

Welcome to the Tricycle online retreat to our third segment on the six *paramitas*. In this segment we will look at the relation between the six paramitas, and we will start looking into more detail in the practice of these six virtues. So each of these virtues are interrelated with one another. Like, so the basis of all these practices is, as we know *bodhicitta*, altruistic attitude—the intention to benefit other sentient beings based on a true and genuine loving-kindness and compassion for all of them. So generosity here is not just not having any greed or being stingy, it’s also about truly benefitting, being benevolent, bringing well-being and happiness to other sentient beings and freeing them from suffering, freeing them from difficulty. So that is what leads us to the practice of generosity, is that intention.

Generosity, in turn, the consequence of it is ethical discipline, for if you really want to benefit and help sentient beings, you must avoid harming them. That is the essence of ethical discipline: not harming other sentient beings. So here it implies a knowledge of what is harmful, what is not harmful, what one—how one can benefit them. And ethical discipline itself implies and brings about our perfecting forbearance. For if we have this knowledge and the ability and the discipline to avoid harming and the power to benefit, then naturally whatever hindrance, obstacle comes about, that one will not be affected by it. One will not resort to the negative actions. One will be able to somehow stand our ground, which is here keeping a state of mind of—a joyful state of mind in all circumstances, a calm state of mind, free from anger, agitation and hatred.

On the contrary, able always to have this benevolent attitude in regards of other sentient beings no matter what the circumstance. And if one has such—how to say—forbearance, then one can truly be perseverant and joyous in our virtuous activities, meaning that nothing can stop us from pursuing our cultivation of virtue till its perfection. And so this perseverance, in turn, is the basis of meditative concentration. If one doesn’t have that steadiness, that perseverance, that effort to go thoroughly, then, for example, in meditation one will not be able to develop one-pointed concentration and focus; for one will start to feel tired and give up or some other difficulty arises. One thought arises and one doesn’t know how to deal with it. And doesn’t want—doesn’t see the qualities of meditation, cannot maintain ourselves on it. So that capacity—to maintain ourselves and our training—is what brings us to then truly develop meditative concentration, which is not just the fact of sitting in meditation and trying to meditate.

It is actually acquiring the result of meditative training, gleaning the stability of mind—a state of mind that is perfectly calm and clear and able to concentrate at will, as long as it wants on any subject or any topic. And such meditation actually enables us to get really hold of our mind. Our mind becomes able, powerful, so it is somehow bringing our mind to a greater state of ability and power. And this, in turn, is extremely important for the perfection of wisdom. If one does not have that stability, although one acquires—how to say—wisdom intellectually, through our analysis and reflection, one cannot transform our dualistic clinging to the self, to other sentient beings as inherently existing. One will not be able to overcome all our illusions. One will always fall back into them. So one needs this stability of mind upon which one applies discernment. That is how the six paramitas are all interrelated.

So perfecting wisdom implies having all the—or perfecting all the other virtues. One can, for example, focus on one principally for the moment, but it will not be a paramita perfected unless it is associated with all the others—and particularly with wisdom. It is said that all the five first paramitas are like a group of blind people: they cannot lead to awakening. For them to be—how to say—for these other paramitas to contribute towards awakening, they must be lead by wisdom, discernment. So now we'll come to the second part, which is discussing each of the paramitas in greater detail.

Let's start with what is the easiest for us to first start cultivating, which is generosity. Now, for generosity to be truly benevolent it must be based on bodhicitta, on loving-kindness and compassion. It must be motivated by the thought to benefit sentient beings. For example, you can have generosity that is not actually proper generosity because our motivation is not really to benefit other sentient beings. For example, one can want to give and benefit other sentient beings because, well, one wants a reward in return. So this reward can be of different natures. For example, it can be just simply one wants that person to appreciate us, be grateful to us. That can be one of the reasons one cultivates generosity. So this is not the proper motive. And then another motive can be, for example, one believes in karmic retribution of virtuous actions. So understanding here to a certain degree the Buddha's teachings, one thinks, “and Okay, being generous will bring about wealth and happiness for me.” And so if that is our motivation, that also is not the proper motivation because it is based on selfishness. It is not generosity without any hope of a return for us.

Then, also, one can imagine that one has the right motivation that is truly on the base of loving-kindness and compassion just to benefit sentient beings. However, then in what we are giving can also not be real generosity. For example, if we give something that can be harmful in one way or another. You know, sentient beings may ask sometimes for certain things that are not beneficial for them, like, they want weapons or poison or something like that. If you give that, of course, it is a gift, but it is not practicing benevolent generosity. It is giving something harmful. So that can—that is not actual generosity.

Then in another circumstance, for example, one can think of—I’m sorry. One has their proper motivation. One is giving something that is truly beneficial but also, however, not to the right person. So this is, this will also—how to say—not enable us to perfect generosity. So what is it here, the “not the right person” mean? It means, for example, let’s imagine someone just for the sake of his own, you know, to challenge us; for example, to challenge our generosity, he asks us—or someone crazy, for example, a mad person—asks us to give him our life or to cut off our right hand and to give it to him. That is not a proper generosity. It’s not given, first of all, at the right moment to be able to make such gifts. Such as, one has to have already realized totally emptiness and feel absolutely no regret whatsoever to do that; means we must really be able to see this body, like a body of a dream, to be able to do that. If there’s the slightest regret that comes about, then it is not motivated by benevolence, not accompanied by joy. So it wouldn’t be an action of generosity. So here the reason why this, the right person—the person that is not right is mentioned, is because while we are still a beginner practitioner maybe one might encounter someone who will ask a great sacrifice from us like that. And so if we are not ready and not capable of it, one shouldn’t do it. For engaging in such action will be harmful to our own practice, to our development and will not really be beneficial towards that person. So that is not proper generosity.

