Love and All That... The Ten Pāramī

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 44:55

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully self-awakened one.

I just thought we'd bring the week to an end by going through the ten perfections, or at least some of them. The *pāramī*. *Pāramī* actually means the other shore. Buddha always talks about Nibbāna or that final place as something transcendent. So it's an island. He talks about it as an island. And I want to start off with our ever topic of love.

So this word love, it goes from the sublime to the ridiculous. We love ice cream and we love God. So it's really just trying to look at human beings, relationship between human beings. Jean-Paul Sartre, in one of his plays, which is about hell, he says, I think somewhere he says, "Hell is the other people." It's the others. And in his play, if I remember rightly, I should have looked it up, he has a homosexual, a heterosexual, and a lesbian, stuck in this room forever. And their sexual orientations really tell you that they just simply cannot communicate on any level.

So our task really is to form relationships with human beings that are wholesome, skillful and all that. And this whole business about attachment and what it means and how it manifests. So if we define attachment as a psychological dependency on someone, in this case human beings, for our happiness, then we have all the same problems that we had with porridge, with attachment to porridge. And if we just think about that then you'll see that it's very easy to pick up when we're using the other person as an object. Remember that as soon as the other person is there to please you, then they become an object. They become something that is pleasing you. That doesn't mean to say they can't please you. It's the reason why you're doing something is for them to please you. There's a difference.

So if you have a friend or a partner or somebody who's funny, then they make you laugh. But if that's what you want from them, if you ask them for that, then they become a comedian. They become somebody whom you expect to make you laugh. So this whole business about how we relate to people, our definitions of them, and just to see if we can recognise certain things.

Now, when we're children, of course, and we're little babies and stuff, attachment is absolutely necessary. Because in order to have true love, you have to be a mature human being. And in Freudian understanding anyway, you don't get to full maturity of ego until you're 21. That's why, whatever. But the thing is that there's a maturation process. And the child's attachment to its mother and father is just part and parcel of their beginning relationship with the other. Because at that time, the other's all for them. I mean, it's all

demanding and all-consuming. Because from their point of view, they're the only important person in the world.

So the relationship that we start off with is one of attachment. It's just part and parcel. But it's through that that we form this relationship. And as we pass through various stages and the scruffiness of teenage, and then you end up at the end of the process, 18, 19, 20, 21, slowly beginning to feel that you are entire, you're grown up, as they say, an adult. And at this point, of course, if your relationship hasn't changed to human beings as it was when you were 15 and 14 and 3 and 4, then life can get difficult.

Although it's necessary for the child to have that attachment, it's not necessary for the mother or the father. And of course that's difficult to understand. And before we go any further, do make a distinction between unwholesome, just unwholesome states, and immorality in the sense of defined by the five precepts. We're not talking about murder and thieving and all that. We're talking about just unwholesomeness that comes into a relationship which begins to move away from love and towards control. So that's your movement. Whenever there's attachment you want to control the person because you want them to please you.

And recognising that when we're in relationship with somebody whether it's an intimate relationship or a friendship or anything like that, I mean that's the marker. And depending on the other person and their relationship to human beings, their feeling of being demanded upon may actually satisfy their feelings of attachment, of feeling needed and that sort of stuff. So it's not always the case that although we are aware that we are behaving from a control point of view, the other person might not experience that. They might actually like to be controlled. So there's a whole dynamic which gets very complicated. But at least we ourselves can wake up every time we are imposing upon the other.

So as usual, if your friend, your partner, your child or whatever, if you're angry with them, then that's coming from a place where you expected them or wanted them to do something. Now, it's not as though the other person, especially children, shouldn't do what you tell them to do. But it's the anger which is not necessary. Now, I know some people argue that anger's good, if you take the energy and transform it. Yeah, if you can take the energy and transform it. That's good. But as just anger, just being angry with somebody, that's obviously a confrontation. So either you diminish the person, they actually have to be humbled and shamed, or they fight, and then one of you has to escape.

