six paramitas progress in sequence, growing in importance. Having practiced and efficiently cultivated generosity and ethical conduct with a good motivation, the third paramita of patience that we need to practice is very important. What are the shortcomings of the first two paramitas without the third?

It is taught that whoever has generosity and ethics but no patience will easily get angry when causes and conditions prevail, and that a single outburst of anger or rage (*khong-khro*) extinguishes (*zäd-pa*) all positive karma accumulated through having practiced generosity and ethics. Shantideva taught: “Those tormented by the pain of anger will never know tranquillity of mind.” There are many other disadvantages of being impatient. For example, we will get sick due to disliking food that is served and due to not being able to sleep properly at night, which is usually caused by constantly thinking of those persons we consider enemies and scheming to take revenge. These are really bad experiences, right? And it’ll certainly be hard to attain peace and happiness having such feelings and thoughts. This is why in the sixth chapter of *The Bodhicharyavatara*, Shantideva stressed that we shouldn’t let anger arise in our mind and therefore we need to be very aware and attentive.

How can beginning practitioners like us, who are again and again overwhelmed by anger, avoid becoming angry? Our anger lessens if we reflect the disadvantages and pain that we cause ourselves and others by being angry. We should remember that - like everything else - anger is impermanent and is by nature empty of true existence. We will never be able to find anger if we check and try to locate it. Investigating whether the very disruptive emotional defilement of anger is the true nature of our mind, we will find that it isn’t.

We saw that mind's essence is Buddha nature and not anger or rage. The Buddha nature is always and ever immaculate and pure, i.e., free of negative emotions. But we react in dependence on causes and conditions that arise in daily life because we lose our awareness and aren't attentive. As a result, we become involved in a big fight over something quite trivial. We all have experiences like this, for example, we become angry when somebody points his/her finger at us and scorns, "*Du bist schlecht!*" ('You are bad!')." But what is *schlecht* ('bad, awful')? It's only a word that consists of three syllables in English, yet we can't accept the insult that these three syllables make us feel. We defend ourselves and shout back, "I'm not bad. I'm good! *Du bist schlecht* ('You are bad!')." The argument escalates, both parties alternately saying, "*Du bist schlecht. Er ist schlecht. Sie ist schlecht,*" and so forth - and more fighting evolves. In comparison, a tiny spark can cause a whole house to burn down. Likewise, a small word spoken with anger can hurt and become the cause for a huge argument. These situations arise very often because we live in a community and associate with many people. We can't tolerate being slandered, blamed, or accused. So, we should repeatedly think about our essence, our true Buddha nature, and think about the reason we become angry when we do. Not finding a reason, we can let go of our anger.

Acharya Nagarjuna stated: "Like a dream, like an illusion, like a city of Gandharvas - that's how birth and also living, that's how dying are taught to be." We should think about this verse and know that every accusation or harsh word that makes us feel hurt is like an echo. In another verse, Nagarjuna taught: "If somebody meanly hurls one single syllable at us, we should think that it is like an echo." Echoes are mere repetitions. If somebody who is in a cave or in a valley that is surrounded by steep mountain slopes yells, "I am a buddha," an echo will resound, "I am a buddha." The echo is worthless and senseless. If that person yells, "I am good," the echo will be repetitive and make the sound, "I am good." We have to train to realize that negative statements made without reasons are not our problem but are an echo of somebody's anger. If someone has a reason to be angry with us, then we should try to find out the reason and look for a solution in order to clarify the matter. When we have clarified things, then it's finished.

Let us sing the verse by Nagarjuna together: "Like a dream, like an illusion, like a city of Gandharvas – that's how birth and that's how living, that's how dying are taught to be."

Gandharvas are spirits. They resemble hungry ghosts and always appear in a city, no matter how large or how small it is. When a Gandharva spots an empty bowl, for instance, it thinks it's as big as Berlin and circles around the bowl. That's why Buddhists fill the offering bowls on their shrine with water in the morning and turn them upside down after having emptied and dried them in the evening. If we don't do this, Gandharvas move in and sit in the bowls. We can't see this, but then we have difficulties. We shouldn't leave the offering bowls empty and open for too long, so we have to fill them as fast as we can; otherwise the Gandharvas see the open and empty offering bowls, think it is a city, and move in. This is only an example of how our mind creates dualistic concepts that are illusions, which aren't reality but appear in different forms. This is why we have to train.

Since we are in the relative world of samsara, many causes and conditions come together and give rise to negative things, like somebody treating us in an unfriendly or impolite manner. When we notice that this is happening - and knowing that it's useless to be upset about things that make no sense -, we need to try to practice patience. It's good to reflect that the true nature of somebody

who is mad and angry with us is not anger but is the Buddha nature, the same as us. But it happens. Then we are free to give that person our love and compassion, to pray that his or her negative actions be purified, and that he or she acts with love and compassion. That's how to engage in mind-training.

As said, the disadvantage of not practicing and cultivating patience is again and again becoming angry. If we have patience, then we and everyone we associate with will experience happiness and joy. We will be at peace with each other and will live in harmony. Shantideva described this in the sixth chapter and wrote: "Those who seize and crush their anger down will find joy in this and future lives." Ultimately, they will attain enlightenment and then will continuously abide in bliss and happiness. These are the temporary and ultimate results of perfecting the paramita of patience.

The essence of patience means not being disturbed by anything. As it is, we don't like anyone who harms us, but we shouldn't retaliate with scorn and anger when someone insults or hurts us. We should make good use of the opportunity to be patient with those persons we think are our enemies. As stated in *The Bodhisattvabhumi*: "Whenever the mind is not uptight but only compassionate, it is not disturbed by anything. This is the essence of a Bodhisattva's patience." In *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*, Ngülchu Thogme tells us: "For Bodhisattvas aspiring to a wealth of virtue, anything that harms is a treasury of jewels. Never getting hostile or angry, to be patient is the practice of Bodhisattvas." So, due to practicing *Geduld* ('patience' in German), Bodhisattvas are always very nice and never find an enemy to be angry with. When somebody is not nice to them, they are happy for the chance to practice patience. How can anyone practice patience if there's no opportunity? That's why Ngülchu Thogme wrote: "Anything that harms is a treasury of jewels." So, when we are able to be patient with those we consider enemies, we will have attained the goal. In short: The object of our patience is anybody or anything that harms us and the method is practicing patience. The best objects of practice are enemies. By practicing patience, we will attain happiness, which benefits us and everyone else.

