

## The Six Paramitas, Part Two

(Based on a talk given by Rev. angel Kyodo williams in 2007 at the Center for Transformative Change/New Dharma Meditation Center in Berkeley, California.)

Good Evening.

So, last week we talked about the *paramitas*. I suggested that I might continue to talk about them. Last week we went through a little overview of them and then talked about each one. We talked about the notion of these being transcendental virtues, virtues that carry you over to this place that is always here, that carry you to nowhere, and yet there is a notion of arriving at a place in relationship with our lives in which we stop resisting and kicking and screaming on a perpetual basis so that we can live our life as if it mattered to us, all the time. And through that we see the value of each action that we make, that we take and how it expresses our service to all others. You do that by cultivating these qualities.

Each of the perfections gives rise to the next one. Actually, you could just start with one and forget about the rest if you wanted, because each one actually gives rise to the next one. It creates the space and the opportunity for the next one. It doesn't require it; it actually gives rise to it. And what's wonderful about these qualities is they're each also an antidote to some bit of fussiness that we're all carrying around. Each one has an essential outlook, and so there's an outlook to each of the *paramitas*.

The first one being *dana paramita*, or generosity or giving, of which the essence is unconditional love.

Here we are, we're done.

If you can truly cultivate a quality of unconditional love, what else is there a need for? By cultivating generosity, cultivating the willingness to give us the transcended aspect without seeking return, without seeking accolades, without seeking applause, we can cultivate the kind of boundless open heart that enables us to give even when there's no likelihood, whatsoever, that anyone will notice.

When you have truly cultivated *dana paramita* then you have cultivated the antidote to greed, a boundless open heart, unconditional love, a willingness to give, which is the antidote to greed.

Each of us expresses different human qualities that are less than useful in our daily lives. And all of us--we actually express all of them, but some of us are pretty well connected to one or two. And so, you can start to think of each of the *paramitas* as I go through them and say to yourself, Oh, yeah, greed. That might be my thing.

Rather than connecting to, Oh, I would like to be generous and giving, find the thing that you might need support for and an antidote to. You get what I mean? So, you go and you deal with the disease, the dis-ease that is your dis-ease when you want medicine. Don't just choose any of the medicines. If you really want to get to the heart of it, as you listen to this discover, Ah that one; that's my disease. And allow yourself to pay particular attention to that *paramita*. If you can't remember that, start with *dana paramita* and know that it will lead the way, it will give rise to *silā paramita*, ethics, *silā paramita*, the essence of which is compassion. It's the fundamental outlook for cultivating the quality of the virtue of ethics even when no one's watching. Even when no one's watching. That's the transcended outlook. Even when no one is watching provides you with the antidote to attachment and also ignorance.

The essence of the outlook of ethics is being in integrity, being in alignment with what is really true for you. And of course, one has to discover that and one can't be in alignment, truly be in alignment, nor be in integrity if one is holding on very tightly, which is why the practice of generosity first makes space for the possibility of being in alignment.

Because if you are busy counting your little parts, you know, I've got four and she's got eight, your mind is working on some kind of comparing nature between this and that. Self and other. What's going on here? What's going on over there? And it's very challenging to then be clear about where you actually are because your mind is holding on to these other ideas. So generosity is really important. Cultivating a boundless heart gives us the opportunity to actually be willing, even, to see our own lack of integrity. It is through that action that we make the opportunity for ourselves to say, Oh, yes, because we have loosened up things in general.

As you bring yourself into alignment it becomes more and more clear that there is this need for patience because as you get yourself into alignment you bring yourself into integrity. And it is only natural--and you are now, oh so generous--it is only natural that you are going to discover people that are oh, so difficult to deal with. And so cultivating ethics, *silā paramita* gives rise to the next *paramita*, which is patience, *kshanti*, because if we don't cultivate that capacity to stay in alignment, to be in integrity and someone is wearing us out we can't go anywhere from there. Right?

The fundamental outlook of patience is a deep desire, a deep desire, to be stable and open to whatever is actually happening and to cultivate a quality of equanimity with that. So cultivating patience is not like, I feel really good about this situation, and so I can hang out and wait. We cultivate patience even when someone has done us harm, even when someone has done us harm. We develop the capacity to quell our anger, to allow our anger to subside even when you're pretty sure they're wrong.

*Kshanti paramita* isn't interested in who's wrong and who's right in order to cultivate transcended virtue, to cultivate a virtue that carries you from the shore of endless suffering to the shore of freedom. It would be helpful not to be trying to figure out

what percentage of right or wrong is going on. But rather allow yourself to rest in a sense of equanimity, to receive the situation just as it is. Allow that to be the antidote to anger that aggressive charge that wants to find blame, that wants to figure out who's responsible.

