

A Study of Pāramīs - Bhikkhu Bodhi

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Lecture 1: Introduction and the Perfection of Giving (Dāna-pāramī)

Bhikkhu Bodhi

Introduction

The Buddha said to the monks that they should develop wholesome states (kusalā-dhammā). The development of wholesome states leads to welfare and happiness. What are the wholesome states that should be developed? I put these in three categories:

1. wholesome states included in meritorious actions;
2. wholesome states that constitute the pāramīs or pāramitās; and
3. wholesome states that constitute the bodhipakkhiya-dhammā or aids or requisites of enlightenment (bodhisambhāra).

The governing principle behind the performance of deeds of merits is significant and is called the law of karmic retribution. This is the principle that the volitional action that we perform has the capacity to bring results that correspond to the ethical nature of the original action. According to this law, unwholesome action, immoral or evil action or unwholesome deeds bring the accumulation of unwholesome kamma, a kind of energy which has the capacity or potential to ripen in the form of suffering and miseries in the future. In other words, unwholesome action generate undesirable fruits or consequences by way of causing lower rebirth, sickness, poverty, pain, and various types of suffering either later in this life or in future lives.

On the other hand wholesome kamma or virtuous actions, bodily, verbal and mental, generate wholesome karmic potential with the capacity to bring desirable fruits in the future, to bring fortunate rebirth into states of prosperity that ensure success in one's undertakings, even bring physical beauty, intelligence and success in whatever one undertakes, good health, wealth, everything that people desire in a mundane way.

What lies behind the working of the law of kamma is the principle of retribution, good deed begets good result, bad deed begets bad results. Good kamma that brings good result is called meritorious action. The most basic types of merits are generosity, moral discipline or virtue, and bhāvanā (meditative development). From these three root types of merits, there are different secondary types of merits.

But in order for the spiritual life to unfold in a meaningful way, it seems that it's not sufficient just to have this principle of retribution by means of which good action brings good result and bad action brings bad results. It is also necessary to have what I would call a law of conservation in the spiritual domain. It is a law by means of which good and bad actions also accumulate certain energies in the mind, energies which are preserved as the stream of consciousness flows on from one life to the next. We need something to account for what I would call the cumulative energy which is inherent in unwholesome and wholesome actions or qualities so that when we habitually perform these actions or habitually generate these states of mind, they build up a strength and gather a momentum which carries across through the entire duration of this present life and continues on into future lives.

I think within Buddhism, the idea of certain qualities called *pāramīs* or *pāramitās* developed partly to meet this requirement. What I found to be of interest and even curiosity to myself that in my study of the Pāli Nikāyas I found that they do not really give anything to account for this cumulative capacity of good and bad actions to continue on from life to life, this capacity for good and bad deeds to gather momentum and to carry or continue through as persistent features of our character. It seems that in the Nikāyas and presumably in the Āgamas, almost all the focus or attention is given to the retributive aspect of kamma, how actions bring results that correspond to the ethical nature of those actions. We need something to explain how the good and bad moral qualities that we develop build up an inner force from life to life, gain momentum across the succession of life times and then become integral aspect of our kamma. We could call them moulding forces from one life to the next. I believe that the doctrine of the *pāramīs* was introduced at least in part to fulfil this role.

The idea of *pāramīs* in the sense that it is used in the latter Buddhist traditions doesn't occur in this sense in the old Nikāyas or presumably in the Āgamas. They are introduced first in latter texts of the Sutta Piṭaka, in the work called the *Buddhavaṃsa* (accounts of the lineage of the past 24 Buddhas, how future Shakyamuni Buddha as bodhisattva made his original aspiration for enlightenment under Dīpaṅkara and received prediction to Buddhahood from Dīpaṅkara Buddha and practiced under successive Buddhas until he became the fully enlightened one) of the Pāli Canon. In the northern Buddhist tradition, the *pāramitās* might have been introduced in the Sarvastivada texts, and were later incorporated wholesale into the Mahāyāna doctrine of the Bodhisattva Path. But the doctrine of the *pāramitās* seems to have been part of the pre- Mahāyāna soil out of which Mahāyāna Buddhism arose. So the ideas of *pāramīs* or *pāramitās* are common to the two traditions, Theravāda and Mahāyāna; they might be considered as forming a kind of bridge which connects early Buddhism in its latter phases to early Mahāyāna Buddhism.

We have two words which basically convey the same idea. In the Pāli tradition, the word commonly used is *pāramī*, sometimes *pāramitā* is also used. In the northern tradition, the more common form is *pāramitā*. Both words are abstract nouns coming from the adjective 'parama' which means supreme or excellent. A *pāramī* is a supreme quality or excellent quality or perfection. *Pāramitā*, the word preferred by the Mahāyāna texts and also used by Pāli writers, is sometimes explained as "pāram (far shore) + ita (gone)", "gone to the far shore", which is a playful explanation. The real literal derivation is the adjective, 'parama' which means supreme.

Originally in Buddhist texts, the idea of *pāramīs* was introduced to explain the practices which a bodhisattva undertakes in striving for the attainment of supreme Buddhahood. This is how the idea

was first introduced in the Buddhavaṃsa. The future Buddha Shakyamuni lived as the ascetic Sumedha incalculable aeons ago in the far distant past. He had come from a very wealthy family. Both his parents had died when he was a young man and left him a vast estate. But then he reflected, 'all wealth is transitory; that life ends in death; and that there is nothing belonging to us in this world that we can take with us when we die.' He made the decision to leave the household life, to give up his mansion, his stores and hordes of gold and silver and precious gems. He adopted the life of an ascetic, living in a cave or a hut (kuti) in the mountain. He practiced meditation and very quickly he achieved all of the deep stages of concentration (samadhi), attained various spiritual powers. One day when he was going down to the village on alms round, he heard the news that the Buddha Dīpaṅkara had arisen in the world, and that the Buddha Dīpaṅkara was going to be visiting the city nearby the mountain where he was living. The ascetic Sumedha was overjoyed by the news that a Buddha had arisen in the world. He went to visit the city where the Buddha was expected to arrive. He saw the people were working, preparing the road for the Buddha to enter the city. At that time, the road was partly muddy. They were cleaning up the mud and strewing the road with sand so that the Buddha would not get his feet dirty as he entered the city. Just as the ascetic Sumedha was working on his part of the road, the Buddha Dīpaṅkara arrived with a large assembly of monks. When the ascetic Sumedha saw the Buddha Dīpaṅkara approaching, he was so overawed by the presence of the Buddha Dīpaṅkara that he bowed down in front of him right in the mud. He spread his body on the ground and offered his body as a plank for the Buddha and the monks to walk across. When the Buddha came in front of Sumedha, there arose in Sumedha's mind the wish, the aspiration, 'let me not listen to the teachings of the Buddha now, the teachings intended to lead to deliverance, Nibbāna, but let me make the aspiration to become a Buddha in future aeons.' When the Buddha came just in front of Sumedha and saw this ascetic lying down, covering the mud, forming a plank for him to walk over, he looked deep into the mind of the ascetic and saw that this ascetic had just made in his mind an aspiration to attain Buddhahood in the future. Then he asked himself, 'will the aspiration succeed?' When the question came into his mind, he could see at once that this ascetic will, after so many thousands and thousands of aeons, that he would become a Buddha named Gotama or Shakyamuni living in such and such a part of India with such and such disciples. Then he gave the ascetic Sumedha the prediction or prophecy of his future attainment of Buddhahood. Instead of walking over him, the Buddha walked around him and also told the other monks to walk around him. After he had received the prediction, the ascetic Sumedha then went off into solitude, and reflected on the qualities that had to be perfected to fulfil his goal. As he reflected in this way, the ten pāramīs came to his mind, one after another. This is how the idea of pāramīs originally entered into the southern tradition, the Theravāda tradition.

As time went on, the idea of pāramīs or pāramitās was given an extended interpretation so that they become not exclusively the qualities that a bodhisattva aiming at supreme Buddhahood has to fulfil, but they become the qualities that any aspirant for enlightenment in any mode, whether as a disciple (an individual as a direct disciple of the Buddha) or Paccekabuddha (privately enlightened one) or a Sammāsambuddha (perfectly enlightened one), has to fulfil. Generally we speak about people as being engaged in the development of the pāramīs that correspond to their spiritual aspiration.

The Pāli commentaries grade the extent to which the pāramīs have to be developed according to the aspiration of the disciples or the followers. In order to achieve the supreme Buddhahood, one has to perfect the pāramīs for a maximum of 16 asaṅkheyyas (incalculable periods) + 100,000 great aeons; for bodhisattvas of sharper faculties (wisdom, faith, energy), the duration is 8 asaṅkheyyas + 100,000 great aeons; and for those of sharpest faculties, it is 4 incalculable periods and 100,000 aeons. One great aeon is the time for the development of a world system from a nucleus to its maximum expansion and to contraction to maximum compression (duration from one big bang to

one big crunch of a world system). Those who aim to become a Paccekabuddha have to practice for 2 incalculable periods + 100,000 great aeons; those who aim to become a great disciple have to practice for one incalculable periods + 100,000 great aeons; and so on downwards in diminishing length of time.

In the two Buddhist traditions, there are ten qualities called pāramīs or sometimes pāramitās in the southern tradition; in the northern tradition, absorbed into Mahāyāna, there are originally six pāramitās. The six pāramitās in the northern tradition later get elaborated into ten pāramitās which are somewhat different from the set of ten in the southern tradition. But the two sets overlap to a great extent, they are in no way mutually exclusive. Qualities designated by one expression in one tradition are designated by a different expression in the other tradition.

I will explain now the ten pāramīs in a general way according to the way they are explained in the Theravāda commentary, explained with reference to the practice of a bodhisattva aiming at supreme Buddhahood. The commentary defines pāramīs as:

I. What are pāramīs?

The pāramīs are the noble qualities beginning with giving, etc., accompanied by compassion and skilful means, untainted by craving, conceit, and wrong views.

The qualities such as giving (dāna), moral conduct (sīla) etc., are somewhat different from the practice of meritorious deeds. Even though the names of the qualities are the same, the mode in which they are practiced differs. In the case of meritorious deeds, it doesn't really matter very much what the motivation behind the action is. If the motive is a benevolent or an altruistic one, it will be so much the better. But if one practices them just to gain merits so that one wants to ensure a happy rebirth in the future, the quality of the merit still remains intact. The deed is still a meritorious deed though somewhat blemished by a self-seeking or egocentric motivation.

In the case of the pāramīs, they only become spiritual perfections when they are accompanied by compassion and by skilful means. To be accompanied by compassion means that they are rooted in compassion which is the great aspiration of the bodhisattva. The great bodhisattva makes the aspiration for Buddhahood out of compassion for the world in order to find the way to deliverance, to liberation from suffering for all the world. What motivates him in making that aspiration is great compassion, mahākaruṇā. This great compassion underlies his practice of the pāramīs from beginning to end and it accompanies the performance of the pāramīs. The practice of the pāramīs is said to be accompanied by skilful means, the wisdom that transforms these practices into support for supreme enlightenment. Skilful means also signifies the ability to find opportunities for the practice of the pāramīs in the way that brings the greatest benefits to other beings. For example, if somebody comes to a bodhisattva to ask for a gun to rob a bank, the bodhisattva who is practicing giving will not give him a gun.

In the handout is the classical formulation of the aspiration by which bodhisattvas practice each of the pāramīs. I will go through them individually and explain the practice of the pāramīs based on these formulas.

1. The Perfection of Giving (Dāna-pāramī)

The Perfection of Giving (Dāna-pāramī): "May I always be generous and open-handed, giving to others the threefold gift in accordance with their needs - joyfully, with a heart

free from the taint of selfishness, with a heart overflowing with kindness and compassion.”

The formula shows first of all the attitude to be taken when one engages in the practice of giving. The attitude has to be one of a generous heart, one of free-flowing generosity without any reservation, a generosity in which the mind is not holding back on its possession. It should be rooted in the idea that whatever one has that can be utilized by others should be (in principle at least) used for the purpose of benefitting others. Ideally one is aiming to reach a perspective where one doesn't make claims on any of one's possessions; one just sees whatever one possesses as means for helping and benefitting others. What one gives to others are called the threefold gifts:

1. material possessions (external things such as. wealth, food, shelter, clothing, medicines instruments, devices such as computers when they are needed; material things related to one's own body like body organs.) that are beneficial and will not be used for harming others. In giving material things, one has to apply a certain degree of prudence in practicing giving. Though ideally one has the attitude of giving everything for the benefit of others, in practical terms, one still has to function within the world and one has to recognise there are limits to the amounts that one could practice giving right here and now. The practice of giving is a skill that one has to develop and cultivate over time. One should not give in such a way as to create extremely burdensome hardship for oneself. Apart from that, one should give to the utmost of one's capacity. The important thing is not so much the amount that one gives, but the attitude of giving – the attitude of wishing to be free from objects of attachment, wishing to help and benefit others.

In giving material things related to one's own body, at this point, we are not able to make momentous sacrifice (like the Buddha who in his many previous lives as a Bodhisattva sacrificed his life for the good of others as told in Jātaka stories and other stories of Buddha's past lives). But we can give from our body in ways that might be accessible to us. For example, if one is strong and healthy, one can donate blood to a blood bank without expecting anything in return; some donate kidneys, cornea (at their death). Offering parts of one's body when one is alive or at death can be a great source of merits and way of fulfilling the perfection of giving or dāna pāramī.

2. The gift of Fearlessness:

- giving a sense of safety and security to other beings, particularly when one meets with people who are afraid and anxious, console them, dispel their fear, give them courage and shelter them, inspire their self-confidence;
- provide sanctuary and protect those who are in physical danger and whose lives are threatened.
 - For example, during a tumultuous period in Sri Lanka's recent history, Sri Lankan monks gave protection or shelter to the Tamil people in the Buddhist temples when they were hounded by the mobs of Sinhalese gangsters and thugs.
 - There are animal sanctuaries to protect the lives of animals. For example, Sri Lankan Buddhists form societies to collect funds to buy the cattle destined for slaughterhouse and give them to the farmers or dairy farms. There are also Korean monks and nuns who buy up birds from markets and release them. There are also regular promotions by various temples (PUTOSI) of releasing captured animals to the wild.

The gift of fearlessness could be either psychological (security) or physical safety.

3. Gift of Dhamma or Buddha's teaching – This is considered the foremost of all gifts because all other gifts alleviate pains and sufferings temporarily and bring temporary type of benefits. It is the Dhamma which has the capacity to eradicate all sufferings permanently and bring the highest happiness, bliss and peace.

One gives the threefold gifts in accordance with their needs, appropriate to each one as needed. One doesn't give gifts arbitrarily just for the purpose of practicing generosity. One should practice generosity skilfully one has to understand what different types of beings actually need and give the types of gift appropriate to each one. One does not just give the gift casually or with a clinging to an object. One gives joyfully, one should arouse a mind of joy before (joy for the opportunity to practice giving), during (joy of giving away an object of attachment) and after the act of giving (joy of reviewing how good that one has practiced this act of generosity). Giving in this way by arousing joy, one gives with a heart free from the taint of selfishness. To practice generosity with joy helps wipe off the taint of selfishness from the heart. From the beginning to the end of the act of giving, one gives with a heart overflowing with kindness and compassion. In the beginning, one might not be able to arouse that kindness and compassion when giving, if one practices giving and arouses the joy of giving, little by little that joy will break down the barriers of discrimination between self and others, then one will be able to experience a warm flow of *mitt* and *karuṇā* (loving-kindness and compassion) in the very act of giving.

Lecture 2: The Perfection of Giving (*dāna-pāramī*) continued & The Perfection of Virtue (*sīla-pāramī*)

We have been discussing now the ten *pāramīs*, the ten spiritual perfections. These are qualities that as Buddhist practitioners we have to develop within ourselves and build up through repeated acts again and again through the course of this life and in the course of many lives in the future. These are the qualities which impart a kind of lasting potency to the mind, a purifying and uplifting power which makes the mind a suitable vehicle for the attainment of ultimate enlightenment. It is these ten qualities that come to ultimate fulfilment and expression in the personality, the character of a Buddha. To emulate the Buddha's example, we have to work by building up these qualities within ourselves. These qualities are carried over in our mental continuum from one life to the next. So a person's personality or character reflects the degree to which he or she has developed these qualities in the course of his or her earlier lives.

I have been discussing the general characteristics of the *dāna pāramīs* and the perfection of giving, *dāna pāramī*. Now I'll speak about the benefit that comes from the practice of perfection of *dāna*. The first and most obvious immediate benefit is that one helps others; helps eliminate the sufferings of others; and helps to bring joy and happiness to others. There is also some beneficial impact on oneself. It helps lead to a weakening and eventually elimination of a sense of I and mine, a sense of self. The Buddha teaches that the root or underlying cause of our bondage to *saṃsāra* is the clinging or grasping the idea of self. We have to begin dismantling this very complex and unwieldy structure of the self that we built up in a gradual way, gradually weakening its grip on the mind by engaging in selfless acts, acts of self-sacrifice, of self-relinquishment. These start off in small ways and gradually develop more and more strength. They build up momentum so that in time to come, we eventually think little about relinquishing even parts of our own body to help others; even if we are put into a corner, even ready to sacrifice our own life. Those who have reached the pinnacle in the practice of giving are ready to relinquish life after life. In the beginning we start with the best of our capacity, practicing giving and helping others, little by little the practice of giving will attenuate the grasping the sense of I or self until this sense or idea of self is utterly relinquished, then we just think we live entirely for the benefit of the world with no sense of self at all, no holding to anything as being mine, no reluctance nor hesitation to give when necessary. Practicing giving in this way even on a small scale gives a new sense of purpose to our life. People usually think that they can gain meaning in their life by acquiring more and more possessions. They build up their sense of identity by having a big house that impresses others, luxurious cars driven by chauffeurs, having lots of stocks and bonds, etc giving them a sense of self-importance. The state of mind created by this attitude is really one of intense suffering, agitation and worries (of competition/comparison from/with others). When one dedicates one's life to the practice of giving and benefitting others, it gives a real sense of inner happiness. One is not basing one's happiness on externals but on one's ability to give and help others. It opens one to the needs of others and provide for the needs of others.

It's said that the practice of perfection of giving reaches perfection when it is free from three very subtle points of grasping, three very subtle conceptual attachments:

1. Attachment to the idea that 'I am giving' – the idea of 'I' as the subject of the act giving;
2. Attachment to the idea of this person as the 'recipient' of the gift;
3. Attachment to the idea the gift or value of the gift being given.

These are three apprehensions or false deluded perceptions since they are structured on the subject-object dichotomy that involves discrimination between self and other, and in addition there is the gift being given. According to the Buddha's teaching, when one has the true wisdom, one sees that there is no real personal self (subject) that gives, there is no substantial object to be given, and there is no real object of the self – the object of the gift. Practicing giving in this mode has to be conjoined with prajñā or wisdom. At the beginning of the practice of dāna pāramī, we start off with wrong perception. As we practice generosity, we attenuate the sense of 'I' and 'mine', we lay a foundation for the purification of the mind. When the mind is purified, true wisdom arises, then we see into the ultimate absence of any true self, any substantial object. And when we gain that insight, then we can practice giving in the perfect dimension, giving without any adherence to the subject-object dichotomy.

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Lecture 2: The Perfection of Giving (dāna-pāramī) continued & The Perfection of Virtue (sīla-pāramī)

Bhikkhu Bodhi

We have been discussing now the ten pāramīs, the ten spiritual perfections. These are qualities that as Buddhist practitioners we have to develop within ourselves and build up through repeated acts again and again through the course of this life and in the course of many lives in the future. These are the qualities which impart a kind of lasting potency to the mind, a purifying and uplifting power which makes the mind a suitable vehicle for the attainment of the ultimate enlightenment. It is these ten qualities that come to ultimate fulfilment and expression in the personality, the character of a Buddha. To emulate the Buddha's example, we have to work by building up these qualities within ourselves. These qualities are carried over in our mental continuum from one life to the next. So a person's personality or character reflects the degree to which he or she has developed these qualities in the course of his or her earlier lives.

I have been discussing first about the general characteristics of the dāna pāramīs and the perfection of giving, dāna pāramī. Now I'll speak about the benefit that comes from the practice of perfection of dāna. The first and most obvious immediate benefit is that one helps others; helps eliminate the sufferings of others; and helps to bring joy and happiness to others. There is also some beneficial impact on oneself. It helps lead to a weakening and eventually elimination of a sense of 'I' and 'mine', a sense of self. The Buddha teaches that the root or underlying cause of our bondage to saṃsāra is the clinging or grasping the idea of self. We have to begin dismantling this very complex and unwieldy structure of the self that we built up in a gradual way, gradually weakening its grip on the mind by engaging in selfless acts, acts of self-sacrifice, of self-relinquishment. These start off in small ways and gradually develop more and more strength. They build up momentum so that in time to come, we eventually think little about relinquishing even parts of our own body to help others; even if we are put into a corner, even ready to sacrifice our own life. Those who have reached the pinnacle in the practice of giving are ready to relinquish life after life. In the beginning we start with the best of our capacity, practicing giving and helping others. Little by little the practice of giving will attenuate the grasping the sense of 'I' and 'self' until this sense or idea of self is utterly relinquished, then we just think we live entirely for the benefit of the world with no sense of self at all, no holding to anything as being mine, no reluctance nor hesitation to give when necessary. Practicing giving in this way even on a small scale with simple things gives a new sense of purpose to our life. People usually think that they can gain meaning in their life by acquiring more and more possessions. They build up their sense of identity by having a big house that impresses others, luxurious cars driven by chauffeurs (Mercedes Benz; Rolls Royce), having lots of stocks and bonds, etc giving them a sense of self-importance. The state of mind created by this attitude is really one of intense suffering, agitation and worries (of competition/comparison from/with others). When one dedicates one's life to the practice of giving and benefitting others, it gives a real sense of inner happiness. One is not basing one's happiness on externals but on one's ability to give and help others. It opens one to the needs of others.

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4. Attachment to the idea that 'I am giving' – the idea of the 'I' as the subject of the act giving;
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6. Attachment to the idea the gift or the value of the gift being given.

These are three apprehensions or false deluded perceptions since these perceptions are structured on the subject-object dichotomy that involves discrimination between self and other, and in addition there is the gift being given. According to the Buddha's teaching, when one has the true wisdom, one sees that there is no real personal self (subject) that gives, there is no substantial object to be given, and there is no real object of the self – the object of the gift. Practicing giving in this mode has to be conjoined with *prajñā* or wisdom. At the beginning of the practice of *dāna pāramī*, we start off with wrong perception. As we practice generosity, we attenuate the sense of 'I' and 'mine', and then we lay a foundation for the purification of the mind. When the mind is purified, true wisdom arises, then we see into the ultimate absence of any true self, any substantial object. And when we gain that insight, then we can practice giving in the perfect dimension, giving without any adherence to the subject-object dichotomy.

Sīla Pāramī

The next spiritual perfection is *sīla pāramī*, the perfection of virtue or moral discipline. All the *pāramīs* are expressed in the form of aspiration.

2. The Perfection of Virtue (*sīla-pāramī*): "May my actions of body, speech and mind always accord with the precepts I have undertaken: pure and clean, free from breach or blemish. May my conduct always be noble, lofty, and upright, a model for all the world."

This formula very subtly encapsulates three aspects to the practice of moral discipline. It's important to note all of them. Before we go into the actual explanation, I should explain the preliminaries to the undertaking of *sīla*, moral discipline.