There are three categories of patience, *bzöd-pa-gsum*. They are: (1) patience of not being disturbed by the harm done by others, (2) patience of enduring suffering, and (3) patience while practicing to realize the definitive meaning of the Dharma.

I have gone through the first category, *gnöd-par-byed-pa-la-ji-mi-snyam-pa'i-bzöd-pa*. Let me add that we should investigate what and who causes us harm and how anger arises in us. If we examine well, we might come to know the source of our anger and can practice patience. As said, the object of our patience is an enemy, and the method is to practice patience instead of letting anger arise in us.

The second category is *sdug-bsngäl-dang-len-pa'i-bzöd-pa*, the 'patience of enduring suffering.' Suffering can be immense and thus very difficult to deal with. It would be wrong to think that it is unbearable, though. We need to take advantage of the situation and learn to accept suffering and pain by practicing patience. The Tibetan term *sdug-bsngäl* (translated as 'suffering') means 'problems of any kind.'

Everybody experiences suffering and problems - more or less. I, too, have lots of problems at the Dharma center, problems with visitors and with the staff. There are so many different mentalities and varying opinions, so sometimes it's really not easy for me. But I try. Of course, we often refuse to accept our problems and want to run away from them. And, of course, we always want to be happy, feel comfortable, and have no difficulties or problems, but this isn't possible in samsara. We are all emotional. We all have disturbing emotions, right? And sometimes they cause problems. Problems are always there, some more difficult to accept than others. In any case, it's better to accept them. It makes things easier if we accept them, otherwise our suffering and problems increase the more we try to run away. So, when a problem or suffering occurs, it's important to accept it.

If we are sick, take the medicine our doctor prescribes but aren't cured, what can we do? It's very difficult to accept that doctors can't always help their patients. Nobody wants to be sick. Everybody who is sick wants to be free of an illness or disease. What can we do if there is no solution? We can try practicing *Geduld*, 'patience' - and accept. If it's very difficult to accept, we can look at those who suffer more than we do. Some people have no legs, and/or no arms, and/or are blind. When we look at the problems others have, then our own problems seem very small in comparison, sometimes. Realizing we aren't alone makes it easier to deal with our problems. We try to experience this feeling, try to look inwards, and practice meditation, which is mind-training. We can practice mind-training by praying: "May my present suffering be of true benefit in that it removes the suffering of all living beings." We should also reflect that any suffering that we experience is the result of our previous negativity. By praying and contemplating this way, our past negative karma is purified. The benefit is that we have love and compassion for all sentient beings who suffer in samsara.

As said, there are many kinds of suffering and they are all marks of *samsara* ('conditioned existence'), e.g., suffering of hunger and thirst, suffering due to heat and cold, earthquakes and floods, a demanding boss at work, and suffering of old age, sickness, and death. There is also suffering connected with our Dharma practice. If our knees hurt or we have back problems after having meditated for 10 minutes, then it's a problem. Sometimes it's too hot; sometimes it's too cold. Sometimes we feel uncomfortable when the telephone rings. If we always look at our problems, we will always have problems. If we can be patient with any problem we have, whether in daily life, at the office, or during our spiritual practice, then it's easier to endure. Having patience with any problem is accepting it.

Another advantage of having patience is that we won't have any difficulties travelling in India and can easily accept waiting for a train for 3 hours or being bitten by mosquitoes while touring on a hot summer day. So, there's a huge difference between practitioners who have experience being patient and those who don't. Experienced practitioners can even sleep on hard stone, without a blanket or pillow, because they know that it won't kill them. Inexperienced practitioners need comfort. It would be quite difficult for them to travel in Himalayan countries. Sometimes there aren't even guesthouses, so having the money to pay a high price for a comfortable room is useless. Travelling in many areas of the Himalayas, such tourists even go crazy when they can't sleep in a comfortable bed, and then they pant while complaining, "Oh, oh, oh! I can't sleep!" Sometimes there aren't even restaurants in many areas of the Himalayas, which isn't a problem for practitioners who have experience. Having patience enables us to take things lightly and,

because we know what it means, we can understand others much better, can help them solve their problems, and are able to share with them more easily.

So, four qualities are developed by practicing patience with suffering in samsara. They are: renouncing samsara, diminishing our pride of feeling so lucky to be better off than those who are suffering more than we are, developing loving compassion for them, and feeling enthused about engaging in positive actions.

The third category of patience is *chös-la-nges-par-sems-pa'i-bzöd-pa*, 'patience (while practicing to realize) the definitive (meaning of) the Dharma.' Something is not right if we do not run into difficulties while practicing the Dharma and if we find that it's very easy for us. Difficulties naturally arise when we listen to the Dharma teachings, contemplate, and meditate them, so we need to be patient and not become discouraged while progressing along the path. If we think that the hardships are too much for us and feel discouraged, it's helpful to think about Jetsün Milarepa, who really didn't have a comfortable life. Sometimes he didn't even have clothes to wear and only ate nettles, in fact, it is said that his body turned green from only eating nettles. Actually, he wasn't a poor and lazy person. He endured many difficulties, and he surely wouldn't have wanted to practice the Dharma had everything always gone smoothly during the early years of his life. Because of his experiences and his patience, Jetsün Milarepa was and remains within the innermost circle of Dharma, while we, as beginners, merely stand at its outer edge. He had no friends and owned nothing, but he always resided in meditation. There were and are many masters like him. We can see this by looking at the life of the Buddha. He was a prince named Siddhartha Gautama and was the son of King Suddhodana, the leader of the Shakya people who lived in northern India, an area that today is part of Nepal. He renounced his luxurious life, became an ascetic, and meditated for six years, while living off a few kernels of rice each day. That's *Geduld* ('patience'), and we won't get far without it. Thinking about the life of Lord Buddha, Jetsün Milarepa, and other great masters makes us realize that we really don't have much patience and encourages us to practice more.

