

Welcome to the fourth segment on our discussion of the six *paramitas* on the online *Tricycle* retreat. So we have discussed in the last segment the relation between the six paramitas, and we started explaining each of the paramitas individually. And we’ve covered the paramita on generosity. So, now we look at the paramita of ethical discipline.

So one must know that all of these paramitas are perfected not by the quantity of things done externally, but by the quality of the state of mind. Meaning here, for example, the perfection of generosity is not measured on the amount of things one has been able to give. It is measured by the fact that one has developed a truly benevolent and generous attitude; that one is free of all greed and all attachment. And so ethical discipline is, of course, following the moral principles of the Buddha’s teachings, which are essentially characterized by not harming other sentient beings.

And so it is, on one hand, avoiding negative physical and verbal actions and also, on the other hand, cultivating virtues as we’ve seen. But, in essence, the ethical discipline can be characterized by vigilance. Meaning here, knowing our state of mind and our physical state. That means, being aware of what one is thinking and what one is doing. Usually one isn’t aware. One just follows our instinct and our habitual patterns, our habits. One doesn’t really take into account—or have some distance—to see exactly what is happening in our mind.

So here this vigilance is associated with also another quality, which is remembrance, remembrance of what is it that is beneficial and what is it that is harmful to us. So, for example, here we need to remember when, for example, hatred arises in our mind, that that hatred is something negative. That hatred arises and if you follow hatred, you will just suffer more and it will lead you to more suffering and more pain. If you remember that, then you can become—immediately use the antidote to hatred, for example, trying to cultivate compassion, looking at the situation that triggered that hatred, developing a state of understanding.

Why other sentient beings are being violent is because of their confusion, and therefore through that understanding they are developing compassion, for example. So ethical discipline here is related to both vigilance and is cultivated,

let’s say, more precisely through vigilance and remembrance. So they both work hand-in-hand. So the contrary of remembrance is forgetfulness. If you forget—if you are somehow absentminded and unaware of the situation—then you will not even be aware that you are getting angry and upset, and you will just realize that you are suffering and you’re trying to struggle with that. You will not be able to take any distance from it. So ethical discipline here is about avoiding what is harmful for ourselves and for other sentient beings. So this is the true or proper ethical discipline.

Certainly in other teachings, for example, ethical discipline can be about not harming other sentient beings, but doesn’t mean about not harming ourselves. In Buddha’s teachings it’s about not harming others and not harming ourselves. So one must understand here the true cause of harm. The true cause of harm resides in the mind. It is the afflictions, the negative states of mind. They are the one—those negative states of mind are the ones that trigger the negative physical and verbal actions. So if you have vigilance and remembrance, then you will be able to cultivate truly discipline and always maintain yourself in a favorable condition, free from harm; and also be able to avoid harming any other sentient beings.

On the following paramita, to summarize a bit—as practice on the following paramita of forbearance, patience—the contrary of forbearance is, of course, mental agitation and anger, hatred. So this is, for example, what occurs when someone harms us. So why is it negative to get angry and upset, be irritated? It is negative because the moment your mind is irritated, from that moment on your mind is in a state of pain. You experience suffering from that moment onwards. So forbearance is not about actually cultivating suffering, it’s about not letting suffering settle in your mind. And for that you need to be able to forbear with whatever that—whatever the circumstance that would trigger hatred and anger and agitation, which would make that external harm even more harmful, even more painful.

So here it is about forbearing with that small pain, to not let a greater pain grow in our mind. It is said that one instant of anger and hatred is so negative that it will destroy within our mind-stream tremendous good potentials, positive force. And also, the Buddha explained that there is no greater hardship than that of patience. You know, in other religions and traditions, they teach us mortification. Well, in Buddhism, the only mortification is patience, that is forbearing with other beings’ harms and the natural sufferings that occur. So to always and somehow—to always keep a state of mind that is content, calm, peaceful, joyous. And somehow

patience is like making the commitment that “I will never let myself be upset by anything. I’ll always, no matter what happens, always be happy.” So that is kind of the commitment of patience one could summarize.