The preliminary to the undertaking of *sīla*:

1. Form the intention to lead an ethical life: First one has to form the intention (resolution or determination) to lead an ethical life, a life of upright conduct. It is this intention that can be a truly revolutionary experience for a person who has been leading an immoral life (gambling; fishing; drinking; womanising). Consider a person who has been leading a life which he does not think twice about harming other beings, killing, gambling, drinking, fishing, and womanising. Suddenly something happens to that person and his mind becomes transformed and decides to lead an ethically life. This intention can be a powerful transformative experience which impels the mind in a new direction.
2. Undertaking precepts: It is not yet enough just to have the intention to lead an ethical life, one has to purify one's virtues and undertake the observance of the precepts. This is usually done in Buddhist tradition in a formal ceremony where one approaches a monk or spiritual teacher and in the symbolic presence of Buddha represented by a statue or image, he receives the precepts in the fixed formula.
3. Observing the precepts without transgression: The third aspect of purifying the virtue is observing the precepts without transgression. You make the determination to keep these precepts. To keep the precepts firmly impressed in the mind, it is a good practice to recite them every day at the beginning of the day. In this way you bring them freshly into the mind every day so that when you encounter some situation that tempts you to break the precept, then you remember that today this morning 'I made the resolution to keep the precept. What is more important – momentary enjoyment from that I might get from breaking the precept or the clear conscience I'll enjoy by fulfilling the precept?' One makes the sincere and determined effort to keep the precept without transgression.
4. Reparation for amend: The fourth aspect of purifying one's conduct is making reparation for amend if for some reason one does break the precept. There are different ways to make amend. If the transgression is serious and it is weighing heavy on the mind, one could go to a spiritual teacher or friend and make an open confession of it. If it is a minor transgression and one feels qualms of conscience about, then one bows down in front of Buddha image in one's shrine room and makes a confession imagining that one is in the presence of the Buddha himself. After making the confession, one makes a fresh resolution not to break the precept in the future.

That's just the preliminary four ways of purifying the virtue.

The three aspects of observing the precepts or purifying virtues are:

1. Virtue as abstinence or avoidance;
2. Virtue as performance;
3. Virtue as a model for the world.

1. Virtue as abstinence

Virtue as abstinence is achieved by undertaking precepts or observing certain rules of behaviour. This is a point sometimes difficult for some people with modern ways of thinking to accept. Some think that it is not important to have rules and one should just behave naturally according to one's own impulses, and then one can be sure that whatever one does will be acceptable appropriate behaviour. According to the Buddha, from the outset of one's training almost all the way through to the end, one needs certain very concrete and specific guidelines to help steer our actions into the right channels. If one thinks that one can behave rightly just by following one's natural impulses, that would lead one to many difficulties and troubles for oneself and others. One has to learn precepts, take precepts and regulate our conduct on the basis of these precepts. Not that the precepts are absolutely inflexible, rigid commandments. The precepts are guides to the ways of action which are most likely to be truly beneficial to ourselves and to others. The ways of action in body, speech and thought help us subdue the afflictions or the defilements of our mind, to become masters of our own mind. Eventually by fulfilling these precepts, we will be able to advance to the higher stages of the Buddha's path.

The Buddha has laid down ethical training in terms of certain codes or precepts.

Five Precepts

The most basic are the five precepts. I explained the five precepts in the talk on the basis of merits. I should point out that for those who want to enter upon the higher practice of *sīla* or moral discipline, rather than merely following the five precepts, they should endeavour to follow the ten courses of wholesome action or *kamma*. Some of these are identical with the precepts. The ten courses are divided into three groups in relation to the three channels of action, body, speech and mind.

In regard to body, there are three principles:

1. To abstain from killing;
2. To abstain from stealing;
3. To abstain from sexual misconduct;

In regard to speech, there are four courses of action:

4. To abstain from lying (one of the precepts);
5. To avoid divisive speech (speaking one thing to some people here and speaking another to the people there to create disagreement and dissension between these people and the other people); to speak in concord to promote harmony;
6. To avoid harsh speech (speaking angrily or bitterly to others; speaking to hurt people; etc), instead speak gently; and
7. Avoid idle chatter and gossip.

In regards to the mind, there are three courses (not expressed as precepts) or trainings:

8. To avoid covetous thoughts (thoughts or scheming aimed at gaining possessions of others);
9. Avoid thoughts of illwill (wish that others meet with miseries and harms or sufferings);
10. To hold right view (like the right view on the law of *kamma* and its results, the understanding that actions through body speech and mind bring results that correspond to the ethical quality of these actions).

This is virtue of abstinence, expressed in the line of the formula for the practice of *sīla pāramī* – 'May my actions of body, speech and mind always accord with the precepts I have undertaken: pure and clean, free from breach or blemish. ...'

When one undertakes the precepts, particularly the five precepts, one wants to hold them consistently without any kind of compromises or subtle breaches or breaking of the precepts, without engaging in any

actions which even border on breaches of the precepts (e.g. torment or tease animals in zoo – a kind of breach or blemish in the observance of precept; flirting with women etc is also a blemish on the precept).

2. Second Aspect: Virtue as Performance

The positive aspect of *sīla* is expressed in the line – ‘... May my conduct always be noble, lofty, and upright, a model for all the world.’

One wants not only to abstain from unwholesome type of behaviour, one also wants to follow ways of behaviour that are especially worthy, elevated and ways of conduct that make one’s personality or character lofty and noble. Some characteristics of lofty behaviour:

1. Polite and considerate to others – Show respect and deference to others; Should not be presumptuous (thinking, ‘I am the best’); Should not be competitive; Should not be grating or irritating to others; One should show actions which are polite and actions which lead to mutual respect and harmony;
2. Gentle behaviour – treating others with kindness and consideration, not harming or injuring others; soft and friendly; greeting with smiles; having warmth in one heart when one relates to others; if someone has done something wrong, correct him/her in a gentle and firm way if one has to.
3. Honest behaviour – being trustworthy in one’s deeds and in one’s words; one doesn’t try to exploit others even when one can get away with it; one doesn’t try to deceive others; one gives pride of place to the sense of honour in one’s own innate dignity so that one will not stoop to do anything dishonest even if one can gain an advantage from it because one recognises that the purity of one’s own character is far more valuable than worldly or material gain that one could achieve by behaving in unscrupulous ways.
4. Helpful behaviour – rooted in loving-kindness) (*mettā* or *maitri*) and compassion (*karuṇā*); one takes an active approach in seeking ways to help and benefit others. For examples, one is ready to help those in needs; to give assistance to old people (run errands or shop for them; one takes care of sick people; one tries to provide poor people with their material needs; help the uneducated people with their education. One always tries in any way to be helpful to others.
5. Straight behaviour – one acts the same both in private and in public; one maintains a sense of integrity and avoids hypocrisy in one’s behaviour (by thinking that crowds are observing one even when one is alone); one acts in accordance with one’s ideals, one frames one’s ideals on the basis of one’s actual behaviour.
6. Being ready to admit one’s shortcomings, to reveal one’s faults, and to conceal one’s virtues and strong points (not making a display of one’s good qualities). The ignoble person speaks little about his own faults and shortcomings. Truly noble persons say little or nothing of others’ shortcomings except to correct some faults, and they do not conceal their own faults while maintaining some measure of integrity.

The above are aspects of virtues as positive performance.

3. Third Aspect of Virtue: Serving as a Model for All the World

One has to consider how through one’s behaviour, one can be an example for the whole world to follow, the highest ideal in Buddhism. One’s behaviour is not limited to one’s domain alone. One considers that others look upon one to determine how to act on the basis of one’s behaviour. One considers how one’s behaviour can be a true way of uplifting others and guiding others in the direction of nobility of action. One does not want to behave in a way that will be a cause for the degradation and deterioration of others.

Though the ultimate ideal is to be a model for all the world, don’t try to start off in that way. Think first in a small scale way. As a parent, think how one should behave to serve as a model for one’s children, how the children can be inspired by a lofty example of what it means to be a human being. As wife or husband, how could one be a model for the spouse to behave. In a community, how one could behave in such a way to improve the character and action of one’s neighbours when they see one’s behaviour. As a citizen, how one could behave to uplift the ethical standard of behaviour of one’s country. Beyond the country, we have to consider about the world. We have to be a model of compassion, non-violence, truthfulness to help change the direction of the world for the better. We try to change the world beginning with oneself, by correcting our speech, action, and thought. In this way, we contribute to the welfare of the world.

A Study of Pāramīs - Bhikkhu Bodhi

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Lecture 3. The Perfection of Renunciation (nekkhamma-pāramī)

Bhikkhu Bodhi

Over the past few weeks, I have been explaining the practice of the ten spiritual perfections. So far I have explained the perfection of giving and the perfection of virtue. Now we come to the third perfection, Nekkhamma pāramī, the perfection of renunciation, the formula is:

3. The Perfection of Renunciation (nekkhamma-pāramī): “May I always have the discernment and strength of will to renounce the worldly life and go forth into homelessness in order to lead the pure spiritual life. May I be able to relinquish all points of inner attachment in order to enter the exalted concentration absorption and liberation of the mind.”

This pāramī or aspiration establishes the importance of renunciation as a factor in the Buddhist training. I think it very necessary to place special emphasis upon this aspect of the Buddha’s path in order to ensure that we retain and keep in view this ‘transcendental dimension’ of the Buddha’s teaching. Some people who interpret it in a new culture tend to water down this rather bitter edge of the teaching to make it seem that Buddhism is a way simply to live a comfortable ethical life within the world, sometimes by doing good in order to benefit others, by trying to be simply mindful when engaged in day-to-day activities, Buddhism becomes transformed or translated into an ‘art of living’ rather than a path to liberation. I don’t want to underestimate the importance of having a proper art of living. In order to function within this world, we have to live according to high ethical standard. We have to fulfil our responsibilities to others; and also to experience some calm, equanimity and balance of mind, we need mindfulness, awareness and contemplation. But the Buddha’s teaching isn’t really aiming at keeping us within the range of the world; it aims in the direction of transcendent or lokuttara or supramundane dimension of reality, i.e. the teaching is leading in the direction of liberation from birth and death, to Nibbāna. I think this is equally true whether it’s Theravāda and Mahāyāna and other forms of Buddhism.

A popular way of interpreting Buddhist teachings is that: Theravāda aims at liberation from the world; Mahāyāna aims at a kind of reaffirmation of saṃsāric existence. There are some differences in interpretation between the two schools. What underlies both, the true dimension of both the Theravāda and Mahāyāna, is a recognition of the unsatisfactoriness of our ordinary conditioned existence within the realm of birth and death, and aims for ultimate liberation from birth and death. The difference, very concisely, is that in the older form of teachings preserved in Theravāda, one aims at complete liberation from saṃsāra and complete realisation of Nibbāna, whereas somebody who is following the bodhisattva path has to keep one foot within the realm of

birth and death in order to work to benefit sentient beings and the other foot ideally should be planted in the unconditioned element, Nibbāna.

We do not find in the six pāramitās of the Mahāyāna a special pāramitā called renunciation. This doesn't mean that the real Mahāyāna neglects the importance of renunciation. If we look at the works especially of Atisha (important in bringing Buddhism to Tibet) who created a synthesis of the path in which he described three main stages of training:

1. Training in Renunciation;
2. Training in Bodhicitta, the aspiration for Buddhahood; and
3. Training in the wisdom that realises emptiness.

This formulation of the path has become quite instrumental in the development of Tibetan Buddhism. In the works of Tsongkhapa, the first stage strongly emphasised is renunciation. This is the foundation for all of the higher practices of the path. The stress on renunciation is extremely important in all schools of Buddhism.

Ideally when the mind is strongly motivated by this urge for renunciation, it will lead to the going forth into homelessness. This was why before his enlightenment, as a prince living in the palace, when his mind was shaken by the discovery of the dangers of conditioned existence, old age, sickness and death, then he encountered an ascetic who inspired him with the desire to leave the worldly life to go forth as a homeless ascetic seeking the truth. After the Buddha made the great renunciation, he lived as an ascetic, struggling and striving for six years before he attained enlightenment. After his enlightenment he established a monastic order, an order of monks and nuns, to provide a field of opportunity for those who wanted to practice his teachings in full earnestness. This monastic order has continued for 2500 years now. Even though most of the followers of Buddhism would not be able to make this step of going forth into the homeless life, those who are really serious in the cultivating the Buddha's Path have to develop gradually according to one's own station in life a mind that leans and inclines in the direction in the direction of renunciation. The way to push the mind in the direction of renunciation is by reflecting on the dangers or unsatisfactoriness in sensual pleasures first and then in worldly existence in general.

In the formula given,

'The Perfection of Renunciation (nekkhamma-pāramī): "May I always have the discernment ... to renounce the worldly life"

'Discernment' here means the wisdom, the insight, or the natural perceptivity to see the danger or the unsatisfactoriness in a life of sensual enjoyment, more broadly the dangers or the unsatisfactoriness in the round of birth and death of saṃsāric existence. One impresses a sense of the unsatisfactoriness in sensual pleasure upon the mind by systematically contemplating the different dangers or miseries tied up with sensual pleasures. There are various formulas that come down in the text. If we reflect upon how sensual desire works, we see that the mind always becomes filled with an image of ultimate gratification to obtaining some sense object. We strive and struggle to obtain that sense object, in the end we find that it doesn't bring us the real happiness that we wanted. We become driven further into this cycle of wanting, desiring, struggling to obtain the object of desire, obtaining it, enjoying it for a while, and then finding that we are not really satisfied with it. This process repeats itself through the sense desires through each of the physical senses. We go seeking wonderful beautiful forms to the eyes; beautiful uplifting sound, celestial music to the ears; delightful scents; wonderful delicious tastes; and a variety of tactile sensations. We go exploring, investigating trying to find some satisfaction to the senses. Sometimes we obtain the object that we want, then we are delighted and we enjoy it. Very often the object that we want eventually gets lost or destroyed or goes its own way, we are left feeling miserable and unhappy. Other times when we fail to get the object that we want, then we feel frustrated, miserable, angry, and we have to pursue it even more vigorously. If we get it, we get this momentary satisfaction. Even when we can hold on to the object we want, we find that our interest in the object gradually fades away with time. Sense pleasures obsess the mind and result in disappointment in the end. The investment of energy in getting the object gets us tired and exhausted. This is the unsatisfying nature of sensual pleasures and is shown in several similes in Buddhist texts. Sense pleasures are like baited hook or a chain of bones. Dogs gnaw on the bones and find no meat and they get involved in dog fights with other dogs over the bones, and no one gets any satisfaction. People are attracted to sense pleasures (like fish attracted to a baited hook) thinking that they can find their happiness in sense pleasures (bait). Sometimes

the mind becomes so beguiled by this attraction to sense pleasures that even the laws of morality, the principles of ethics no longer have any binding force on them. People are ready to steal, to cheat, lie, even to kill in order to enjoy sense pleasures (murders over some sense desires; bank robbery - robbing banks to acquire possession such as houses, wealth, etc to acquire sense pleasures). When people break the principles of morality, they do not have any real quietude in their mind, the mind is always agitated. To violate the principles of morality because of sense pleasures won't bring any real satisfaction. Because sense pleasure exercise such a deceiving hold over the mind that people are easily sucked in to discard any kind of principles or restraint in order to indulge in the desires. In the text, sense pleasures are compared to salty water. A person wants to quench his thirst. He comes across a pool of salt water. He thinks drinking this water would quench his thirst. A few minutes after drinking it, he is consumed by an even stronger thirst than before. This is the way sense pleasures obsess the mind and makes one crave enjoyment even more intensely. Another reflection on sense pleasures is to consider that they have a degrading impact on the mind. If one is dedicated to the development of the higher consciousness, a higher mind, a deep and steadfast spiritual life, sense pleasures become felt and experienced as something agitating and disturbing rather than gratifying and enjoyable. To indulge in them is considered low and degrading, it pulls the mind downwards rather lift the mind upwards. For example, consider some people enjoying themselves on a night out in a night club drinking, singing, dancing, watching the chorus girls dancing, joking and chitchatting. To them, they are having a wonderful time. To a person leading a meditative life, this seems to be a fruitless and pointless squandering of precious time of a human being. As the mind becomes more refined, even subtler types of sensual enjoyment seem to pull the mind downwards and blunt the higher faculties (e.g. going for a special dining out just to indulge in the variety of tastes of some special foods). To really impel the mind more strongly in the direction of radical renunciation, one has to look even more deeply into the general dangers inherent in all conditioned existence within the round of birth and death, saṃsāra. These are summed up in the Pali tradition in the formulation called the eight bases for saṃvega, for acquiring a sense of urgency. The word, 'saṃvega' is a sense of urgency – a kind of commotion or agitation that takes place in the mind, that moves or breaks the mind out from its accustomed routine. It dispels the ordinary sense of complacency of acceptance of things the way they are or ourselves the way we are, and it pushes us to certain urgent action to resolve the dilemma of human existence. When the bodhisattva was living in the palace and saw the old man, the sick man, the corpse, this created in him saṃvega, the sense of urgency. Throughout the unfolding history of Buddhism, there has been the arising of saṃvega which has driven millions of men and women from worldly to homeless renunciant life.

The Eight bases of Saṃvega or urgency are the eight themes of contemplation or reflections:

1. Reflection on birth – considering the pain and misery of coming back after one's death into the womb or other modes of existence; rebirth as an animal in an egg; considering the possibility of death that may take place in the gestation period; pain of undergoing the process of birth.
2. Reflection on old age – contemplating the misery of old age; becoming feeble; losing the sharpness of one's faculties, fading of one's memory; becoming dependent on others, weak, helpless.
3. Reflection on illness – reflecting that as long as one is alive in embodied existence, one is subject to many types of illness, heart disease, stroke, cancer, pneumonia, diabetes, AIDS, flu, diabetes, etc.
4. Reflection on death – cutting off of life; all the fear and anxiety that surrounds one's approaching death.
5. Reflecting on the miseries in one's past existences within saṃsāra – the great mass of sufferings that we have undergone, reborn and again and again undergoing old age, sickness and death
6. Reflecting on the miseries of one's future existences within saṃsāra – the rounds go on and on in inexhaustible time, undergoing birth, old age, sickness and death
7. Reflecting upon the miseries of rebirths in lower realms of existence – rebirths resulting from unwholesome action into the planes of miseries as an animal, as miserable tormented spirit, even in hell.
8. Reflecting on the suffering connected with the search for food – many parts of the world suffer from famine conditions or shortage of foods; millions of people living near starvation level; throughout the animal realm, life centres around looking for food - animals are constantly on the lookout for foods; fears of being devoured by predators in the animal realm; even human beings in prosperous societies have a certain amount of burden centring on the consumption of foods - have to work to buy foods, shop for foods, cook and wash the dishes, etc. Through beginningless rounds of existence, the

amount of food we have to eat is incalculable; we eat the food, one meal after another and on and on, and expel it. This quest for food will go on interminably until we get out of saṃsāra. These are the ways of reflecting upon the dangers in the rounds of existence.

To generate the mind of renunciation, first contemplate the dangers in sensual enjoyment; then contemplate the dangers/unsatisfactoriness tied up with saṃsāric existence in general; then reflect upon the benefits of renunciation, the important complement in developing this pāramī. One considers that the household life is cramped and confining whereas the life of renunciation is like open space. One is free from all the burden and responsibilities of looking after a house, a family, etc. One is able to live a life of utter simplicity, one's life becomes in a sense stripped down to bare essentials. One comes to enjoy simple routines, doing the same thing over and over every day, performing the service, the liturgy at the same time, simple meals at the same time. This life of simplicity gives a certain joy and happiness to the mind that one doesn't find in a life of complexity, of complicated commitment, involvement and obligations. One reflects that the life of renunciation is a life of purity. In putting on the particular type of robes and appearance e robes, one signifies that one is stepping away from a world of sensual pleasures and committed to purification of one's mind. In a life of renunciation, one has the leisure and opportunity to devote wholeheartedly to the study and practice of Dhamma. Lay people who want to earnestly and seriously follow the path of the Dhamma should try to incorporate principles of renunciation in their own life by simplifying their life style as much as possible, try to be content with simple requisites of life, avoid unnecessary luxuries (especially the ostentatious luxuries), live as simply and plainly as possible thus reducing one's dependence on externals, try to cut off unnecessary commitment, try to avoid living a busy schedule of social obligations or involvement, try to find and develop happiness in quietude by finding/doing activities in Dhamma that are meaningful and give one joy (e.g. undertake intensive study some Dhamma texts, etc) and by devoting time to devotional practices and meditation, these will give one a glowing inner joy and happiness that make one lose interest in the enjoyment of the outer world.

Nekkhamā as renunciation has a deeper meaning merely than that of giving up external things or adopting a monastic life. Nekkhamā as renunciation also signifies the relinquishment of all points of inner attachment. In the formula, the aspiration or vow reads:

“May I be able to relinquish all points of inner attachment in order to enter the exalted concentration absorption and liberation of the mind.”

This inner renunciation is the renunciation of those mental states that hinder the higher development of the mind. The Buddha summarised them in the five hindrances – sensual desire, illwill, laziness, restlessness and doubt. Besides those five particular five hindrances, there are all those thoughts, projects, plans, mental constructions that spring up from those five hindrances and that ordinarily overrun our mind and cause so much disturbance and inner distraction. To fulfil the practice of inner renunciation, we have to work at weakening and eliminating the five hindrances, at quieting down and stopping all of the disturbing agitating thoughts and emotions, and find the inner peace, the inner bliss that comes from detachment. When one is able to break the hold of these points of inner attachment to relinquish them, then one gains access to the higher states of consciousness, to various higher attainments of concentration called Samādhi or jhāna or deep meditative absorption or the vimokṣa, the liberation of mind. These higher states of consciousness form the foundation for further progress along the meditative path into the development of insight and wisdom.

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Lecture 4: **The Perfection of Energy (viriya-pāramī)**

Bhikkhu Bodhi

We have been going through the 10 pāramīs or spiritual perfections according to the southern school. Last time we covered the perfection of renunciation, nekkhama pāramī. In the usual list of pāramīs according to the Theravāda School, the fourth pāramitā is given as wisdom or prajñā. I have changed the order somewhat because it seems that this sequence is not perfectly logical (to my mind). It seems that wisdom is really the culmination of pāramitās and so it should come at the end. I put it last in the list I prepared. We could see all the other pāramitās as preparing the ground work for the perfection of wisdom. The fourth perfection in this list is energy. The formula given is:

4. The Perfection of Energy (viriya-pāramī): “May I be filled with inexhaustible energy, vigour, and fortitude in cultivating the path to enlightenment and in working for the benefit of others.”

Energy, vigour and fortitude are roughly all synonymous terms. What this particular factor emphasises is the need for vigorous energy in perfecting all the other requisites of enlightenment. Energy is not so much a specific field or object of its own but it’s a quality that has to spread over all the other pāramīs, and bring them all to maturity, to ripeness, bring them all to the peak of perfection. Without energy, without determined effort, one would not be able to accomplish anything. Our own natural tendency is to either flow with the stream of desire or to just drift along with the lazy tendency of the mind. To follow the Buddha’s teaching, one has to go against the stream of our own natural inclination, the stream of desires, craving, the attractions of worldly enjoyment, and the seeking for self-benefit. When one enters the practice of the Dhamma, one has to work at training one’s character, training one’s mind to transcend the limitation of the finite mind, the limited mind, defiled mind. One has to rise up to ever greater heights in the cultivation of virtue, merits and wisdom. To do all these requires determined effort and energy. It is with energy and effort that we have to take up all the practices of the Dhamma, from the very initial step all the way to the culmination.

The perfect embodiment of energy is the Buddha himself. Throughout his life, he was always engaged in energetic work for the benefits of others. First in his own quest for enlightenment, he spent six years training himself in the most rigorous and difficult practices. He fulfilled all the practices of asceticism, even self-mortification even though he realised this was the wrong path that he had taken, still he fulfilled this practice with the utmost strength and vigour thinking that whatever had to be done for enlightenment, that he would do. After he attained enlightenment, when he became the Buddha, throughout his life, he would spend 8-9 months each year walking all over the highways and byways of India, going from town to town, village to village teaching the Dhamma. In the course of a single day, in the morning after rising, he would sit in meditation and entered into a special attainment in which he would be able to look out upon the world and see the minds of sentient beings to see who he could teach and transform that day and who would need his help. After rising from meditation, he would wash himself and go for the alms round together with the monks.