As it is, we are really proud of ourselves and are often surprised if we managed to meditate for an hour, thinking, "Wow!" It's not always easy to practice every day, because of having a job and family. But we should reserve time each day to practice meditation. We can make a schedule, e.g., having time for the job, time for the family, and time for meditation. The time we reserve for practice is short in comparison, so it's easy. We can't imitate the Buddha or Milarepa, who lived alone in a cave in the barren mountains of the Himalayas and had no obligations. If we imitate them and move into a cave in the West, people will think we are a dangerous madman or woman and will call the police to pick us up. We live in another culture that has another philosophy and life-style. It's not easy to learn other philosophies, like the Eastern philosophy or the Western philosophy. There are differences, right? But it's not that much of a problem if we have *Geduld*, 'patience.' Nobody has to give up everything and run off to meditate in a cave, which they will probably regret afterwards. These are not the times to practice in such a manner. Being content with what we have and contemplating *Geduld* five minutes a day is a very good way to transform our mind - it's enough, it's really good, and we can be happy. We need not and cannot imitate Milarepa, the Lord of Yogis.

While Jetsün Milarepa was meditating in solitude, three thieves entered his cave. They looked around everywhere for things to steal. They found the leftovers of a dry radish in the tin can that was in front of his cave and didn't find anything in his pouch because it was empty. They even picked up stones to see if there was anything beneath them. Milarepa told them: "I couldn't find anything here during the day. What do you expect to find in the darkness of the night?" They laughed, Milarepa laughed, and the three thieves left. They understood him - they understood that he was a true practitioner. So the thieves helped Milarepa practice, hunters also helped him. Let me tell the story of the hunter who became one of Milarepa's foremost disciples. I told it on another occasion and will repeat it here for those of you who didn't hear it or haven't read the transcript.

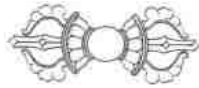
One time Jetsün Milarepa was meditating love and compassion in a cave situated in Nyeshang, Nepal. Nearby, a strong hunter and his hound were chasing a deer. The deer knew that Milarepa was very good, came to him for protection, and laid down at his right side. The hound was a very powerful dog. It could catch birds that were flying in the sky and could bite into hard stone and break out pieces of rock with its teeth - that's how powerful the dog was. Chasing the deer, the dog arrived, cooled down completely in Milarepa's presence, laid down at his left side, and licked his thigh. Shortly afterwards, the hunter managed to climb up the steep mountain path to the cave. When he saw the deer and his vicious dog lying at Milarepa's left and right sides, he was shocked and became furious. He pointed his bow and arrow at Milarepa and shouted, "What have you done to my dog? It was supposed to kill that deer for me and now the animals are together like a family." The enraged hunter shot an arrow at Milarepa, but it fell to the ground. Milarepa thought, "The dog and deer listened to the teachings I gave them. This man is a human being, after all, so maybe it will help if I give him teachings." Milarepa said to the frenzied man, "Please listen to me. You have enough time to shoot at me, so maybe you have a little bit of time to listen to my teachings." The hunter was stunned that Milarepa was not afraid of him, so they talked. Milarepa told him, "I'm never afraid. You have so many weapons that you can use to shoot me. I don't have things like that. I only have natural weapons. My natural weapons are my loving kindness and compassion, so I'm not afraid. Listen to my teachings." Having received teachings from Milarepa, the man cooled down completely, gave up hunting, and became one of Milarepa's foremost disciples. His name was Chira Gonpo Dorje, *chira* meaning 'hunter,' and he is known to this day as Chira Repa, 'the Cotton-clad Hunter.'

This incident illustrates the result of having perfect patience. If we have patience, we have no problems in daily life. We have no problems with a husband or wife, no problems with a job and a boss, and no problems with hunters and thieves. So, patience is very important.

Shantideva presented a simile to illustrate the effect of perfecting the three kinds of patience. He wrote: "To cover all the earth with sheets of hide - where could such amounts of skin be found? But simply wrap some leather 'round your feet, and it's as if the whole earth had been covered!" Although we have many wonderful experiences, as this verse implies, we experience many difficulties, have many rivals, and know many people who are out to harm us in some way or other. We can't agree with everybody we know and can't live in harmony with everyone. If we eliminate a hindrance and manage to conquer an enemy, another hindrance arises and a second, third, and fourth enemy follow. It's impossible to conquer all negative forces we encounter in life, but we can overcome our destructive emotions that arise in our mind-stream, like anger, by

developing and cultivating patience. If we are patient, then we will be at peace and then loving kindness and compassion will naturally unfold in our mind and manifest openly and freely, just as though we had covered the entire earth with sheets of hide.

The ultimate result of perfecting patience is attainment of Buddhahood. At that time, we will have achieved the relative results, which Shantideva described in the short verse: “For patience in samsara brings such things as beauty, health, and good renown. Its fruit is great longevity, the vast contentment of a universal king.”



4. Diligence – *brTson-'grüis*

Having practiced the first three paramitas is not sufficient, though. We also need to be diligent. Also translated as ‘joyful endeavour, exertion, and perseverance,’ diligence is the fourth practice in the sequence of the six paramitas and accompanies them all.

If we aren’t diligent, we become lazy, can’t mature, and can’t even accomplish secular aims. Therefore it’s very important. Lacking diligence, we can’t develop qualities of worth, can’t help ourselves or others, and can’t attain the ultimate state of our spirituality, which is Buddhahood. We need to fully perfect the two accumulations of wisdom and merit in order to achieve Buddhahood, but we will fail if we aren’t diligent. What are the disadvantages of not practicing diligence and what are the advantages of practicing diligence?

No matter how hard it seems to be, we can accomplish any aim that we wish to achieve if we are diligent. We can even climb a high mountain if we are diligent. It is stated in *The Ornament Sutra*: “Whoever is not diligent cannot develop analytical insight. Whoever is not diligent is lazy and cannot work for the benefit of sentient beings. Whoever is lazy is extremely distanced from enlightenment. Diligence enables one to climb over the mountain of worldly concerns.” If we are diligent, then studying and practicing the Dharma as well as working to achieve worldly aims are easy for us, and we will progress and succeed. We will certainly develop many positive qualities. The disadvantage of not being diligent is that we will be lazy and won’t accomplish anything. These are the differences between having diligence or perseverance and not having it.