So frustration with somebody, frustration, whenever frustration arises. Grief. I mean, that's a regular one. The loss of a friend, whether they just got upset with you and ran off and turned away, or a partner, a partner who's died, whatever. There's always that grief. And again, you have to separate out the sorrow from grief. So sorrow is what you might call just a natural feeling which arises when you contact somebody else's suffering. When you contact somebody else's suffering. It can be just at the sight of them, the feel of them. It can almost sometimes be quite visceral, that you actually feel their suffering. And what that ought to do, of course, is bring out the compassion, a wanting to help.

But the grief, of course, is turning inwards. It's a form of self-pity. And if we confuse grief with sorrow, then it's very difficult to stop grieving because a person measures their love by their grief. The sense of loss, the sense of emptiness, the loss of a person. You're left with this grief which you feel is, or the person says to themselves, well, that's an expression of my love. But actually it's an expression of attachment. And what happens is, as soon as a person begins to grieve less, they get guilty. It means they're not loving them as much as they used to. So they've got to bring up the grief again.

This came home to me as a very stark example when a late middle-aged woman came in and said that she'd been grieving her son for five years, couldn't stop. And I pointed this out to her. And she seemed to click. And she came back the next week and said that her grief had completely gone. And what she'd done is to go to the grave to accept the death of her son, and then to wish him all the best, in whatever future life. In other words, that letting go. There may still be a certain sorrow at the cause of death, the person died young, there's that, but that again is a contact with the person and their suffering. It's not actually turning inward towards ourselves and saying, oh, poor me. We don't like to say that. We don't like to see grief as, oh, poor me. But that's actually what it is. Again, it's one of these distinctions. It's very difficult. It's like indulgence and enjoyment. And you've just got to work at it, really.

Then, of course, there's this fear. And that, of course, that's when the control of the other becomes quite obvious. My dear mother was a wonderful Italian mother but my God she had us all and you had to fight to get out of the door especially at certain times just in case somebody would attack you or murder you. It was just unbelievable. We all did escape and she couldn't handle three boys so it was a case of really feeding on her fear of what might happen to her children. And that, of course, again, is understandable. It's not as though you can't understand that. But what it does is, of course, it creates a control around the child which can stymie that child's development, depending.

And just the fear which moves into, the fear of loss which slips into jealousy, wondering whether your partner is nipping off with somebody else in the dark. It manifests in various ways, this fear of loss that's underlying the attachment. And remember the attachment is because there's a part of us, a part of our happiness which is dependent upon that person.

And then there's the addictive behaviour. The having to have the same person. It's another way of controlling that the person can't change. So often throughout life, of course, we change. And it's often the case that in midlife, people change so much that they separate. And that change produces a real clash within one of them if one of them changes the other one doesn't. It becomes a real clash and they find it very difficult because they can't control the other person's change. You often hear stories of people who have moved towards Buddhism and the partners have gone absolutely berserk, partly wrong understanding about becoming part of a sect or something and all that. But it's also sometimes just this business of, that isn't the person I married, that isn't the person I formed a relationship with. And so, again, it's a cramping thing, a holding on. And again, always based on this control and the fact that we're dependent on them for a certain level of our happiness. And then all the other stuff that comes up, general

boredom with friends and partners, so all that rubbish that arises between people.

Now, the cure isn't to try and kill this stuff, because as soon as you try and kill it, so you notice one of these attitudes coming up and you try and kill it, you try and bury it, well all it does is, it just comes round the back and feeds into little unresolved grudges and all this sort of stuff and in the end it all explodes and it's all very terrible. So one of the things that one of the purposes of meditation is to perhaps even bring up a memory where that's arisen and just get in contact with it. When you're actually in a situation to be aware of it arising, that's very difficult when you're in process to be aware of it arising and just to be able to keep it to one side, not to push it away but to actually just park it there and produce that different attitude.

So as soon as you find yourself getting irritated with somebody, it could be anything, it could be on a phone, it could be a person at work, as soon as you find that irritation, it's just to be if you can catch it at the arising, it's within your control. Once it's risen too far it's beginning to affect the way you're talking, the way you're looking, your blood pressure. But if you catch it just as it's coming, and you park it, and you put your entire attention on what the person is saying, rather than what your reaction is to what the person is saying, then there's that effort to communicate. And of course that often, to the other person, often feels like they're being listened to. Remember often when we're talking, we've got our answers prepared before they finish saying the first few words.

