

Gina LaRoche and Jen Cohen

Living in Our Money-Driven Society: Navigating the Path to Awakening

Week Four: “Navigating the Path to Awakening”

July 23, 2022



Gina LaRoche: Hello, and welcome to Week 4 of “Living in Our Money-Driven Society: Navigating the Path to Awakening.” This week, we’re going to focus on navigating our path to awakening. As a reminder of how we got here, we started talking about context and the two truths. Then we spent time talking about the money trap, and we hope you did take the opportunity to share a secret you have about money with someone in your life and notice what became available to you out of letting go of that secret.

Navigating the path to awakening around money came to me when I was on retreat at IMS. I had been really struggling with how to live the life of a householder and walk on a path toward awakening. I kept saying to myself and my teacher, “How do I pay the mortgage and follow the Buddhist teachings?” Then the *paramis*, or perfections, resurfaced as a teaching for me. I had forgotten about them. These are the 10 perfections that reportedly the Buddha focused on in the eons between the time he saw the previous Buddha and the time he himself became Buddha.

I’ve been using these 10 perfections as a guide for me, and we wanted to bring them into this conversation to hopefully be a guide for you. The first of the *paramis* is *dana*, which has been our thread throughout the entire course. We are asked to donate *dana* at our Buddhist centers when we’re on retreat, and oftentimes those requests are really secret. They’re publicly asked, but my choice to give is held in secret. So I wanted to start with generosity. How are you moved to give or offer or honor in your life? Is it publicly or privately? If it’s publicly, what drives you to be public about it? If it’s privately, why do you keep things private? I tend to keep a lot of our giving pretty private. When they say, “Do you want to post a Facebook that you gave to such-and-such organization?” I always say no. The thing about generosity is that we believe we want to give from a place of being supportive but not helping, this middle path of how I hold what I most deeply value and allocate my resources toward it from a place of sufficiency or enoughness.

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Jen Cohen: And from one liberation, this sense that we're not here to help each other. I mean, we are here to help each other in one way, but our generosity isn't coming from a place of “Oh, poor you, oh, righteous, fabulous me.” We're sharing because we know the interdependent nature of all of life, and we know that the giving and the receiving are, as one of our shared teachers used to say, the right hand and the left hand.

Gina LaRoche: Thank you. The second parami is virtue, which is an interesting word. It's really releasing carelessness and offering deep care. But I think in our society, we think of virtue as almost a bad thing. We have a lot of stories around money and how virtuous we are with it or without it, and so the virtue parami can be a tough one to hold while we're holding this navigation from the relative truth to the ultimate truth.

The third parami is renunciation, which I feel like is really a dirty word in Western society. Whenever we would talk about the word sufficiency, whenever we would say, “Are you sufficient?” or “Take a stand from sufficiency,” people would say, “Well, I don't want to have to give up anything.”

Jen Cohen: Or “Why would you settle for enough?” Because more is always better, right?

Gina LaRoche: Right. And so we might even just start with renouncing our stories about money, renouncing the lies we're holding about money, dropping our secrets around money. We might also choose to renounce debt and being indebted to others. We could do an entire hour on debt and the morality of debt and how we feel about debt. For me, sometimes my husband and I go on these renunciant months. We'll have a month where we don't buy anything except for food and paying our utility bills just as a practice.

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The fourth parami is wisdom, paying attention and knowing what to let go of and what to hold on to. To me, it is the path, and breaking free of the money trap is really having the wisdom to know what responsible enough means for you or mean for me.

Energy is the fifth parami. It's right effort. For me, I can get stuck in money conversations or even stuck in my own money journey, and energy means to really drop that stuckness or stickiness and keep the energy and wisdom flowing toward my commitments, toward my values. If I'm going to do a renunciant path, it's really having the energy to continue on the journey.

The next one is patience, which Jen and I have none of. It's so interesting because when we're taught about money, we're taught to start saving when you're 22 and to have patience, and through the time value of money and the power and the magic of compound interest, if you have patience, you're going to wake up one day when you're sixty years old, and you're going to be a millionaire. That's the story that at least I was fed. I won't project it onto others. For me, I like to bring the patience in as I'm unwinding from my own money issues, as I'm on my own journey to awakening. It's really to have the patience to take the next step. I did not get here overnight, and I'm not going to unwind overnight. It takes a level of patience to arrive at this place where you're defining your own awakening.