While that kind of anger shields you from the directly scary, from your own grief or pain or disappointment, if we allow the practice of *kshanti paramita* to be present for us, we then have the opportunity to experience the entire situation, which includes what's going on for us and our own direct experience of that pain, of that suffering. And then when we're in that experience, most exquisitely, it doesn't matter who is to blame.

*Kshanti paramita* for sure gives rise to the next *paramita*, which is *virya*, effort. And *virya paramita's* essential quality is outlook. Its essential outlook is the development of a strong heart and mind--strengthen heart and mind. So that you can practice and be in the practice of the dharma even when you don't want to! Even when you don't feel like it! In fact, quite specifically, when you don't feel like it.

So we develop this quality of effort, of bringing ourselves to the situation over and over again, even when you don't feel like it, as a way to allow ourselves to move beyond laziness, to move beyond our habitual tendency, to push back against life and say, I'd rather be doing something else; I just want to checkout for a while and stay here. And yet life continues.

If we are truly cultivating ourselves in a way that makes us available to the world that is in me then it's not going to happen on our time; it's not going to happen when we feel like it. It's not going to happen when it feels like it's convenient. And so it's a good idea to cultivate this quality of *virya paramita*, of effort, as an antidote to laziness so that when there's a need we can go. When the dharma is called for, we can offer it; when suffering is present, we can meet it rather than turning our head, rather than shrinking away, rather than wishing the situation was different in any way. Then we can meet it.

This quality of real courage, this effort, this *virya paramita*, this quality of courage in turn gives rise to room for mental stability, emotional clarity and thus, we find ourselves practicing *dhyana paramita*. Meditation.

It can be still, sitting meditation; it can be moving meditation but to cultivate the quality of mind that enables us to be steady, clear, stable, when all of the cycle of life is going on, is what *dhyana paramita's* value is.

It gives us the firm ground from which we can now bring all of the other qualities into play and allow those to come through and express themselves from this place of stability, this place of open heartedness, this place of courage, this place that is rooted because it is patience, this place that is alive, unwaveringly clear.

And of course, *dhyana paramita* is the antidote to dullness, because the essential characteristic of meditation is to be Awake, is to be aware, is to be in full relationship with life, is to be in the moment to moment dynamic tension that is life itself.

When we think of meditation, we often think of stillness. And my own meditation is a dynamic stillness that is constantly pulsing in relationship to whatever situation I find myself in. And that dynamic stillness, that pulsing, that aliveness, that connection, that give and take with life is happening whether I'm being still on a cushion or whether I'm moving through the world being in relationship with people, whether I'm working with the exchange of money, the receiving of food--just the give and take of life, the giving of our heart on a moment to moment basis. All of that leads to *dhyana paramita*, this fundamental outlook of openness. This fundamental outlook of being willing, willing, willing to see life clearly and being willing to cultivate the steadiness that is required in order to see life clearly.

And as I mentioned last week all of these thread around into *prajna paramita*, wisdom. I've heard lots of discourse about what wisdom might be and that often ends up sounding to me more like intellect, less like wisdom. And so I would offer that each of the five proceeding *paramitas* simply give rise to wisdom, there's nothing to do. In fact, the only thing to do is to release any hope, whatsoever, for an outcome from any of them. Release hope completely. Bring your full intention and attention, your perfect intention, to each of the *paramitas*. And then release thoughts of virtue or non-virtue, transcended or ordinary. This shore or that shore is *prajna paramita*.

We have a little bit of time for a couple of questions.

Speaker One: What's the term for meditation?

aKw: *Dhyana paramita*. It's the Sanskrit word. I offer the Sanskrit terms because we have come to use these translations that don't always speak fully to the meaning of words. And so *dhyana* is the root and actually means, "stable." It tells us something more than the word meditation does. We think meditation and we think "Oom," and we come up with all kinds of ideas of what meditation might be.

But the root word of *dhyana* is steadiness, it's stability, it's firm. It means many different things, and so by beginning to hear the root of the word then we understand a little bit more. We understand that we can flush it out, that we don't get stuck in some very fixed idea of this means "meditation." This means I have to cross my legs and put my hands in a certain way and only then am I doing meditation. Well, you might be doing meditation, but that is not the limitation of *dhyana paramita*, that is not the limitation of the perfection of *dhyana*, which is something more expansive than our language has with its very short life span. It's something that has the capacity to really get around, thus the only way to really understand *dhyana paramita* is to practice.