And that, if we're really in conversation with somebody, ideally speaking, our attention is completely on listening. And then there's a moment where you have to switch gear and you have to think, oh, right, my response. And then the response comes. There's always a little moment, a gap as you move from one mode of receiving to the next mode of responding. But of course, when you hear people speaking, they often speak over each other. Politicians, they don't listen to you when they get three different parties on the radio or TV and they're just talking over each other. So all these little indications are for us to work on and just keep bringing ourselves back to that *mettā* which is just an openness, a kindness, a gentleness, and all the qualities that you would expect of a friend.

It goes much deeper than that of course. It's about trust. It's about a friend who may also, I mean your partner, your spouse, your brothers, your sisters, all these people can become confidants. And part of that is the ability to trust that the person isn't going to put it on the social media. That's bad news, isn't it? Which unfortunately happens.

There's a case, this silly case, of typical Western tourists. They walk up this holy mountain in Malaysia. It's not a Muslim holy mountain. It's one of the ethnic groups there. It's a holy mountain. And they think that their ancestors live up there. And so they have a whole ritual about going up this holy mountain. They take chickens up and stuff like that. And they went up there and posed in the nude, about six or seven of them. And they stuck it on social media. Well, of course, within seconds, it was into the Malaysian authorities' hands. They came down. They were arrested. And luckily, one of the women said it was all very foolish and stupid. Probably the thin air. And they've been put in jail for three days and fined. It's just

that you have to be very careful. I eschew all social media.

So, some indications anyway about *mettā*. And it's a subtle enemy. That's what it's known as, attachment.

Similarly, when it comes to these other forms like compassion. So, compassion. The subtle enemy is grief or pity for somebody and often again the person is using their compassionate acts in order to feel good. So the definition of a do-gooder is that they do you the good they want to do you because it makes them feel good.

So I mean if a friend turns up when you're sick and has made this special chicken soup, and you... Oh, vegetable soup, excuse me. I'm talking to a vegetarian. Vegetable soup. I'm not saying I want chicken soup. Let's get that clear, please. Clear boards. Vegetable soup. And you say well, I just can't eat it. So that's all I said but you could do something for me. So what's that? Clean the toilet. Well, I didn't come to clean your toilet. I came to give you some soup. So you get all upset about it. And then of course they start doing things that you don't want them to do and you throw them out and they go away and say I can't understand it. I just went there to help, that's all I did. And they threw me out. So very strange mental states that people get into.

And not being appreciated. They didn't say thank you. They didn't buy me a present after all I did for them and all that sort of stuff. So the whole thing about generosity is of course if it's a real act from the heart, then of course it's given without presumption of any return from it. People do it quite easily for things like these appeals, for earthquakes and stuff like that. They're very happy to give knowing they're not going to get a penny from it themselves, apart from that feeling of goodness that they try to help the situation. But that's not always true between human beings. And I think you've got to be careful. You haven't got to be silly about it like for instance, there's the ritual swapping of gifts at Christmas. You get a lump of cheese and they get socks. That's fine.

That's just a sort of ritual, you know, like two warring tribes come together and offer each other gifts. They won't fight anymore. That's all right. But when you actually want to be generous in the sense of giving something—your time, your wealth—then you really have to set your mind to it. It's not, if you do it spontaneously, in inverted commas, the old habits will be underneath it because they're there. So you have to make it quite a self-conscious act. You've got to have real determination. I mean, it's very easy—most of us say yes too easily. Like one of the families says, "We're redecorating—you've got time to come over?" "Oh yeah, want to come over Saturday?" "Oh yeah, yeah, come on, yeah." And then when they've gone you think, "Oh God, I don't want to go over there." And then the phone call: "Got terrible headache. I'm not well." Anything not to go. And all you had to do was just stop for a minute and say, "Well, I don't think I can come this Saturday," and so on and so forth, and make sort of sober excuses.

So the idea of compassion comes under this whole business of generosity. And it's coming from the heart of wanting to help. And when you give, whatever you're giving, in the scriptures it says there are three parts: one part, what you are giving has been attained in a wholesome way, so your money has been

earned through a wholesome job or whatever, and you're giving it without any hope of return, without any consequence, and you're giving it to somebody who is worthy of the gift.