After eating, he would take a little rest. He would devote the rest of the day to teaching and training the monks. In the evening he would give Dhamma discourse to the lay people. Late at night he would give additional instructions to the monks. After dismissing the monks, beings from other world systems or deities would come to him for advice. He would sleep for only two hours per night in the course of a day. Even though we cannot immediately emulate such a high model, still we should bear in mind that the Buddha should be taken as the symbol of perfect energy.

In our own approach to the practice, we should try to build up our energy step by step, little by little. Energy is aroused by realising that obstacles to the energy have to be overcome. What are the obstacles? The first obstacle is laziness. Even though one might be reading about the Dhamma, inspired by the Dhamma, when it comes to making effort to really practice earnestly, one just doesn't want to invest that extra effort in taking up the practice. Instead one prefers just to remain floating along in the drift of one's worldly habit. Laziness is an obstacle to be overcome. As long as one gives way to laziness, one will not be able to make substantial progress. Laziness tends to reinforce another obstruction, the attachment to one's worldly enjoyment. To practice the Dhamma, one has to be ready to go against the stream of our worldly enjoyment or our familiar comfortable routine. That means simplifying our life by reducing our dependence upon external things. We should devote more of our attention and effort to cultivating the inner side of our being; particularly we have to recognise the distinction between the unwholesome and wholesome qualities of the mind. We have to work to overcome the unwholesome qualities of which the most dominant for most people is attachment.

Another major obstruction to the application of energy is self-disparagement. One might be inspired by the Dhamma, wanting to practice, but one feels that one has too many obstacles that one is incapable of really practicing seriously. One just gives way to this self-disparagement and berates oneself as unworthy of practice, incapable of success, and one doesn't make any effort. Whatever we are in one particular life is a reflection of the quality we developed in the preceding life. If one does not make any earnest effort to practice in this life, then in the next life one will have the same character, again berating oneself, feeling miserable, despondent, dejected and unable to practice. Self-disparagement is the third obstacle.

A fourth obstacle is timidity, being afraid to take up the practice of Dhamma. One might be afraid that entering the practice might have a harmful effect on one's mind, might create trouble for oneself and/or others, or become fearful and apprehensive when we see that one has to work earnestly on oneself. To succeed in the development of energy, when these qualities arise in the mind and pull us away from the practice, then we have to recognise them as they are, call them by their true names and not yield or surrender to them; and to recognise that we are engaged in the most important of all paths, the cultivation of the Dhamma, this is a path that brings us ultimately to true happiness and fulfil our own well-being and enable us to be a source of benefits and blessings to others. With this in mind, we have to overcome our laziness. To be ready to diminish or reduce our attachment, we need to have self-confidence even though the path may be difficult and require a lot of effort and earnest application, we have the ability to succeed. Instead of being frightened and timid, one has to arouse great courage in entering the path, courage to face all of the obstructions that could arise from within oneself and outside oneself.

In the arousing or application of energy, there are three stages mentioned in the Suttas. It's important to understand the distinction of these stages. These three stages apply particularly to the practice of mental development, meditation.

1. The first is called instigating energy – the initial arousal of energy. At the outset, in order to undertake the practice (meditation), one has to arouse the energy to practice. At first the energy would falter, unsteady, one might even meet with inner resistance or inner conflict, but one makes the determination to practice and one stirs up the energy to engage in the practice. As one undertakes the practice for some time, one enters upon the second stage.
2. Persevering energy – this is the energy which persists in the endeavour. Here the energy is building up momentum and strength so that one can continue in one's practice. One still has to make a determined effort, but now the energy is built up to the point where it is able to carry one along.
3. Invincible energy – non-retreating energy. This is the energy which is able to accomplish everything with success. When one enters upon this stage of invincible energy, one's energy becomes so strong that it seems to swell up spontaneously. The current of energy is carrying one along so that one has to make almost no effort.

The invincible energy is the third stage in this process that is built upon previous two stages. One has to begin by instigating the energy, which calls for determination, struggle, recognition of the point of attachment and resistance until one is able to overcome those obstacles and enter upon the persevering energy. When the persevering energy gains momentum, then the energy becomes invincible.

To help us take the initial step of arousing the energy, there are certain types of reflections or measures that one could adopt. One is to use one's understanding through reflection. The most basic level is understanding the principle of cause and effect, and to recognise that powerful and momentous effects are built up through a slow and gradual accumulation of causes. Therefore when one sets out to follow the path of Dhamma, one can't expect that one is able at once to reach the greatest height. One recognises that to reach the top of the mountain, one has to begin at the foot of the mountain, work up each meter step by step, at times one could go and at others one has to struggle, at times simply by foot and at others one has to use mountain climbing equipments. When one understands this principle of cause and effect, one recognises that one's has a similar nature, one begins with simple steps, be very patient with oneself, undertakes simple practices and work moderately or temperately, not be in a rush or hurry, not be full of enthusiasm and vigour one day or a week or a month and then give up and surrender to one's inherent laziness. By working persistently, day by day, month by month, year by year, recognising the law of cause and effect, one can build up gradually a strength that will become indomitable. Just like a falling mass of snow that rolls down a mountain, it picks up more snow till it becomes an avalanche. Like one's mind flowing along the slope of Dhamma, practicing methodically and patiently one picks more and more strength, more and more wholesome quality, wholesome energy, which becomes nucleus around which one can gather more wholesome quality, more strength, more virtue, and more wisdom. Therefore superior understanding of this law and effect enables us to understand how progress takes place through the gradual and methodical working of causes giving rise to effects which in turn become the causes for other effects.

Then we need to stir up our energy for some perception of danger, perceiving the danger in negligence, the danger in laziness. People think that it's quite acceptable to be lackadaisical that they need not care for their mind as long as everything is comfortable and secure around them. In Buddhism it's constantly taught that when one yields to negligence and laziness, then the enemy, the defilements, the unwholesome tendencies of the mind have greater opportunity to become active. When these defilements get the upper hand, gradually they will become the driving forces of our personality and our life, even impelling us to very powerful unwholesome actions. So when we see the danger in laziness, then we will be more determined to make an effort in practicing the Dhamma.

Another step to be taken is to make strong resolution with the will. This practice blends in with another pāramitā called determination. One arouses one's willpower as the moving force in making an effort, in generating energy. When one arouses one's willpower, one has to do so realistically not idealistically. One has to use the will with the recognition of one's own limitation and not make too many excessive demands on oneself. While one recognises one's limitations, one also has to take steps to overcome them, identify one's weakness and find the antidotes and remedies for overcoming them. One has to proceed from beginning to end without giving up. To further strengthen one's willpower, it's useful to reflect upon the examples from the past. One reflects upon the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Arahats from the past, reflecting that they were not born with their wisdom or enlightenment. They began as ordinary people like us. They reached the peak of their spiritual greatness through the application of energy. They recognised at that point that they were not enlightened, and that in following the Buddha's path, they could reach enlightenment. They began with little steps, worked gradually, day after day, month after month, year after year, lifetime after lifetime until all the conditions were ripe for their attainment of liberation or enlightenment. As one applies and develops energy in this way, then one starts to find more and more joy in the practice of the Dhamma. This joy becomes an incentive for continuing one's effort. As the Buddha said if the practice of Dhamma did not lead to happiness and wellbeing, but it led to harm and suffering he would not teach it. But because one sees that this practice leads to one's own wellbeing and happiness that one undertakes the practice. As one engages in the practice of the Dhamma, one starts finding joy and happiness that is pure and wholesome, happiness that comes from wholesome energy which rises and floods into the mind and clears the mind of its dark stains and dross, and fills the mind with bliss and rapture, with tranquillity. At its peak, one can balance tranquillity and joy; one is joyful, happy, and yet calm and inwardly collected.

The activity to be performed with energy is mentioned in the resolution read. It is to cultivate the path to enlightenment and is working within oneself in observing precepts, practicing meditation, studying the Dhamma, and developing wisdom or insight. This is the process of developing wholesome quality within one's own mind through engaging in wholesome activities outwardly or inwardly, and then in working for the benefit of others. In helping others, one assists one's own progress. One should integrate that altruistic service to others with one's own inner cultivation.

A Study of Pāramīs - Bhikkhu Bodhi

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Lecture 5: **The Perfection of Patience (Khantī-pāramī)**

Bhikkhu Bodhi

I have been speaking about the practice of the ten pāramīs or pāramitās, the ten spiritual perfections. These come in the context of the wholesome qualities that one has to develop and practice in order to fulfil the Buddha's path. So far we started from the beginning with the practice of the perfection of giving or generosity, then the perfection of virtue or morality; then following the ten perfections of the Theravāda, the perfection of renunciation, letting go of one's worldly attachment to worldly enjoyment and sensual pleasures; then the practice of perfection of energy or vigour. Now we come to the counterpart of the practice of energy or vigour, the practice of perfection of patience. When one practices the ten perfections, the two qualities that have to be held in balance are energy or effort and patience. If one applies energy, but one does not have patience, then one is likely to over-stretch one's resources or over-exert oneself and becomes exhausted and burnt out, even damage one's wholesome or virtuous project that one undertakes. To counterbalance effort or energy, one needs patience. But if one is too patient, then one does not make any effort, one just let everything take its own course. One becomes bogged down in slovenliness, sloth and laziness, and one can't accomplish anything worthwhile. What is needed is a delicate balance of effort, striving, endeavour and patience, endurance, forbearance.

In the Visudhimagga, there was a simile used to show the delicate balance of the two qualities needed. In India, students who were trained in medicine also learned surgery. In one of the tests given to the students of surgery to evaluate their skills, a lotus leaf was placed on water and students were given a sharp knife to cut the lotus leaf without pushing it under the water, to make a sharp clear incision in the lotus leaf without pushing it into the water. If one applied too much energy without the patience, the student would make too much effort and push the leaf under the water and fail the test. If the student were too patient and delicate and afraid to push the leaf under the water, he would just make scratches on the leaf, and fail to make a clear sharp incision on the leaf, and would fail the test too. The one who passes the test is the one with enough strength to cut the leaf and has enough patience to keep calm during the process of cutting so that he doesn't push the leaf under the water. What is needed to supplement and complete the exertion of energy is the fulfilment of patience.

The expression of the practice of perfection of patience is given in the formula:

5. The Perfection of Patience (khantī-pāramī): “May I always be patient under all circumstances, no matter how difficult and challenging they might be without giving way to anger, dejection or discontent. May I be forbearing and forgiving towards all beings, even towards those who revile me, abuse me, and harass me.”

Here there are two dimensions of practice: first being patient under external circumstances connected with situations or with inanimate objects; then there is patience in dealing with other people. Some people find the first type of patience easier to fulfil, the other more difficult. Others might find the patience in dealing with people easier to fulfil but they have a difficult time remaining patient in regard to external conditions. To fulfil the perfection of patience, one has to succeed in both aspects. There is a third aspect as well and will be mentioned later.

Patience is needed in all aspects of one’s life because patience protects all good and wholesome qualities. It’s said that there is no fault worse than anger. When one readily gives way to anger, anger will destroy all of one’s wholesome or virtuous qualities. Even a little anger can have a very strong and lasting destructive effect. A simile in Buddhist text compares anger to just a little bit of flame. In India, the classical big mansion is built with 7 storeys all well-furnished. Somebody comes in with a small speck of flame and throws it at a curtain or the spark from electrical wiring may start a fire that destroys a 7-storey mansion. When we let anger rise in our mind and get control of the mind, the anger spreads and flares up, becomes bigger and bigger, so strong that even though we get many merits from being very generous, strict in one’s practice, devout in devotional practice, strong in meditation but doesn’t recognise anger, this could destroy the merits and mind of samādhi. We have to work very carefully and diligently to control and master anger.

First in regard to external circumstances, there are situations that make us lose our patience. Sometimes one might undertake a project that one sets one’s heart on, then that project fails. One may be working at a job, because the company is downsizing and one gets the notice that one is dismissed from the job; or when one does not get the promotion one wants, one feels disappointed and despondent. Sometimes personal relationships can get very stressful; here the whole set-up of the relationship causes a lot of frustration and discontent, one gets upset, angry, and dejected. In some cases, chronic illness or certain debilitating conditions that don’t respond to treatment can cause people to become upset, angry and dejected. These are several unhealthy ways that one could lose patience. One becomes angry, thinking, ‘one is a victim of circumstances’, ‘why is this happening to me?’. Sometimes a little bit of anger (not in the sense of rage) arouses one to overcome obstructive conditions is useful in inspiring or impelling us to make more determined effort. The blind anger of lashing out at one’s circumstances is destructive and it does not bring any resolution of one’s problem. One has to use obstructive conditions and turn them into a kind of goad for strengthening one’s practice of Dhamma, inspiring one to make stronger effort to arouse stringer determination, and to not get angry or blame others or the working of circumstances thinking that somehow one is fated with failure.

Usually when repeated outbursts of anger fail to make a difference, then one falls into dejection or self-pity, one becomes upset and miserable. When one becomes upset and miserable, this is like

putting a straitjacket around oneself. One then starts rating oneself lowly, loses all courage and hope, and resigns oneself submissively to what one takes to be one's fate.

The third response which develops from this dejection and self-pity is that one becomes dissatisfied with oneself, rating oneself lowly (low self-esteem) and others more highly, condemning oneself; or else one develops false humility, thinking one has no talent, no virtue that can be called upon). Instead of giving way to anger, dejection or dissatisfaction, what one has to do is to rise up and meet the challenge of difficult conditions. This is the way we practice the proper response to these difficult conditions. First when one meets with difficulty, one has to ask whether the difficulty one faces is really due entirely to outer conditions or due to one's own fault. If on investigation, one realises that the problems are actually due to external conditions, and after repeated best attempts to overcome them fail and there is just no way to succeed in overcoming them, then one should tell oneself to just accept the conditions with equanimity, not with self-pity or feelings of dejection or angry resistance to them. When one accepts those difficult conditions, one also recognises that these conditions are also stamped with the universal mark of impermanence. Even though the difficulty might last a long time, one always considers or reflects that 'even this too someday will pass'.

There is a famous story in which a king heard about some very precious ring that hidden away some place in his kingdom. He sent one of his wise advisers to look for this ring. The adviser found the ring, a plain ring with an inscription on it that read, 'this too will pass'. The minister told the king that the ring had a great reputation and whoever found it must wear it all the time. So the king put it on his finger. Some months later, a rebellion took place in his kingdom and the rebels took control of the kingdom, dethroned and put the king into the prison. The king was in prison and he looked at the ring, 'this too will pass'. One day, some of his allies who worked in the new administration came and showed him a secret passage to escape from the prison. Together with some of his friends, he ran off and lived in poverty in disguise in a remote part of the kingdom. Whenever he felt dejected, he looked at the ring, 'this too will pass' and this gave him encouragement. Some months later, more of his former subjects came to the king's aid and took control of the kingdom and restored the king back to his former position as head of the kingdom. Instead of feeling arrogant and puffed up with power, he looked at the ring, 'this too will pass'. He knew that everything is impermanent, there is no need to be dejected in times of difficult conditions, there are no reasons to feel elated when one meets with what one desires, one has to maintain equanimity under both conditions. When one meets with difficult challenging external conditions, and one cannot rectify them by appropriate effort, one just accepts them and recognises that they too will pass, that they are impermanent.

As mentioned before, there are two alternatives - the difficulties one faces can be due to the conditions themselves or due to one's own fault. If they are due to the conditions themselves and are irreversible, one has to accept them. If on investigation, the problems are arising due to one's own fault. One then asks if one has tried one's best. If one has tried one's best, then there is no need to become disappointed or dejected; one can console oneself that one has made the best effort and makes the determination to keep trying in the trust/confidence that with enough effort, one will eventually succeed. In other words, one accepts the present limitations of one's conditions, but one does not lose inner courage, inner hope, and inner self-confidence. If one finds that one

hasn't been trying one's best, then one makes a determination to do better in the future, applies a firmer, more concentrated and determined effort. In any case, there is no room for anger, dissatisfaction and dejection which all just cause miseries to oneself and prevent one from making any effective effort to overcome the challenging and difficult outer conditions.

In fact in practicing the Buddha' path, what one does is to take the difficult outer conditions and transform them into an opportunity for fulfilling a pāramī, a spiritual perfection. Without these challenging difficult conditions, there is no real opportunity to fulfil a pāramitā. What makes a quality like patience a pāramitā, a spiritual perfection is just the very fact that one has developed this quality under conditions that work against it. If one has never met with difficult circumstances, if everything follows one's desire, if every effort one makes is immediately successful, how could one fulfil the perfection of patience? What one does is to take the difficult conditions, harness them to the practice of the Path. This is in a sense one meaning of yoga, yoga = yoke = join the difficult conditions to spiritual path, and make those conditions stepping stones to the progress and fulfilment of the Dhamma. In this respect, patience ties up with two other pāramīs, energy or effort and adhiṭṭhāna pāramī (perfection determination in the southern scheme) or perfection of resolution or vow (in northern scheme of pāramitās).

So far I have been discussing patience under external circumstances. Most people are not so much troubled by external circumstances as they are by challenges that arise in dealing with other people. Consider a situation: you are on one side of the street, and you are looking at a man across the street who is constantly shouting to you, 'you stupid fool', 'you stupid fool'. You look across the street, you see him, and you hear what he is saying. You look around and there is nobody else on the street and you realise he is looking straight at you and talking to you. You think to yourself, you have never seen that man before and why is he calling out 'you stupid fool', 'you stupid fool'. You start to get angry and walk across the street to give him a lesson. You come up to the man, ready to punch him and see that it is a dummy, a machine in front of an amusement shop. It is electronically programmed to chant 'you stupid fool, you stupid fool', its eyes still are focusing across the street even though you are in front of him, then you start to laugh and your anger dissipates, you realise it is not a person, it's not really speaking to you. If all the people in our lives who give us difficulties, we got to know them very well and we see that they just programmed dolls made to look like human beings, then we wouldn't be upset. It's because we take them to be human beings with true persons, true selves that we cherish enmity against them, this causes so many problems for us.

What we especially have to do in dealing with human beings is to overcome this anger and to transform anger into loving-kindness (mettā or maitri), one of these sterling Buddhist virtues. The capacity for loving-kindness is limited and damaged by our tendency to anger. One elementary way is to reflect on the misery and danger that is bound up with the angry mind. Anger is a very powerful defilement of mind (easily disposed to people with untrained mind) that brings great pain and misery to oneself first of all even before anger expresses itself in action directed against others. When one's own mind gets overrun and obsessed by anger, one feels miserable and one wants to get rid of it and one just can't. Angry thought just keeps bubbling up and keep coming and burning, one just has no peace, no quietude. When one doesn't control the anger, one is likely to express it outwardly and brings misery and pain to others like those closest to one. Even strangers can feel the anger in an angry person – scowl in the face of angry persons, hard expression in the eyes, never

speaking friendly words, no smile. One wants to avoid an angry person. One who smiles and seems friendly or one with loving-kindness wins friendship while anger destroys friendships and relationships. Anger creates a lot of tension and stress in the family when one comes home angry. One comes home from work angry at one's colleague or boss and takes it out on the family members or pet dogs. That causes them to become upset and they have to take it out on somebody else. The whole atmosphere in the family is infected with this illwill and discontent. Other people want to avoid one and one becomes lonely and isolated. When anger builds up, it destroys all of one's merits and good qualities. Anger can motivate one to perform destructive actions to oneself and others. Sometimes these lead to self-destructive addictive habits (dependence on alcohol and drugs) and actions that are destructive of the welfare of others (even murders). Anger can eat up all of one's good qualities.

To bring the good qualities to perfection, what one needs is patience, patience in dealing with other people, whether they are close to you, strangers and enemies. The big challenge is how does one tackle anger in dealing with other people? Because anger is such a strongly rooted habitual tendency of the mind, the first step, before one does anything else, is to recognise anger as anger when it first arises, this is the practice of *satisampajañña* (*sati* = mindfulness, being aware of what is taking place in one's mind) with clear comprehension (= *sampajañña*, you know what is the state arising in the mind, you can identify it, label it and specify it). When you label the mental state and keep it under observation, this prevents it from gathering momentum. When the mind starts getting excited, just watch the mind, label it 'anger's starting, anger's starting', watch it until it goes away or subsides and the mind settles down. If the anger gets stronger, divert the mind from the person or situation that is making you angry, focus on the breath, even for five breaths, mindfully 'breathe in, breathe out', this is like putting a brake on the anger, this puts the mind under one's control to some degree, thus preventing the anger from getting stronger and exploding. In this way, one helps the mind to settle down. If this does not work immediately, then one can even use a little force to push the anger away, sometimes this succeeds and other times not, by averting the mind to see the anger, 'this anger has come, it is self-destructive, let me dispel it' to push it away. If this doesn't work, use certain lines of reflection to overcome the anger. One way is to reflect that anger has many dangers, 'If I give way to anger, I'll make enemy of other people and make enemy for myself. Patience is such a valuable virtue, let me keep my mind calm.' And if the person is one who persistently annoys or irritates one, one way to overcome that lingering resentment in one's mind is to develop loving-kindness towards that person. If one practices meditation on Loving-kindness, one knows how to arouse loving kindness towards the person who is causing one trouble, and wish, 'may this person be well; may this person be happy; may the person be free from all harm and suffering.'

Suppose one has a persistent enemy, a way to overcome that antagonistic relationship is by treating the person in a friendly way with kind action and gentle speech. In this way, one changes the person and relationship, changing the relationship of hostility, of clashes to one of friendly cooperation. This is illustrated in a story in one sutta. In the Heaven of Thirty-three, Sakka, the king of the gods has a throne where he sits and presides over the assembly of the gods. At one time when the Sakka was away, a demon (*yakkha* or *yaksha*) called the 'anger-eating demon' came and sat on Sakka's throne. When the gods saw that, they were outraged and shouted at the demon to get off. The more they shouted at him, the bigger, more powerful and uglier the demon became till the gods became tiny dwarfs. The gods just had to give up while the demon sat there and enjoyed himself.

The demon ordered Sakka's food to be brought to him. Finally Sakka arrived on the scene and said to the demon, 'how are you my friend? Are you comfortable there? Do you have everything you need? Anything I can get for you? Do you like to have another meal?' As Sakka spoke in this friendly and loving way, the demon started to become weaker and smaller until it became like a little ant and it popped into the air and vanished. The way to overcome enemies or foes is to change them from being enemies into being friends. In this way, one has a peaceful happy mind, the other person also has a peaceful happy mind. The relationship becomes one which is productive and beneficial instead of one that is stressful and harmful.

A Study of Pāramīs - Bhikkhu Bodhi

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Lecture 6: **The Perfection of Truthfulness (Sacca-pāramī)**

Bhikkhu Bodhi

Today we continue our discussion with the pāramīs that we have to fulfil on the path to enlightenment. Now we come to the sixth perfection on the list, sacca pāramī, the perfection of truthfulness, and the formulation is:

6. The Perfection of Truthfulness (sacca-pāramī): "May I always speak the truth, live by truth, and be devoted to truth in order to win the confidence of others."

