

*Chan Workshop: A Review of the First Four Paramitas (4/9/2017)***Chan Workshop – Basic Dharma Class: “The Six Paramitas”**: Review of the First Four Paramitas
April 9, 2017

Reference: “The Six Paramitas: Perfections of the Bodhisattva Path” by Chan Master Sheng-yen, and other class notes

The First Paramita: Generosity

Mahayana (Great Vehicle) Buddhism places great emphasis on generating a supreme altruistic intention to help others. Without rejecting or clinging to nirvana, a bodhisattva vows to return to worldly existence to help sentient beings. This is the correct scope of mind on the Mahayana path.

The true practice of paramitas is to be free from self-attachment and self-cherishing – all Buddhist practices can thus be viewed as paramitas as long as they accord with the above principles. From the Mahayana standpoint, practicing for one’s own benefit is not truly paramita practice; only when we practice to benefit others that we are truly practicing the paramitas. And the truth is, your own rewards will be greatest when you strive to benefit others.

The Six Paramitas’ purpose is to eradicate the two types of self-attachment, to sever the two types of death, and to transcend the ocean of suffering.

- Two types of self-attachment:
 - First, attachment to one’s own body, the extension of which is our concept of life span. Eradicating this means transcending our illusions about the world.
 - Second, aversion to the afflictions and sufferings of worldly existence. Transcending this aversion means we no longer fear the cycle of birth and death.
- Two types of death:
 - First, physical death.
 - Second, death that consists of the stages of transformation on the bodhisattva path – the death of progressively subtler layers of attachment that are shed as great bodhisattvas progress through the ten stages.

Generosity can be practiced in two modes:

- Generosity with Characteristics:
 - This is when we have a motive for performing a generous deed. For example, we can give as a form of repayment for something received (when we feel indebted to someone).
 - Within this category, we also have “generosity with characteristics and intention” which is giving with the intention of being recognized, being reciprocated, or earning spiritual merit. Although a little self-serving, these are still good and better than not giving anything.
- Giving without Characteristics:
 - This means giving freely, without self-oriented motivation. It includes the gift of wealth, the gift of the Dharma, and the gift of fearlessness.

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- When we have altruistic intention, we will be more diligent in finding ways to help others, and in the process, we ourselves gain the most.

The Three Kinds of Gifts:

- The Gift of Wealth:
 - Includes: material wealth, time, knowledge (including speech), and ones' own body (including one's strength and energy, and organ donation).
- The Gift of the Dharma:
 - When one correctly expounds on the teachings of the Buddha, such as the teaching on dependent origination, impermanence, and so on, then he or she is giving the gift of Dharma.
- The Gift of Fearlessness:
 - This gift is about being able to respond to people's fears and needs with wisdom and compassion, alleviating people of their fears, whatever the origins of those fears.

The Second Paramita: Morality

Morality means conducting oneself in accordance with the Buddhist precepts. At the most basic level are the three cumulative pure precepts. Other types of individual liberation precepts are taken to complement or uphold the three cumulative pure precepts.

The five basic Buddhist precepts are: not killing, not stealing, not lying, not committing sexual misconduct, and not taking intoxicants.

The shravaka precepts last only a lifetime because their essence arises from body and speech thus when physical life ceases this essence also ceases. But the essence of the bodhisattva vows is established on the subtle level of one's mind-stream or mental continuum – it's a mind-dharma not a form-dharma – thus the bodhisattva precept essence persists life-after-life until one achieves full buddhahood. Bodhisattva precepts can be taken cumulatively over and over again, which is how bodhisattvas integrate the precepts into their conduct and being over many lifetimes.

Another difference between the precept essence of a shravaka and that of a bodhisattva is that the shravaka vows place greater emphasis on renunciation, whereas the bodhisattva precepts go beyond renunciation and take altruistic bodhi-mind as the very foundation of the path.

We should contemplate the emptiness of our worldly goods but still use our assets wisely to benefit sentient beings – as one upholds the bodhisattva precepts, renunciation and bodhi-mind manifest inseparably.

*Chan Workshop: A Review of the First Four Paramitas (4/9/2017)***The Third Paramita: Patience**

Without patience, we would not have a stable mind and body and we can become very agitated and consumed with internal turmoil.