And this brings up the old question about people on the streets. Well, if you know somebody is going to use your money for drugs and whatnot, then it's up to you whether you want to give it or not. But you can give it and make sure that they know what your intention is: "This is to help you get night lodgings or food." What they do with it is their problem. Otherwise, you get yourself into all sorts of silly states.

And generosity in the commentaries—this is not in the scriptures as such, as far as I know—but they point out that generosity itself is actually a path to liberation. Because every time you're generous, every time you're giving something without hope of return, you're actually renouncing something. Now the whole of the spiritual life is renunciation. The whole of it. The whole of the spiritual life is renunciation. And this renunciation, remember, isn't some sort of self-mortification. We don't have to end up in rags on the streets or something. It's letting go of these attachments, letting go of these relationships we have to things, to our money, to our possessions, and to people, and to our time. "My time is for me."

And when you offer that, when you offer some of your wealth and some of your time for the benefit of somebody else, what you're actually doing is saying, "Well, I'm not going to use this amount of money to make me happy. I'm going to have to give up going to the Costa del Sol this summer. Or worse. And I could use this time to listen to heavy rock, but I'm going to help you paint the walls." So that sense of giving something also has this basic thing about renunciation, and all this is quite easy when you come from the position of gratitude.

So this gratitude is such a lovely mental state to develop, and just at any time, at any time of the day, whatever you're experiencing, having had that experience, to say thank you. Whether you've just eaten a cup of coffee at one of the coffee houses, or whether you've just had a meeting with a friend, or whether you've just been caught in the rain and you're soaking wet, say thank you. And it's this business of just recognising the little gifts that are given to us every day. Every day something happens which is just given without your asking. Even if it's only the level of the air that you breathe. It doesn't have to be there, does it? You can actually go down even to basic physical things to raise that sense of gratitude. And then the rest of it follows quite simply, quite easily, usually.

So you have to be careful with this business of compassion. And again it's always to do with intention. So as soon as you want to move, make sure your conscious intention is wholesome. Sometimes we're not aware of subliminal stuff—it pops up later. One example I always give is here, when you make an offering here, this is for the benefit of other meditators who come here, because everything you've received has already been paid for by past donations. So this is for the benefit of others. And then when that's really filled your heart, that's when you let go of it. That's the point.

Now that action is a habit. You're creating the habit of just giving. Remember there's that distinction between a desire and the empowerment of the desire. So it depends on the desire. And then of course once

you've given it, you always get this little voice saying, "You are truly a very generous person." Oh, you know, "Too much. Get some back." So as soon as you see that, you say, "Well, that's old martyr." That wasn't me. That's just the old habits coming through. And so you've got to be careful not to be judgmental about that. "I must be a horrible, terrible person because I can't give something purely." Because you did. You did give something purely. So these things are constant in our lives. People ask us for little favours here and there.

I got on a bus a while back and I must have looked terrible or something because this person actually got up and gave me their seat. Well, I expected that in the fifties or the sixties. You don't expect anybody to get up for some old crock. I thought, "Thank you very much." So, these little gifts.

Now, the other ones, perfections—where are we? So it starts off with the perfection of giving, the perfection of morality. So remember that our ethics is the measure of our delusion or enlightenment. All these five training rules that we keep—not to kill living beings and not to take what is not freely given—remember those are really gross things. And our job is to really move towards a refinement of our conscience, a refinement of our behaviour. And in a sense, that's what the Buddha was trying to do with this *Vinaya* for monks. He was trying to make it so that the behaviour of his monastics were refined. He's got masses of rules, even on how to eat. We can't chapu-chapu or suru-suru. Chapu-chapu, and suru, so when you take a drink. All these little rules about a certain dignified way of behaving.

So *sīla* here is better translated not as morality—they always do that. It's more like ethics, which is to do with relationship. And this relationship also is to do with things. That's why I keep going on about doors. I mean, poor doors. They've suffered a lot in this place, I can tell you. So it's a case of recognising that if we're gentle with doors, we're probably a bit more gentle with people. When you go home, just watch how you kick the French door shut. Just catch yourself doing it. As you're leaving it with your hands full, you give it a kick. Or put your pan down on top of the stove—bang! As though you've got a grudge. So that's morality.