The definition of diligence is ‘gladly engaging in virtuous activities.’ In the seventh chapter of *The Bodhicharyavatara*, Shantideva wrote: “Heroic perseverance means delighting in virtue. Its contrary may be defined as laziness.” So, diligence is permeated by joy.

In order to be diligent, we first have to be interested in something. Then we gladly do what we need to do in order to accomplish whatever we are interested in. This is why the Tibetan term *brtson-'grüis* is also translated as ‘joyful endeavour.’ If we aren’t happy, it will be very hard for us to achieve anything that we are interested in. For instance, if I tell someone to go to Cologne and that person really didn’t want to go, he or she would be miserable and would feel that the one-hour ride took three hours. In German, not being happy about what we are doing is formulated like this: *Ich habe keine Lust, aber muss trotzdem* (‘I don’t want to, but have to anyway’). This

means not being interested and therefore not being engaged with joy, right? Doing things we don't like to do makes us feel bad. It's like the uneasy feeling that the night doesn't seem to end when we can't sleep, whereas time seems to fly when we sleep peacefully. In the same way, any work that we do without joy is hard and never seems to end, whereas anything we do is easy if we like doing it. It's the same with realizing Dharma and achieving enlightenment. But we have to be interested so that we practice the path, progress, and succeed in awakening to the truth of the Dharma that is in our mind-stream. If we are interested, it's easy. So, delighting in virtuous activities is the essence of diligence.

As said, we become lazy if we lack diligence. There are three categories of laziness, *le-lo-gsum*. They are: (1) laziness of disinterest in wholesome ways, (2) laziness of despondency, and (3) laziness of self-contempt. These three categories subsume every kind of laziness.

The first category of laziness is being disinterested. It causes indolence, i.e., sleepiness, in which case one is only inclined to eat and sleep. If this is the case, it would be important to contemplate impermanence and the imminence of death. Realizing that time is precious, one will be inspired to make the best use of one's time by engaging in Dharma practice and virtuous activities, instead of sliding into a state of mental torpor or idleness. One needs to set limits to one's indolence, otherwise all one will do is eat, and eat, and eat and lie around in bed or on the couch, sleeping the day away. In that case, one doesn't even feel like getting up to go to the bathroom when one needs to. This is real laziness or sloth, so please take care. If this happens to you, tell yourself that it's not okay to just eat, drink, and sleep and that it's important to do something good, for instance, to listen to the Dharma, contemplate the teachings, meditate them, and to do your work.

Sometimes we fall into idleness. We have to recognize if we have. Then we need to realize that it's a fault and that it's impossible to develop spiritually or to keep a job as long as we don't do something about it. It's not good, right? Realizing that it's not good wakes us up, and then we stand up. Shantideva recommended: "As such a man would leap in fright to find a snake coiled in his lap, if sleep and sluggishness beset me, I will instantly dispel them." Yes, *schnell* ('fast' in German). If a snake comes, we are afraid, wake up, and are suddenly in a hurry. In the same way, if we notice that our hair is on fire, we wouldn't hesitate to extinguish the fire right away. Like this, we need to be *fleißig* ('diligent'), but most German people are already very diligent, and they are speedy. I never thought that I'm slow before I came here. I try to hurry, but it's hard getting used to the speed here. I'm learning the German language and noticed that I'm really slow at learning and arriving on time for classes. Sometimes the subway is late. Then the teacher scolds me and says, "You have arrived 10 minutes too late two times now. If this happens a third time, I'll really be mad at you." So maybe I'm not lazy but just too slow. German people always start on time and sometimes it's a little bit difficult to follow. Maybe it's not good to always be in a hurry. In any case, it's a problem for me to have to hurry. I try, but usually it doesn't function.

So, we have to dispel our laziness of disinterest just as fast as we would leap to get rid of a snake on our lap. And we should cultivate our interest and joy in anything we do. If we don't, then we will sink into mental torpor, become idle, and spend our time only eating, drinking, sleeping. Of course, we need to eat, drink, and sleep to stay healthy, but it's important to be moderate.

The second category, laziness of despondency, is also a big obstacle to achieving anything good in life and to developing Dharma activities. Somebody who has succumbed to despondency lacks self-confidence and discourages himself/herself by uttering, “Somebody like me can’t withstand hardships. They’re too heavy for me. I won’t accomplish enlightenment anyway. I’m not intelligent enough. I’m not really strong. I have no energy. I’m weak. I’m too stupid and not even good enough to take on a job. Why even bother trying?” Being lazy like this makes people really depressed. We should dispel any despondency we might have.

In the Tibetan language, this state of mind is called *snying-chung*, ‘small-hearted, cowardly.’ It’s important to really encourage ourselves to be *snying-stobs* or *blo-stob*, ‘brave, courageous, strong, light.’ Shantideva wrote: “The buddhas, who declare the truth, have spoken and indeed proclaimed that if they bring forth strength of perseverance, the very bees and flies and stinging gnats or grubs will find with ease enlightenment so hard to find!” In the next verse he taught: “Able to distinguish good from ill, if I, by birth and lineage of human kind, devote myself to bodhisattva training, why should I not gain the state of buddhahood?”

We are human beings and can do so much. We have to strongly encourage ourselves to be *snying-stob*. When we want to accomplish something, we can tell ourselves and really feel, “I can do that! It’s no problem. I’m intelligent. I have love and compassion. I’m really empowered. I have everything I need to accomplish what I want. If animals are able to get what they want, why should I be so small-hearted? I’m a human being and have all capabilities to achieve what I want. Why should I be so cowardly?” Everything will be easy and we will succeed if we are courageous – in daily life, at work, and in our Dharma practice, too. Being courageous is important.

Student: “I have a question. Is it possible to combine diligence with the practice of patience, i.e., being patient with an obstacle and therefore not doing anything about it?”

Lama Sönam: The two practices are connected. Diligence always accompanies patience.

Same student: “But it’s possible to use patience as an excuse not to be diligent, by being patient with an obstacle, like when I don’t practice meditation.”

