

The Perfections (Pāramī)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · International Talks · 48:41

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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Before we get to the topic of the perfections, I'd like to balance two things. Yesterday when I spoke about *kamma*, I emphasized the significance of *kamma* mainly in the process of our liberation. Now I'd like to connect this more to our earlier discussion about dependent origination.

The Buddha says very clearly that in this two-meter-high body is *dukkha* and the end of *dukkha*. Remember, *dukkha* is that whole unsatisfactory essence of our lives.

When we try to grasp the entire notion or concept of *kamma*, as you know, the Buddha spoke about rebirth. What brings us into that particular, specific family? Is it complete chance or is there some connection? According to research done by people who have memories from past lives, it appears that we're born in groups. We're born repeatedly in the same families, towns, villages.

This shouldn't surprise us too much, because what attracts us to any object, whether human or otherwise, is attachment. So often you'll find sentences in the texts like: we have all been mothers, fathers, sons and daughters to each other—that we have all been mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers to one another. This might not be a very pleasant thought for some of us, but it's there.

The entire teaching of *kamma* is quite vast and complex sometimes. But as far as I'm concerned, when we centre on our true objective—when we focus on our true goal, which is to liberate ourselves from *dukkha*—then the whole matter of *kamma* centres upon how we create *dukkha* and how we manage to develop happiness.

So hopefully now those of you who are here for the first time already have some idea of how to undo or cancel that past conditioning by using this meditation, and how to begin creating a good heart.

Tonight I'd like to focus on how we move from here into ordinary daily life, and we can look at some of these perfections. The perfection is translated as *pāramī*. *Pāramī* essentially means the other shore. The Buddha often uses the image of sailing from one island to another, which also means crossing the ocean or overcoming storms and so forth.

Let me read these ten perfections and then we'll select some of them. The first is generosity. Then there's morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving-kindness, and

equanimity.

When we now look at the quality of generosity, the Buddha says that generosity is the easiest to develop, in the sense that you don't even have to be good. Even a thief can be generous, especially with what he's stolen. That's why we have these legends about Robin Hood and William Tell.

I think now I want to say one middle thing that's done at the end of every course, for example—to make a contribution, or to give something, to give an object. So the first thing I must present is the object. So first I must decide about the amount. I come to some decision and decide I'll give this much.

There are many different types of reasons for giving which then remove or suppress the purity of giving. For example, we can give as a gift, but only because someone else gave us a gift. This is essentially business. That doesn't mean it's bad. In society there are many such relationships where gifts are mutually exchanged. At Christmas you expect a bottle of wine and they expect a bottle of wine too. It's a social thing that strengthens social bonds and so on. But you see, this isn't pure giving.

Because pure giving is giving without hope for any return. And you know that people can give things in order to get something. That's actually theft—or rather, it would be better to call it bribery. In politics, for example, or in the Olympic committee. This apparently happens all the time. I don't want to be too cynical, but I don't know how much taxpayers' money went into the pockets of this Olympic committee. And we hope at least it was worth it.

So we can give for various challenges, for various reasons. One of the beneficial reasons we give is when we've done something wrong, so we iron it out or replace it. But we also want to develop the art of pure generosity. And how can we do this?

I decide to give some contribution to charity or something like that. So I hold that cheque or that money in my hand and I quietly say to myself: I give this my wealth for the benefit of these people and I won't have it. And I say this until my heart is completely absorbed in that giving. When my heart really wants to give for the greatest cause—to help someone else. Until my heart really wants to give for no other reason than that.

And when that happens, I quickly put that money into that box. And the reason is—when we return to how we create kamma, and you know there's good and bad kamma, everything depends on our intention.

This intention that I have when giving, this pure intention, is now active kamma in my psychology. And when I take several such steps purely, I begin to create conditioning of pure giving. After you've given and the act is completed, the act is completed. That conditioning is done.

However, a voice appears: "You gave too much, take it back" or "You're amazing." But you label it. "Ah, that's Māra, I see you." I've labelled it. I haven't reinforced your conditioning. And why did I behave like this? The more I act like this, the more likely you are to disappear.

So you begin to know that the knowledge that's created around knowledge is old knowledge. So you see that recognizing that thoughts around some activity appear is actually caused by old conditioning. Once you then begin to feel guilty about these thoughts, then new conditioning begins of feeling guilty.

And finally, to weaken that feeling of guilt—if that voice told you that you were stingy and should have given more, you agree to give more money so you won't feel guilty. You think you're generous, but you're only serving your own guilt. That's dangerous. You can end up mentally ill by being generous.

Another type of generosity is of course time—giving time in the form of service. In other words, you want to do good for someone. So a friend or someone is ill. You call them and tell them you want to visit. And you have some idea how to help them.

The idea you have is that you can perhaps cook some soup for them or bring some food or drink. But first you'll be kind and ask them. You call them and ask. You come to their house and see them. And you tell them you'd like to cook something for them, buy something for them.

And they say, "Well, not really. If you really want to help me, can you clean my toilet?" If you really want to help me, clean my toilet. And you recoil from that person. "I came to buy you something, to cook something, and I'm not going to clean your damn toilet."

Here we have that compassion with ego, giving with ego. This is another such little problem.

When a person gives or does something for someone, you feel good. And that's the merit. When we make offerings in Buddhism, we give our merits to other beings. In the evening, when we recite loving-kindness, I tell you to imagine people in your mind and offer them your merits and blessings.