Renunciation we've talked about. And this renunciation, remember, that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to see where our attachments are and slowly undermine them completely until we get to the end where our relationship to life is just radically different. When I say radically different, it's not as though we don't have right relationship now. It's just that it begins to corrupt. We override it. We override it. So we take, for instance, our little grace before meals. And that gives us the right attitude. And we're eating the food. And there's always this little bit of override of wanting to indulge in the taste. I noticed today that a few people—many more than usual—went up for seconds. I won't say any more.

Wisdom. Wisdom is mainly to do with what we've been talking about all week, the dependent origination, the three characteristics of existence. And remember, there's three levels of wisdom. There's the wisdom that you receive from listening and seeing, and then it becomes your own wisdom, it becomes your own, when you can actually express it to another, when you can explain Buddhist principles to other people. It's

become your own intellectual property, you might say. But if somebody says to you, "Well, what is this dependent origination?" you say, "Well, you better go and ask Bodhidhamma." And it's still—it's not as though you've not understood it, but it's not been absorbed. It's not been actually masticated and turned into your own particular property. So that's where you want to get to really, at an intellectual level: to be able to explain to yourself *kamma*, dependent origination, these characteristics of existence and so on. And then of course they become real because you actually experience them. And then they're coming right from the heart of experience.

Energy. Energy. Right energy. It's right there also in the Eightfold Path—energy, effort, commitment, stability, diligence. We've got masses of words for this sort of right effort. Zeal. Not giving up. Committed. That's what this means. It doesn't mean the energy to run around a bit. It's a sort of—it's the energy you need for that commitment to the path. Resolution. So this is part of it, the resolution bit, the *adhiṭṭhāna*. And that energy shades into these resolutions that we make. And resolutions only last just about for as long as you say them. So you've got to keep resolving. Every day you've got to resolve, even in relationships. This taking refuge in precepts, for instance—people who've committed themselves to the path, sometimes for a short time, a year, other times for life. And it's like you get the feeling, "Well, I've done it now, and that's it." No, it has to be constant.

It's like a marriage or a relationship, but especially a marriage. Once you've committed yourself at the marriage ceremony, that's it. You can forget it now. And of course, what happens is the little destructive things that happen in relationships and all that build up and there's nowhere where it can be resolved. So for me, like the anniversary for somebody who's married is an occasion of forgiveness and re-establishing the sort of right relationship. If you don't do that, it just gets... wanders off the path.

And I remember saying this when I was asked to give a little talk and do little ceremonies for a friend at his marriage, and I said I pointed out that the love we're talking about is an emotion. I said, "Sometimes you have a romantic emotion towards your partner, sometimes you don't. And sometimes you love them and sometimes you don't." But that's not the love which we're talking about when we're talking about a relationship—whether it's between married people, a friendship, between parents and their child. It's a sort of commitment to the person. And the commitment is defined by the relationship you've made. So obviously for a parent it's that commitment of parenting and so on. And you've got to separate that out. And that's the resolution. That's your commitment.

Then there's loving kindness. And finally, equanimity. So equanimity, as I think I pointed out when you first came, was arguably the most important of these qualities. Because what equanimity does is it stops all these things falling into their what's known as their near enemy, or better still, their subtle enemy. How love slips into attachment, compassion into grief, and so on and so forth. How, for instance, even courage can move into foolhardiness. That's his near enemy. His obvious one is cowardice, but his near enemy is foolhardiness. So you can see in that particular case a lack of wisdom, being a bit stupid about what you can do.

So equanimity is meant to keep you at that—it's meant to be a sort of base underneath us, which is calm, steadiness of attention, a sort of recognition of what's happening, so that as soon as we come off into the near enemy, we're sort of aware of it. But if you're caught up in it, if there's a sort of excitement, a sort of over-excitement into something, then the equanimity is lost. You're always coming from a deeper base of calmness. That's the idea of equanimity. And again, it's something we can develop. And it's obviously not easy. It's something that comes with just the practice of it.