Lama Sönam: You are right. It isn’t dangerous because you keep the thought to practice in your heart. Shantideva also taught that we need to take a break. Instead of using patience as an excuse, you can take time for a break.

Other student: “Patience is a positive quality, whereas using it as an excuse isn’t.”

Translator: “The question is that patience doesn’t seem to fit together with being diligent.”

Lama Sönam: Oh, that’s a danger. If it doesn’t fit, it’s a delusion. You need to have both patience and diligence for any practice and work that you do. Patience and diligence are related. Therefore, with mindfulness and awareness, we do not forget our practice and keep it in mind. Sometimes it happens that we aren’t diligent. That’s why I spoke about the disadvantages of being lazy and the qualities of being diligent. We have to contemplate them and then try again. Is it like that?

Student: “Yes, thank you.”

Lama Sönam: I hope this is the right answer for you.

Shantideva spoke about four kinds of strength that we need to have in order to accomplish an aim. He wrote: “The forces that secure the good of beings are aspiration, firmness, joy, and moderation.”

Before starting anything new, whether spiritual or worldly, we have to examine and find out whether we have the ability and opportunities to work on the goal we aspire to accomplish. This is the first strength of aspiration or intention. Sometimes we have a problem with our intention and think, “Oh, I can’t accomplish what I would like,” and then we change our mind. The second strength is having firmness, stability, steadfastness. The third strength is being delighted about doing what we need to do in order to accomplish our intention.

The fourth strength is being moderate about what we do, which means not forcing ourselves to do what we intended. For example, if we wanted to practice five sessions of meditation that day and are tired after having done four, we don’t force ourselves to do more. Instead, we just make a *Pause* (German for ‘to take a break’) and start again when we feel strong. This applies to anything we do, whether daily work or spiritual practice. If working at accomplishing our intention is too much for us, we take a break, do yoga exercises for our body, or have a massage. Then we are strong again and can continue. In any case, we never ever give up until we attain the result. Before we attain a result, though, it’s normal that many obstacles arise in our normal life as well as in our spiritual life. Obstacles make things hard. Sometimes people think that anyone who has become a monk or is a Lama experiences no obstacles, is never stressed, and has no worries, but this is not so. Lamas are human beings, right? They get sick, too, and encounter many different kinds of obstacles. But maybe they are more skilled at taking a break, letting go, and never giving up. So, we may never give up, not until we reach the goal.

Student: “I didn’t understand the fourth point. Does it mean that we need to re-energize, regain energy?”

Lama Sönam: Yes. Therefore I gave the examples of doing yoga exercises or getting a massage. Singing and listening to music also energize. After that, we continue where we left off.

Another question: “What is the strength of stability?”

Lama Sönam: Never moving away from what we are doing. Often we aren’t stable, and then we have problems. We start something, give up, start something else, give up, and so forth. Being stable means, with confidence, sticking to what we set out to do and never losing confidence that we can achieve that goal. Yet, we need to be strong to achieve a goal, so we think about the four strengths, which encourage us, and we never give up until we fulfil our wish and reach our goal.

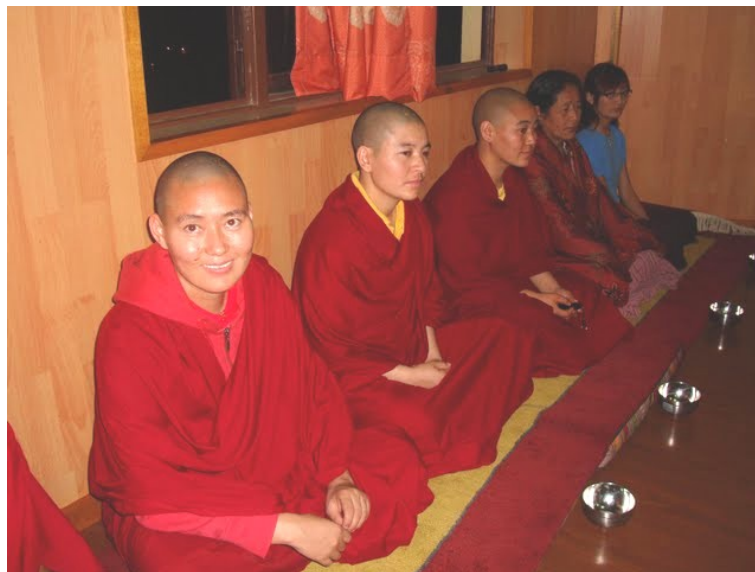
The third category of laziness is self-contempt. The German translation of the Tibetan is *erniedrigende Faulheit*, which translates into English as ‘demeaning or belittling laziness, i.e., belittling oneself.’ The definition of laziness of self-contempt is ‘attachment to unwholesome activities.’ It means being preoccupied with enemies or non-virtuous activities, which are the opposite of wholesome activities. We saw that the definition of diligence is ‘gladly engaging in virtuous activities.’ Only focusing our attention on our enemies and always arguing and fighting with them are grave faults. Furthermore, only working in order to become rich, which is due to strong attachment, is also a fault. Of course, it’s not easy to work for a living and accomplish our aims, but working to become rich is very negative. From a spiritual point of view, striving to become rich is also laziness. Je Gampopa taught: “Laziness of self-contempt is being attracted and attached to non-virtues, such as subjugating enemies and accumulating and hoarding material possessions. Since they are the cause of suffering, they need to be abandoned. Instead, we should

resort to the antidote of laziness, which is engaging in virtuous activities to accomplish our own benefit as well as that of others.”

There are three categories of diligence, *brtson-'grüs-gsum*. They are: (1) armour-like diligence, (2) diligence of application, and (3) diligence of not being self-content.