Throughout his discourses, the Buddha had always frequently emphasised the importance of speaking the truth, not only as a way of facilitating communication but also contributing to one's own spiritual growth. The most famous short discourse on the value of truthfulness is the advice the Buddha gave to his little son, Rahula. Shortly after Rahula was ordained as a novice, he called Rahula to his presence. He had a cup of water on his table. There was just a little bit of water left in the cup and he showed it to Rahula. The Buddha said, 'Just so little is the spiritual worth of a person who is not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie'. He threw a little bit of the water away and said to Rahula, 'So a person who is not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie throws away whatever little spiritual virtue he has been cultivating.' Then the Buddha turned the cup of water upside down on the table, and said to Rahula, 'So a person who is not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie turns his whole inner being upside down.' The Buddha concluded the discourse, saying, 'When one is not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie, there is no evil that one would not do.' One could see the importance of truthfulness in today's world wherein so many sides we are constantly bombarded by falsehood. One sees falsehood multiplying in so many domains of human activities. In politics, politicians are ready to tell lies in order to promote their own policies or cover up their own schemes and prevent others to expose them or knowing about them, e.g. Watergate scandal. Politicians are always out to project false states in order to win popular support. Even though they might have hidden motives, they show themselves to be friendly in order to gain favour and win votes. Often they are ready to change their policies overnight when it serves their advantage. In ancient times, when people had some solid, ethical criteria on which to base their lives and conduct, they were ready to stand up on matters of principles. In the modern age, expediency triumphs over matters of consistency and fidelity to truth; and popularity triumphs over firm adherence to principles as guidelines of conduct. This is an example of how falsehood and deception proliferate in politics.

In the world of commerce and advertising, we see advertisers have no scruples about making false claims about their products. Although there are agencies which are supposed to monitor the claims of the manufacturers/corporations, often members of the agencies have been appointed through pressure from the manufacturers/corporations themselves so that they serve only to give the seal of approval to the products turned out by the manufacturers. Often manufacturers will present distorted pictures of their products in order to win a market share. They will be able to push their products without any control by higher authority. Sometimes manufacturers would even cover up flaws and dangers in their products even when these flaws and dangers put people's lives at risk. One of the notorious cases is the tobacco industry. Although scientific investigations establish fairly conclusively that the use of tobacco poses a threat to health, cause cancer, heart disease, the tobacco industry for years were fighting these claims and drew testimony from scientists that the industry hired to testify that their investigations showed no real dangers to cigarette smoking or that the dangers were exaggerated. Sometimes car manufacturers would produce a badly designed model of their car that put people's lives at risk and they don't want to withdraw that model of the car when the danger becomes known, so they will try to cover up the flaw of the product. Drug manufacturers will cover up the danger in the pharmaceutical product when the danger in the product becomes known. The same happens with the manufacturers of guns and rifles and their denial of easy access to firearms are in any way responsible for the widespread violence in the American society. The same happens with the denials that violent shows in television contribute in any way to violence in the American society. In this way commerce becomes a source for the proliferation of falsehood and lies in the society.

Even highly responsible corporate executives systematically issued lies and falsehood to cover up their misdemeanours in misappropriation of company funds. Sometimes this web of lies that they'd woven brought about the destruction of their companies and led to many people losing their jobs and livelihood. In the world of entertainment, popular media, TV, music in subtle ways project illusory images of human life. They consistently try to make us believe that the path to real happiness lies in romantic love, sensual indulgence, and flamboyant living. The media of entertainment consistently undermine any sense of personal responsibility or social accountability. All of these sources of falsehood, politics, advertising, professional lies, the entertainment, the weaving of this net of falsehood etc spread down to ordinary people so that ordinary people lose their own scruples about telling lies to secure some advantage, thinking 'If leaders of nations, captains of industries can do this, if the corporations can do this, why should I be obliged always to speak the truth?' The use of falsehood is not confined to the mundane sphere of life, even religious and spiritual leaders/figures also pick up the same habit of speaking falsehood. Religions become big business, some televangelists in the past decades have been found to be guilty of channelling funds to their own personal bank account or exploiting their own workers sexually; some Indian gurus and Buddhist spiritual teachers have also been found guilty of exploiting their students financially and sexually and using falsehood and denials to cover these up. In this way we see falsehood has become so rampant in human life today.

The Buddha's teachings put a brake against the disposition to resort to falsehood through the fourth precept, "the precept to abstain from speaking falsehood". We have to consider different types of falsehoods because they have different levels of gravity or seriousness:

1. Malicious lies being the most serious - Malicious lies deliberately intended to cause damage to another person, to injure another person's reputation, to cause financial ruins of other people or loss of position in society; to create dissension and discord among people who have previously been living together harmoniously. These are lies with the heaviest moral weight.

Examples of lies of grave offence in the Vinaya:

- making false accusation about another monk intended to cause him to fall from his spiritual life;
 - telling a falsehood with the aim of splitting a harmonious sangha.
2. Self-seeking lies – These are lies directly aimed at securing some personal advantage for oneself, for gaining wealth, a higher position, respect and admiration of others.
 3. Defensive lies – These are lies told to excuse oneself from some other misdeeds that one has committed. Instead of accepting the blame honestly and truthfully, one tries to wriggle out of it by denying one's culpability or by shifting the blame to others;
 4. Trifling lies – A lie that is an exaggeration or a lie told as a joke to get laughs, 'white lie' or innocuous lie that does not serve any purpose at all.

One question that I have never found dealt with explicitly in Buddhist texts – Is the commitment or obligation to truthful speech a moral absolute? That is, are we always obliged to speak the truth under all circumstances and under all conditions? In my own personal opinion, it seems to me that cannot be the case. There can be situations where there is a possible clash or conflict of contrary moral imperatives, say between the obligation to speak the truth on the one hand and on the other the obligation to protect and safeguard the lives of others. On the scale of moral value, the highest value should be placed on non-injury, on not doing anything that can bring real damage and harm to others. There could be cases where telling a falsehood or slightly distorting or misrepresenting the truth might be necessary in order to protect others from serious harm or damage. An example is when Christians who hid the Jews in their homes to protect them from the Nazis would speak a falsehood when asked by the Nazis if they had seen any Jews. These are exceptional cases. In our ordinary communication, it's important to speak the truth and to remain firm in one's commitment to truth.

Now I want to speak about some of the dangers or disadvantages which come from speaking falsehood without any qualms or any sense of scruples or restraint. One immediate danger is when one consciously speaks falsehood, this creates some very subtle but deeply embedded pangs of remorse even though one might not admit it to oneself. When one habitually speaks falsehood, it creates some kind of feeling of discomfort in the mind, a 'scarring of the tissues' of conscience. When one speaks falsehood, misleading people and distorting a real situation, one betrays the trust of the people one speaks to and one knows it, this creates a gap or distance between oneself and others and there is no way to bridge.

Another danger of speaking falsehood is that falsehood tends to proliferate. When one sees that one could get away with telling one lie, one feels less hesitancy about telling subsequent lies until speaking falsehood becomes habitual. Another problem with telling lies is that one lie needs the support of other lies. One falsehood has to be buttressed and sustained by other falsehood. So

when one gets into the practice of telling deliberate lies, then before long, one finds that one has to weave a whole web of lies to protect oneself, a whole web of falsehood intended to reinforce each other. The problem with lies is that they are very fragile and difficult to sustain. In this respect they are different from truth. Sometimes it is difficult to adhere firmly to truth. When one takes one's stand on truth, one finds that truthful communication makes one strong and invulnerable. Truth itself is strong and invulnerable. Lies are easy to resort to but are fragile and difficult to sustain. When one lie collapses and found out to be a falsehood, the other lies lose their credibility in the eyes of others, so that before long the entire tower of lies one built up diligently and intensely cracks and collapses and falls to the ground, one finds oneself exposed and rejected as an untrustworthy person, a liar and deceiver; one becomes a pariah or an outcast.

Another danger of lies is that they break down or undermine the coherence of the society. For people in a society to function and work together to create a viable social order, they must be able to trust each other's statement. Interpersonal communication presupposes that people are speaking the truth. When lying becomes widespread, especially when people in high positions of high responsibility have been found to be guilty of telling falsehood, people feel that they no longer can trust one another so that the very glue of trust that holds the social order together starts to disintegrate, the social coherence or harmony also disintegrates. Suspicion and distrust spread throughout the whole social order. People feel that their neighbours and colleagues are out to cheat them. When there is such strong distrust for one another, people start to cheat one another. Nobody knows who or what to believe anymore.

Another consequence of speaking falsehood is that when one becomes habituated to speak lies, after sometime one starts to believe one's own lies. One loses the ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood. One gets lost in the labyrinth of falsehood until one can no longer find one's way back to truth. One loses the ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood, between deception and reality.

This leads on to what one might consider the greatest danger in habitual lying. In a sense, it is not merely a moral or ethical fault but it is a misrepresentation of the real nature of things. Telling falsehood is not only a violation of an ethical rule, but also an act of violence against reality. By distorting the truth in speech, one is contributing to constructing a false and distorted picture of the world. One builds up false conceptions in one's own mind and projects them through speech to the minds of others. Then one comes to accept them oneself, so that one becomes a victim of one's own falsehood and distances oneself from the truth. If one considers what is the focal point or centre of the morally heavy type of lies, it is the idea of 'my self'. Falsehood is aimed at furthering one's own advantage, projecting a false image of oneself, at defending oneself, or at injuring others who are conceived of as rival selves. All these lies in some ways sustain the delusion of a truly existing self and in this way they reinforce the ignorance, *avijjā*, the most fundamental root of suffering, the most basic cause of our bondage to *saṃsāra*.

In contrast to the disadvantages of falsehood, we can consider the positive benefits of truthful speech. First of all, when one speaks the truth consistently, one enjoys ease of conscience, ease in one's mind, no need to defend oneself. When one is honest in one's communication with others, then one can open up deep channels of mutually beneficial and enriching communication with other

people. Lies build up barriers between people. Truthful speech is very essential for bringing about deep-rooted transformation in one's own character and personality. The Buddha distinguishes between superior and inferior persons. The inferior person is one who speaks at length about the faults of others and says little about his/her own faults. The superior person is one who speaks fully about his/her own fault, but says little about the faults of others. On all occasions except when it's really necessary and truly beneficial to others, one shouldn't speak about the faults and shortcomings of others. When it's really important for one's own development to reveal one's fault, then do so. Speaking the truth is important for self-transformation. In order to transform or correct oneself, one has to recognise one's own faults first within oneself and then when necessary, one has to be ready to communicate them to others. This idea plays an important role in Buddhist monastic discipline. The Buddha laid it down as a guideline for the monastic order. When a monk breaks a fundamental precept, the monk should confess the transgression to another monk. Confessing the transgression eases the conscience and ensures that the monk will not be disposed to repeat the transgression in the future.

Truthfulness in speech implies that one is not prone to deceive others about the nature of reality. This helps to prepare one's own mind for comprehending the true nature of things. Truthful speech implies that one has a sense of responsibility to the truthful representation of reality. This supports one's own quest for truth and contributes to the growth of wisdom. According to Buddhism, wisdom is the insight or understanding that dispels the clouds of delusion that cover up the true nature of phenomena. The aim in Buddhism is to develop wisdom, to uncover the true nature of things, to see things as they really are. That means that we have to remove the clouds of ignorance and delusion that obstruct clear vision. Truthful speech or truthful communication encourages us to remain faithful to the truth. Thus it enables us to strip away the layers of delusion and false concepts that distort our understanding. By speaking the truth consistently, we keep our mind straight and honest. This helps us to arrive at a straight, direct, honest grasp of things as they really are, above all the correct comprehension of the true nature of the self.

One of the most important benefits of speaking the truth is that when one speaks the truth consistently, one is able to win the trust and confidence of others. Truthful communication has a magnetic effect. When one meets someone who is speaking the truth or honestly, one feels disposed to place trust in that person and to accept what the person says in confidence. (This doesn't mean that the person on whom people place trust and confidence is necessarily a speaker of truth since there are a lot of 'frauds' out there who are very clever at covering up and presenting a very bright and pleasing exterior so that they could hoodwink people and mislead them along false paths !!!) Communication of truth has a strong charismatic power of winning the trust and confidence of people. This becomes very important in the propagation and spread of the Dhamma, the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha himself is called *saccavadi*, the speaker of truth. It's said that, 'As he speaks, so he does; as he does, so he speaks'. It's important not only to speak the truth, but also to live in accordance with truth. One's action should accord with one's words; one's words should accord with one's actions. In the Indian tradition which still survives even today, it's believed that one who consistently lives by truth and speaks the truth acquires very high degree of spiritual power that can even affect seemingly miraculous changes in the external world. Regularly when we recite suttas or discourse of Buddha, at the end of the discourse, we recite some blessing lines, '....by

this assertion of truth (etena sacca vajjena), may you be well, may you be happy, may you be free from all illness and suffering’.

There was a story from the Indian tradition that illustrates the mystical power of truth. This was the story about the King Asoka who was travelling by the side of Ganges river one time. He saw the river flowing so powerfully down to Patna, he thought to himself, ‘is it ever possible for anybody to reverse the direction of River Ganges?’. He told this to his ministers who then spread this question through to the city of Pataliputra (Patna). An elderly prostitute heard this and she thought she would try to make the River Ganges flow upstream. She exerted her will and made the river flow upstream. King Asoka asked how she could make the river flow upstream. She told the king how, ‘I made this declaration of truth. In all the years that I have worked as a prostitute, I have never discriminated between men on the basis of their caste, social ranking, their wealth and their position or social power. They came to me, they paid the required fees, and I treated them all in the same way without any discrimination. I made that statement in front of the River Ganges. As soon as I made it, the river flowed upstream.’

Another story related to a young village boy who was bitten by a snake. He was lying unconscious and getting close to death. The uncle, a Buddhist monk was called in. He recited a sutta, but that did not help. The uncle then thought to make a declaration of truth in his attempt to save the boy, ‘The first week that I was ordained, I enjoyed living the life of a monk. But from the second week on till the last thirty years, I felt miserable leading the life of a monk. By the truth of this statement, may the boy be saved.’ The poison in the boy’s belly came out, there was still more poison in the boy’s body. So the father then followed and made a declaration of truth, ‘Even though I have a reputation for being a generous supporter of monks and Brahmins, I must say truthfully that whenever monks or Brahmins come to me for gifts of food, financial aid, the first thought that came to me was, what’s these worthless beggars coming to me for, I wish they would go away and leave me in peace.’ After he made the declaration, the poison in the boy’s chest came out. There was still poison in the boy’s head. Then the mother made a declaration of truth, ‘from the day I have been married, I have served my husband humbly, obediently, very softly, always following his instructions and directions, but I have thought through all of these years why I do I have to live with such an overbearing, inconsiderate, nasty man.’ After she made the declaration, all the poison came out from the boy’s mouth and ears, and he came back to normal life.

A Study of Pāramīs - Bhikkhu Bodhi

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Lecture 7: Perfection of Determination (**adhiṭṭhāna-pāramī**)

Bhikkhu Bodhi

I have been speaking about the ten spiritual perfections, *dasa pāramī*, according to the southern Theravada tradition. So far we have covered the perfections of giving, virtue, renunciation, energy, patience and truthfulness. Now we come to the perfection of determination, the *adhiṭṭhāna-pāramī*, expressed in the aspiration:

7. The Perfection of Determination (*adhiṭṭhāna-pāramī*): "May I be fixed and unshakable in my determination to follow the way of the Buddha in life after life, without ever turning away due to laziness, fear, or doubt."

In a sense this is one of the most important of the *pāramīs*. It is a practice that extends to all the other *pāramīs* and which reinforces them and makes them instruments of inner change and self-transformation. The Buddha's teaching itself, the Dhamma can be described as a discipline of self-transformation on the one hand and self-transcendence on the other. The Dhamma is a discipline of self-transformation because it is concerned principally with changing ourselves, changing ourselves from deluded ordinary people into sages and saints, from foolish people into wise luminous people, from worldlings into Aryans or noble ones, arahants, bodhisattvas and Buddhas. This process of self-transformation occurs by way of self-transcendence. We have to continually be transcending our present limitations, rising above our limitations, deepening our insight, our wisdom, enriching our virtues, and then moving beyond all sense of limitation to arrive at the unconditioned, the ultimate, the truly real. All such changes depend upon the practice of the Path. The Buddha's function is to point out the Path to the ultimate while we have to walk the path ourselves. The burden of training in Buddhism rests upon our own selves, above all upon our own mind. The object is to transform the mind, to purify the mind and illuminate the mind. According to the Buddha, the mind is the most powerful in the world, more so than nuclear energy. The whole variety of the world is really devised by the mind; the whole variety of the animal kingdom comes about through the different tendencies of the mind of living beings. One could consider what the mind can accomplish, build skyscrapers, powerful computer systems, putting men in space etc. All this knowledge and instruments come from the mind. The mind can also be an instrument for great destruction, wars, pillages etc. Buddhism is concerned with transforming the mind, unfolding the inherent capacities of the mind. Those capacities always lie dormant. With the proper applications or methods, these capacities can be extracted, waken up from these dormant states, unfolded and brought to fullness

of development. The Buddha's teaching begins with the minds of ordinary people afflicted with sufferings and defilements, wrapped up in delusions and selfish desires. It shows us the way to gradually purify and transform that mind into the enlightened mind, ultimately into a mind of the Buddha, a mind radiant with wisdom of enlightened, permeated with purity, overflowing with love, compassion and inner peace. This transformation comes about through the exercise of the will or volition, *cetanā*, that faculty of the mind which embraces all of the capacities of the mind. Ordinarily *cetanā* or volition works in the service of selfish desires. The will becomes an instrument of people's desires, a means for fulfilling the desires. The will gets scattered in different directions according to the changing desires of the mind, whims and caprices. Sometimes the will gets focused very strongly but with some selfish purpose in mind. The will is an active force that can be used to shape and transform the entire quality of one's life if one directs the will in the right way, in the direction of the good, the wholesome. I sometimes conceive of the mind in terms of three overlapping dimensions – the cognitive aspect (concerned with knowing and understanding); the emotional aspect (concerned with feeling); and the volitional aspect (domain of the will). It is through the proper exercise of the will that one can transform the cognition from one usually permeated with delusions misunderstandings and wrong views into wisdom, correct penetrative understanding and insight. Usually emotions sway between liking and disliking, attachment and aversion. Through the exercise of the will, one can transform the emotion into loving-kindness and compassion. The will itself is usually the instrument of selfish grasping. But the will can also transform itself into the great resolution to serve and to benefit others. Most people usually waste the potential of the will by making the will the servant of their own selfish desires. In Buddhism, one tries to harness the will (*yoga*) and to make it into an instrument for the realisation of wisdom, of highest good, for attaining true purity of heart and spiritual freedom.

Determination or *adhiṭṭhāna* is the process by which one trains the will. Determination represents a decision first to enter upon the Buddha's Path. Once one enters the Path, it is through determination that one continues along the path without giving up part way through. It is the determination that propels one to follow the Path all the way through to its end. In the collection of Buddha's sayings in the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha said, 'I had known two things: not to be content with the partial cultivation of good qualities; and not to become discouraged in exertion.' He made the determination to fulfil all wholesome qualities. Once he made that determination, he strived on constantly without discouragement to follow the path to its culmination until he had achieved the fulfilment of all good qualities.

So determination has a twofold role. First it's through determination that one makes the inner commitment to enter upon the practice of Dhamma, to follow the teaching of the Buddha. It is determination again which enables one to repeatedly or continuously stretch and extend one's limits and pushes oneself towards higher goals and higher accomplishment. For example, in meditation, accomplished meditators are able to sit firmly without vacillating for three, four hours in a stretch. It's through determination first that one could learn to sit without moving for a certain duration, like 30 minutes. It's through determination one makes a decision to extend the sitting to forty minutes. After one accomplishes the ability to sit for forty minutes, one makes a determination to extend the sitting to say fifty minutes, to one hour and so on until one could sit for hours in one stretch. Step by step, through determination that one gradually builds up little by little one's ability to sit for an extended duration. Consider the determination entailed in perfecting the

pāramīs towards attaining Buddhahood. It's through the determination to follow the path step by step, life after life over millions of aeons, that the Buddha was able to extend his limits to become ever deeper in wisdom, ever more abundant in virtue, ever greater power and capacity of the mind. It's through the determination to fulfil all of the practices step by step, working patiently and persistently at bringing all of these virtues to perfection till he finally attained supreme enlightenment in his final existence. It's determination which enables us gradually to build up our spiritual potential as we work patiently and persistently to fulfil all of the qualities of the path.

Determination implies that one will not be deterred or hindered by obstacles and this gives determination its significance. Determination means the will not to be deterred by obstacles, the will not to become discouraged by barriers to our development. It is precisely through the force of determination that one is able to transform obstacles into aids to progress. Without barriers, there would be no progress. When one is feeling weak and helpless or despondent and discouraged, it's through determination that one is able to rise above those feelings of weakness and helplessness, despondency and discouragement and discover new strength and courage to push forward or wait patiently until these feelings subside. When one feels sluggish, it's determination that enables one to stir up fresh reserve of energy to push forward.

Determination implies repeated effort in the training, implies self-discipline, constancy, persistence in the tasks one sets for oneself. It's through determination first that one launches in a new direction in the practice of the Dhamma and pushes beyond one's present limitation. Again through determination that one consolidates and solidifies the new territory that one has entered. As one moves across this path of Dhamma, one faces inner and outer obstacles, personal tragedies, attacks or slanders by others, bad health, tensions in relationships, and the wild and sluggish mind. Through determination, one does not give up and turn away, but one pushes on higher, deeper and extends oneself more widely. Like a businessman who just opens up a new business, through his determination to succeed, he is able to marshal his business skills to enlarge his business, opens up branches and extends the business further, bigger and wider and beyond to become a huge corporate success.

Through determination one could achieve great things. It is through the practice of Dhamma that one could achieve the greatest thing. But without this determination, one would not be able to succeed. Through determination, one looks ahead towards the ultimate goal. There are different goals pointed out in the Buddha's teachings. There is the lower goal of simply living according to the ethical norm, becoming a decent respectable human being by avoiding all unwholesome courses of conduct and by pursuing wholesome courses of conduct. If one follows these standards, then one becomes a human being of integrity, one who realises the human ethical ideal. By practicing meritorious deeds, one will be capable of a happy and fortunate rebirth in the human or celestial realm. According to Buddhism, this is not enough; one has to aim for ultimate liberation from suffering. There are different vehicles for accomplishing this liberation – the vehicle of personal liberation or the vehicle of universal enlightenment through Buddhahood. Whichever goal one determines for oneself, one has to prepare to practice persistently and courageously, and to practice over many lives. One makes the resolution to follow the path of the Buddha - one makes the determination not to turn away due to laziness, fear or doubt, the three major obstacles or deterrents. Through laziness, one thinks it's too hard to follow the path, one would rather drift

along with the currents of one's desires and find enjoyment in the different delights of the world and the one loses one's will to practice. The second deterrent is fear. One sees that the Dhamma makes very strong demands that lead one into deep domains of the mind that one has not experienced before. Sometimes this will arouse fear that it's just too difficult. One has to be ready to sacrifice one's wealth to benefitting others, to observe high standards of ethical discipline, to undertake difficult practices to train and master the mind, and all these lead one to think that one just can't do it and gives up. The third obstacle is doubt even though one may initially get some benefit. Is there truly such a thing as enlightenment? Is the Buddha really a wise accomplished person? Am I really getting benefits from this practice? Is there really karma or rebirth? Is there really such a thing as defilement, as factor of enlightenment? Are these just imaginary constructions by some ancient philosophers whose teachings are no longer relevant to our modern age? These obstacles repeatedly crop up as we follow along the Dhamma. To overcome them we have to be strong, powerful and unflinching in our determination. While we set ourselves very high and lofty goal, we also have to bring the determination to bear on our everyday life by making specific determination to follow or undertake specific practices and to stick with them every day. For example, make the determination to stake out a period (30 minutes, one hour or two hours, morning and evening) for oneself for spiritual practice, take the 3 refuges, take the 5 precepts, do a few liturgy recitations, train the mind in meditation, share the merit, and dedicate the merit to one's goal. This everyday practice builds up one's force of determination and one's wholesome quality. In undertaking the practice of the Dhamma, one recognises that one has set for oneself the highest goal. The lure of this goal should be enough to stir up one's determination to follow the path day by day, year by year, even life by life until one arrives at the goal.