There are three kinds of patience:

- Patience with Those Who Wish to Harm Us:
 - If we do not habitually respond negatively, we can develop the courage and skills to protect ourselves as well as others, avoiding hurting ourselves and others. In the perfection of patience, the critical pivot is to apply wisdom to turn around difficult situations. And to resolve confrontations, we must extend compassion to those who would harm you. The sutras say practicing patience is manifesting wisdom and compassion.
- Patience with Regard to the Environment:
 - This means enduring pain and difficulty when faced with natural calamities hurricanes, great storms, extreme cold or heat, and so on. This includes also patience with one's own body and its troubles.
- Patient Endurance of all Dharmas:
 - This is regarding all phenomena, including our own experiences of pleasure and pain, as having the nature of emptiness – that all dharmas lack independent self. This kind of patience encompasses all favorable and unfavorable conditions, and embraced the two previous patience practices.

Note that patience practice is not only for difficult situations, but also in comfortable situations where we can get overly joyful, idle, arrogant or greedy.

When we practice the three kinds of patience, we are actually contemplating emptiness. When we contemplate the impermanence of all our experiences – whether painful, pleasurable, or neutral – we gain an insight into selflessness, and thus directly engage the Dharma.

Patience can be worldly or world-transcending:

- Worldly Patience:
 - This is manifested in coping with the environment, enduring extreme heat, cold, hunger, thirst, pain, joy, criticism, and physical fatigue.
- World-transcending Patience:
 - This goes beyond the experiences of pleasure, pain, fatigue, etc. It is forbearance in integrating the Dharma into one's life, in accepting the difficulties that come with exertion in practice, and in using one's time wisely and fully.

By its nature, perfecting patience is a long, laborious process. Be patient and continue to practice, even if it feels like you are not making progress. To practice patience is to integrate it into our daily lives, our careers, our studies, and so on. The practice of compassion and the sense of tolerance and patience are at the core of Buddhism.

*Chan Workshop: A Review of the First Four Paramitas (4/9/2017)***The Fourth Paramita: Diligence**

The paramita of diligence nurtures zeal in one's practice. It is a keenness without fear for demanding work, and is the antidote for laxity.

Making vows is essential to Buddhist practitioners, and having vows and aspirations are key to keeping us diligent instead of becoming lax. We can give ourselves all kinds of excuses for not practicing. But when we have made a vow, whether they are small, great or ultimate vows, we dare not become lax – we will constantly remind ourselves to go forward. With diligence, one will persevere in helping sentient beings regardless of whatever calamity or obstacle may occur. With diligence and vows, it is possible even with limited resources to accomplish unlimited results – we have a choice to exert all of our effort and to accomplish our vows. Great effort will gain great results.

There are three types of diligence:

- Diligence that is like Armor:
 - This manifests as fearless courage, enabling one to overcome all obstacles. One sees no enemy because nothing appears as an obstruction, and therefore nothing causes problems. He/she perceive problems as opportunities to enhance their own skills, and thus profits from even the most difficult challenges.
- Virtuous Diligence:
 - This is diligence that gathers all virtues, that is, practitioners who engage in this type of diligence use the experiences of body, speech, mind and all the phenomena in the environment as opportunities to practice. Whatever they experience and encounter, their whole being is filled with the aspiration to practice, from instant to instant. They do not separate their practice from their daily lives. They keep their eyes wide open to seize every opportunity to practice anywhere and anytime.
- Compassionate Diligence:
 - This is diligence of great bodhisattvas who will pursue sentient beings to hell, heaven, or any other realms of existence, to ensure that they will gain liberation. At the same time, these bodhisattvas do not expect anything from sentient beings, and they are not there to impose any ideas or to force anything upon others. Bodhisattvas are there to benefit sentient beings, to make them feel secure and at ease, and to provide them with opportunities to move towards liberation.

In summary:

- **Diligence that is like Armor** gives rise to vows that will be like armor to protect practitioners from obstructions on the path to buddhahood;
- **Virtuous Diligence** is realized through personal experience of the Dharma while engaging in virtuous deeds; and
- **Compassionate Diligence** is to share with other sentient beings the benefits of personal practice.