Armor-like diligence (*go-cha'i-brtson-'grüs*) is similar to the four strengths and is formulated in the prayer that we recite: “I delight in virtuous deeds from now until I reach perfect Buddhahood and until I have been able to lead all living beings to that very same state.” Keeping this prayer in mind and acting accordingly is the armour that we wear. Diligence of application (*sbyor-ba'i-brtson-'grüs*) is being perseverant in purifying our emotional defilements, with the pure intention to attain the result of Dharma practice and thus to be able to benefit all living beings. Diligence of not being self-content (*chog-par-mi-'dzin-pa'i-brtson-'grüs*) is not telling oneself, for example, “I meditated in retreat for a month and that’s enough for the rest of my life.” We are not like that. Diligence of not being self-content means that we aren’t complacent and aren’t satisfied with insufficient results. We engage in the antidote by resolving: “I will be diligent practicing the path of Dharma until I reach the ultimate result of enlightenment and have led all living beings to that very same state.” Shantideva taught about this and wrote: “And since I never have enough of pleasure, honey on the razor’s edge, how could I have enough of merit, fruits of which are happiness and peace?”

The result of diligence is both ultimate (*mthar-thug*) and immediate or temporary (*gnäs-skabs*). The immediate result is attainment of temporary good qualities and everything that is pleasant in samsara. The ultimate result is attainment of complete realization or perfect Buddhahood. Having joyful endeavour is very important and is indispensable if we aspire to attain both the temporary and ultimate results of diligence. Let us now contemplate these instructions for a short while together.



5. Meditative Concentration – *bSam-gtän*

Having practiced the first four paramitas, we then practice meditative concentration. If we don't, we will remain subject to our deeply ingrained habit of being distracted. When we become involved with distractions, our mind continues being clouded by disturbing emotions. As a result, we don't have the capacity and strength to develop and cultivate the Dharma.

It's very important to practice meditative concentration so that we don't give in to distractions. Shantideva explained: "Those whose minds are slack and wandering are caught between the fangs of the afflictions." This means to say that when we have become lost in distractions, our afflictive emotions arise and as a result we engage in unwholesome activities. Then our mental consciousness will not be relaxed and at peace.

If we want to practice calm abiding meditation, we can go to a solitary place, i.e., into retreat. If this isn't possible, we should again and again practice calm abiding meditation for 15 or 30 minutes each day, if possible for an hour each day. This would be just as good as being in retreat. It's very important to practice calm abiding meditation, so it would be good to reserve time each day for this practice. It's recommendable to switch off the phone and any similar distraction to be able to rest in calm and ease during this time. It's important to diminish and remove anything that can distract us. It would be good to practice with one other person, who could help us not be distracted. One person is enough. Two or three people are too much, because they start gossiping. What about four people? Even more gossiping, and then our mind would really be distracted, never coming to rest. What about Dharma centers? Sometimes people talk and gossip too much at the centers, creating and spreading rumours. A few years ago a Lama from Kham in East Tibet came to Germany and stayed at Kamalashila Institute for a while. A friend invited him to go swimming and to the sauna. When he returned, he was so surprised that everyone knew where he had been. Everybody at the centers in Hamburg and Berlin also knew. He commented, "The centers in Germany are like a radio station." So, that's why it's better to be in solitude when one practices meditation.

Having seen the disadvantages of giving in to distractions, what are the advantages of abiding in the calm of our mind? It's important to know that the advantages of resting in calm and ease are that we vanquish our negative emotions (*nyön-mongs*) and develop wisdom-awareness, *shes-rab*.

Before starting to meditate, it's important to be grateful and content, *chog-shes*. Appreciation, gratitude, and contentment are preliminary practices and aren't insignificant. There are three instructions we need to follow in order to practice calm abiding meditation. They are: Bring your body on your cushion - bring your mind into your body - and bring ease to your mind.

We start our formal practice to stabilize our mind by taking in what is called "the seven-point posture of Vairocana." We need a comfortable place, a matt, and a cushion that we like and really feel connected with. The first of the seven points is being seated, so we sit on a cushion. If we have no problems with our knees, we can sit either in the full-lotus or in the half-lotus. The second point is having a straight back so that the energy channels in our body are straight. The airs, which are closely connected with the mind, flow through these channels; so if our back is straight, our channels will be straight and the airs will flow through them in a straight way. The third point is the placement of our hands. The left hand rests about 4-finger widths below our navel and our right hand rests on our left hand, the tips of our thumbs lightly touching each

other. We are also free to rest both hands on our knees, our right hand on our right knee and our left hand on our left knee. The fourth point is that we should hold our shoulders slightly lifted, at an equal level. They should be like the wings of an eagle about to soar into the sky. The fifth point concerns our eyes, which we don't close but keep slightly open; it's said, "half-open/half-closed." Our gaze should be directed 8-finger widths beyond the tip of our nose and focused on the ground. If it makes us feel comfortable, we are free to lift our gaze sometimes and look higher than the ground or straight ahead. The sixth point concerns the tongue, which we hold against our upper palate. The seventh point is pulling our chin inwards, pressing it a little bit against our Adam's apple. This allows our head to rest evenly and lightly on our spine. These are the seven points of bringing our body on our cushion. They enhance the ability to bring our mind into our body so that it can relax and rest in calm and ease. This is called "meditative concentration."

The essence and definition of meditative concentration in brief is that our mind is one-pointedly focused on virtue. There are many points of focus used in calm abiding meditation, e.g., calm abiding with an object, either with a pure object or with an impure object, and calm abiding without an object. An impure object, which we can use to concentrate our attention on, is a flower, for example. A pure object is a statue of Arya Tara or Bodhisattva Chenrezig, whose mantra OM MANI PEMA HUNG is also a pure object. We focus our attention on the object we chose and become accustomed to it. If we practice calm abiding without an object, we just watch our breath and don't visualize anything. If we have many thoughts, then the best antidote is using our breathing to practice calm abiding meditation.

To practice calm abiding meditation by using our breathing, we just watch our out-breath and in-breath and relax. Normally, we can do this for a minute without being distracted, but then thoughts arise again. Our mind is like a frog that leaps around or like a monkey that jumps around and lands where it shouldn't. When we notice that this has happened, we bring our mind back and focus on our breath, with mindfulness and awareness. It's very important to bring our mind back. What is it within that notices that we have become distracted? Our awareness. Having become aware of distracting thoughts, we bring our mind back to our practice. If our thoughts merely increase through this method of practice, we can count our breathing. We feel our out-breath and then our in-breath, counting them as one. We repeat this and continue counting our ingoing and outgoing breathing as 2, then as 3, then as 4, until 10, increasing the number of counts to 20 or 21 as we progress in practice. Then we take a short break and start again by counting from one. When we notice that we have lost track of our counting, we take a short break and begin again by counting from one. This practice makes our mind peaceful and clear.