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Lecture 8: Perfection of Determination (**adhiṭṭhāna-pāramī**) Con'd

Bhikkhu Bodhi

Last week I spoke about the seventh pāramī, the adhiṭṭhāna pāramī in a general way. I want to cover the adhiṭṭhāna pāramīs in details in this talk because it is one of the most important pāramīs. I will review some of the main points covered in the previous talk. Our main responsibility as practitioners of Buddha's teaching is the transformation of the mind. The Buddha places the mind at the very centre of his entire teaching because the mind is the source of happiness and sufferings, of bondage and liberation. Even though the mind is the root of our whole existence and determines the whole quality of our lives, usually we give little attention to the actual nature and the quality of our mind. The Buddha's path is laid down as a systematic and very precise method for transforming the mind. What we have to do is to transform the mind from its ordinary conditions in which it is wrapped up in its delusions and defilements into an enlightened and liberated mind. The end point of the teaching is the mind that is liberated from all of the kilesa, defilements, worries and distress, an enlightened mind which is radiant with wisdom, purity and peace. This transformation of the mind depends upon the exercise of the will or volition. Volition is a particular mental factor. It is the act of force of the mind which shapes and transforms all other aspects of our existence. Determination is the act by which we direct the will to this work of inner transformation. It is through volition that we firmly decide to do what is difficult to accomplish and apply ourselves again and again to fulfilling this decision.

In the practice of Dhamma, determination has 3 main functions:

1. First, it is through determination that one makes the initial decision to follow the Dhamma. It is through determination that one decides to set one's feet on the path of Buddha.
2. The second function: After one enters the path, it is determination that enables one to continually stretch one's limits. The Buddha's path is a gradual training which goes further and deeper. It is through determination that one applies oneself to taking further steps to go more deeply and widely into the Dhamma. Through this aspect of determination, one decides to undertake new practices, more difficult practices; one decides to take a path which challenges one to make greater effort.

3. The third function is to consolidate the new practices one has undertaken to gain command over the new territory of practice that one has entered in one's practices. That is, once one takes up the practices, one makes the determination to continue with them without becoming discouraged, lazy or self-indulgent.

So much is a brief recapitulation of the talk I gave last week.

Now I want to explore in greater detail the specific nature of determination in relation to the fulfilment of Dhamma practice. I'll use as the underlying structure for this explanation Master Yinshun's scheme of the five vehicles which I'll reduce more concisely to three, as follows:

1. First, the vehicle of the human ethical norm;
2. Second, the vehicle of personal liberation; and
3. Third, the vehicle of universal enlightenment.

The three vehicles are not mutually exclusive; they interpenetrate in that the higher vehicle includes the teachings pertinent to the lower vehicles. Each of the three includes the practices below it, the second incorporates the practices of the first, and the third includes the practices of the first and second vehicles. Thus the determinations which are operative at the lower vehicle are also absorbed into the higher vehicles.

1. Determination of the Vehicle of the Human Ethical Norm

The root determination in the first vehicle is to lead an ethically upright life, to exercise self-restraint in body, speech and mind; and to fulfil as many mundane good actions as possible. Determination at this level is expressed by the firm commitment to observing fundamental ethical principles, especially the Five Precepts and the ten courses of wholesome action (three of bodily action – abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct; four of speech – abstain from lying, slander, harsh speech, idle chatter; and three of mental – give up excessive greed, illwill and wrong view). This determination also extends to other practices by which one exercises benevolence in relation to fellow human beings – giving, practice of charity, serving others in ways which promote the welfare and happiness of others, being an upright and responsible person in one's community. The practices that pertain to this level are not in any way unique or specific to the Buddha's teachings. These can be regarded as part of the shared ethical heritage of humanity. What the Buddha emphasises is that to fulfil these practices, one has to make a very firm determination to do so even though it will detract from one's pursuit of one's own selfish interests.

2. Determination of the Vehicle of Personal Liberation

This level of understanding arises from the realisation that this life and even future lives that we might live are not capable of giving full and complete happiness and satisfaction. It arises from the perception that we exist within a round of repeated existence, the round of rebirth and death or saṃsāra. No matter what type of existence we might acquire within this round of birth and death, we cannot find any kind of final satisfaction.

The basic framework for understanding the role of determination at this level is given by the Four Noble Truths: The Truth of Suffering, its Cause, its Cessation, and the Path to the end of Suffering. In his first sermon, the Buddha says that each of these Four Noble Truths implies a specific task:

1. The Noble Truth of Suffering is to be fully understood;
2. The Truth of the Cause of Suffering is to be eradicated;
3. The Truth of Cessation of (liberation from) suffering is to be realised; and
4. The Truth of the Path is to be cultivated.

These become then the four long term determinations that one has to make: the determinations

1. to fully understand the nature of sufferings;
2. to eradicate its causes;
3. to realise liberation from suffering; and
4. to cultivate the path that leads to liberation.

2.1 Task Imposed by the First Noble Truth: The Noble Truth of Suffering Must be Fully Understood

The first determination arises from the task imposed by the First Noble Truth – the Truth of suffering must be fully understood. This Pāli word translated as ‘fully understood’ also implies overcoming or transcending so that one has to both understand and transcend that which is essentially suffering or unsatisfactory. What is the actual denotation or meaning of this truth of suffering? At its deepest level, the truth of suffering is the truth of one’s own body and mind, the five aggregates. It is the flawed and finite nature of the five aggregates that makes them sources of suffering. The body and mind are sufferings or are bound up with sufferings because they are conditioned phenomena, impermanent, without any underlying substance, devoid of any inner core (anattā). If one misperceives or wrongly conceives them, then one grasps and clings to them as being ‘I’ and ‘mine’, thereby inviting suffering for oneself. Most people look for fulfilment outwardly, seeks enjoyment of sensual pleasures, in comfortable security of home and family, in one’s personal relationships and career, and so forth. One imagines that one could find happiness by exploring the enjoyment of the outer world, thus loses oneself in its endless diversity and infinite possibility. One does not look deep within oneself and does not probe beneath the outer appearances of things. People are enchanted by the outward surfaces of things and wander in the world of appearances, accepting the reality of things at face value. They become wrapped up in falsehood which they imagine to be truth, taking what is impermanent to be permanent, taking what is really a source of suffering to be pleasurable, and taking what is empty and selfless to be their selves.

The follower of the Dhamma doesn’t accept appearances at face value. He is not out to have fun or get ahead in life but to know and see the truth, to probe and investigate the truth. This deep investigation must begin within oneself. One has to study and investigate the real nature of one’s own body and mind. It is by studying and investigating the real nature of one’s own body and mind that one can understand the truth about the entire universe whether it be the cells of one’s body or the most remote galaxies which all conform to the same laws, they have the same marks or characteristics. They are all conditioned phenomena, impermanent, suffering or unsatisfactory, and not self.

The determination here is the determination to know the truth clearly, deeply and fully. To know the truth about suffering means to overcome and transcend sufferings and to win freedom amidst the changing conditions of the world. When one has this understanding or insight, then one isn't turned around by changing conditions, one can remain steady and imperturbable whether conditions are favourable or unfavourable.

2.2 The Task Imposed by the Second Noble Truth: The Cause of Suffering Must be Understood

The second determination arises in relation to the task imposed by the Second Noble Truth, that the cause of suffering must be eradicated. According to the Buddha, the cause of our suffering is our own craving and ignorance along with the other defilements. Usually one thinks that one's suffering or discontent is caused by something outside oneself; that the way to find comfort and security is to change the outer world to make it more conformable to one's desire. The Buddha says that the real cause of our suffering or discontent is our craving and ignorance, or our greed, hatred and delusion. Our ignorance and craving not only brings us discontent here and now, they are the two roots of the round of rebirth. It is our ignorance of the true nature of things gives rise to craving, the thirst for enjoyment, pleasure and power. It is that craving that pushes us from life to life through the round of rebirth called *saṃsāra*. To find freedom from sufferings, to find real happiness and peace, and also to achieve liberation from the round of repeated existence, one has to work to purify one's mind of these defilements. To purify one's mind, first one has to understand oneself honestly and deeply. Then one has to work to master oneself. This means one must restrain the defilements from their active expression, and to undertake the practices that weaken and eventually eliminate them. One's main task is to control and master one's mind, to control craving especially the craving for power and domination (which in my view is even more dangerous than sensual craving). Since all defilements ultimately originate from ignorance, one must make a firm determination to gain wisdom, the true insight into the nature of things, the wisdom that penetrates the hidden truth of all phenomena. The second determination is the determination to eradicate the cause of suffering.

2.3 The Determination on realisation of freedom from Sufferings

The third determination is related to the task imposed by the third Noble Truth, and is the determination to realise the freedom from sufferings. We all seek to be free from suffering or discontent, but usually we act in ways that only increase our suffering. We indulge in senses without any restraint; we pursue gain, power and fame. These pursuits don't really satisfy our thirst; instead they become obstructions which prevent us from finding real happiness. The Buddha speaks of the existence of a state of perfect bliss and peace, the fulfilment of our deepest wishes for happiness, this is what he calls *Nibbāna*. This state is ever-existing. It is unconditioned freedom, unborn, unchanging, indestructible. It is always available to us deep within ourselves, but it is covered up by our desires and delusions. It lies beyond the round of birth and death; it is the state of liberation from birth and death, but it can be realised by us right here and now within the cycle of birth and death. Because this state of unconditioned freedom is covered up by our desires and delusions, in order to attain it, to experience it, we have to strip away our desires and delusions. Then we can know and see for ourselves the supreme ultimate truth. To attain this requires very firm determination. In the sutta, the Buddha instructs his disciples, 'you should make the determination

to attain that which you have never attained before; to achieve that which you have never achieved before; to realise that which you have never realised before.’ This requires a determination to undertake the work necessary to achieve the realisation of truth.

2.4 Determination Imposed by the Fourth Truth: the Way to Freedom From Suffering Must be Cultivated

The fourth determination is that based on the fourth noble truth, the truth of the way to freedom from suffering. This implies the task that the way to freedom of suffering must be cultivated, must be developed. To gain liberation, one has to take up practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. One has to learn the path, understand the eight path factors, and most importantly to put them into practice. This requires determination. It requires the strength of will to uphold the guidelines on right conduct; to train, tame, and compose the mind; and to gain wisdom and true insight. The ultimate determination is to fulfil the practice of the path. One has to proceed in a very patient and gradual way, step by step, and not to jump ahead too fast. One should hasten (make an effort and exert oneself) slowly (proceed patiently, work skilfully and intelligently). One needs to make the determination to enter the practice and hold to it without digressing from it. The ultimate determination at this level was expressed by the Buddha and some of his great disciples when they felt that their faculties had fully matured. They would sit and make the determination, ‘I won’t get up from the seat even if my blood and flesh dry up till only the bones remain. I won’t get up from the seat until my mind is liberated from the defilements.’ One shouldn’t try to push oneself in that way. One has to work skilfully with firm determination.

To summarise, at the level of personal liberation, there is one root or basic determination with three branches. The root determination is to realise and attain the state beyond suffering, the ultimate freedom from all bondage and limitation, the state of tranquil peace and unconditioned happiness. The other three determinations emerge from this root determination: the determination to fully understand the truth about one’s body and mind; the determination to eradicate the delusions and defilements of the mind; and the determination to follow the Noble Eightfold Path to its end.

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Lecture 9: Perfection of Determination (**adhiṭṭhāna-pāramī**) Con'd

Bhikkhu Bodhi

Over the last few weeks, I have been discussing the perfection of determination, the adhiṭṭhāna pāramī. The main responsibility as Buddhist practitioner is the transformation of the mind. Transformation of the mind depends on the will or volition, which is the active force of the mind. It is volition that shapes and transforms all other aspects of the mind. Determination is the act or process by which one directs the will to this work of inner transformation. It is an act of volition by which one firmly decides to do what is difficult to accomplish and applies oneself to fulfilling this decision. Determination is a quality upon which the Buddha himself always placed emphasis because he recognised the great potential in determination for transforming the mind. To explore the role of determination of Buddha's path, I have been using Master Yinshun's scheme of the five vehicles which I have reduced to three for ease of explanation: these are

1. first, the vehicle of the higher human ethical norm;
2. second, the vehicle of personal liberation; and
3. third, the vehicle of universal enlightenment.

In the last talk, I spoke about the specific determinations of those who follow the vehicle of the human ethical norm and the vehicle of personal liberation. For those who follow the vehicle of the higher human ethical norm, they make the determination to consistently uphold moral conduct and to practice other important human virtues with the aim of living a worthy life as a human being and of achieving a higher rebirth. For those in the vehicle of personal liberation, the determinations are governed by the structure of the Four Noble Truths. They set out to **fully understand** the nature of the body and mind, and thereby to transcend suffering. They are determined to **eradicate** the defilements, particularly ignorance and craving, the cause of suffering. They determine to **realise** and to attain the highest happiness and peace, Nibbāna. They determine to **cultivate** the Noble Eightfold Path, the way to complete liberation from suffering. Those are the four determinations in the vehicle of personal liberation which I explained in greater details in the previous talks.

3. **Vehicle of Universal Enlightenment** –

Vehicle of Universal Enlightenment is the path of practice aimed at the supreme enlightenment of Buddhahood. Those who follow the path of universal enlightenment with strong determinations are known as bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are thus those who make the aspiration of Buddhahood the

centre and governing force of their spiritual life. This path grows out of the vehicle of personal liberation, and it presupposes and comprises all the doctrines and practices of that vehicle. However, it has a different emphasis and scope. These differences stem from its aim, that is, from the motivation that underlies the practice. For the bodhisattva, the aim is not one's own personal liberation from suffering but to acquire the ability to lead countless other beings to liberation from bondage and suffering. The aim is to achieve the skills needed to lead countless others to the ultimate bliss, freedom and peace of Nibbāna. The only person who can perform this function fully and perfectly is a fully enlightened Buddha. The Buddha's enlightenment thus has a universal, even a cosmic significance. He is not merely a liberated sage, but a world teacher. He attains enlightenment not for his own sake but for the purpose of opening the doors to liberation for the whole world. He arises in the world to rediscover the path to deliverance from suffering and to share that path with as many beings as possible in the world. He establishes the Dharma of liberation in the world. He teaches the path to liberation in extensive detail and guides countless others to ultimate freedom. To accomplish this, a Buddha must understand the Dharma, the truth, the principles of things in its entire entirety, in all of its details and implications. He must understand the minds of sentient beings in their detailed differences and complexity, and must know how to guide many different people with different aptitudes and capacities for understanding in accordance with their own capacity. Thus a Buddha's enlightenment has a vaster range than the enlightenment of those who attain personal liberation by following his teaching. It requires a far more extensive knowledge and has a more far-reaching significance, even a cosmic or universal significance. Thus the career of a bodhisattva, a career which culminates in Buddhahood, also has a vast universal significance of a truly cosmic scope.

According to Buddha's teaching, those who aspire enlightenment in any mode through any vehicles must cultivate wholesome virtuous practices over many life times, building up their spiritual potential little by little. But the requirements for bodhisattva, those who aspire to the supreme enlightenment of Buddhahood are especially vast, awesome and demanding. To attain supreme enlightenment requires an inconceivable expanse of time, even millions of kappas (=kalpa=cosmic aeons) spent in perfecting all the factors that culminate in Buddhahood.

Sometimes in the text, to illustrate the bodhisattva's career, the simile of the ocean is given. Consider a man standing by the ocean watching wave after wave beat against the shore. Each wave can be considered to be a cosmic kalpa. The ocean consists of an inconceivable, unimaginable number of waves, each one arising, beating against the shore, and receding. In the same way a bodhisattva pursuing the goal of Buddhahood, every kalpa is just like one wave in the ocean. It's through millions of these kappas that the bodhisattva must work in perfecting the pāramitās.

There is a beautiful verse in the very beginning of Samantapāsādikā, Achariya Buddhagosa's commentary on the Vinaya Piṭaka:

“He who for immeasurable millions of cosmic aeons,
Passed his time undergoing extremely difficult practices,
Undergoing hardship for the welfare of the world,
I pay homage to that great compassionate one.”

This verse also underscores the motivation behind the bodhisattva's practice of this very difficult course. The motivation is this great compassion (mahākaruṇā). This great compassion is the inability to endure the suffering of other sentient beings. It is the quality by which one is so moved by the sufferings of others that one is ready to postpone one's own attainment of one's final liberation until one can act most effectively to remove the sufferings of others and promote their ultimate welfare and happiness. Through great compassion the bodhisattva wishes to rescue his/her fellow beings from the ocean of saṃsāric suffering even if it means undergoing unimaginable hardships and sufferings over inconceivable periods of time.

For a person to enter upon the vehicle of universal enlightenment, to become a true bodhisattva aiming at the ultimate enlightenment, compassion alone is not enough. There must also be the clear recognition that it is only a fully enlightened Buddha who can actually perform the work of liberating beings from suffering, liberating them finally and completely. It is great compassion coupled with this recognition of the unique function of a Buddha that gives rise to the bodhicitta, the firm fixed determination to attain Buddhahood for the purpose of benefitting and liberating countless sentient beings. Because bodhisattvas must pursue their path for such long period in the face of so many obstacles, determination plays an extremely vital role in their vehicle, more so than it does for those who follow the other vehicles.

A bodhisattva must be determined to dwell within saṃsāra for countless aeons undergoing inconceivable hardship without seeking private emancipation into Nibbāna. At the same time they must not delight in the pleasures of mundane life. They must be firm in their attitude of renunciation, in their resolve to cultivate all the factors leading to enlightenment and to cultivate them to the highest degree possible in the fullest measure. Thus, they walk on a "razor's edge", on the one hand they must depart from the mundane life of worldly enjoyment, on the other they must also refrain from attaining Nibbāna quickly before they have perfected all of the requisites of Buddhahood. What enables the bodhisattvas to walk on the razor's edge is their determination. The bodhisattvas' determination comes to expression in the form of vows. Vows are formulated determinations to be kept ever present in the forefront of the mind, to be constantly renewed and to be brought to ever higher, deeper and vaster degrees of fulfilment.

The classical Mahāyāna tradition which has given very extensive attention to the bodhisattva path has many different formulations of the bodhisattva vows. The most popular in far eastern Buddhism is what's called the "Four Great Vows":

1. Sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to rescue them;
2. The defilements are inexhaustible, I vow to destroy them;
3. The gates of the Dharma are immeasurable, I vow to enter them;
4. Buddhahood is supreme, I vow to attain it.

3.1 First Great Vow: "Sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to rescue them"

As mentioned above, the Bodhisattva career is born from great compassion, from the strong overpowering wish to rescue other beings from sufferings, and to confer on them the highest bliss and peace. The love and compassion of bodhisattvas are such that they are ready to subordinate their own liberation to the desire to liberate others. They consider their own attainment of

enlightenment to be primarily a means of liberating countless others. During their long preparation for Buddhahood, they seek to the best of their ability to introduce others to the Dhamma and guide them along the Path. They work to propagate and support the Dharma and thereby help others to gain entrance into the Dhamma and make progress in the practice of the Path. From their great compassion, they are ready to postpone their own attainment of final liberation in order to cultivate all the factors of Buddhahood. This will then enable them to attain the final goal as a Buddha and to exercise the supreme functions of compassion to realise and proclaim the Dharma in all of its fullness and guide countless beings out of saṃsāra to the ultimate bliss of nirvana. Although the bodhisattva makes the vows to liberate countless beings, the only one who can do this effectively is a Buddha. Thus the bodhisattva vows to attain Buddhahood for the sake of rescuing and liberating countless beings.

3.2 Second Great Vow: “The defilements are inexhaustible, I vow to destroy them”

Even though bodhisattvas do not realise the final goal until all their qualities are mature enough to attain Buddhahood, this does not mean that they live indulgently. They recognise the great danger in the mental defilements and the benefits in overcoming them. They must work constantly and diligently to subdue and eliminate the defilements. They train in taming and mastering the mind till they are able to enter all the meditative attainments, the jhānas and samādhi. They also vow to help others to subdue and eliminate their own defilements. They do this in the only way possible by teaching others the Dhamma and guiding them in the practice of the path. The bodhisattvas must eliminate not only the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion, pride, arrogance, etc, but also the very subtle obstructions that prevent them from gaining the complete knowledge of all phenomena. To gain the vast knowledge that is the unique possession of a fully enlightened Buddha, they must eliminate even these very subtle mental obstructions.

3.3 Third Great Vow: “Buddhahood is supreme, I vow to attain it.”

The guiding ideal of the bodhisattva is always the attainment of Buddhahood. For those on the vehicle of personal liberation, the Buddha is essentially a teacher, the supreme guide along the path. But for the bodhisattvas, the Buddha is not only the guide along the path, but also the goal of the path itself. The Buddha is both the guide and the goal of the path for the bodhisattva. Thus bodhisattvas always keep the figure of the Buddha before their inner eyes. They do so by venerating the Buddha, praising the qualities of the Buddha, meditating on the bodily form, and reflecting on the majesty of the Buddha’s qualities. The qualities of the Buddha are innumerable and inconceivable, and can be briefly summarised as threefold:

1. First there is immaculate purity of the Buddha which comes with the eradication of all defilements along with the subtle residues of the defilements;
2. Second is perfect wisdom by which they comprehend all phenomena both in depth and extension;
3. Third is great compassion by which they work ceaselessly for the good of all.

By repeatedly reflecting on the greatness of the Buddha’s qualities, bodhisattvas must make their vow ever stronger and more powerful until it becomes invincible, firm and unwavering. They make the vow that however long it may take, whatever the difficulties, “I vow to attain supreme

Buddhahood for the welfare of the world, of all beings.”

3.4 Fourth Great Vow: “The gates of the Dharma are immeasurable, I vow to enter them.”

To win Buddhahood, a bodhisattva must bring to fulfilment all the practices that culminate in supreme enlightenment. These are the 37 bodhipakkhiya dhammas or 37 aids to enlightenment such as the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the five spiritual faculties, seven factors of enlightenment, the Noble Eightfold Path. They must fulfil the 10 pāramīs in three levels according to the Theravāda tradition, the ordinary level, the medium and the ultimate levels, making a total of 30 pāramīs. They have to master the various meditative states, the jhānas and samādhi, master them and know them inside and out, backward and forward. They must practice the four great Brahmavihāra, the divine abodes, great loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity. The bodhisattva must fulfil all the practices of the disciple and fulfil them to the ultimate degree. To fulfil the practice of the pāramitās, they must be ready to sacrifice their own bodily organs, their bodies, even their lives over countless aeons to bring all these qualities to completion. Since these practices extend over countless aeons, strong determination is needed to persist in the practice. Hence they make the vow, “the gates of the Dharma are immeasurable, I vow to enter them.” This means that one vows to bring all the practices of Buddha’s path to fulfilment in the highest degree possible in the most extensive detail.

By way of conclusion, I want to point out something that I discover that is interesting. The Four Bodhisattva Vows as they are expressed in the Mahāyāna tradition are actually a kind of reinterpretation or an extension of the four determinations that define the disciple in the vehicle of personal liberation in early Buddhism.

1. First in the vehicle of personal liberation is the determination to fully comprehend and thereby overcome all suffering. This becomes reinterpreted or expressed as the vow to rescue countless sentient beings from suffering.
2. Second determination based on the Second Noble Truth is the determination to eradicate the defilements, ignorance and craving, taken to be the causes of suffering. This is retained in the bodhisattva vow to eradicate all the defilements no matter how inexhaustible they may be. This also is reinterpreted to some extent to mean vowing to help others eradicate their own defilements.
3. The determination to realise Nibbāna, the cessation of suffering is reinterpreted and expressed in the bodhisattva vow to attain Buddhahood which brings nirvana and the ability to help others attain liberation.
4. The determination to follow the Noble Eightfold Path as the way to liberation from suffering becomes reformulated as the bodhisattva vow to enter all the gates of Dharma which include the Noble Eightfold Path, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, as well as the pāramitās and other qualities.