Then the next paramita, the paramita of perseverance, is about—it is also characterized by joy. So this is seeing how the virtuous efforts we are doing, like practicing generosity, ethical discipline, forbearance, meditation, wisdom, how all of these are what is truly meaningful, what is truly beneficial for ourselves. It’s the true way of cultivating the causes of happiness for oneself and for other sentient beings. And if you understand that, there’s tremendous joy in applying ourselves to cultivating these virtues and qualities.

So that is what perseverance is: it’s having joy and happiness in doing these virtues. For example, you know, we can take for example that any action implies some degree of effort, some degree of perseverance. But it seems like an effort or something difficult when one has no joy in doing it. For example, there are people who like to play video games and they can spend all day and all night in front of their computer playing video games, and they are happy to do that and they don’t feel any hardship to do that. But if you ask them to—all day, all night—read their school textbook, they will find that very hard and difficult to do because they find no joy. They don’t see the interest in it. So if you see—if you find joy and interest in doing something it will not feel like a hardship and difficulty. That is perseverance.

Perseverance is actually when you don’t feel like it’s an effort—you’re so happy to do it. You find joy in accomplishing virtue and benefitting sentient beings. And this is because you see how beneficial it is. And the more you realize—how to say—the good consequences of virtuous actions, the more you become perseverant. Perseverance is something that grows with your understanding and experience in practicing the path towards awakening. So here it is really also associated with the virtue, in particular. It’s not just about putting effort and being joyous in any action. It is really being joyous in virtuous actions. This is a very important point, because the contrary of perseverance is, of course, laziness.

Laziness takes many forms. It’s being idle, of course, but it’s also engaging in non-virtuous actions. For example, the video games we mentioned earlier: being perseverant in that is not enthusiastic perseverance, is not the paramita. So that’s a very important point about perseverance.

Then the following paramita, meditation, is possible; one can perfect it once one has this perseverance. Without perseverance if you try to meditate, try to stabilize your mind, try to develop the calmness of mind, because mind is so agitated, one will easily feel overwhelmed and unable and so forth. So one needs to—how to say—have this joy in seeing.

That means, here, when you start to meditate you see the benefits that come from meditation, you feel joy in meditating. And you will pursue the practice of meditation and then, through that, you will be able to truly acquire the state of *jhana* or mental stability, concentrative—you’ll truly be able to be the master of your own mind. And so being the master of your own mind means that you can concentrate on whatever you want for how long as you want, without ever being distracted from whatever it is you’re focusing on. And so this gives a tremendous power to your mind. And this power is used as the basis for perfecting wisdom, which is the following paramita.

So the paramita of wisdom, one can say, has different aspects. First aspect is acquired through learning. That means listening to the teachings and reflecting on those teachings. So here it is about understanding. You know, it’s about acquiring knowledges, in general. But here, more specifically, it’s about acquiring ultimate knowledge. That means genuine knowledge of understanding the true nature of our mind and the true nature of phenomena.

So for this one needs to first understand how illusion works. What is confusion? What is the contrary of—in other words—discernment? So there is absolutely very much to say about this topic. It’s a very vast topic. Of course for a more thorough study of this I invite you to read, for example, the ninth chapter of Shantideva’s *Bodhicaryavatara* or the works of great masters like Nagarjuna; but also the works of great meditation masters, like the Indian masters Maitripa, Milarepa or Gompopa and their teachings about cultivating wisdom.

So one aspect of cultivating wisdom is, first, recognizing how illusion functions. So here, basically, the illusion is our misconception about reality. So it is how we relate to our own mind and to phenomena, to our own mind. We relate to it as the ego, as the self. And to phenomena, we think they exist truly and that they have a substantial basis; that they have an inherent existence. We attribute such things and so one should analyze this. So, here, of course, when I say this, it seems like

there is a very—we all are philosophers that have a very, how to say—elaborate conception about reality, about mind.