It is said that our breathing is like a horse, in which case the horseback rider is our mind. Our breathing is like our body, so when the horse trots, our mind hops along. Horses can be very wild when they are broken in and at that time they jump, kick, and buck with all their might. There's no chance that our mind doesn't jump when our body does. This picture illustrates the very strong connection between our *lūs* and *rlung*, our 'body' and 'breathing.' Therefore, breathing meditation is very good, because our body and mind come to rest and find peace. Counting our ingoing and outgoing breath is an easy method through which we develop mindfulness and awareness.

There are many methods to practice calm abiding meditation. In the Mahayana tradition, *thong-len* ('giving and taking,' i.e., exchanging self with others) is also considered a calm abiding practice and is seen to be very, very important. When, with diligence, we practice *thong-len*, we really develop the first paramita of generosity quite well and will be able to perfect the other transcendences easily. We will attain the ultimate state of calm abiding by becoming more and more stable in our practice, which is the best prerequisite to attain the state of complete and perfect enlightenment.

Question: "How do we combine breathing meditation with special insight meditation?"

Lama Sönam: Breathing meditation has more to do with the aspect of calm abiding meditation. But there is the danger of clinging to one's experience of breathing meditation. Then one has to apply special insight meditation.

Same student: "So it is the next step?"

Lama Sönam: Yes. We practice special insight meditation to realize the sixth paramita, which is *shes-rab*, 'wisdom-awareness' of the fact that nothing exists inherently but everything exists in dependence on many other things. It is realization that the three cycles discussed above – the meditator, the object of meditation, and the act of meditation – are not self-existent and that experiences made during calm abiding practice are nothing but experiences. By resting in calm, we are able to pacify our negative emotions, but it isn't possible to cut them away at their root by means of calm abiding meditation. This is accomplished by realizing the true nature of all things, which is the result of having perfected *shes-rab*. We accomplish *shes-rab* by practicing insight meditation, the sixth paramita.



6. Wisdom-Awareness – *Shes-rab*

Wisdom-awareness is the sixth paramita. It is called "the eye of wisdom that guides the other five paramitas," which are as the blind in the absence of wisdom-awareness. As stated in a Sutra: "How can thousands of millions of blind people who do not know the way reach a town? Anyone who doesn't have wisdom-awareness is blind. Without having it, the five blind paramitas are without a seeing guide, which makes it impossible for them to attain enlightenment." This means to say that realization of wisdom-awareness enables the other five to see.

Realization of *shes-rab* is realization of the fundamental, true nature of all things, *gnäs-lugs*. Without having erred or gone astray, having wisdom-awareness means we have the ability to practice the path to perfect Buddhahood. It is stated in a Sutra: “As a group of blind people can all easily be led to their desired destination by one seeing person, likewise, wisdom-awareness takes the blind qualities to Buddhahood.”

There are three categories, *shes-rab-gsum*. They are: (1) wisdom-awareness won from hearing the Dharma teachings, (2) wisdom-awareness gained by contemplating the teachings that we have received, and (3) wisdom-awareness won by meditating the meaning that we have understood.

Wisdom-awareness won from hearing the Dharma teachings (*thös-pa'i-shes-rab*) is the wisdom-awareness we develop and gain by listening to the words of our Lama while he teaches without error. Reading books and articles is included in this category, in which case the teacher is speaking to us by means of the written word. Sometimes we hear in our mind while reading, right?

It isn't enough to just receive the teachings. We need to unmistakably understand the meaning (*dön*) of the Dharma teachings by reflecting them. This way we attain the wisdom-awareness gained by contemplation, *bsam-pa'i-shes-rab*. We need to fully integrate the meaning in our mind-stream, until we have gained certainty of the truth of the teachings. This is why in a song of realization Jetsün Milarepa warned us when he taught: “One will merely be clinging to words as long as one hasn't gained certainty of the meaning.” We need to really anchor the meaning of the teachings in our mind-stream. Whenever we are uncertain, we need to ask our Lama or people who are more knowledgeable and experienced than we are, until we have understood the meaning correctly and have gained certainty, *nges-shes*.

But, gaining certainty of the teachings will not suffice to really anchor the teachings in our mind-stream. So, there is the third category, which is wisdom-awareness won by meditating the teachings, *sgom-pa'i-shes-rab*. We will only be able to unmistakably and fully realize the true nature of all things when we have won wisdom-awareness by having meditated and thus become completely familiarized with the meaning of the way things are, *gnäs-lugs*. Having heard the teachings, contemplated, and meditated them well, the result of perfect meditation is unpolluted, clear knowledge of the natural state of all things. At that time, we will have cut away any latent doubts that we still have.

If we have received the teachings and contemplated them well, then - by having perfected the practice of meditation - we will have gained unfettered certainty that all inner and outer phenomena are nothing else than dream-like appearances or illusions, i.e., that nothing has inherent existence and no phenomenon exists independently.

Presently, our mind is constantly fettered due to the deluded way we perceive the five objects of perception (forms, sounds, scents, tastes, and feelings of touch). As a result, we automatically experience attachment or aversion for anything we perceive and then make judgements, for example thinking, “This is nice; that isn't. This sounds pleasant; that doesn't. This smells nice; that doesn't,” and so forth. Being attached or appalled in this way, we act. By acting in dependence on our judgements and opinions, we accumulate karma and as a result remain

fettered in samsara. Developing wisdom-awareness is the antidote to being enmeshed in samsara. We become free from samsaric ways by realizing that all outer and inner experiences and phenomena don't really exist the way they appear but are like a dream and like an illusion. This is why Acharya Nagarjuna stated that all things are "like a dream, like an illusion."