Now I have covered the explanation of perfection of determination, adhiṭṭhāna pāramī. As followers of the Buddha, we should choose whichever particular path that agrees with our own temperament, and then make the firm determination to follow that path consistently in all of our actions day by

day, day after day. I thank you all for your attention. May the blessings of the Noble Triple Gem be with you all.

A Study of Pāramīs - Bhikkhu Bodhi

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Lecture 10: **The Perfection of Loving-kindness (Mettā-pāramī)**

Bhikkhu Bodhi

8. The Perfection of Loving-kindness (mettā-pāramī): “May I develop a heart of boundless loving-kindness and great compassion, a heart vast, sublime, and immeasurable, embracing all beings within its range.”

We have been discussing the practice of the ten spiritual perfections or pāramitās. Now we have come to the mettā pāramī, the perfection of loving-kindness. This pāramī has special importance because it is precisely this pāramī which motivates a bodhisattva to undertake the fulfilment of all the pāramīs to the ultimate and highest degree. In order to achieve liberation, even those who don't aim to reach the full enlightenment of Buddhahood still have to develop the pāramī of loving-kindness to an extent necessary to bring the liberation of the mind from all anger and hatred.

The Pāli word, 'mettā' (Sanskrit: maitri) literally means friendliness. The word is derived from the word, 'mitra', which means a friend. The word doesn't mean the ordinary feeling of friendliness or chumminess. Mettā means a quality of warmth and affection for others rooted in a true or deep concern for their true welfare and happiness. Many translators into English render the Pāli word, 'mettā' by the compound word, loving-kindness. 'Kindness' shows the way the quality expresses itself in our attitude, in our action. 'Loving' emphasises the care and concern that underlie this kindness. Mettā is not mere kindness in the sense of just performing benevolent action towards others; and it's not the kind of personal love connected with affection or close relationship. Mettā is a quality which unites this deep concern for others with an expression of this love in benevolent beneficial actions, bodily, verbally and in thought.

In Buddhist commentary, mettā or loving-kindness is defined as the wish for the welfare and happiness for others, both of these aspects must be stressed. When we practice mettā, we wish them to be both happy and well. To be well means externally to be free from all harm and danger such as accident and injury, bodily and mental illness, legal difficulties and so forth. To be happy means to be free from all distressing states of mind such as worries, anxiety, sorrow, fear, greed and other stressful disturbing mental states. At a still deeper level, when we practise mettā, we also wish for others to develop the causes of happiness and well-being. That is, we develop the wish for them to engage in wholesome actions, in virtuous ways of behaviour, and to cultivate wholesome mental qualities for these are the true causes of well-being and happiness both in this and future lives.

Here the practice of mettā is conjoined with a certain element of wisdom. It's through wisdom that we understand the law of cause and effect, the law of karma and its consequences. When we practice loving-kindness, we have to include this element of wisdom so that we wish not only that others be happy here and now, but that they will cultivate the causes for experiencing future happiness and for achieving the ultimate happiness of liberation.

The practice of loving-kindness is closely related to the practice of perfection of patience or khantī pāramī. Both loving-kindness and patience are opposed to the mental defilements of anger and illwill, but they counteract these defilements in different ways. Patience is a quality that we generally have to develop when we are provoked or aroused by situations that normally generate anger. When we practice patience, we have to exercise certain restraint over the mind. When we are in situations which provoke our anger, patience means we make the determination not to give way to anger, but to control, master and subdue the mind. The practice of patience thus points inwardly, and it leads us to confront our own anger and our inclination to take revenge upon those who do harm to us or to those who are dear to us.

Loving-kindness is a more active and positive quality by which we actively wish for the good and happiness of others and seek to promote their welfare and happiness. Even though we have to cultivate loving-kindness in our own mind, loving-kindness is a quality which necessarily extends outwards towards other people. According to Buddhism, loving-kindness is a quality which can be systematically developed towards other people. As it is developed, it eventually acquires an infinite range extending boundlessly to all living beings.

Loving-kindness is also closely connected with compassion or karuṇā. The two qualities have a difference in aspect or in attitude. Loving-kindness wishes for the welfare and happiness of others in any situation they might be in. Compassion is a feeling of empathy or closeness or the sharing of feeling that we experience with those who are afflicted with actual suffering. Compassion is what arises when we feel the suffering of others as our own; when we share their suffering, and when our hearts tremble with the suffering of others. Compassion is expressed as the wish that those who are afflicted with suffering be free from their suffering.

Thus loving-kindness is concerned with the wish for well-being and happiness of others while compassion is the wish for those afflicted with suffering to be free from their suffering. The two have different aspects but are closely intertwined so that if one has one of these qualities will tend to have the other. Of the two, loving-kindness is more comprehensive, and thus it's usually developed first. When loving-kindness is well developed, it can then be used as a basis or platform for developing compassion. Through developing loving-kindness, we cultivate a real care and concern for the wellbeing of others so that when we see others are afflicted with suffering, our hearts naturally and spontaneously share their suffering and wish to relieve them of their suffering.

Why do we practice the development of loving-kindness or mettā in Buddhism? The first and most basic reason is a somewhat selfish one. Loving-kindness is the most direct and effective remedy for illwill and hatred. Hatred is the most destructive force in the entire world; it brings unimaginable harm and misery to all of humanity. The whole course of human history from the most ancient time right up to modern time is written in blood. Countless millions of people have lost their lives, their family members, and everything they possessed because of the hatred of others. Even in today's

world, we see so much conflict and destruction based on ethnic, religious, and national hatred. We see this in the Middle East, in Israel and Palestine where there had been so much senseless killing, suicide bombing and revenge killing all rooted in hatred and anger connected with ethnic, religious and national identity. We see this in Africa where there are so many countries which have gigantic arms bill and yet many of the people in those countries do not have enough food to subsist from day to day. Countries fight with one another based on a sense of identity, ethnic, religious and national identity spilling out in the form of hatred and vengeance against those of a different ethnic, religious and national identity. By developing loving-kindness, each can make a contribution towards peace and harmony in this world.

In our personal lives we can see how hatred and anger bring us so much misery. When our minds are overrun by anger, then we experience stress and tension. Anger and illwill create conflicts and tension and ruin our relationships. When our minds are full of anger and hatred, we experience misery that also spills out in different channels in speech, relating to others and in thoughts towards the others, and thus create miseries for other people too. Loving-kindness is the most direct and powerful remedy for the sickness of anger and illwill. Loving-kindness is a quality that softens the mind. A mind full of anger is stiff, hard and rigid. A mind full of loving-kindness is soft and gentle. As loving-kindness is developed, it brings us inner peace and happiness. When the mind is radiant with loving-kindness, we experience a happiness that does not depend on outer conditions. People usually think that the way to find happiness is to pursue their own selfish interest. In fact the more one pursues one's own self-interest, the more miserable one becomes. When one transforms this self-concern and develops a real deep care and concern for the welfare of others, one starts to feel freer, more at ease, peaceful and happy within oneself.

When one cultivates loving-kindness, it also has the effect of attracting other people, and it brings one many friends. When one regularly practices loving-kindness, that quality of mind just spills out through the features of one's face, words and actions so that people naturally take a liking to one. If we meet people who are still angry with us and if they abuse and revile us, such behaviour of theirs will have no impact on us when we have a mind of loving-kindness. When we meet with such people who try to harm us, instead of wanting to revenge ourselves against them, we'll be moved to help them to overcome their own anger and hatred for we understand that this anger and hatred is bringing them so much harm and injury.

Loving-kindness is also a strong motivating force which moves us to perform wholesome actions. Loving-kindness underlies several of the other pāramīs or spiritual perfections, particularly the practice of giving or generosity, the observance of precepts or morality, and the practice of patience. All of these can be seen as expressions of loving-kindness and they in turn will strengthen our loving-kindness and make it more powerful.

Loving-kindness can be cultivated as an exercise in meditation. As this is done, it can lead to samādhi or profound concentration called mettā-ceto-vimutti or liberation of the mind through loving-kindness. This concentration in turn can be used as the basis for developing insight wisdom. Thus we can move from the systematic development of loving-kindness to the attainment of samādhi, and from there to the development of wisdom. Through insight wisdom, we attain vimutti or liberation.

In the context of the bodhisattva path, loving-kindness and compassion jointly are the two roots of the bodhicitta, the aspiration for supreme enlightenment. It is his boundless loving-kindness and compassion that motivates a bodhisattva to follow this very difficult course for countless aeons dedicated to fulfilling all the pāramitās or perfections. Thus loving-kindness is an essential factor in the way to supreme Buddhahood. The Buddha himself is the fullest expression and embodiment of loving-kindness. It was his great loving-kindness that motivated the Buddha many aeons ago as a bodhisattva to undertake the practice of the pāramīs. During his last life, it was the same loving-kindness that motivated him to toil day in, day out for 45 years, teaching and guiding others along the path to enlightenment. Thus from this we can see that there are many cogent reasons for undertaking the development and practice of loving-kindness.

How does one practice loving-kindness? The Buddha speaks about three manifestations or ways of practicing loving-kindness – mettā-kāyakamma, mettā-vacīkamma, and mettā-manokamma, expressing loving-kindness through bodily action, through speech and in thought. We practice loving-kindness through our bodily action – give people gift in order to benefit them; help people in various ways, call doctor or give medicine to people who are sick; giving people a ride when they need it. We express loving-kindness in speech by speaking kind words of comfort or encouragement or praise to uplift those who are in trouble, dejected or depressed or diffident. We can practice and express loving-kindness in thought. Often we spend too much time looking for the faults and shortcomings of other people, always tallying up the defects of other people. In so doing we tend to become resentful towards them and bear grudges against them. Instead of doing this, we should try to look for the good points of others, their virtuous qualities. That is one way of cultivating loving-kindness in thought.

According to Buddhism, it's not sufficient just to allow the mind to take its own course. One should make a deliberate effort to develop and cultivate loving-kindness so that it becomes firmly rooted in one's mind. This means that one undertakes the practice of loving-kindness as a deliberate exercise in meditation. What's very characteristic of the Buddhist tradition is that it has developed a highly systematic method of developing this meditation on loving-kindness. The Buddha shows us a step by step process by which we can transform our whole mind. Even if we are constantly angry, resentful and grudging persons, we can become open, radiant, gentle and loving persons through systematic and continuous practice. Buddhism gives us a method for systematically cultivating loving-kindness. There are two main aspects to this method – the formula, and a sequence or order in which this quality is to be developed.

Sequence or Order

To develop loving-kindness systematically, we classify people into certain categories. We choose at the outset one person representing each of these categories:

1. oneself;
2. a dear and respected person, generally a teacher;
3. a dearly loved person;
4. a causal friend;
5. a neutral or indifferent person; and
6. a hostile person or an enemy.

It is significant to note that one begins developing loving-kindness towards oneself. The reason for this is that love for others is only possible when one can feel genuine loving-kindness towards oneself. The love that one develops for oneself is not the usual selfish, ego-centric love but it's a deep concern and wish for one's own welfare and happiness. By developing this, one is able to dissolve one's anger and frustrations, and then the mind becomes soft, gentle and pliant and is able to extend the radiance of mettā to others. Developing loving-kindness towards oneself first gives one a standard or criterion for extending loving-kindness to others. In extending loving-kindness to others, the key factor is learning to identify with them, in a sense share their inner sense of identity. One does this by putting oneself into the skin of others so that one can feel as if one is the other person. If we look into ourselves, we see immediately that above all, we each want to be well and happy. Once we recognise this, then we can immediately realise that everyone else, every person wants to be well and happy. We project ourselves into the minds and bodies of others and we share their inner wish for wellbeing and happiness and make it our own. Then we return to ourselves and generate the wish that the other person be truly well and happy. This takes practice at the beginning, but once one learns to do it, then it becomes progressively easier.

In the formula that I have listed in the outline, I mentioned whole groups of people. I have to emphasise that at the beginning it is very important that one chooses specific individuals for generating loving-kindness. If one chooses a group of people, then the loving-kindness would be too fuzzy, vague or formless. It's important to choose particular individuals from each group and make them the targets of one's mettā practice. The individuals selected should always be living individuals (not those who have passed away), should not be individuals with whom one has sensual or romantic relationship.

When one takes up the practice of developing loving-kindness, it's very important to be patient and persistent in one's practice; one should not expect to succeed immediately. At first one might not be able to generate a real heartfelt loving-kindness to the persons selected; still one should not give up on oneself on trying to generate real loving-kindness. At the beginning, one generates a semblance or image of loving kindness – thinking the thought, 'may so and so be well and happy; may he be free from harm and suffering...,' and we don't really feel that. But we are turning the formula over and over in our mind and thinking those thoughts along with the words of the formula. As one practices in this way, even though it might seem artificial at first, at a certain point suddenly a spark will flare up and you will know that now the loving-kindness has arisen, even just for a moment. As one persists, one will develop that little spark of loving-kindness till it becomes stronger and more powerful just like a full fire of love.

I have put in the outline the formula and the sequence. The formula consists of different words which enable one to generate loving-kindness towards others. I'll cover the methodical development of loving-kindness in the next talk.

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Lecture 11: **The Perfection of Loving-kindness (Mettā-pāramī) (con'd)**

Bhikkhu Bodhi

8. The Perfection of Loving-kindness (mettā-pāramī): "May I develop a heart of boundless loving-kindness and great compassion, a heart vast, sublime, and immeasurable, embracing all beings within its range."

Review

We raise the question of what is mettā or loving-kindness. Loving-kindness is warmth and affection for others rooted in the concern for their true welfare and happiness. Mettā is translated in English as the compound word, 'loving-kindness'. The word 'kindness' of the compound word indicates the way the quality is to be expressed in our attitude and action. The word 'loving' emphasises the care and concern that should underlie this kindness. The Buddhist commentators define mettā as the wish for the welfare and happiness of others – they often join the two words, welfare and happiness, hita and sukha in Pāli. When one is wishing for the good of others, one wants them to be both well and happy. When we develop loving-kindness in the context of Buddhist practice, we also wish for others to develop the causes of happiness and wellbeing. We want them to engage in wholesome virtuous action and to cultivate wholesome mental quality. These are the true causes of wellbeing and happiness both in this life and future lives. By recognising this, we bring in the element of wisdom, understanding the law of moral causation. If we are wishing for somebody to be happy by going to parties, taverns or shows, getting rich and squandering his wealth on trivial pleasures, we are really wishing for him to enter upon a self-destructive course of conduct. We have to wish for somebody not only to enjoy pleasure and happiness here and now, but also to be actively cultivating good conduct and good states of mind as these are the karmic causes for happiness and spiritual progress in life after life.

Loving-kindness is closely connected with compassion. There is a difference in attitude or aspect between the two. Loving-kindness is the wish for the welfare and happiness of others in any situation they might be in. Compassion is a more specific feeling of empathy or sympathy with those afflicted with actual sufferings. Compassion is what arises when one feels the suffering of others as one's own; when we share their suffering and our hearts tremble or shake with the suffering of others. Compassion is expressed as the wish that those afflicted with suffering be free from their suffering. Between the two qualities, loving-kindness is more comprehensive and thus it is usually

developed first. When loving-kindness is well developed, then we can use it as the basis for developing compassion.

Last week I explained that loving-kindness is to be actualised or expressed through the three channels of action, bodily action, speech, and thought. Last week, I spoke in more detail about how to actualise loving-kindness in bodily action, speech and thought. Now we have come to the point where I am explaining specifically the meditation on loving-kindness. I explained that this technique is extremely important for changing our attitude little by little, step by step, from one of aggression or anger or hostility or resentment to one of boundless loving-kindness and compassion.

The meditation manual says that when one proceeds to develop the meditation on loving-kindness, one first has to recognise the dangers in anger and hatred and the benefit in loving-kindness. One doesn't think about this casually, but one really reflects, examines, and investigates on the particular danger of being in the grip of anger and hatred, and the blessings, benefit and beauty of developing loving-kindness. Some of the dangers in hatred and anger are that they are causes of inner torment, burning of the mind; they alienate other people, making us feel lonely and miserable; they cause stress and strain in our interpersonal relations. If the anger and hatred become really strong, they could lead to acts of severe violence and cruelty, and then we act in destructive way, speak angry words, and we create very powerful unwholesome kamma that will burn up much of our spiritual merit and could even lead to lower forms of rebirth.

In contrast loving-kindness softens the mind; it brings inner peace and happiness. On a more practical level, it attracts many people and wins many friends. Loving-kindness inspires and motivates us to engage in wholesome actions which benefit others. In this way we can fulfil several of the other pāramitās including generosity, sīla or moral discipline, and patience, khantī (kṣantī).

When one begins the practice of mettā as a formal meditation, it's good to devote several sessions to just sitting or even walking (walking at moderate pace), turning over in one's mind over and over again the dangers of anger and the benefits and blessings of loving-kindness. This impresses them deeply upon the mind and generates a strong desire to overcome the tendencies to anger and hatred and to develop the mind of loving-kindness.

The actual practice or technique for developing the loving-kindness meditation involves two main components which I call the target groups and the formula. Target groups are people who are recipients of our mental waves of loving-kindness. People are classified into different categories. People are graded in a way which facilitates most effectively first the development of loving-kindness and then extension to universal dimension.

The target group consists of oneself, an esteemed person (generally a teacher), a loved one (a close person), a dear friend, a neutral person, and finally a hostile person or enemy. It's important that one chooses a specific real living person to fill each category. At the outset of the practice, it should be one person in each category. In the early stages, one sticks with the same person from each category. One doesn't go about changing the person. After one gets some experience and skill, then it's good to change the persons.

The Formula

The formula consists of different words which enable one to generate loving-kindness for others.

‘May he be well; May he be happy; may he be free from harm (physical illness; to enjoy good bodily health); may he be free suffering (sorrow, mental fear or distress, conflict; to enjoy peace and tranquillity etc);...May all his good purposes be fulfilled (wishing him to sow the seeds of future happiness).’

When one applies this technique of meditation, at the outset, unless one is especially gifted, one can't really generate real loving-kindness. This is why we have the verbal formula. We use it as a tool or device or skilful means to arouse mettā. It takes time and training for real genuine mettā to arise. In the practice, we connect our thought process to the words of the formula. We try to feel the wish signified by the words. For example, when I am developing loving-kindness towards my teacher, as I recite the words of the wish, ‘may my teacher be well’, and I try to arouse a real actual wish for the welfare of my teacher through those words. This is not be a mechanical repetition of the formula like reciting a mantra; and it is not a process of self-hypnosis where one is just trying to put oneself in a trance. In undertaking the practice, one has to work with mindfulness and clear comprehension of what one is doing. This is a process of gradual cultivation. It requires patience and persistence. When one is developing loving-kindness, one has to use the formula and turn it over and over in one's mind. Through the words of the formula, one tries to generate the feeling that corresponds to the words. When the practice is starting to succeed, it doesn't mean the mind is going to be radiating with bright light going out; but rather the mark that genuine mettā is being generated is that physically there comes a warm soft glowing feeling in the region of the heart, and mentally there is a sincere heartfelt concern and wish for the welfare and happiness of the other person.

In taking the persons in the formula, the meditation manual always insists that one must begin with oneself. This is a very important point. The reason that one must begin with oneself is that to generate loving-kindness towards others, one must first has to get a sense that the deepest urge of one's own being is to be well and happy. When one gets some clear idea of this urge, one has to dwell on it and then generate a real concern for one's own welfare and happiness. This will help dissolve the hard crust of anger, resentment, frustration and hostility that might have been building up in one's mind over a long time. Once one is able to generate this concern for one's own welfare and happiness, then one gradually brings in the other persons representing the target groups. First one brings in the respected person like one's teacher; then one takes a loved one, not someone (not a sexual or romantic partner) towards whom one has romantic or sexual feeling; and then one brings in a close friend. In the early stages of practicing loving-kindness meditation, it's good to terminate the practice with these three persons, the respected person (like a teacher), a loved one, and a close friend. Going further might tire the mind out. In order for loving-kindness to develop, one has to have a natural sense of closeness and concern for that person. These three persons are naturally close to oneself and it would not be extremely difficult to generate loving-kindness towards them.

Even as one is developing loving-kindness towards these people who are naturally close to oneself, in the course of one's practice, as the heart begins to expand, all of a sudden one might recall the faults of these persons or strains in the relationship. One has to overlook the person's faults and any strains on the relationship and focus on the good side of the person, the person's worthy quality.

When the mind becomes softened to these three close persons, one is going through in one's session, first with oneself, then the respected person, a loved one, and a close friend; then goes back to oneself, respected person, loved one, and the close friend; back to oneself, respected person, loved one, and close friend, in a cycle like this until the mind becomes soft, gentle and it develops that warm glowing feeling towards all of them.

When one develops some degree of skill of developing loving-kindness to the close ones, then one can bring in the neutral person. This is where difficulty arises. The neutral person is one with whom one has no close personal relationship. It is a nameless person that we see in our neighbourhood. Usually we see this person as a 'mindless face'. This is just a delusion that comes from our own deeply rooted, self-centred perspective. What one has to do with this person is to gain some sense of empathy or identification with the person, a feeling of closeness and concern, a deep and genuine concern for that person's wellbeing and happiness. How do we do this? There are various practical techniques in the Buddhist tradition. The simplest way is to exchange our sense of self-identity with that of the other person. We project ourselves imaginatively into the other person's skin, body and mind. We consider that just as we want above all to be well and happy, just as this is the deepest urge of our own being, so does the other person, the nameless face also above all wants to be well and happy. We try to imagine that for the time being, 'I drop my identity and take the identity of the other person.' Sometimes that will help us generate a feeling of closeness and concern for the other person. Sometimes this doesn't work, then we have to use other methods. For example, one technique is to reflect that, 'just as I have parents who love me and are concerned about me, so this person also has parents who love him/her and are concerned about that person. Maybe it's just pure chance that we ourselves are not that person's parents. The person may have a wife/husband who loves him/her, he/she has children just as I have children,..'. In this way, you try to find points of commonality between yourself and the other person, you realise that it's almost just chance that you are you and he is he. With just a flip of the coin, you could have been him, and he could have been you. If you really have deep confidence and faith in the Buddha's teaching of rebirth, then you reflect on the Buddha's statement, 'It's hard to find a single person who at sometime has not been your own mother, father, sister, brother, son or daughter in previous existences.' One has to experiment with different techniques till one finds one technique that works effectively that helps to create that feeling of closeness, friendliness, even identification with the seemingly neutral indifferent stranger. When one succeeds, that barrier drops out, one is able to generate real loving-kindness towards that seemingly neutral person.

Lastly one comes to the hostile person or enemy. This is the person with whom one has to be very cautious when one tries to develop loving-kindness towards him/her. Before we admit the hostile person into the chamber of our contemplation, we first have to build up the momentum of loving-kindness towards the other person (neutral person). When that momentum is built up, then we bring in the hostile person. Sometimes one has to go through the whole gamut or range of persons again and again – self, teacher, loved one, a friend, neutral person; again self, teacher, loved one, a friend, neutral person; again self, teacher, dear one, a friend, neutral person; again self, teacher, loved one, a friend, neutral person; repeatedly until one has built up the force, then one extends to the hostile person. When a hostile thought towards the 'enemy' person arises, then one has to use the techniques of reflection, same as those reflections towards the neutral person in order to soften one's feelings towards the so-called enemy and make that person one's friend.

The mark of triumphant success in developing loving-kindness towards individual persons is gaining the ability to generate mettā to all the persons in the different sets equally without discrimination, that you are able to regard them all as your close dear friends. In the Buddhist manual, this stage is called the abolishing or removal of barriers since there are no more discriminations between close people, neutral people, hostile people and oneself. One regards them all with the same loving-kindness that one has towards oneself. Once one reaches the stage when one can generate mettā towards individual persons in the groups with a fair degree of success, then briefly at the end of one's session, one can do an extension and expansion of the mettā to different types of beings:

- first one takes all human beings, imagines them spread out in different continents, North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, etc generate to all human beings the wish for their welfare and happiness;
- others beings if you believe and accept the teachings on other realms - radiate loving-kindness first to the devas or celestial or heavenly beings, then to beings in the lower realms, to the animals, the to the hungry ghosts or tormented spirits, and even to the beings in the hell realm.
- Finally let the mind spread out through the entire universe with all of its many galaxies and world systems, each with its multiple planes of existence, each inhabited by countless sentient beings, and one generates the wish that may all sentient beings throughout the universe be well, happy, free from harm and suffering, may all their good purposes be fulfilled.