Then there is also, in terms of—how to say—a manner. Proper generosity, proper benevolent action also implies that whatever we give and do for other sentient beings are done in a helpful, in a beneficial way. That is, if we are to give, to give respectfully, kindly, to give appropriately. That means the right thing at the right time. For example if you offer a meal to someone who is already full, that is not beneficial, really, to him. If, on the contrary, also you offer something to someone who is hungry at the right time, appropriately, something that is good for his health but you do it with disdain, with condescendence, then that is not the proper

attitude through which one gives. So one must be careful to avoid those—how to say—faults in our, how to say, endeavor or our generous work.

So the proper generosity is, of course, implies the right motivation—means here bodhicitta, intention to benefit. It implies also that we give things that are beneficial, that really help sentient beings, and that we give it also to the right people. For example, starting first by those who are really in need; for example, giving money to someone who is already rich is less beneficial than giving money to someone who is poor. In the same way, one must first start by helping those who are good to us, who have been kind to us, such as our parents. You know, they have helped us when we were a child. If it were not for them we wouldn't be alive. We wouldn't have what we have now. They are someone—they are people—towards which one should cultivate gratitude and try to help them, especially when they are in difficulty and they are older. One should really try the best as we can to help them and be generous and kind, compassionate towards them. But also, towards, for example, people who have taught us a lot, who have brought us to become a better human being, who have enabled us to cultivate qualities; such as our teachers, mentors, our spiritual friends. And also practicing generosity towards the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Not that they actually need our generosity; it's just that it is a way of being inspired by them and dedicating ourselves to follow their example.

And so the buddhas and bodhisattvas, being such examples of loving-kindness and compassion, making offerings to them is somehow a way of expressing our admiration; and, at the same time cultivating this benevolent, generous attitude that characterizes the buddhas and bodhisattvas. For example, in Tibet they have the tradition of making offering bowls. These offering bowls are just filled with water. So the reason for this is that water was extremely abundant in Tibet and Tibet, as some of you must know, is where the sources of many of the great rivers of Asia arise or are found. So the water is extremely cheap and abundant there. So to offer water, you don't really feel that you are making a big sacrifice or you don't feel any stinginess. So the quality—you see, the quality of a gift is not just in the amount you give or what exactly you give, but also in how you give. So, here, to give with joy, without a hope of anything in return, without feeling greed or loss, is what characterizes generosity.

So when you give water you don't feel a sense of loss or greed. You don't feel also that you have done something so great that you have to take pride in it in order to—it's just water or something you find everywhere. So that's why water is

used to be offered as a way of cultivating. If we're able to have that attitude with water, then one can maybe—eventually—have that attitude with many other things and feel no pride in having given it, or feel also no regret in giving it and being able to give it with joy. And also this offering is made to the buddhas, for they are truly the ones who will be able to appreciate our genuine attitude on one hand; and, also because they are such objects of admiration, such objects of qualities that we try to emulate. So they're also one of the best objects of generosity. So this way one can start by cultivating generosity from first small things. You know, maybe one is not able right away to give a lot, but to start by giving something that is—that one is happy to give.

There are many stories in Buddhist literature that show us how one can train to give and be able to give with greater quality. For example, one of the disciples of the Buddha was unable to be generous. Buddha taught him first by, for example, giving to himself. He couldn't let go of coins from his hand. So the Buddha taught him, “Give to your other hand and then one day you'll be able to also give to another.” And so by training in that way he was able to become generous and give to others. So when you think about, you know, material things, material objects—one develops a very strong attachment and greed towards them. But if you really look at them, all these material objects, we don't really own them. And also the idea of them being ours—belonging to us—is an illusion. It's just a convention, actually. Nothing really belongs to us. One cannot take any of this with us when we die. We just have the use of it for a certain moment.

And we can do many things with what we have. We can bring about a lot of happiness and wellbeing. If we can do that, then those material things have really served their purpose. If we just keep it for ourselves and don't do anything with it, then they are of no use. As the Buddha said, “All that has not been given is already lost. Only what one has given is truly gained.” So what one has given and made proper use of—that is a benevolent use—that is truly something that one has gained. One has gained, through that, ourselves in becoming a better human being. One has made progress. One has accumulated positive karma. One has brought about happiness and wellbeing to other sentient beings. What one has kept for oneself only has already lost, because one day we will have to let go of it. And it will not have helped us become a better human being or enabled us to benefit other sentient beings. So, truly, it is lost. So that's why, you know, generosity is really a very important quality.

Karma Trinlay Rinpoche
Week 3, *Practices of a Bodhisattva: The Six Paramitas*
April 21, 2014
“The Relations Among the Paramitas”

It is said it is also the source of wealth for, you know, if you look at the mental state of mind the contrary of generosity—you know, greed, stinginess—is actually a state of mind that is extremely poor. It is always—it feels it never has enough. It is never content. It constantly is in want. The state of mind, on the contrary, that is benevolent, generous, feels satisfied, feels content, is—how to say—complete. And because that state of mind like that is more open, naturally, wealth and wellbeing and things come together. Others are grateful, naturally, even if we don't want it. Many, many good things come from generosity. It's a very great quality and it becomes all the more great when it is truly associated with the other paramitas, and when it is done truly through loving-kindness and compassion. We will end this third segment and we will look into the other paramitas in the next chapter.