Nagarjuna presented seven examples to illustrate how inner and outer phenomena really are. He wrote that phenomena are (1) like a dream and (2) like an illusion, i.e., they are nothing else than the coming together of specific causes and conditions in moments of time. Furthermore, phenomena are (3) like an optical illusion. An optical illusion is, for example, a scarecrow placed in fields to scare away the birds. In my village in Nepal, scarecrows are placed in the fields at the end of August, when crops are ripe. Many birds come and eat our very good fruits, vegetables, and wheat then. These scarecrows are designed in the form of a human being. Many times people who pass by think that real humans are standing there; then they are afraid to pass by them and take a detour. We, too, are often deluded and could think that a scarecrow is a real person who is out to get us. All examples show that things appear relatively but ultimately don't exist the way they appear to us. Then Nagarjuna wrote that phenomena are (4) like a mirage. This example illustrates that phenomena appear relatively, just like a mirage appears in the desert, but ultimately mirages are non-existent. Then he wrote that phenomena are (5) like an echo. Relatively, an echo is a sound. It is real and we hear it, but ultimately it has no true existence. I spoke about echoes earlier. Number six is that all phenomena are (6) like Gandharvas, which I also spoke about. For example, if there is an empty house, someone can move in, which is normal on the relative level of existence. But the house has no lasting nature. If we think it does, we will be just as deluded as the Gandharvas. The last example is that all phenomena of relative reality are (7) like a reflection on the surface of water. Reflections appear, but they are only reflections and nothing more. For example, when we see the moon reflected on the surface of still water, it's not the moon. So, although phenomena appear to be independent existents, everything that appears in our relative world is as a reflection.

If we examine appearances, we will discover that no phenomenon really exists the way it appears and is in truth empty of true existence. This is the ultimate truth. The seven examples help us understand the ultimate way phenomena really are, namely, that the true nature of all things is emptiness, *stong-pa-nyid*. Emptiness means that all things are impermanent, appear in dependence on many things, aren't independent, and have no inherent existence. When we have wisdom-awareness, we will have realized emptiness.

We also need to realize the indivisibility of appearances and emptiness, i.e., the indivisibility of clarity and emptiness, *zung-jug-bsäl-stong*. Perfect realization of wisdom-awareness is realization of the union of the two truths - the ultimate truth and the relative truth, *dön-dam-bden-pa* and *kun-rdzob-bden-pa*. We saw that phenomena are empty of inherent existence and appear to us clearly. When we have realized the indivisibility of clear appearances and emptiness, then we will have perfected the transcendent paramita of wisdom-awareness.

This is a good moment in the teachings for us to again sing the verse composed by Acharya Nagarjuna that we sang earlier:

"Like a dream, like an illusion, like a city of Gandharvas

– that’s how birth and that’s how living, that’s how dying are taught to be.”

Conclusion

Generally speaking, any practice we do entails the paramitas. For example, when we meditate for 20 minutes, then all six paramitas are included. We are practicing the second paramita of discipline or ethics when we meditate. Also, sitting in the seven-point posture of Vairocana is *great* ethical conduct, because we don’t do anything stupid then. When we feel a pain in our knees, we are practicing the third paramita of patience. When we meditate for about 20 minutes without taking a break and without letting ourselves be distracted, we are practicing the fourth paramita of diligence or joyful endeavour. And, of course, when we meditate, we are engaging in the fifth paramita of meditative concentration. When we conclude a meditation session, we dedicate the merit, which is sharing with others and is practicing the first paramita of generosity. When we clearly see disturbing emotions and thoughts in our mind and examine how they really arise, where they come from, where they go, and clearly see that they don’t really exist, then our mind is protected. Clearly recognizing thoughts and emotions with mindfulness and awareness is the quality of wisdom-awareness.

We also practice the six paramitas when we fill our offering bowls with water. We also practice the six paramitas when we offer a flower to the Three Jewels. So, we have to train a little bit in all six paramitas, with a pure and open heart, right? *Das wär’s* - ‘that’s it.’ We didn’t have time for another question and answer session, but I’m sure you understood everything.

Speaker: “Lama Sönam, we want to thank you very much for having given us these very precious teachings in this short period of time. You have given us so much to reflect upon when we are home again.”

Lama Sönam: *Danke*, ‘thank you.’

Speaker: “We also want to thank Hannelore for her fabulous German translation when Lama Sönam spoke Tibetan and when he spoke English. You were so generous, disciplined, diligent, concentrated, and patient with us the whole time.”

Hannelore: “Thank you.”

Lama Sönam: So, thank you very much. It was a really great time and a good group. It made me feel very happy and was a good experience. Thank you very much to all of you. Let us recite the dedication and pray that all sentient beings be happy, everyone be healthy, we see each other again and again, and for our meditation practice. The dedication prayers are a very virtuous way of sharing with all sentient beings.

Dedication

May all virtue that is created by accumulating merit and wisdom
be dedicated to attaining the two truth bodies that arise from merit and wisdom.

May Bodhichitta, great and precious, arise where it has not arisen.
Never weakening where it has arisen, may it grow ever more and more.

May the life of the Glorious Lama remain steadfast and firm.

May peace and happiness fully arise for beings as limitless in number as space is vast in extent.
Having accumulated merit and purified negativities,
may I and all living beings without exception swiftly establish the levels and grounds of
Buddhahood.

All you sentient beings I have a good or bad connection with,
as soon as you've left this confus'd dimension,
may you be born in the West, in Sukhavati,
and once you're born there, complete the bhumis and the paths.



Special thanks to Nicola Sischer for having made the recording available to us. Verses composed by Shantideva quoted in this article are from the book: Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva – A Translation of the 'Bodhicharyavatara,'* translated from the Tibetan by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boston & London, 2003. Photo of Lama Sönam while he was teaching in Münster in 2009 taken and kindly offered for this article by Josef Kerklaui. Photo of young nuns and a lay practitioner receiving meditation instructions during the preparations for the summer retreat at Karma Lekshey Ling Institute in 2009 and photo of a young scholar with the Tibetan bell at his side while taking exams at the Institute courtesy of Khenpo Karma Namgyal. Photo of beautiful wild rose taken and graciously offered by Lena Fong. In reliance on the fabulous simultaneous German translation by Hannelore Wenderoth, this seminar was translated into English, edited, and arranged by Gaby Hollmann, solely responsible and apologizing for any mistakes. Copyright Lama Sönam Rabgye, resident Lama of Kamalashila Institute in Germany, and Karma Lekshey Ling Institute in Kathmandu, 2009. All rights reserved. Distributed for personal use only.