Next is truthfulness. We've talked a lot about truthfulness and being true and telling people what's happening. I've done a ton of money experiments. I was doing this debt reduction, and I remember meeting this woman on the elevator. On the elevator, I was talking to her about my debt reduction plan, and by the time we got off the elevator, she was so inspired. She said, "I'm going to start doing this debt reduction." I'm very open and honest and will speak truth about money pretty much anywhere. I personally think—and we collectively think—that it is very critical, particularly in our society, to break free from those secrets and to start truth telling.

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The next parami is determination, or rigor. If you’re going to walk this path, if you’re going to choose any of what we’ve discussed over the last four weeks, there is a holding and a rigor. We just offer that to you. Personally, we have found having a partner and a buddy to be invaluable. Even now, I have a girlfriend of mine, and we walk every morning. Most of the time, a couple times a week, one of us will talk about our money journey. We’ll ask, “Oh, what do you think about this? What do you think about that?” And it’s in partnership where we can unwind and sort through some of the issues that we don’t quite know how we want to navigate.

And then finally, the last two paramis are actually part of the *brahma-viharas*. I always say I actually do the “paramis plus.” So not only is kindness or lovingkindness critical as we navigate this path toward awakening, but so is compassion: having compassion for ourselves where we are and where we’re going, compassion for our experience, compassion for others. This is the place to ask, “Am I giving from a place of pity, the near enemy of compassion?”

The third brahma-vihara is appreciative joy, having true joy and appreciation for other people’s success. When your neighbor pays off the car or buys their first house or decides to renounce shopping or their way of life, the practice is to be joyful and happy for them and also to bring joy and happiness for yourself and your own work.

Finally, the last parami and the fourth brahma-vihara is equanimity. My teacher, DaRa Williams, says, “Equanimity is when the mind is unperturbed, undisturbed by whatever experience is arising. It has the quality of balance that catches the mind or rests the mind before it falls into extremes. Because once you’re falling, you just have to go with it. Hopefully, the practice kicks in so you won’t make it home when you land, but you’re able to rebalance or regain the capacity to see things as they are. Equanimity is a spacious stillness of the mind, a radiant calm that allows us to be present fully with all the different changing experiences, which constitutes our

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lives and our world. If we could hold this quality with our relationship to money, we believe that this will put us all on the path to awakening.”

Jen Cohen: We’ve spent four segments together, and for us, these paths around unwinding from a context and system of money scarcity have gone hand in hand with the path of practice and awakening, to move from a context that’s contracted and based on separation and delusion to living in a context that’s grounded in enoughness for all beings for all time and that has a core practice and set of principles around generosity and care for all of us and reciprocity and ethics.

To have a wise and just relationship with money is a radical thing in our culture, to try to build those practices and build our family life and our organizations. We have tried to build our organization around these practices and principles. We have a generosity marketplace, for example. That’s just one example. There are a million things that we do to support living in an awakened and clear mind and a wise mind and a full compassionate and generous heart in the way that we’re walking. You can break free from the money trap and use that grid of practices, and you can practice noticing the accumulation and letting it go. You can practice awareness itself, and you can practice your asset inventory. You can practice generosity. And if you want to talk to us about it, we really do have a million experiments that you could run to support breaking up the mind that has been conditioned the way that it has in our culture.

Gina LaRoche: Thank you for walking with us over these past four weeks navigating this path to awakening. We really appreciate your time and attention.

Jen Cohen: We’d like to thank Tricycle for having us and the person that you don’t see who’s filming us right now, Dan, and Emma, who’s in the other room, who came heroically to support us and bring flowers. There are a lot of other people who made this possible, including someone from Tricycle who’s watching this whole process to make sure we don’t go off the rails. We just

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want to thank all those beings who made this moment possible and also all of our teachers who are way too numerous to mention. This path comes through us. It's not ours, but we're happy to share it. Thank you.