And the important thing is this stopping. I keep talking about stopping. I keep trying to do it myself, frankly. Just stop for a moment and just see the momentum. What's in that momentum? Some of it's wholesome, some of it isn't. Some of it you have to wait until it passes. As the momentum drops, it begins to lose energy. That calm base arises just quite naturally. And out of that you get your next intention and off you go. So it really is this effort to just keep stopping as much as you can throughout in your daily life.

So tomorrow we have this little celebration. It's really celebrating the anniversary of the founding of this place. But it also, I would like to point out, you'll hear me point out the Mahāsī Sayādaw as well. So I'll offer an occasion for those people who have taken refuge in precepts to re-establish that commitment. And just in case somebody might be thinking of doing that, it's just very quickly: it really is finding your reference point. What is the fount which is giving meaning to the rest of your life, even to death? Is there something that you already have which is giving that a complete meaning to your life, from birth until death?

And everything you're doing, day after day. And all the things in your spiritual portfolio. Are they all just disparate elements? Like in a roundabout. You're sort of jumping from a horse onto a camel. Or is it—or are you actually right in the centre of that roundabout? And these things just come up. And you're always moving from the centre. You're not on the periphery just jumping from one to the other. So the idea of the spiritual path is that you do have this grounding. You know yourself. Who is your basic contact point, your reference point.

And in Buddhism we have these three. The first one is the Buddha himself. So the Buddha is both the historical figure, who is a teacher—he's taught us this particular path—he's the exemplar, he actually travelled it, he's not teaching it as some intellectual understanding that he's got through life, and he's an archetype in the sense that that path is true for all human beings. If you look at any spiritual tradition, it's always about renunciation. Look at all the saints, from the Desert Fathers to St. Francis, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, all these people, Gandhi, all these people are renunciates. I mean, that's the spiritual path.

And also, the more lay people, like, who's the South African president? I forget his name. Mandala. Mandala, yeah, Mandela. Mandela, got it, Mandela. I mean, he gave his life to this whole thing. I mean, he's a secular saint, you might say. So, in that sense, he's the archetype. But, of course, what we're really taking refuge in from a spiritual point of view is the Buddha within.

We're putting a certain confidence that there is something in us which is seeking liberation and will be

liberated. Although the Buddha would not, I think, make such an outlandish statement as I'm going to make, but I can't imagine it not being a spiritual, psychological imperative that everybody, in the end, must become fully liberated, because that's the trajectory everybody's on, even when they seem to be going the opposite way, even when they're getting into murky waters and doing terrible things. They're always, if you ask them, they're always doing it for what they think is a good reason. I mean, these ISIL people. And it's always a twisted love. It's always a love for something, but it's just off.

And the *dhamma* is the teaching, which is also this practice. The teaching and the practice. And that's really where the foundation is, because it's the practice itself, which is realising the path for us from moment after moment. And then the sangha is again traditionally those people who've experienced *nibbā na*, so they're witnesses to the Buddha.

But it's companionship. When the Buddha's asked what does he mean by right livelihood, he says good companionship. It's interesting that he doesn't say making money or going out and helping lepers. He doesn't define it in those terms. He just says it's good companionship. That's where you find your right livelihood. So in other words, when you want to do something and you find the right companions, then you have this momentum that forms. And in the doing, that becomes your livelihood. Perhaps it could be translated as lifestyle.

So that's what the three refuges are. And they become your reference point. That's what it means. And of course the training rules are just basically a platform where you just don't want to go. And of course we usually have problems with the last one. I'll take drinks and drugs that cloud of mind. What's wrong with that? Glass of wine and all that.

And really they are training rules. They're not commandments. They're not absolute statements. Thou shalt not. It's just, if you want to go on the path, this is the way you train yourself. So it's up to the individual how they want to define these things for themselves. But ultimately, knowing the effect of alcohol on the body anyway, you generally wouldn't want to do it.

So we've covered a bit of ground there. And I can only hope that you will continue with your practice, that you will devote yourself to your self-betterment, that my words have been an encouragement and not a discouragement, and that you will attain full liberation sooner rather than later.

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