Of course, when the Indian masters like Nagarjuna refute different philosophical points of views, they are talking to these—they’re obviously confronting these elaborate demonstrations. But what he actually really has in mind is our instinctive way of relating to ourselves and to phenomena. Because while one is inclined to think “I” and because of that inclination, one develops a theory to prove the basis that “I” has a substantial existence, that exists independently from the mind and body as an eternal thing, for example. That idea, that elaborate concept, comes first from this inclination.

So if through the philosophical refutations the basis of these elaborate conceptions are eliminated, are refuted, then somehow our instinct, our instinctive relation, has no, nothing to back it up, and then we can see how it is just a confusion; just an arbitrary, conventional way of looking at reality, but does not actually constitute reality as it is. So that understanding, in itself, is also not sufficient. One needs them to recognize the state of mind or—how to say—apply ourselves on a state of mind that is free of being confused or a state of mind that would not mislead us. So this is recognizing the true nature of our mind.

And seeing what is the state of mind that is not confused, which is the innate, pure quality of mind—recognizing it as it is, beyond conceptualizing it, beyond any—beyond relating it through a concept or a medium, recognizing it non-conceptually, directly as it is. So this is the—how to say—part of cultivating the perfection of wisdom. And so this is done on the basis of meditative cultivation. The first aspect of, you know, recognizing what is illusion and refuting all these thoughts and arguments we might have, that—how to say—back up our illusion, is the philosophical, analytical aspect.

And then the more meditative or contemplative aspect is about relying on a state of mind that is free from confusion that will not mislead us, recognizing the genuine nature of our mind, which cannot be characterized by existence and non-existence and so on, which is, by lack of terminology, just said “emptiness,” meaning empty of inherent existence; also, empty of all the wrongly attributed qualities to it. Like, for example, one might think of it as existing or one might think of it as a nothingness.

All of these are concepts applied to the mind that do not enable us to see it directly. It is relating to it always through an idea or a concept. So wisdom is about relating to the nature of the mind directly as it is. And so this—one can start this first through, you know, the philosophical aspect and then through meditative training. And then this understanding is then not just something that is done in meditation. For example one can—in the practice of the six paramitas—remind ourselves how this world, how it appears to us; as all depends on causes and conditions, doesn’t exist in itself inherently.

It is, if you really look at its substance, its substance is the same as the substance of a dream. It does not have more existence than—is not more true than a dream. It has probably been longer lasting, more consistency, it’s longer lasting and more consistent than a dream; but it, fundamentally, in its existence it is the same thing as what one experiences in a dream. It is just an illusion, just something our mind experiences. And so this understanding, this also is a great—how to say—relief, meaning here that suffering and conditioned existence is not a fatality? It is something we can work with. We can do something about it. One can really, truly free ourselves from suffering because suffering is just an illusion of the mind.

And, by doing that, by making effort and trying to free ourselves from suffering, we can also benefit other sentient beings and help other sentient beings do the same thing. So the practice of the bodhisattva is all about using all the teachings of the Buddha not just to free ourselves, but to also help others and bring others to mature, others to become better human beings and eventually maturing to awakening.

So this summarizes our presentation on the six paramitas, the six perfections. Of course, it is not a thorough presentation. It might lead to a number of questions, so I strongly invite you to study this topic in more detail with whoever your teachers are, with them, and also, of course, by—how to say—relying upon the masters of the past, the foremost of whom is the Buddha and his teachings and his great disciples that I’ve already mentioned, such as Nagarjuna, Shantideva and, later, other masters of different traditions in Tibet: Milarepa, Gompopa and so forth. I really strongly advise you to rely upon their teachings.

And, directly related to this topic of the six paramitas, I have given a thorough explanation of the *Bodhicaryavatara* of Shantideva, which presents in detail the practice of the six paramitas. And this has been entirely recorded and is available

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for your viewing online on the [Bodhi Path website](#). So, if you would like, you are most welcome to also refer to those explanations. And I make the wish to conclude that may you develop *bodhicitta* and progressively advance on the path through the practice of the six paramitas, and may you have immediate wellbeing in samsara and be able to gain the ultimate wellbeing of awakening. So thank you very much for your attention.