This is the practice of mettā pāramī, the perfection of loving-kindness. Thank you all for listening. May the blessings of the Noble Triple Gem be with you all.

A Study of Pāramīs - Bhikkhu Bodhi

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Lecture 12: **The Perfection of Equanimity (upekkhā-pāramī)**

Bhikkhu Bodhi

9. The Perfection of Equanimity (upekkhā-pāramī): “May I develop a mind of perfect equanimity, a mind that is just and impartial towards all beings, without bias or preferences; a mind that cannot be shaken by the pairs of worldly opposites (gain and loss, fame and obscurity, praise and blame, pleasure and pain).”

We have been talking over the past few months about the ten pāramīs, the ten spiritual perfections. Today we come to the upekkhā pāramī, the perfection of equanimity. What is this quality called equanimity? Equanimity (upekkhā) is balance of mind, a quality of mind that protects one from swinging to extremes. Equanimity doesn't mean apathy, lack of feeling or lukewarm indifference. Equanimity is the unshakable calmness, serenity, and self-mastery that we attain when we learn to transcend extreme reactions to the experiences that we undergo in the course of our life. Equanimity protects us from being overcome by destructive emotions. It gives a quiet, still and silent point of observation from which we can properly assess matters before we act. In this way, equanimity enables us to act most effectively. It thus is an extremely valuable quality that promotes the entire practice of the path of Dhamma.

The Pāli word for equanimity is upekkhā and the Sanskrit word is upekṣa. The word is based on a root which means 'to look; to perceive'. Thus equanimity implies the ability to look at things objectively without being swayed by subjective emotion. With equanimity we can view conditions with detachment; we can see through the changing vicissitudes of life, and we are no longer controlled by them. The Buddhist texts speak of equanimity in two main contexts. One is equanimity in face of changing conditions of life. The other is equanimity towards other people, the ability to regard others impartially, free from favouritism and prejudice.

To understand the importance of developing equanimity, let's consider our usual frame of mind. Think of your state of mind as you go through a typical day in your life. If you pay close attention, you will see that the mind is often in the grip of mood. Moods are like clouds in the mind; sometimes there are heavy dark clouds, sometimes light fluffy clouds, sometimes slow rambling clouds, sometimes clouds that fly by quickly. Whatever kind of clouds they might be, they cover up the deep blue immensity of the sky; they obscure the brilliant radiance of the sun; they cast shadows

on the ground; and often they bring rains, sleet and snow. The mood of the mind originates from the 'dwelling place' of the mind, i.e. from what the mind is dwelling on. Again reflect upon your own states of mind. You will see that so often, the mind is either running backwards to the past or jumping ahead into the future. It seldom rests quietly in the present. If you tune in even more finely to your thoughts, you will see that many of them are driven by extreme attitude. When we think about the past, sometimes we replay the enjoyment that we experienced in the past, yesterday, last year or many years ago. We congratulate ourselves on our success; we relive our pleasures, and we long and yearn for the vanished happiness that we imagined we enjoyed, indulging in nostalgia. On the other hand when we think about the past, we might think about our failures, mistakes or missed opportunities. Then we feel regret, self-pity or self-blame. Our joy vanishes and misery comes in to take its place. In either case, the mind is knocked off balance. When thoughts of pleasures and success in the past arise, then we cling to these thoughts and try to hold to them, thus they knock us in one direction. When thoughts of failures and disappointment sweep across the mind, then we get overwhelmed by them, and they knock us in the other direction. That is the way we live so much of our life moving from elation to dejection, from pride to self-pity. That is the way it is with the past.

We find that basically the same pattern also holds in regards to thoughts about the future. When we think about the future, our thoughts are usually driven either by hope or high expectation, the desire for success, the dream of ultimate fulfilment, or else when we are in a pessimistic mood, we are overcome by negative thoughts, fear of disappointment, worry about failure, anxiety over the loss of wealth or loved ones. In either case, again there is no mental balance, no self-mastery, and no equanimity. The mind is like a drunken driver, trying to drive down the middle of the lane. No matter how hard he tries to go straight, inevitably he swings back and forth. Sometimes he goes too close to the car in the next lane, sometimes too close to the edge of the road. If he is not careful, he might drive off the road altogether and destroys himself and others.

Equanimity is the quality that enables the mind to hold to the middle position. The Buddhist commentary explains equanimity as *tatramajjhataṭṭā*, which means 'standing in the middle'. The idea of equanimity is thus closely connected to the Buddhist concept of the Middle Way. Longing for the vanished past and high hopes for the future are both manifestations of craving or attachment. Regrets about the past, and fear and worry about the future are both manifestations of aversion, hatred or resistance. Thus the mind is driven by clinging and aversion, attraction and repulsion, liking and disliking, this goes on from morning to night. The Buddha teaches that such a condition is one of great suffering. Even though we might not want to admit it, when we aren't in control of our mind, then we are in a state of agitation. Even when we attained our cherished goal, when we win the success we dream about, as long as we cling to our success, we make ourselves vulnerable to disappointment. When circumstances change, when our success cracks down, then we find ourselves in the dumps, we become angry, dejected and sorrowful. Looked at objectively, victory and defeat, success and failure are both forms of suffering. Success accompanied by attachment is 'sugar-coated' suffering while failure is the 'bitter pill' of suffering. In either case, we do not experience real, stable happiness, a happiness that remains firm despite changing circumstances. For Buddhism, stable happiness depends upon a mind that can't be shaken by circumstances. Real happiness comes when the mind is poised in equanimity. The ordinary mind, the untrained mind is like a feather in the wind. When the wind blows from the east, the feather flies to the west. When the wind flows from the west, the feather flies to the east. The mind of equanimity is like a

mountain, it does not move when the east or west wind blows. The mountain remains firm even if it is hit by a hurricane or a tornado. In the same way the mind of equanimity is firm and steady, lofty and unwavering.

This is why the Buddha says that equanimity is one of the greatest blessings. In the famous Mahāmaṅgala sutta, the Buddha says, ‘when one’s mind does not shake when touched by the changing conditions of the world, when the mind is sorrowless, stainless and secure, that is the highest blessing.’

‘Mind does not shake when touched by the changing conditions of the world’

The Buddhist texts often speak of eight changing worldly conditions or the ‘eight worldly winds’. They come in four pairs of opposites: gain and loss; fame and bad reputation; praise and blame; and pleasure and pain. Four of these are considered types of success: gain, fame, praise and pleasure. This is what most people want. The other four are types of failure: loss, bad reputation, blame and pain. This is what everybody fears and despises; that is what we dread and what we are ready to sacrifice everything to avoid. We spend our lives trying to achieve the four types of success and to avoid the four types of failure, but very often we can’t get our way. We aren’t masters of our own destiny because life is inescapably unpredictable. We are subject to the play of conditions. Again and again, we fail to attain wealth and fame; we get blamed and criticised by others; our health declines and we have to face pain and illness; we have to face the loss of loved ones; we must also have to face the inevitable end of our life, death. How can we keep balance in the face of these uncertainties of life?

To keep balance in the face of these uncertainties, the quality that we need is equanimity, upekkhā. How are we to develop this equanimity? There are two main contributing factors in the development of equanimity, mindfulness and wisdom. In developing equanimity, the particular type of mindfulness that we need is awareness of our own state of mind. This is one of the four satipaṭṭhānas, the four applications of mindfulness called ‘contemplation of mind’. By this technique, we don’t let the mind get carried away by its mood. Inevitably different moods, thoughts or emotions arise, but we recognise them, identify them and don’t let ourselves be swept away by them. When a mind of attachment arises, we recognise it as a mind of attachment and let it go. When a mind of aversion or disliking arises, we recognise it as a mind of aversion or disliking and let it go. Whatever state of mind arises, we just notice it, observe it, penetrate it and understand it, but we don’t cling to it and become the victim of our mood. By identifying the state of mind with mindfulness, we gain some distance from our own states of mind, from our own thoughts and mood. Thus mindfulness brings detachment, and from this detachment comes equanimity.

Wisdom

The other main factor needed to develop equanimity is wisdom, paññā or prajñā. This wisdom has two aspects (principles). One relates to the law of kamma and its fruit. With this aspect of wisdom, we recognise that whatever that happens to us is the result of our own kamma or our own volitional action in the past. We should not think of the external world as something completely foreign and external to us. Seen from one angle, it can be understood as the field in which our past kamma is working itself out. Thus the events that the world throws at us, the various experiences we meet

with in life are actually challenges to us to overcome the limitations of our kamma. Instead of trying to escape from our difficulties in the way that we usually do, we should face them with courage and determination; we should see them as challenges to grow spiritually. Pain, failure, criticisms from others, grief at the loss of loved ones, these can become part of a path of self-transformation, of inner purification. We can consider our difficulties and suffering as an opportunity to increase our strength to renew our resolution to make new effort to try our best in spite of all the obstacles and hindrances that we face. We might not get what we want, if we try to develop equanimity, we can be confident that we are quietly building up inner reserves of strength to help us tread the path to enlightenment to ever greater height. Similarly when we meet with success, we also need to apply the wisdom of kamma and its fruit to view the success with dispassion. Thus we don't become self-satisfied, we don't indulge in our merit, but we take this as an incentive to develop ever more wisdom and virtue.

The second principle of wisdom used to develop equanimity is the teaching of non-self or anattā. The Buddha teaches that the most fundamental delusion at the base of the mind is the delusion of self, the delusion that we have a real and substantial centre of personal identity. Because we accept the idea of self as a reality, our life usually revolves around the notions of 'I' and 'mine'. The thought of 'mine' gives rise to greed and craving. The thought of 'I' gives rise to self-love, pride, and conceit. When we fail to get what we want, our sense of self is injured and thus we become miserable and depressed. When we succeed in getting what we want, our sense of self blows up, and then we become elated and ecstatic. Both these emotions, elation and dejection, ecstasy and depression, are states of agitation. The medicine for this agitation is the wisdom of selflessness. The Buddha teaches that all phenomena, internal and external, are to be contemplated thus, 'This is not mine; this is not I; this is not myself.' The true and highest realisation of non-self comes about through insight meditation. Even long before we make the breakthrough to direct realisation of non-self, we have to begin applying this theme to all aspects of our life. In the midst of the changing conditions of life, we should constantly remind ourselves that whatever happens to us is devoid of any relation to a truly existing self. Everything that we take to be 'I' and 'mine' is just empty, conditioned phenomena arising and ceasing through causes and conditions. When we deeply investigate and contemplate this truth of selflessness, we become detached from everything that attracts us, detached from everything that disturbs us, and this results in equanimity.

Second Aspect: Equanimity Towards Persons: Impartiality

The equanimity towards persons means impartiality, viewing all persons as the same without discrimination, bias or favouritism. Ordinarily we distinguish between our friends and benefactors, these are the people we favour; and then we are unconcerned with strangers, these are people with whom we have no relationship; and we dislike those who treat us badly, those who are out to harm us. This is quite natural inclination of the mind. To develop equanimity, we regard all these people as the same, we make no discrimination between them; we have the same attitude towards our so-called friends and our so-called foes. One way to develop this equanimity is to reflect upon the beginningless nature of the saṃsāra. In the course of our many countless lives in saṃsāra, we have had various relations to countless beings. These relations change from one life to the next. Our friend in one life becomes a stranger in the next life. In the third life he becomes an enemy. The

enemy in one life becomes a stranger in the next life; and in the life after that he might become our friend. Why should we discriminate people just on the basis of chance relationships in this one life.

The other way to develop this equanimity towards persons is to use the idea or theme of non-self as a template for viewing all other people. We realise that people, human beings have no substantial truly existing selves on the basis of which we can distinguish them as friends, strangers and enemies. In reality they are constantly changing streams of conditioned formations without any stable centre of selfhood. If that is the case what is the basis for discriminating friends, strangers and enemies?

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Lecture 13: **The Perfection of Wisdom (paññā-pāramī)**

Bhikkhu Bodhi

10. The Perfection of Wisdom (paññā-pāramī): "May my wisdom grow as vast as space, as deep as the ocean, and as luminous as the sun, dispelling the darkness of ignorance and illumining the true nature of all things."

In my talks on Saturdays, I have been explaining the ten perfections, dasa pāramīs as they have been transmitted in the southern Buddhist tradition. Today I come to the last of the 10 perfections in my own arrangement, this is paññā pāramī or better known as prajñā pāramitā. I will explain this topic according to the tradition with which I am best acquainted, the Pāli or Theravāda tradition. Although I have read some of the prajñāpāramitā sutras of the Mahāyāna tradition, it's still too difficult for me to interpret and explain their meaning. To do so, one would require several years of study, especially of the Madhyamaka philosophy which provides a systematic interpretation of the Sanskrit prajñāpāramitā sutras. In the Pāli commentaries, wisdom or paññā actually comes fourth among the ten pāramīs. I find this list somewhat disorganised. I think the list in the northern tradition shows a more logical progression in making the whole sequence of pāramīs culminate in the perfection of wisdom. Thus in the talks that I have been giving, I have reorganised the Pāli list by taking wisdom pāramī out from the fourth place and put it in tenth place. This I believe is in conformity with the statement of the Buddha that among all the factors leading to enlightenment, wisdom is the chief and foremost of them all. We see in the five spiritual faculties (indriyas) that the other four indriyas lead to and culminate in paññā, wisdom. We have faith, energy, mindfulness, and concentration, these are the four fundamental faculties and their crown is paññindriya, the wisdom faculty.

Wisdom is so important among the ten pāramīs because it is the guiding factor for all the pāramīs. The large Sanskrit Prajñāpāramitā Sutra supports this by making a statement that the other perfections gain the name perfection or pāramitā when they are supported and sustained by prajñāpāramitā or the perfection of wisdom; when they lack support by the perfection of wisdom, prajñāpāramitā, they cannot be called pāramitās or perfections.

At the beginning of our practice of the Buddha's path, we have to cultivate all the other qualities like generosity, morality, patience and the rest as preparatory steps to the development of wisdom. When wisdom arises, it then takes hold of the other qualities like generosity, morality and patience and transforms them into spiritual perfections. It is wisdom that embraces them, encompasses

them and pervades them, and thereby makes them serve as qualities capable of leading to enlightenment and liberation. Without the guiding function of *prajñā* or wisdom, the other *pāramitās* or qualities would be merely random virtues, not qualities leading to enlightenment. Wisdom without the other virtues would not be wisdom at all, but only intellectual cleverness. When wisdom embraces and guides the other qualities, they become integral parts of the Buddha's path leading to the deepest realisation of enlightenment and the attainment of perfect liberation. When wisdom is accompanied by the other wholesome qualities, it becomes noble and sublime, a wisdom that shines forth in our character and conduct.

The path to enlightenment is not a straight line, it unfolds like a spiral. In actual practice, the Buddha's path winds around and around. But this circular movement is quite different from the circular movement of *saṃsāra*, the cycle of birth and death. In *saṃsāra*, birth leads to death, and death is followed by new birth; the process turns around pointlessly, and we meet with suffering again and again but acquire nothing of any lasting benefit. However the Buddha's path might be called a three dimensional circle. In other words, it is a spiral that winds around, and in winding leads higher and higher. We begin with faith, which is usually accompanied by a spark of wisdom or insight into the real nature of life. Motivated by this faith with our mind lit up momentarily by this spark of wisdom, we engage in various wholesome virtuous practices such as giving generously, observing precepts, cultivating loving-kindness and compassion, and practicing meditation. These practices produce virtuous dispositions in the mind, and these virtuous dispositions clear the mind of the oppressive weight of the coarser defilements. As they gather strength, they generate joy and happiness; they bring tranquillity and clarity. All these wholesome dispositions serve as the groundwork, the soil for the arising of wisdom, which becomes brighter and brighter until it floods the mind with light, like a search light on a dark night. This wisdom will then embrace the other wholesome qualities and make them *pāramīs* or *pāramitās*, spiritual perfections in the true sense of the word. Then wisdom and the other wholesome qualities will gradually mature together, nurturing and strengthening one another until they reach fulfilment at the realisation of full enlightenment and liberation.

In its emphasis on wisdom as the key to spiritual development, the Buddha's teaching is unique among the great religions of the world. The reason why wisdom plays such a major role in Buddhism is because the Buddha points to ignorance as the deepest root cause of human suffering. Liberation cannot be achieved by faith and devotion; it can't be achieved by worshipping the Buddha; and it can't be achieved by performing rites and rituals. Such practices can be helpful as expressions of faith and devotion, and they can produce wholesome states of mind. However liberation is ultimately dependent upon direct personal insight into the fundamental truth of things, upon insight into the final mode of existence of phenomena. This insight is the function of wisdom.

In the teaching on the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha says that craving is the origin of suffering. This statement should not be taken in absolute terms for it's made with a practical purpose in mind. We should understand that even craving has a more fundamental cause, and that cause is ignorance. Ignorance and craving together are responsible for much more than the suffering on an individual human life extending between birth and death. Together ignorance and craving hold us in bondage to the beginningless suffering of *saṃsāra*, the round of birth and death that has been turning through inconceivable time. Therefore if we want to gain freedom from *saṃsāra*, we have to

overcome craving. If we want to overcome craving, then we have to eliminate ignorance. The means for eliminating ignorance is wisdom. Wisdom overcomes ignorance and brings along with it realisation of the reality beyond birth and death; it brings liberation into the birth less and deathless state called Nibbāna.

In English the word 'wisdom' has a very general meaning. In Buddhism, the word paññā or prajñā is used in a very specific sense. Paññā means knowledge and vision of things as they really are, knowing with direct insight the true characteristics of phenomena. Wisdom is penetrative insight into the true nature of things. We normally assume that we understand things as they are, especially if we are intelligent, even more so if we have university degrees, B.A., M.A. or Ph.D. degrees. Buddhism tells us that what we take to be wisdom or intelligence is just a deluded notion. Buddhism says that the knowledge that we normally pride ourselves on is just conceptual information knowledge, practical technical knowhow, but it is not true wisdom. For Buddhism, true wisdom manifests in the absence of greed and craving, in the absence of hatred and anger, in lack of pride and conceit. It also manifests in love and compassion, in simplicity and contentment, in humility and selflessness. If we are prone to greed, if we easily get angry, if we are conceited, if we are lacking in love and compassion, and if our mind is constantly overrun with all sorts of desires, we could take this as a clear indication that we do not possess real wisdom.

The Buddhist texts sometimes speak of ignorance as like a mist that clouds up our mental vision. Sometimes it's compared to cataracts that cover our spiritual lives so that we see things in a distorted and deluded way. Ignorance makes us perceive, think and understand things in confused ways. The Chinese Prajñāpāramitā Sutra uses the expression, 'diantoumugxiang', ideas which are upside down and like a dream.

Wisdom in contrast is a faculty that can blow away the clouds and mists of ignorance. It's like a lancet that can remove the cataracts that cover our spiritual lives. It's through wisdom that we are able to see things the right side up, so that we can see and understand things correctly. The things that we have to see with wisdom are not some mysterious and esoteric secrets, but are the realities concerning our own lives, the real nature of our own experience. It is just this world of day-day experience that lies closest to ourselves. It's this day-to-day experience that constitutes what we call ourselves. But it is the real nature of this day-to-day experience that is usually hidden and distorted by ignorance. So we use the Buddha's teaching as tools in order to undertake a systematic, methodical, careful and thorough investigation of our own experience. We take our own bodies and minds as the objects of our investigation. We make a sustained systematic attempt to understand them accurately, clearly and properly. It is this process of gradually unfolding insight into the true nature of own existence that constitutes the Path of wisdom that leads to the ultimate freedom.

The process of cultivating wisdom has to be guided from the outset by right view. The Buddha says that the whole development of the Path depends upon right view. In order to acquire right view, we have to give a great deal of attention to correcting our views, our attitudes, our perspective. In the Buddhist tradition, it is said that there are three kinds of wisdom: wisdom that arises from learning; wisdom that arises from reflection; and wisdom that arises from meditative cultivation. Usually they are seen as three steps; but they can also be seen as steps that occur not successively but

concurrently, each progressively enriching the others. I prefer to see them in the second way, but it's easier to explain them as unfolding in a step by step process.

To acquire wisdom, to acquire right understanding, the first step is to acquire the wisdom born of learning. This is the wisdom that comes from studying the Dhamma properly under qualified teachers, and studying texts, sutras and commentaries that disclose and reveal the true nature of phenomena. In the Pāli Canon, I regard as especially important for gaining right understanding a number of suttas from the Majjhima Nikāya, especially from the chapter on Vibhangavagga, Suttas Nos 144-149; and also important are several of the chapters from the Saṃyutta Nikāya, especially the chapters concerned with Dependent Origination, Five aggregates, twelve sense bases, four elements or 18 elements and the final chapter concerned with the Four Noble Truths. So the first step of developing wisdom is to learn the Dhamma properly. As we study the Dhamma, a kind of wisdom arises in the mind, a conceptual understanding that conforms to the real nature of things.

To sharpen and deepen our understanding, we have to reflect upon the teachings that we have studied. We have to take up the teachings, investigate them, examine the meanings of the teachings, draw out their implications, explore their interconnections, and see how they relate to ourselves, to our own lives. For example we read in the text about the teaching of anattā, the teaching on non-self, what exactly does it mean to say, 'sabbe dhamma anattā – all things are non-self?' How does this teaching of non-self relate to other fundamental teachings of Buddhism such as the teaching on impermanence, or dependent origination, or the Four Noble Truths? How can we establish validity of these teachings by means of reasoning and reflection? These are important matters to be considered. For developing the wisdom that arises from reflection, it's often helpful not just to stay isolated and alone but to engage in Dhamma discussions with others. Almost inevitably we develop one particular point of view that is conditioned by our own biases, prejudices, presuppositions; a point of view which is moulded by our own previous learning, our own experience, our own mental tendencies. So our understanding as far as it goes might be correct or accurate, but it will usually be limited. To widen our understanding, to be able to see the same subject from different angles, it's helpful to engage in discussions with others; because then we see the same subject as illuminated by other people on the basis of their experience, their preconceptions and pre-understanding. By trying to integrate our understanding with the understanding of others, then we can gain quite broad and comprehensive understanding of the subject. When we hold discussions with others, we have to be careful that the discussions don't degenerate into angry debates in which we maintain our opinions stubbornly, and just argue with others trying to defeat them, and prove the superiority of our understanding. When we engage in discussions, it's always best to go about them in a humble frame of mind, wishing to learn from others; we should also keep a critical eye not to accept things just blindly because somebody else who might seem more knowledgeable and authoritative says so.

First we have the understanding born of learning. I should add that learning here includes not only one's own reading of the texts but also attending Dhamma discourses by knowledgeable teachers. Then along with the wisdom born of learning, we develop the wisdom born of reflection; by thinking about the teachings, reflecting on them; and by widening our point of view through discussions with others.

In the third place comes bhāvanā-maya-paññā, the wisdom born from meditation. Once we have established a clear understanding of the meaning of the sutras, once we have sharpened our view through reflection, then to transform our conceptual understanding into direct experience, we have to train our mind to see directly the things we have studied and reflected upon. This is done through the practice called meditation, 'bhāvanā' which means cultivation or development. It's through meditation that we transform our conceptual understanding into direct knowledge, direct experience. Usually we begin with a simple object, something upon which we focus and collect the mind. This is because the Buddha says that experiential wisdom arises through concentration, samādhi. When the mind is scattered and when it is driven by the waves of conceptual thought, then we cannot understand the subject deeply and penetratively. To gain this penetrative insight, we have to focus the mind, collect the mind. So we take an object of meditation, usually simple like the breath, the body as a whole, or a quality like loving-kindness. We collect the mind on the subject till the mind becomes collected, quiet, unified. In that collectedness or concentration of the mind, the mind develops penetrative strength, a power to go deep into the object of observation. We then take this unified mind and focus it upon the stream of experience as it is flowing on from moment to moment. We let the mind ride the stream of experience. Through mindfulness, keep the attention on each occasion of experience. As we attend mindfully to our experience from moment to moment, just like a flower that opens up and unfolds in the light of the sun, so our experience opens and unfolds so that we can examine it in detail, explore it and understand it accurately.