Whether we can do this or can do it, I don't know. Some people say we can't influence other people at a distance. But in the practice we do, we're developing a generous heart.

When we do good, we feel good. And we should feel good. We should be happy. The Buddha said that when he taught, he felt joyful, happy. When someone accepted the Dhamma, he said he felt happy. He said he felt joyful. And when someone said they rejected the Dhamma, he had no bad feelings. When a person isn't ready, they're simply not ready.

So when we do good, we feel good. We should feel good. But the danger then is that we do good so that we feel good. In English we say that's do-gooding. So don't be a do-gooder.

These mistakes, errors, we can overcome by clarifying our intentions for ourselves. Even though we know there are other intentions which we see as unbeneficial, we choose the one we know will lead us to the cessation, to the end of suffering. And we make our decision based on that.

This type of psychology applies to all the virtues I've mentioned. Whatever virtue we have always makes us happy. Virtue and happiness belong together. This shows us a bit how we can develop the perfection of

giving.

Let me move to the third one, which is renunciation, because it's related to generosity. When I give my wealth, it means I can't use it for myself. So maybe I have to give something up to give this matter.

So I might have had to give up something to give this course. I might have realized that if I gave too much money, I couldn't then afford the holiday I wanted. I'd have to take a cheaper holiday instead. So I gave up the holiday I wanted so I could help someone else.

It can also happen that a family member is ill and to help them, I don't go on holiday.

Renunciation in Buddhist teaching shouldn't be confused with self-mortification. These words have similar meaning, but we can give them different definitions. You know that the Buddha himself practiced this mortification. He said he ate so little he became very thin.

But the thing about this type of mortification, the understanding of such mortification, is that it's based on the idea that evil is the body. When I don't go near food and eat only some seeds, then of course I won't develop greedy or gluttonous tastes. So I believe the reason for such greedy tastes is my tongue.

But we of course know this isn't the cause of greedy tastes. Greedy tastes come from wrong attitude in the heart. So when we practice such mortification, we're still adding suffering to what we already have, needlessly.

So renunciation for the Buddha was to see where attachment is. And we don't know the strength of that attachment until we let go of the object. You don't know how you cling to your leg until it falls off. You don't know how you cling to your job until you lose it. You don't know how you cling to your family until they die. You don't know how you cling to money until you have none.

So renunciation is doing something so we can see that attachment. One example I've already given you is that you don't know how you cling to television until you sit in front of it and turn it on and leave it off.

When we saw that reluctance to give something or reluctance or resistance to devoting our time to someone, this resistance is a measure of our attachment. So when we give, we also renounce.

But we can also renounce things just to get rid of habits or addictions. My habit is tea. I tell people that when I don't drink tea, then I'm fully liberated.

So when you see you're too attached to something, a good practice is to leave it alone for a while. And what this creates is all the tension around obsession. And what it actually takes away is all the tension around obsession. And that leads to a peaceful heart.

When we take such common habits, like smoking—smoking isn't just a mental habit, but also a physical habit. And it's very difficult for people to go through the hell of stopping. Some people I know who were able to give it up did so only after they had a heart attack. They simply needed that kind of shock to give it

up. In this case, fear of death was greater than the obsession to smoke.

I think one of the problems is that in our society we don't practice renunciation at all. When we say in religions, in Christianity there are fasts. Christianity has the period of Lent. During Lent, a Christian can give up something. And Muslims have Ramadan. So for one month they can't eat when the sun is in the sky. For a whole month they can't eat while the sun is on the horizon.

In all religions there's recognition that human beings fall into wrong, bad relationship with this world. They think this world will bring them heaven. One of the greatest myths of today is that technology will cure everything. Eventually we won't even have to die with the right genetic engineering. No problem with natural resources, because technology will create energy for us.

This is a great myth of today, and it's leading us to disaster. And this is a quality you should reflect on and see if from time to time you can practice renunciation. And when you do, you'll always feel the benefit.

For example, when you enter the Buddhist order, the Buddha ordered his monks to shave their heads. So I don't have to waste time combing my hair anymore. Not that I had much to comb anyway. So we all have the same robes in the same color. This removes all morning uncertainties. Should I wear something blue?

The more you renounce, the freer you essentially are. So these two qualities of generosity and renunciation go together.

One insight into our three characteristics, into the three properties—*anicca*, *dukkha*—is the quality of *anicca*, impermanence. When we can begin to understand, experience more fully what the Buddha said: there is nothing in this world that's worth creating. There is nothing in this world that's worth holding onto. What would we hold onto?

Unfortunately time is up, but I was able to explain only two. But at least it gave you some idea how to think about these perfections. We have some virtue, and then there's always some enemy against it. And then subtle energy. For example, love—the enemy of course is hatred. Not energy, but the subtle enemy is attachment.

So that we clarify our intentions when we want to do something virtuous—when you stay with that virtuous wanting, then you'll catch such little thoughts. Negative thoughts that you don't want to do it, various other thoughts. "I don't feel like it. I'll do it tomorrow. It's not good for this person to do this, it's worse."

All these little thoughts will appear. And to make this conscious means it stops influencing how we behave in such a literally subversive, unknown way. As I said, you can do something for someone, but they don't thank you. And that rings in you for years.

But when you did what you wanted to do, you did it with a completely pure heart. But they should still thank you for it.

That's about all, and during this break I'd like you to walk in peace and not push it too much. And if any questions arise about what we've discussed, you can put them in those jars.

Thank you.

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