What does it mean to see the real nature of our experience with direct insight? In the teachings of early Buddhism as presented in the Pāli Nikāyas, it is said that the aim of insight wisdom is to see the three aspects of experience that normally remain concealed from us. They remain concealed from us not because they are difficult to see in themselves, but because we generally don't want to see them and so we constantly try to hide them from our view. Yet for Buddhism it is precisely these three aspects of experience that hold the key to spiritual freedom. These three aspects of experience are called the three marks or the three characteristics, lakkhaṇa in Pāli or lakṣaṇa in Sanskrit. The three marks of all experience that we have to understand with wisdom are impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) and non-self (the absence of self = anattā).

Impermanence is placed first because the mark of impermanence is the gateway, the door to the other two characteristics. Impermanence is the most evident and objective of the three characteristics. Normally under the influence of ignorance and craving, we are continually seeking for some permanent, constant and absolutely reliable source of security in our lives. We think if we have a good secure house to live in, then we'll be safe and secure; or if we have a strong army, we'll be safe and secure. We are constantly trying to conceal from our sight and recognition any signs that the things that we cling to for security and for pleasure might be subject to change, to loss, to destruction. Even the very thought of old age, decay, thought of illness or of getting cancer, a stroke, Alzheimer disease makes us feel uncomfortable. When we think of ourselves face to face with death, there we are crossing a street, a car driven by a drunken turns around a corner and is coming right at us in full speed, death is inevitable. When we think of this, it's so uncomfortable and it fills us with such fear and dread that immediately we have to turn away and think of something pleasant.

So the first principle is to understand impermanence. To understand impermanence directly brings not misery and depression but a sense of release, of joy and bliss. We feel when we understand impermanence we then feel that we can let go of whatever is impermanent. We understand that letting go means not loss and deprivation but the gaining of inner freedom. When we understand the mark of impermanence, with a little reflection we can then realise that whatever is impermanent is necessarily flawed, defective, unsatisfactory, bound up in subtle or gross ways with suffering. When we see that the things that are impermanent are bound up with suffering, then we realise that they are not worth clinging to, and we are ready to let go of them and we are able to release our attachment to them.

Even though we might be able to let go of the coarse attachments, the clinging to things with the hope of getting pleasures or permanence out of them, there is one very subtle attachment that is very difficult to break, and that is the clinging to things, especially to the phenomena of body and mind with the sense that 'this is mine', 'this is I', and 'this is myself'. Normally through deep or beginningless habit, we cling to body and mind as the thoughts 'this is mine; this is I; this is my true self'. We then try to establish some permanent personal identity within ourselves, something that we can say this is my true self. Then we subscribe to the belief in a world of substantial truly existent objects, the real world out there which is the field of action for this truly existing self. Buddhism says that this idea of self is the lynchpin that holds all the other defilements in place. It's the idea of 'mine' that gives rise to craving, greed and selfishness. The idea of 'I' is the source of conceit and pride. The idea of selfhood or inner soul that is the basis for deluded views. Therefore again and again, the Buddha used the sharp edge of the sword of wisdom to cut through all the entanglements, all of the fetters caused by this idea of self. The culmination of the practice of insight is the insight into the selflessness of all phenomena. One begins with contemplation of impermanence; from impermanence one comes to the contemplation of suffering; and from the contemplation of impermanence and suffering together, one comes to the contemplation of non-self.

The contemplation of these three characteristics is to be applied to our own body and mind. When we examine the body with insight, we see that the whole bodily field is made up of processes that are always changing; we see that all physical phenomena in the body are constantly arising and vanishing moment by moment. Thus the body which is just a compound made up of these physical phenomena is necessarily impermanent and unstable. Since it is impermanent and unstable, we can't find lasting satisfaction in it, and we cannot take it as truly existent self. In the same way all external material phenomena, everything seen, felt, possessed, are constantly changing and thus cannot be taken as substantial realities. After we examine the body which is coarser and easier to see, we then examine the mind and the associated mental phenomena. We see that the whole field of mental phenomena is a stream of ever changing mental processes. What we call the mind consists of feelings, perceptions, volitions and thoughts. These are all impermanent and unstable, always changing, breaking up and perishing, we cannot find in them any kind of permanent security, and we cannot take them to be a truly existing self or to be the abode of a truly existing self. Even consciousness, the light of awareness which floods out through the six senses, and which we usually at the deepest level take to be the self or inner spirit, if we examine this consciousness reflectively, we see it is merely a stream of impermanent acts of awareness, each one arising and passing away. So consciousness too is devoid of any substantial selfhood; one act of consciousness arises, it

performs its own special function of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking, and then it falls away, followed immediately by the next act of consciousness, and so on, one act after another. Consciousness is a stream of occasions of awareness without any abiding self as the permanent subject of awareness.

Insight into the three characteristics is a very high achievement in the development of wisdom. Most of us still have to work at developing wisdom at a more basic level, a kind of wisdom that we can apply in our everyday lives. Here the Buddha offers useful advice. In explaining the factor of enlightenment called *Dhammavicaya*, the investigation of phenomena, the Buddha says that a disciple should be able to discriminate between the wholesome and unwholesome states of mind, between bright and dark states of mind; between blameless and blameworthy states of mind. In our everyday lives we should know, we should understand what kind of states of mind are wholesome, what states of mind are unwholesome. We should observe the effects of our mental states on our conduct, on our relations to others; and we should see what consequences they lead to in the future. It is mindfulness that enables us to be aware of our states of mind. Through mindfulness we bend the light of awareness back upon ourselves, and we light up and illuminate our states of mind. It is wisdom that provides the key to understanding these states of mind. Wisdom enables us to distinguish between the states that are wholesome or unwholesome, states that are beneficial and those that are harmful. This is an important aspect in the cultivation of wisdom and we shouldn't overlook it just because it doesn't sound as deep as the realisation of emptiness or the insight into selflessness.

There is a sutta in which the Buddha spoke to the lay follower, Anathapindika and offered valuable advice. In explaining how a lay follower is accomplished in wisdom, the Buddha said that a lay follower should understand that selfishness and unrighteous greed are defilements of the mind, in so understanding this, he should abandon them. Similarly he should understand that anger, laziness, restlessness and doubt are also defilements of the mind, in so understanding them, he should abandon them. Thus to cultivate wisdom in the context of one's day to day life, one should make an effort to recognise these five defilements whenever they arise, selfishness and unrighteous greed, anger and illwill, laziness and dullness, restlessness and doubt, and then make an effort to remove or eliminate them. At the same time, in one's meditation, one practices calming the mind, building up the power of concentration, and then using this concentrated mind even briefly to investigate one's body and mind as being impermanent, as being bound up in suffering and as being non-self. In this way, one's wisdom will gradually develop until it becomes *paññā pāramī*, the perfection of wisdom.

A Study of Pāramīs - Bhikkhu Bodhi

MP3 lectures downloaded from Bodhi Monastery website:

<http://www.bodhimonastery.net/bm/about-buddhism/audio.html?start=4>

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Lecture 14: **Conclusion – Overview of the Dasa pāramī**

Bhikkhu Bodhi

Over the past few months, I have been speaking about the ten pāramīs according to the scheme of Theravāda Buddhism. Last week I finished the last of the ten pāramīs, which was the perfection of wisdom. In my arrangement of the list of pāramīs, I put the paññā pāramī or prajñāpāramitā last. Now that I have treated each of the pāramīs individually in details, today I want to take a step back and take a general overview of the pāramīs as a kind of guide to the Buddhist spiritual life.

Before I started this series of talks, I used as a basic theme a short statement of the Buddha, which says quite simply, 'you should develop the wholesome; the development of wholesome will lead to your welfare and happiness.' I then presented a threefold classification of the types of wholesome qualities we should develop. I divide the wholesome qualities into three categories:

1. First is the basis of meritorious actions such as giving, moral discipline, meditation;
2. Second are the Pāramīs – the six or ten pāramīs; and
3. Third are the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment, bodhipakhiyadhamma.

This threefold classification is my own, and is not based on any classical Buddhist work. It seems to provide us a very convenient way of organising the variety of Buddhist practices into a systematic structure. I find that each of these categories is governed by a different spiritual law, and I consider this a very important point. The spiritual life is governed by laws that are just as decisive, just as real as events in the material universe whether at the cosmic or microscopic level. One meaning of the word, Dhamma is law. One of the things that the Buddha accomplished through his enlightenment was that he discovered the laws that govern the spiritual dimension of our lives. When we study the Dhamma, we are not just studying some subject matter that we call Buddhism, we are trying to understand the deep laws that underlie our desire for meaning, our desire for inner freedom, for happiness, peace and wisdom. To understand these laws is the key to wisdom.

The law that governs the operation of the types of meritorious actions or kamma is what I call the Law of Retributive Consequences. This is the law which holds that every morally determinate action of ours tends to produce a result that corresponds to the moral quality of that action. The action is called kamma, the result is called kamma vipāka or kamma phala, the fruit of kamma. Simply stated the law of kamma means that unwholesome actions or bad kamma, deeds driven by such motives as greed hatred or delusion will bring us future misfortune and suffering. In contrast wholesome

actions or good kamma, deeds driven by unselfish motives will bring us future good fortune and happiness. Viewed from this angle, good actions or wholesome actions are called meritorious deeds. These actions deposit in our mind a spiritual force called merit, puñña in Pāli and 'phu' in Chinese. This merit has the potential to ripen in the future and bring corresponding results. The merit from meritorious deeds will bring rebirth into a good realm of existence like the human realm or heavenly realm, into a good family if reborn in human realm. Merit brings bodily health, handsome or beautiful physical features, and it leads to success and good fortune in business dealings, to good education, and generally to happiness in life. This is the natural result of this action according to the law of kamma, the law of the retributive consequences of our deeds. This law works with the same invariable regularity as the laws of physics. The laws of kamma work with greater complexity than the physical law, but the same principle is involved here, a law of action and reaction.

The practice of the pāramitās on the other hand is based on a different spiritual law. The relevant principle here might be called the law of the conservation and transmission of spiritual energy. According to this principle the morally determinate actions that we perform not only produce results that follow from the law of kamma, but these actions also leave impressions on our mind, impressions that acquire a cumulative force so that each action that we perform tends to build up a particular habitual disposition to repeat that action. Thus our actions acquire a momentum that is preserved in our stream of consciousness. This momentum continues from one life to the next as we travel on through the rounds of rebirths. In this way our repeated actions in successive lives gradually mould, shape and transform our character throughout our many lives. We might imagine the mind to be like a block of marble. Each important action that we perform is like a cut that a sculptor makes in the block of marble with a chisel. Depending on how he uses the chisel, the sculptor can make an astounding variety of statues out of the same block of marble. He might make statues of demons, of animals, of human beings. He could make statues of saints, statues of kings, statues of a military hero, of peasants, of workers, of plants and flowers, statues of different kinds of animals. In a similar way, our actions build up habits and dispositional tendencies which come to expression in the repetition of the same type of action. These dispositions in their totality constitute our character. Our character determines our ultimate spiritual destiny. However our character is not something fixed, solid and substantial. It is not a self or a soul. It is merely the sum total of our many dispositions and character traits. Thus our destiny is not something fixed and immutable; it is not fate or predestination; but it is the product of our volitions, the product of our decisions and our actions. Our destiny reflects the ever changing stream of our thoughts, our changing dispositions and inclinations. These can all be transformed by the right application of volition, of determination, of decision. This is one significance of the Buddha's teaching on right effort. We have to apply effort to establish in our mind those particular habit patterns that are in harmony with the enlightened nature of the Buddha. These particular habit patterns are precisely the practices that the Buddha himself followed throughout his previous lives aimed at the attainment of Buddhahood. We call these wholesome practices pāramīs or pāramitās, a word which means spiritual perfection.

In the two major Buddhist geographical regions, the list of pāramitās has come down differently. This suggests that the concept of pāramitās did not develop during the life time of the Buddha himself but evolved in a period after his parinibbāna. I think it likely that the northern list of the six pāramitās which arose among the northern pre-Mahāyāna schools was the older version. The southern Theravāda list of ten pāramīs developed some time later. It is possible however that both

sets originated more or less at the same time from a still simpler list of spiritual perfections, and then evolved separately and so the outcome was two different lists of pāramīs. The historical evolution of the concept of the pāramitās is obscure. I have never seen a detailed historical, scholarly study of the concept. In any case at some point after the development of early Mahāyāna, the list of six pāramitās was taken over by the early Mahāyāna sutras and they provided an outline for the practice of the Bodhisattva path. Then during the period of middle stage Mahāyāna Buddhism, the six pāramitās evolved into a list of ten pāramitās by the addition of four new pāramitās – pāramitās of skilful means, resolution, power or force, and knowledge. That list of ten pāramitās is different from the list of ten pāramīs in the southern Theravāda transmission. The ten pāramīs of the southern transmission still play a very important role in everyday Buddhist practice in the living Theravāda tradition. I will compare the two versions of pāramitās later. But first I want to take brief review of all ten pāramitās as I have elaborated individually over the last few months. This will give us a clear picture of the qualities we should be working to develop through our practice of the Dhamma.

At the beginning comes the practice of giving, dāna pāramī. The practice of giving is intended to open up our hearts, and to create a disposition to generosity. It makes us responsive to the needs of others and it enables us to benefit them in any way we can. The Buddhist commentators analyse the practice of generosity into three kinds by way of the objects of giving – giving material things; giving security and freedom from harm; and giving the gift of Dhamma. What is most important, more important than the object given is the attitude of mind with which one gives. It's said that one should give a gift with a mind free from the stain of selfishness; with a heart full of kindness and human sympathy; and with a mind intent on helping others and alleviating their misery.

The second pāramī is sīla pāramī, the perfection of moral discipline, which always involves undertaking and observing precepts. The precepts are our guidelines to right conduct. They help to regulate our actions of body and speech so that they follow the principles of righteousness. The most basic moral code in Buddhism is the Pañca-sīla – the Five Precepts – abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and the use of intoxicants. Beyond these there are more elaborate and more demanding codes of moral precepts that one could follow such as the Eight Uposatha Precepts, the Ten Precepts of a Novice monk, 227 or more precepts of a bhikkhu or bhikkhu or bhikkhuni, beyond that are the Bodhisattva precepts. However moral discipline isn't just a matter of following rules and regulations. What we are really trying to do by undertaking precepts is to regulate our conduct, to make our conduct noble, lofty and upright. We are trying to follow the awesome conduct of the noble sages, the enlightened ones and holy ones of the past, and thereby we ourselves are able to serve as a model for the world. In this time of moral decay, the need for people who can serve as models of moral integrity is truly urgent.

The third pāramī is nekkhama pāramī, the perfection of renunciation. By developing this pāramī, we encourage ourselves to turn away from the deceptive pleasures and the distractions of worldly life and to set our sight on the goal of ultimate liberation. While renunciation comes to fulfilment in the monastic life, one does not have to become a monk or nun to practice renunciation. Even while living at home, in the midst of family one could practice the perfection of renunciation by trying to live a life of simplicity, being content with simple means of support, and devoting one's attention to one's spiritual development rather than acquiring wealth and material possessions.

The fourth pāramī in my organisation of the scheme is viriya pāramī, the perfection of energy. Energy is included among the spiritual perfections because energy is needed for success in all aspects of spiritual practice. Energy is what dispels our laziness, our sluggishness, prevents us from becoming stagnant and from becoming complacent. It's through energy that we can push ourselves forward to achieve and realise what we have not yet achieved and realised. Energy has two main domains of application, inward and outward. Inwardly energy is to be applied to the work of self cultivation, and outwardly it's to be applied to devotion to the work of benefiting others. Through energy inwardly we train our own minds. Again through energy, we serve others and seek to help them, especially to enable them to learn and practice the Dhamma.

The fifth pāramī is khantī pāramī, perfection of patience. This is the counterpart of energy. Patience helps to balance the impulsive and restless tendencies inherent in excessive energy. There are two main things that we need to practice patience towards. One of these is difficult people; the other is difficult conditions, I think all of us have difficulty with other people. We get angry; we feel resentment; we look for the faults of others; we are inclined to denigrate them, and to speak rudely to them. When we practice patience, we change our way of interacting with others. Even if other people hurt us, abuse us, insult us or attack us, we don't feel resentment towards them; we don't bear grudges against them; but we are able to endure their insults and injuries patiently with a calm, unruffled mind. In our hearts we should forgive those who attack us and hurt us. We should also try to find ways to mend our differences and to achieve reconciliation. If we see that they are wrong, we should try to make them understand they are doing wrong and to feel contrition for it. When we see other people in conflict with each another, we should try to bring them back into a state of harmony, to establish friendly feelings and peaceful relation between them. The second domain of patience is difficult condition. If we meet with difficult outward conditions, if we lose our job, if our family expectations are disappointed; if we don't achieve the recognition and appreciation that we expect; if we feel hunger or get ill or experience bodily pain, we should bear it patiently recognising that pain and disappointment are inherent in the nature of life. Of course this doesn't mean that we just remain passive and don't do anything to change the conditions. We should definitely try to change unsatisfactory conditions when we could do so. But when our efforts fail, we should accept our failure patiently.

The sixth pāramī is sacca pāramī, the perfection of truthfulness. One following the path to enlightenment tries to speak the truth under all circumstances, and never speaks falsehood that might jeopardise the welfare of others or bring undiscerned gain and benefit to oneself. The goal of our practice of Dhamma is enlightenment. Enlightenment means the realisation of ultimate truth. Therefore one who seeks ultimate truth must always attempt to communicate truthfully to others. By speaking the truth we win the trust and confidence of others which is so important in establishing bonds of social solidarity. By speaking the truth we also nurture the seeds of wisdom within ourselves. Thus our wisdom can gradually evolve until we arrive at direct realisation of truth.

The seventh pāramī is the perfection of determination, adhiṭṭhāna pāramī. As I explained in my talks on determination, this pāramī exercises a controlling influence over all the others. Our task in following the practice of the pāramīs is to transform the mind from its condition of darkness and bondage to a state of radiant wisdom and transcendent liberation. This transformation comes about through the will, through the influence of volition acting upon the mind, shaping and transforming

all other aspects of the mind. Determination is that act by which we direct the will to the work of inner transformation. It is an act of volition by which we firmly determine to do what is difficult to accomplish and apply ourselves to fulfilling this determination. First we have to make the firm decision to enter the path of Dhamma; then we have to use our determination to advance along the path until in the end we reach our final goal.

The eighth pāramī is mettā pāramī, perfection of loving-kindness. Loving-kindness means a deep heartfelt concern for the welfare and happiness of all living beings, oneself and others. This deep love has to be developed to universal dimension, boundlessly without limits, reservations or distinctions. Normally the mind sets up boundaries to its affection. We extend love to those who are close and dear to us, those who are bound to us by ties of family relationships or personal affection; we regard other people either with complete indifference or treat them with suspicions and hostility. A Buddhist practitioner has to develop a mind of loving-kindness that extends to all people and then to all living beings, the same love that we have for our close relatives and friends. This means the same desire for their wellbeing and happiness that we have for our close relatives and friends. The mind of loving-kindness is a mind that makes no distinction between the self and others; that does not discriminate between friends, strangers and enemies. The Buddhist tradition teaches specific methods of meditation to develop this mind of universal loving-kindness. Once the mind is developed in meditation, then it can be maintained anywhere in a state of loving-kindness under all conditions. Boundless loving-kindness is the basis for great compassion and that is the root of the true bodhicitta, the aspiration for enlightenment, and the support especially for those following the path of the Bodhisattva.

The ninth pāramī is upekkhā pāramī, the perfection of equanimity. Equanimity is balance of mind, the quality of mind that does not swing to extremes. This is not a lukewarm indifference or apathy or lack of feeling. Equanimity implies the ability to look at things objectively without being swayed by subjective emotions. The Buddhist texts speak of equanimity in two main contexts. One is the equanimity in face of the changing objective conditions of life. When we have equanimity, then we can view changing conditions with detachment. We can see through the changing vicissitudes of life, and thus we are no longer oppressed or controlled by them. Equanimity gives us a quiet, still, silent point of observation from which we can properly assess our situation before we make decisions and before we launch into action. In this way equanimity enables us to act most effectively. The other aspect of equanimity is an attitude of equality towards people. That is, treating others equally without discrimination, treating others impartially free from favouritism and bias. In both senses equanimity is an extremely valuable and extremely necessary quality to promote our practice of Dhamma.

Finally comes paññā pāramī, the perfection of wisdom. Wisdom is the crown jewel of all the perfections, the direct insight, the understanding that penetrates to the true nature of all phenomena. All the spiritual qualities developed along the Buddhist path converge on wisdom. Wisdom takes all the others in hand and steers them towards their proper goal, the realisation and illumination of the true qualities of all phenomena, the true and final mode of existence of all phenomena. Wisdom reveals the conditionality of all phenomena, that all phenomena are linked together by the law of dependent origination. Wisdom shows the three characteristics, the impermanence of all phenomena, their connection with pain and suffering; their lack of any

substantial identity, their emptiness and lack of solid selfhood. As one's practice advances, wisdom grows vast encompassing more and more phenomena without any boundary; it grows deeper reaching down to the bottomless depths of things; and it grows luminous lighting up the nature of phenomena; and dispelling the beginningless darkness of ignorance.

Putting all of these pāramīs together into one composite whole, we arrive at the picture of a person who is generous and open-handed; who is morally upright and self-disciplined; one who is detached from worldly aims and worldly pleasures; one who abounds in energy and makes a firm effort in practice; one who is patient with other people and conditions; one who is truthful in speech; firm in determination; full of love and compassion; balanced with a mind of equanimity; and one endowed with vast and sharp wisdom.

How are we to arrive at such a state, which might presently seem so beyond our capacity? The key is to have deep faith in the Dhamma, to practice continuously, never to be discouraged by one's failure and shortcomings; and to sustain the faith that through steadfast effort we can achieve success. We have to begin with simple steps, and then move little by little at our own rate towards higher, deeper and more difficult steps. This is the way an ordinary person, a person bound up with defilements and ignorance transforms himself/herself into a great arahant, a great bodhisattva, a fully enlightened Buddha. It all comes through step by step practice over many years, many lifetimes, even many kalpas or aeons.

One little method that I want to share with you for developing the pāramitās is this - reflect on the pāramitās every day and make this a part of your daily practice. The Buddha says that whatever you bend your mind towards, that becomes the direction of your mind. If you bend your mind towards these wholesome qualities, your mind would naturally flow towards these wholesome qualities. Each day if you take a few minutes, say 5-10 minutes just to recite the formulas for the pāramīs, these qualities will become impressed upon your mind. If you do this every day, doing so with mindfulness and attention to the meaning, over months and years, the qualities of pāramīs will become stamped more and more deeply on your mind.

To help you with this I have prepared two handouts. One has the formula for the ten pāramīs of the southern Theravāda tradition. The other has corresponding formulas for the six pāramitās of the northern Mahāyāna tradition and the formulas for the four immeasurable minds, boundless loving-kindness, boundless compassion, boundless altruistic joy and boundless equanimity. You can choose one or the other of these lists, make it a basis of your daily practice. If you do so, I can assure you that these qualities will take root in the soil of your mind, send forth their stems, their branches, and then bring the flowers of the beautiful qualities represented by the pāramīs. Work at this gradually, little by little every day with patience, you will see the result.